

ADULT LEARNING ON THE INTERNET:  
ENGAGING THE eBAY  
AUCTION PROCESS

BY

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## CHAPTER 1

### THE TIMES, THEY ARE A-CHANGIN'

#### Introduction

"The Times, They are A-Changin'": These prophetic words from Bob Dylan's 1964 song are truer now than any time in recent history. The Agricultural and Industrial Revolutions of the 18th and 19th centuries permanently altered society through new methods of crop production and manufacturing. Today, the world is being radically changed and transformed at breakneck speed by a new revolution, the explosion of information. Not since the Agricultural and Industrial Revolutions have so many changes affected so many people in such a short period of time. This accelerated eruption and transmission of data is dramatically remolding, recasting, and shrinking the global community.

Frequently called the Information Revolution, Information Age, or the Age of Technology, this metamorphosis of data gathering and exchange is rapidly creating a new single-market world. This new world is a world of computer-based knowledge which stretches from living rooms to corporate headquarters. It is changing the way people communicate among themselves personally and the way they conduct business.

Just as previous revolutions inalterably changed people's ways of life over time, the current revolution is



transforming the daily source, volume, and quantity of information that is available at a lightning-quick pace. This massive change has come in an incredibly short time. For the last quarter of this century, these rapid and revolutionary changes have created anxiety in society as "new trends and technologies flash before us with each click of the mouse" (Cahoon, 1998, p. 71).

### The Internet

#### The World Wide Web

The core component of the Information Revolution is the Internet. Commonly known as the World Wide Web or the Information Superhighway (Spencer, 2000), the Internet is a mass conglomeration of multidirectional communication networks (<http://nua.ie/surveys>). Its predecessor, ARPANet, was commissioned by the United States Department of Defense Advance Research Projects Agency in the late 1960s and early 1970s through an effort to create nuclear war-proof network systems. In 1986, the United States National Science Foundation implemented NSFNET, which still provides a major communication service for the Internet today. Later contributors, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration and the U. S. Department of Energy, added communication services and access support, which combined with European network providers to make international access possible to over "one hundred thousand computers on a large

number of networks" (Cerf, 2000, p. 1).

Use of this network is expanding so quickly that calculating global Internet participation is nearly impossible and is out of date as soon as it is published. In such a fast growing market, reporting precise numbers of online participants worldwide is not an exact science. It is subject to change daily. The Internet is "the fastest growing technology in history" (Taylor, 1999, p. 1). Over one-half the homes in the United States are online with 90% of those utilizing the Internet regularly (Taylor, 1999, p. 1). There are currently 362.97 million users of the Internet worldwide with 157.24 million in the United States and Canada. European countries combine to contribute 94.22 million users while Asia and Pacific rim participants number nearly 93 million. The fast-growing Latin American market numbers over 13 million people while Africa (3.11 million) and the Middle East (2.4 million) round out the list ([http://www.nua.ie/surveys/how\\_many\\_online/index.html](http://www.nua.ie/surveys/how_many_online/index.html)). These numbers rise daily as more people gain access to personal or public computers and log on to the Internet.

### eBay

eBay is an Internet website which sponsors auctions for its members. The name eBay is short for electronic Bay. It was born on Labor Day, 1995. It was the brainchild of Pierre M. Omidyar. As an Internet enthusiast, he was

intrigued with the Internet's rapid changes in global communication and business growth. He was searching for a way for his wife to trade Pez candy dispensers with other collectors on the Internet. Omidyar conceived and established a one-stop online auction format which was created for people with common interests to buy and sell their collectibles and treasures.

From its headquarters in San Jose, California, eBay's popularity has grown swiftly, and it is the world's largest person-to-person online trading community (<http://www.ebay.com>). As of October, 2000, there are more than 12 million registered users on eBay (<http://www.ebay.com>). Its present user population is roughly the same size as the population of Illinois (<http://census.gov/population>). The number of current eBay users is more than the population of Cuba and more than the number of inhabitants of Singapore and Switzerland combined (<http://www.population.com>).

eBay offers its users over 4,320 categories in which to buy and sell items. With diversity such as books and Beanie Babies and cars and comics, eBay has a category for everyone and everything. Since its creation in 1995, over 60 million auctions have been completed on eBay. In January 2000, the average daily number of visitors to the eBay site set a new Internet record of 1.782 million (<http://www.ebay.com>). Each day, 6.5% of all Internet users across the world

visit eBay's site to buy, sell, browse, or chat with other operators (<http://www.ebay.com>). In order for these 12 million subscribers to participate in eBay auctions, learning in an informal setting has had to occur. This learning process is confirmed by the large and increasing eBay site use.

### Adult Learning

Transitional periods such as the Information Revolution offer tremendous occasions for learning. Adult learners participating in this revolution use a unique combination of skills and strategies to seize the opportunities at hand. This type of learning is rooted in the adult learning concepts of (a) andragogy, (b) self-directed learning, (c) learning how to learn, (d) real-life learning, and (e) learning strategies. These concepts are all vital to understanding the methods adults use when learning on the Internet and more specifically on the eBay auction site.

### Andragogy

In any study involving adult learning processes, it is important to be familiar with the learning model increasingly known as andragogy. Andragogy is the art and science of helping adults learn (Knowles, 1980, p. 43). Malcolm Knowles popularized this term and is recognized as the father of andragogy although Alexander Kapp, a German grammar school teacher, first used the term (Knowles, 1998,

p. 59).

Knowles' (1980) andragogical model was originally based on four basic assumptions of adult learners. As people develop, their (a) self-concept moves from dependence to self-direction, (b) experiences become a storehouse to access during learning, (c) learning readiness adapts to the developmental tasks of social roles, and (d) knowledge adaptation becomes immediate and their orientation shifts from subject-centeredness to performance-centeredness (pp. 43-44).

While some have argued against the value of Knowles' andragogical model, his work is the foundation of thinking in the field of adult learning during the last decade (Hiemstra & Sisco, 1990). Andragogy is "a term that 'belongs' to adult education" (Merriam & Brockett, 1996, p. 135).

### Self-Directed Learning

Just as society is experiencing this eruption in dissemination of information through the Internet, adult education too is changing with the rapid expansion of research in the area of self-directed learning. While unidentified for centuries, self-directed learning has only become formally recognized and studied during the last several decades (Knowles, 1990). The field of Adult Education and adult educators have become increasingly

interested in self-directed learning during the last 20 years (Long, 1992). Self-directed learning is a process frequently associated with the field of Adult Education.

The process occurs when:

Individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes. (Knowles, 1975, p. 18)

The concept of self-directed learning applies to many learning events in the Information Age. Some may be quite simple such as learning to operate a computer mouse while others are very complex such as learning to design and assemble an heirloom quilt or a stained glass window. These events may involve one or more participants and may occur in formal or informal settings. Research related to self-directed learning reveals that 90% of adults conduct at least one self-directed learning project annually (Tough, 1978) and that 70% of adult learning is self-directed in nature (Tough, 1978).

Knowles describes two concepts of self-directed learning (Brookfield, 1986; Candy, 1991). First, self-directed learning is self-teaching in which learners have power over all mechanical aspects and approaches of their learning processes. Secondly, self-directed learning is personal autonomy or "taking control of the goals and

purposes of learning and assuming ownership of learning" (Knowles, 1998, p. 135).

An attempt to categorize self-directed learning works to restrict its broad meaning. Simply stated, self-directed learning is any process where the learner is the decision-maker and in control of the learning process. Indeed, self-directed learning is a freedom that all learners should be permitted to explore (Rogers, 1969). "It is self-initiated. Even when the impetus or stimulus comes from the outside, the sense of discovery, of reaching out, of grasping and comprehending, comes from within" (p. 5).

#### Addressing Individual Differences

##### Learning How to Learn

Learning-how-to-learn is another concept difficult to define with precision (Smith, 1976, p. 4). Learning-how-to-learn may mean different things for different people. In the last three decades, the seminal research on learning-how-to-learn was compiled by Robert M. Smith. He developed a theory and repertoire of training exercises founded on the idea that it is "as important to teach adults how to learn as it is to specify particular curricular domains for learning" (Brookfield, 1986, p. 64). In his initial work, Smith (1976) offers a working definition of learning-how-to-learn as "a matter of the adult's having (or acquiring) the knowledge and skill essential to function

effectively in the various learning situations in which he finds himself" (p. 5). In later work, Smith (1982) defined learning-how-to-learn as "possessing, or acquiring, the knowledge and skill to learn effectively in whatever learning situation one encounters" (p. 19).

Adult education is a process (Smith, 1976, p. 6). It is important to involve the learner in every phase of the process. Critical to this process is the development of each learners' awareness and capacity for effective self-monitoring and active reflection (Smith, 1991, p. 11). Involving the learner in this process includes participation in planning, conducting, and evaluating learning activities (Smith, 1976, p. 6). These subprocesses assume that learner is involved to the greatest extent possible and that "the learner needs this kind of knowledge and skill to function optimally in the three phases of the process" (p. 6).

The first subprocess of adult learning is Planning. It establishes how adult learners identify their needs and set goals as they select resources and strategies. The second subprocess is Conducting. This is the adult learners' learning activity where they negotiate selected procedures and resources as they learn to give and receive feedback. Finally, the third subprocess is Evaluating. This is how well do adult learners measure the extent to which and how efficiently their goals are met. Learners must be equipped



with these subprocesses to obtain the knowledge and skills to proceed with follow-up activities. Adult learners must possess and practice these skills through the learning how to learn process.

### Real-Life Learning

Learning from everyday situations, opportunities, dilemmas and experiences is a process all learners confront countless times during their lives. As a field of study, Adult Education examines the benefits of learning that is immediately applicable to adult learners' lives as opposed to learning that is from a teacher-directed curricula in formal education. Real-life learning is "relevant to the living tasks of the individual in contrast to those tasks considered more appropriate to formal education" (Fellenz & Conti, 1989, p. 3).

Learning processes traditionally used in formal educational settings differ dramatically from the procedures of real-life learning. With real-life learning, more attention is given to the living tasks of individual learners rather than tasks proposed by formal education (Fellenz & Conti, 1989). People are generally ill prepared through formal education to learn from everyday life experience (Sternburg, 1990, p. 35).

### Learning Strategies

Learners have individual differences in how they conduct learning activities. Those differences have been referred to as learning styles and learning strategies. Learning styles are the stable traits with which learners are born and on which they rely when involved in a learning situation (Fellenz & Conti, 1989, p. 8). A person's learning style is "the individual's characteristic ways of processing information, feeling, and behaving in certain learning situations" (Smith, 1982, p. 24). Learning style is one of the three components of the learning how to learn process (Smith, 1982, p. 23). Learning styles are generally established in childhood and are steady throughout the learner's life (Fellenz & Conti, 1989, p. 8).

In contrast to learning styles are the strategies that learners use when initiating a learning activity. Learning strategies are "the techniques or skills that an individual elects to use in order to accomplish a learning task" (Fellenz & Conti, 1989, p. 7). Learning strategies may also describe ways in which learners and their resources may be arranged during learning situations (Smith, 1982, p. 113). Learning styles are influenced by intrinsic ways of information processing whereas learning strategies deal with the methods learners use to gain information in different learning situations (Conti & Kolody, 1995). Rather than being an intrinsic process, learners have more control over

learning strategies than they do over learning styles. Learning strategies are behaviors that the learner may choose when attempting a learning task (Fellenz & Conti, 1989).

An instrument called Assessing The Learning Strategies of Adults (ATLAS) was developed to quickly and accurately measure the learning strategy preferences of adults as they initiated a learning activity. The instrument identified three groups of learners called Navigators, Problem Solvers, and Engagers (Conti & Kolody, 1999).

#### Problem Statement

The world is experiencing an era of change unlike any in the past. Countries and families all over the world are experiencing the spread of new technology. The Information Age is bringing people of the world together in a way never before experienced or imagined. "Now, in the ever more complex world, we need to accept and apply this basic truth: that we are all in this together, like a family, interconnected and interdependent" (Cuomo, 1995, p. 12). This truth translates well to the current worldwide change. No longer do people live in isolation from each other. People half way around the globe are as close as one's next door neighbors with the click of a mouse button on a computer hooked into the Internet. Society will do well to learn from all this change simultaneously occurring

throughout the world.

During this rapidly changing time, the rate of adult learning is as equally fast paced as the current technological advances. By its nature, adult learning is self-directed and often occurs in non-formal settings. In this learning, learners are completely in charge of their learning processes from beginning a learning activity and monitoring their progress to evaluating their progress. Whether they recognize it or not, these learners are using the andragogical model of learning. Internet learners from those with no formal education to those with graduate degrees are using this learning model. Today's adult learners apply the tools obtained from their learning experiences in everyday life as they conquer the tasks of Internet use. Use of these tools when navigating the Information Superhighway unconsciously enhances adult learners' daily lives. Internet usage by this new breed of learner has changed research in adult learning (Imel, 1999, p. 1). Technology is changing the delivery of adult learning (Cahoon, 1998; Davis & Denning, 1998; Graebner, 1998; Imel, 1999, p. 1).

Although extensive research of computer skill learning exists, "research about how people learn to use the Internet is still rare" (Cahoon, 1998, p. 6). Much time and many dollars have been spent on the concept of computer literacy.

Computer literacy is being taught in schools, being funded by many programs, and being talked about in a wide range of settings. Every day, millions of people display their learning when they enter the Internet auction site known as eBay. Over the past five years, 12 million people have developed their computer literacy skills to a point that they have not only learned how to locate the eBay site and register themselves, but they also bid on items for sale, communicate with other eBay users, and purchase successfully-bid items. Significant learning is taking place when such a growing mass of the world-wide population actively use computer literacy skills, self-directed learning, learning-how-to-learn techniques, and real-life learning strategies. While educational institutions tend to focus on the Internet, computer literacy, or specific software courses in formal settings, nearly two million people a day are applying adult learning principles as they use eBay's interactive characteristics. These 12 million people are the manifestation of computer literacy and yet nothing is known of how they engaged in the eBay process and how they learn while participating in eBay activities.

#### Purpose

The purpose of this study was to describe the learning strategies that adults use in learning to engage in the eBay auction process. One goal identified was to discover the

learning strategy preferences of eBay participants and how the results compared with the general population. Assessing The Learning Strategies of Adults (ATLAS) has been developed for measuring learning strategies in real-life situations (Conti & Kolody, 1999) and was used in this study. Another goal was to determine how eBay bidders describe their learning processes while engaging in auctions and to learn what effects participating in eBay auctions has had on the learners' lives.

### Research Questions

The following research questions were used to accomplish these research goals:

1. What are the learning strategy preferences of people engaging in the eBay auction process?
2. How do the learning strategy preferences of eBay users compare to the norms for ATLAS?
3. How do eBay users describe their learning processes related to (a) getting started on eBay, (b) participating in eBay activities, (c) communicating on eBay, (d) learning through eBay, and (e) experiencing eBay.

Since the study involved the Internet, the data-gathering convenience of the Internet was used in collecting data about how adults learn while on eBay. This was accomplished by surveying eBay registered users who have bid in completed auctions. Information on selected eBay users'

e-mail addresses was obtained from the public domain areas of the eBay website. Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected by a questionnaire featuring open-ended questions and identified-choice responses. Information related to ATLAS was gathered by imbedding the instrument into the online questionnaire.

The data from the demographic questions and the ATLAS groups were used to provide a profile of the participants' learning strategy preferences and to compare these to demographic factors. A chi-square analysis was used to compare the participants' learning strategy responses to the norms for ATLAS, and analysis of variance was used to examine the relationship between learning strategies and demographic variables. An analysis of Likert-scale items and a content analysis of open-ended survey questions were used to describe the participants' learning processes related to eBay and their feelings about this process.

## Definitions

Adult Learning: The process of adults gaining knowledge and expertise (Knowles, Horton, & Swanson, 1998, p. 124).

Andragogy: The art and science of helping adults learn (Knowles, 1980, p. 43).

ATLAS: Assessing The Learning Strategies of Adults is an easy to administer and complete learning strategies assessment instrument developed using the international database compiled using SKILLS data (Conti & Kolody, 1998b, p. 109).

eBay: The world's largest Internet auction website (<http://www.ebay.com>).

Engager: ATLAS grouping of passionate learners who love to learn, learn with feeling, and learn best when actively engaged in a meaningful manner. Engagers seek out learning activities that provide opportunities for interaction and collaboration (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 14).

Internet: A mass conglomeration of multidirectional communication networks (<http://nua.ie/surveys>).

Learning How to Learn: "Possessing, or acquiring, the knowledge and skill to learn effectively in whatever learning situation one encounters" (Smith, 1982, p. 19).

Navigator: ATLAS grouping of focused learners who chart a course for learning and follow it. Navigators rely heavily on planning, attention, identification, and critical use of resources, and testing assumptions. (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 9).

Problem Solver: ATLAS grouping of learners who use the learning strategies associated with critical thinking. These learners test assumptions, generate alternatives, and are open to conditional acceptance of outcomes (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 12).

Real-Life Learning: Learning that is relevant to the living tasks of the individuals in contrast to those tasks considered more appropriate to formal education. Such learning is also called "real-world" learning or learning that results in "practical" knowledge.



(Fellenz & Conti, 1989, p. 3)

Self-Directed Learning: A learning activity that is self-planned, self-initiated, and frequently carried out alone (Knowles, 1975, p. 18).

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### The Internet

The Internet began as a project of the Advanced Research Projects Agency Network (ARPANet) in 1969. This network was designed to enable researchers in government agencies and universities with information exchange options. Housed at the University of California at Los Angeles, the network had 20 different computer systems at approximately 30 universities linked by 1971 (Spencer, 2000, p. 48). By the mid 1970s, two initial protocols were developed by ARPANet. These protocols were called Transmission Control Protocol (TCP) and Internet Protocol (IP) and were developed over the initial course of the Agency's research effort (Cerf, 2000, p. 1).

In the early 1980s, two additional network systems were created. The Because It's Time NETWORK (BITNET) started at the City University of New York and was connected first to Yale University. BITNET provided electronic mail and listserv servers to distribute information along with file transfer capabilities. The Computer Science NETWORK (CSNET) was originally funded by the National Science Foundation to "provide networking for university, industry, and government computer science research groups" (Cerf, 2000, p. 5). BITNET and CSNET merged in 1987 to form the Corporation for

Research and Educational Networking.

In 1986, the U. S. National Science Foundation developed a new network called NSFNET with assistance from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration and the U. S. Department of Energy (Cerf, 2000, p. 1). NSFNET established five mega-computing centers to provide high computing power for all participating in the network. ARPANet, the original network, was decommissioned and the "Internet system began to integrate support for other protocol suites into its basic networking fabric" (p. 2).

Although the Internet began in the U. S. as a federally-funded research project, the 1980s and 1990s have seen a dramatic increase in commercial network providers. The majority of today's Internet is composed of private networking agencies located in educational institutions and government organizations (Cerf, 2000). "The new graphical user interfaces such as Pegasus Mail, CC Mail, Microsoft's Explorer, and Netscape Navigator are sufficiently robust and intuitive to be usable by the average person without guidance or even printed manuals" (Spencer, 2000, p. 49).

The dynamics of this new technology have not only changed the way information is disseminated, but it also is changing how people communicate with each other. Internet use is exploding and people are constantly being exposed to a whole new era of new terminology. Global economy,

telecommuting, e-commerce, e-mailing, networking, http, and html are but a few of the words and phrases which have taken on new or expanded meanings today. Many sentences seem to end with the words "dot com". Information is e-mailed, downloaded, attached, data synched, faxed, and linked. Internet users browse, surf, online conference, and chat. They meet, discuss, conference, and inform all online. They exchange e-mail addresses, web sites, business news, and personal information. Instead of the "tune out and turn on" of the 1960s, today's trendy people "logon" or "logoff". Internet users travel through cyberspace to cybercafes, home pages, and websites to visit with one another.

The Internet has changed the way people interact with technology. In the United States, people have grown accustomed to television which calls for passive behavior by the observer. However, Internet users have become interactive participants with much more responsibility in the hands of each individual. "We have never had the means of connecting so many people with so powerful a set of tools" (Gilster, 1997, p. ix). A world of information is available to Internet users with the click of a computer mouse. Often separated by great distances, people may now access each other with the ease and affordability of global e-mail.

Electronic mail has become a common way for people to

communicate with each other on the Internet. Initially limited to graduate and professional-level researchers in colleges and universities, e-mail began exploding in popularity around 1993 (Spencer, 2000, p. 52). With access to a computer with a modem, an Internet account, and communication software, people can send and receive messages to others all over the world. Today, 96% of all people online use e-mail (p. 45).

This new technological revolution has given rise to a new form of literacy known as computer literacy. Just as literacy may be defined as the ability to read and comprehend written language, computer literacy is defined as "the knowledge and an understanding of computers, combined with the ability to use them effectively" (<http://www.duboismarketing.com/computer.html>, p. 1). Computer literacy may also be described as "digital literacy", which is "the ability to access networked computer resources and use them" (Gilster, 1997, p. 1). Literacy in the Information Age simply requires developing new skills to merge onto the Information Superhighway.

As a new, universal language, this networking and communication system is creating new forms of culture (Cahoon, 1998). Prior to its easy accessibility, users generally used personal computers and the Internet to supplement their regular business and individual

communication techniques. However, today users' lives are changing drastically through cyberspace communication. Society is being transfigured by these sensational technological innovations at the beginning of the Twenty-First Century (Lubar cited in Cahoon, 1998, p. 1).

### Adult Learning

#### Andragogy

The concept of andragogy is critical to the field of adult learning and education. The concept is "the single most popular idea in the education and training of adults" (Brookfield, 1986, p. 91) and is known as a "badge of identity" (p. 90) for many in the field. Since the adaption of the concept in this country, andragogy has "been taken up with enthusiasm in many settings, and the results of the ensuing projects have been extensively publicized" (Houle, 1996, p. 27). Andragogy and adult learning go hand-in-hand.

The origin of andragogy as a concept may be traced to a German grammar school teacher who first used the term in 1833 (Knowles, et al., 1998). Malcolm Knowles is credited with importing and using the term of andragogy in the United States in the late 1960s and early 1970s (Merriam & Brockett, 1996, p. 135). Although the expression did not originate with him, Knowles "popularized it at a time when adult educators were in search of a theory to call their own" (Lee, 1998, p. 48). Knowles (1970) first defined

andragogy as an "emerging technology for adult learning" (p. 58) and compared it with pedagogy, a term which pertains to helping children learn. He later modified its meaning to "the art and science of helping adults learn" (Knowles, 1980, p. 43).

Knowles first presented his andragogical model in 1950 but settled on the name for it in the 1960s (Houle, 1996, p. 27). Andragogy became his dominant theme. He based it on four core assumptions about adult learners as distinguished from child learners (Knowles, 1970). Knowles later added two more assumptions and thus six assumptions are recognized in his final work (Knowles, et al., 1998). His final assumptions about adult learners are:

1. The need to know. Adults need to know why the need to learn something before undertaking to learn it.
2. The learners' self-concept. Adults have a self-concept of being responsible for their own decisions, for their own lives.
3. The role of the learners' experiences. Adults come into an educational activity with both a greater volume and a different quality of experience from youths.
4. Readiness to learn. Adults become ready to learn those things they need to know and be able to do in order to cope effectively with their real-life situations.
5. Orientation to learning. In contrast to children's and youths' subject-centered orientation to learning (at least in school), adults are life-centered (or task-centered or problem-centered) in their orientation to learning.
6. Motivation. While adults are responsive to some external motivators (better jobs, promotions, higher salaries, and the like),

the most potent motivators are internal pressures (the desire for increased job satisfaction, self-esteem, quality of life, and the like). (pp. 64-68)

Instructors traditionally use teacher-directed instruction, or pedagogy, with both child and adult learners (Knowles, 1980, p. 40). This form of instruction treats the students as passive pawns who exist for the purpose of receiving knowledge from the instructor and regurgitating it back in an approved format. With the pedagogic model, the control of learning rests mainly with instructors who direct the process from their perception. This form of instruction is being replaced with andragogy which is a model more appropriate and respectful of adult learners and their experiences.

The andragogical model assumes that adults are active learners involved in all steps of the learning process from selection to evaluation. In andragogy, learners are the directors of their learning processes and needs. With andragogy, the instructor serves as facilitator and resource person. Although Knowles developed the andragogical model to explain the teaching-learning process for adults, he pointed out that this model has proven to be effective for learners at all stages of life. However, it is most effective for adults because children obviously have fewer established convictions and experiences than their older counterparts



(Knowles, 1980).

The andragogical assumptions offer clear distinctions from the pedagogical model. With the andragogical model, adult learners gain increased responsibility for their own learning while with the pedagogical model learners remain dependent on the instructor. With andragogy, adult learners' experiences are a key factor. As adult learners take control of their learning process, they make important choices that lead them to the liberation of their human possibilities (Knowles, 1980, pp. 67-68). Viewed through the pedagogical model, two assumptions affecting learners become significant. These assumptions are what the teacher needs for students to know and the teacher's concept of learner dependence. The pedagogical model should be viewed as an ideology, but the andragogical model should be viewed as a program of elective assumptions (Knowles, et al, 1998, p. 69).

When studying the implications of the teaching-learning process, it is important to consider the principles that made this process significant. In addition to his basic assumptions of andragogy, Knowles identified seven components of adult learning practice (Knowles, 1980, p. 59). These components are critical to the success of programs and are for instructors to employ when facilitating adult learning events. Knowles proposed teachers of adults

should use the seven-step program-planning model which is "concerned with providing procedures and resources for helping learners acquire information and skills" (Knowles, 1990, p. 120).

The first step in Knowles' program-planning model establishes a climate conducive to both physical and psychological learning. An environment beneficial to learning is "perhaps the single most critical thing I do as a facilitator of learning" (Knowles, 1980, p. 224). Physical surroundings include furniture appropriate for adult learners, comfortable room temperature and lighting, and distraction-free surroundings. A student-centered atmosphere where democracy, trust, mutual respect, active listening, friendliness, and cooperation are practiced are essential to the adult learning environment (Knowles, 1980, p. 224).

The second step involves adult learners in reciprocal design of instructional methods and curricula structure. If adult learners are integral to the planning and carrying out of their learning activities, they establish a greater stake in their goal-setting and show greater interest in implementing activities necessary to reach their goals. Small-group activity planning, subcommittees, and large group discussions are effective tools to establish a positive planning atmosphere (Knowles, 1980, p. 226).

The third and fourth steps in Knowles program-planning model diagnose needs and formulate objectives. The third step includes participants in diagnosis of their own learning needs. Self-motivation increases when adult learners assess and measure their current and desired competencies (Knowles, 1980, p. 227). The fourth step inspires learners as they devise their individual learning objectives. Adults are much more open to participation if their objectives are relevant to their needs.

The fifth step incorporates the learners' needs and objectives into the development and design of sequential learning activities (Knowles, 1980, p. 234). Learning activities must relate to the needs and objectives outlined by the adult learner.

Knowles' sixth and seventh steps in the program-planning model address implementation and evaluation of learning objectives. The sixth step establishes the importance of the instructor as facilitator, guide, and resource to the learners as they undertake the selection of appropriate materials, resources, and techniques necessary to accomplish their learning objectives (Knowles, 1980, p. 239). The final step involves learners evaluating, rediagnosing, and reviewing their learning processes. The ultimate test for learners is "whether they have learned what is useful to them" (p. 171).

## Self-Directed Learning

Self-directed learning is "a major deliberate learning effort which the learner himself or herself is responsible for most of the day-to-day planning of what and how to learn" (Tough, 1977, p. 2). Self-directed learning develops as learners assume responsibility for the planning and directing of their learning course (Tough, 1967). When engaging in self-directed learning, "it is the individual's responsibility to select appropriate learning resources and to decide how the resources will be used" (Spencer, 2000, p. 10).

These definitions may imply that the process of learning takes place in isolation. "To many practitioners, the term self-directed learning conjures up images of isolated individuals busily engaged in determining the form and content of their learning efforts and controlling the execution of these efforts in an autonomous manner" (Brookfield, 1986, p. 56). In fact, learning rarely takes place in isolated circumstances. Thus, "self-directed learning usually takes place in association with various kinds of helpers, such as teachers, tutors, mentors, resource people and peers" (Knowles, 1975, p. 18). Self-directed learning occurs within the social contexts of the learners' lives with such societal factors as economics, political climate, and technological developments shaping

and guiding its reality (Spencer, 2000, p. 41).

Much has been written about the important concept of self-directed learning. Of special interest during the last three decades, the concept "has an almost cultlike quality to the extent that self-directedness is viewed as the essence of what adult learning is all about" (Caffarella, 1993, p. 25). Although self-directed learning has been the subject of much deliberation and debate, it is now an accepted concept in adult learning research (Knowles, 1998, p. 135). Malcolm Knowles, Allen Tough, and Stephen Brookfield have each made major contributions to the process and understanding of self-directed learning.

Malcolm Knowles (1975) viewed self-directed learning as a critical concept of andragogy and as a concept important to both the learner and the teacher (p. 7). He distinguished two ideas of self-directed learning in the adult learning literature (Knowles, 1998). First, self-directed learning is self-teaching (p. 135). This occurs when learners assume control of the tools and techniques necessary to teach themselves. Secondly, self-directed learning is personal autonomy in which learners begin "taking control of the goals and purposes of learning" (Knowles et al., 1998, p. 135). Of these two aspects of self-directed learning, personal autonomy is most important for learning professionals (p. 136).

Knowles (1975) established five assumptions about self-directed learners. First, learners become more self-directed as they mature and develop (p. 20). As human beings mature, their capability and desire to become more self-directed increases. Secondly, self-directed learning values the learners' experiences as an important learning resource (p. 20). Learners tap into their own experiences which expands their learning and allows it to become more personally meaningful. Self-directed learning assumes that individual learners possess varying readiness patterns and that they learn what they need in order to complete tasks or solve problems. Thirdly, self-directed learners exhibit a natural tendency to learn by focusing on tasks and problems unique to them. Their learning experiences are used to accomplish these tasks or solve their problems (p. 21). A final assumption of self-directed learners is that they are motivated by internal inspirations such as self-esteem, the desire to accomplish and grow, personal satisfaction, specific knowledge, and curiosity (p. 21).

In the mid-1960s, the concept of self-directed learning was considered "the most overlooked avenue of activity in the whole field of adult education" (Johnstone & Rivera, 1965, p. 37). With his doctoral dissertation, Allen Tough sought to rectify this situation. Tough's work on adult learning projects (1979) profoundly influenced research in

self-directed learning during the last two decades.

From his research, Tough concluded a significant number of adults learn in informal settings like reading, participating in courses or lessons, and listening to or talking with experts (Tough, 1979, p. 3). Tough found that approximately 90% of adults involve themselves annually in a major learning project and that 70% of these projects were initiated by the learner (p. 1). He concluded that most people undertake learning efforts annually and that it is common for adults to spend 700 hours annually in learning projects. Although the learning project may have served to solve a real-life problem, it was discovered that learners were searching for a short-term application or long-term goal (pp. 36-40). Unless actually conducted in a classroom setting, adults often fail to recognize their participation in a learning activity. Although they do not call them learning projects, these adults recognized the learning that occurred outside of formal work or educational settings (p. 15).

Stephen Brookfield (1986) has conducted extensive research in the area of self-direction with particular concentration on successful self-directed learning. Brookfield identified two forms of successful self-directed learning. First, successful self-directed learning employs a variety of techniques. These may include "specifying

goals, identifying resources, implementing strategies, and evaluating progress" (p. 47). Secondly, learners identify an internal change of consciousness. Here learners recognize that they view knowledge as relative and contextual and values and morals as cultural constructs. The learners then use this adjusted perspective to "contemplate ways in which they can transform their personal and social worlds" (pp. 43-47).

Brookfield believed that facilitation was essential to help adults become self-directed learners. He viewed the relationship between instructor and learner as an equal partnership that changes perspectives, shifts paradigms, and replaces one interpretation of the world with another (Brookfield, 1986, p. 19). Brookfield established six principles of effective practice to facilitate self-directed learning (Brookfield, 1986, pp. 9-20).

Brookfield's (1986) first two principles of effective practice recognize that self-directed learning is voluntary and recognize respectful participation. In the first principle, participation in a learning activity is voluntary (p. 9). This participation is based on the learner's desire to develop a new skill or gain knowledge on particular subject. The second principle of effective practice is mutual respect (pp. 12-13). It is important for adult learners to feel they are valued and respected as unique



individuals. Effective facilitation is distinguished "by a respect for participants uniqueness, self-worth, and separateness" (p. 13).

The third and fourth principles of effective practice are collaboration and praxis. Collaboration is the process of diagnosing needs, setting goals and objectives, planning learning activities, developing curriculum, determining methodologies, and evaluation (p. 14). Enabling action and reflection, a process commonly called praxis, are employed by self-directed learners as they take action, reflect on their action, and take further action while engaging in the learning event (Brookfield, 1986, pp. 14-15).

Critical reflection and self-direction are the final principles of effective practice (Brookfield, 1986, pp. 16-20). Participation in self-directed learning fosters the critical reflection skills of learners as they examine the assumptions underlying the acquisition of skills, consider alternative purposes, and place skill acquisition in a broader framework (p. 17). The goal of effective practice is cultivating empowered adult learners. Self-directed learning is a "matter of learning how to change our perspectives, shift our paradigms, and replace one way of interpreting the world by another" (p. 19).

#### Learning How to Learn

Though defining is a challenge, understanding the

concept of learning how to learn is important to the field of Adult Education for it "holds great promise for helping adults expand their learning effectiveness" (Knowles et al., 1998, p. 166). Thus, understanding the concept of learning how to learn is more important than establishing a definition. Learning how to learn happens in everyday lives, yet little research about learning how to learn outside of formal educational or organizational settings exists. Much of the research related to learning how to learn (Smith, 1982) involves college students' meta-cognitive processes (Brookfield, 1986). Instead of focusing on traditional school settings, learning to learn should be viewed as a project for life. (Brookfield, 1986).

Smith cautions against any temptation to shorten the phrase learning how to learn by eliminating the word "how" (Smith, 1976, p. 5; 1982, p. 19). The shorter phrase learning to learn may be easier to write and speak but "loses some of the impact and utilitarian flavor useful in calling attention to the concept and its importance" (Smith, 1982, p. 19). The inconvenience of using "how" is "in the final analysis, the matters under consideration include also learning what, why, when, and where to learn" (Smith, 1976, p. 5).

In addition to the three subprocesses of planning, conducting, and evaluating in the learning how to learn

process, three ingredients are necessary to understand the concept of learning how to learn. They are the learners' needs, the learners' learning styles, and training. These interrelated ingredients are components, or supporting ideas, of the concept of learning how to learn (Smith, 1982, p. 17). Learners' needs are a general understanding of learning, the basic skills of reading and writing, self-knowledge, and learning process skills in self-direction, collaboration, and institutional learning methods (pp. 20-22). The learners' learning styles are the ways that people differ as they think, approach problems, and process information during learning activities (p. 23). Training "pertains to deliberate efforts to help people become better at learning and more successful in the educational arena" (p. 25).

Smith (1982) refers to adult education as a "purposeful effort to foster learning by persons who have become largely responsible for their own comings and goings, in other words, adults" (p. 38). In this effort, he defines four important characteristics of adult learners. A working knowledge of these characteristics is a "minimum requirement" (p. 38) to grasp the learning how to learn concept. Similar to the four basic assumptions of andragogy (Knowles, 1970), the critical characteristics of adult learners are that they possess:

1. A different orientation to education and learning. Adult learners have different responsibilities, choices, and time demands than children. In addition, adults have different perceptions of time and of their self-concept in the life span.
2. An accumulation of experience. Compared to children, adults obviously have more accumulated life experiences. These unique experiences will effect the adult learner's orientation toward and reaction to learning.
3. Special developmental trends. The developmental stages that adult learners travel through are different from the stages of children. These adult stages go back and forth between periods of stability and periods of transition.
4. Anxiety and ambivalence. Adult learners frequently approach learning opportunities with a mixture of excitement and fear. These feelings may be directed at learning content areas and/or learning techniques areas. (pp. 38-47)

There are six optimum conditions for learning. These are conditions in which adults learn best and that "learners have a right to expect" (Smith, 1982, p. 47). These circumstances are especially fitting to the learning how to learn process and are met when adult learners:

1. Feel the need to learn and have input into what, why, and how they will learn.
2. Learning content and processes bear a perceived and meaningful relationship to past experience and experiences is effectively utilized as a resource for learning.
3. Can relate what is to be learned to the individual's development.
4. Amount of autonomy exercised is congruent with that required by the mode or method utilized.
5. Learn in a climate that minimizes anxiety and encourages freedom to experiment.
6. Learning styles are taken into account. (pp. 47-49).

The concept of learning how to learn is helpful to people seeking to expand the effectiveness of their learning processes (Knowles, et al., 1998, p. 166). This is especially true during this era of rapid change and technological growth. In a society where rapid change is a given, learning-how-to-learn in order to live creatively is important (Rogers, 1969). "Learning how to learn is becoming more important in a world economy that is increasingly dependent on knowledge and intellectual capital and faced with rapid change" (p. 169). Adult learning hinges on successfully using the process of learning how to learn for "the only man who is educated is the man who has learned how to learn; the man who has learned how to adapt and change" (p. 104). Therefore, understanding the process of learning how to learn is especially significant when investigating adult learning.

#### Real-Life Learning

Important to the concept of learning how to learn is the concept of real-life learning. As important as formal education is, it is more important for adult learners to "learn on an ongoing basis in everyday, real world situations" (Kitazawa, 1991, p. 31). In addition to (a) moving toward learning from education, (b) toward andragogical concept practice, and (c) toward self-directed learning, the field of Adult Education "has witnessed a

growing emphasis on learning in real-life settings" (Fellenz & Conti, 1989, p. 23).

Real-life learning is the ability to learn on a recurring basis in every-day, real-world circumstances. This learning occurs from the learner's real-life conditions and requires a comprehension of such "personal factors as the learner's background, language, and culture as well as social factors such as poverty and discrimination" (Fellenz & Conti, 1989, p. 25). The concept "has been used to distinguish typical adult learning from the academic learning of formal situations that is usually spoken of as studying or educating" (Fellenz & Conti, 1993, p. 3).

Significant differences exist between real-life problems and problems found in formal education (Fellenz & Conti, 1989; Sternberg, 1990). In real life, learners must recognize a problem exists and must define the problem as opposed to formal education problem issues or models which are defined by instructors (Sternberg, 1990, p. 35). Real-life problems are unstructured, relate directly to the learners' lives, and have multiple answers which are unlike the structured, out-of-context, single-answer problems of formal education (pp. 37-39). Unlike the accessibility of test answers, answers to real-life problems are often illusive (p. 39). Learners in academic settings are rarely challenged to question their beliefs, and the feedback they

receive is distinct and immediate while real-life learners exercise the power of disconfirmation and often receive feedback in a muddled, untimely, and undesirable fashion (pp. 39-40). Real-life problems are rarely solved individually unlike the individual problem-solving focus of traditional educational settings (p. 40). "The real-life learning tasks of adults are distinct for each individual, seldom follow a clear pattern, defy measurement, and often are so episodic in nature that beginnings, patterns, and outcomes are impossible to define" (Fellenz & Conti, 1989, p. 4).

#### Learning Strategies

Smith's learning how to learn concept has influenced research of learning strategies. Learning strategies are "the techniques or skills that an individual elects to use in order to accomplish a learning task" (Fellenz & Conti, 1989, p. 7). Adult learners use learning strategies in informal situations, and learning strategies "are more a matter of preference; they are developed throughout life and vary by task" (Fellenz & Conti, 1993, p. 4). As chosen approaches of adult learners, learning strategies may greatly impact the learners' success. "The skills or techniques selected to accomplish the task often have a great influence on the success of that learning activity. Adeptness and insight in the use of learning strategies is a

significant part of one's ability to learn how to learn" (Fellenz & Conti, 1993, p. 3).

Learning strategies differ from learning styles. The latter are the fixed traits and innate methods people use to process information (Fellenz & Conti, 1989, p. 7) and tend to be stable. Learning strategies are more variable (Conti & Fellenz, 1991, p. 64) and are more contextual. They are "more a matter of preference; they are developed throughout life and vary task by task" (Fellenz & Conti, 1993, p. 4).

In the field of Adult Education, learning strategies have been conceptualized as consisting related to five areas of learning (Fellenz & Conti, 1993). These five main areas are identified in an instrument titled Self-Knowledge Inventory of Lifelong Learning Strategies (SKILLS). SKILLS has proven to be a valid and reliable instrument for measuring learning strategies of adult learners (Conti & Kolody, 1999, pp. 16-20). This instrument uses scenarios from real-life learning situations such as assembling a bicycle or caring for a relative to discover peoples' learning strategies (Fellenz & Conti, 1993).

The five areas conceptualized by SKILLS are Metacognition, Metamotivation, Memory, Critical Thinking, and Resource Management. Metacognition is a conscious, reflective endeavor requiring the learner to analyze, assess, and manage learning activities (Conti & Kolody,



1999, p. 3). Metacognitive strategies including Planning, Monitoring, and Adjusting (Counter & Fellenz, 1993). Metamotivation is a strategy that deals with the learners' knowing and understanding of how they are motivated or why they are motivated to participate or remain in a learning activity (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 4). The learning strategy areas of Attention, Reward and Enjoyment, and Confidence are associated with Metamotivation (Fellenz & Conti, 1993). Memory involves the activities which "store, retain, and retrieve knowledge" (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 6). Memory strategies include Organization, Use of External Aids, and Memory Application (Fellenz & Conti, 1993). Critical thinking is "a reflective thinking process utilizing higher order thinking skills in order to improve learning" (Fellenz & Conti, 1993, p. 30). Testing Assumptions, Generating Alternatives, and Conditional Acceptance are the learning strategies associated with Critical Thinking (Fellenz & Conti, 1993). Resource Management includes Identification of Resources, Critical Use of Resources, and Use of Human Resources (Fellenz & Conti, 1993). Resource Management are the strategies "that lead to effective use of resources" (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 8).

SKILLS has been used in several studies related to the learning strategies of adult learners (James, 2000, p. 66).

Kolody's (1997) study of adult learners at 2-year colleges in Alberta, Canada "set the standard for many subsequent learning strategy preference studies" (James, 2000, p. 68). Along with its predecessor study (Conti & Kolody, 1995), this study "provided a basic design for later studies that used discriminant analysis to clarify the relationship between learning strategy preferences and demographic characteristics" (James, 2000, p. 69).

Lockwood (1997) studied the learning strategy preferences of Montana nursing program students. In this study, discriminant analysis determined no learning strategy differences between groups of students in associate and baccalaureate programs or between students in different campus programs.

The learning strategy preferences of adult learners at the Fort Peck Reservation in Montana were studied by Bighorn (1997). The analysis of this study revealed that "when the variables of age, gender, ethnicity, tribal affiliation, traditionalism, and grades were considered, learning strategy preferences differentiated only between individuals grouped on grades" (James, 2000, p. 70).

In a similar study which examined the learning strategy preferences of workers in Great Falls, Montana, Gehring (1997) found that the preferences "did not differentiate between individuals grouped on the demographic variables of

age, gender, post-secondary attendance, educational credential, or number of years in a particular position" (James, 2000, p. 70).

Research using the SKILLS instrument's five learning strategy areas has led to the development of an instrument called Assessing the Learning Strategies of Adults (Conti & Kolody, 1997). ATLAS was formulated to "produce an instrument which was easy to administer, which could be completed rapidly, and which could be used immediately by both facilitators and learners" (Conti & Kolody, 1998, p. 109). The development of this instrument led to the identification of three distinct groups of learners. The groups are referred to as Navigators, Problem Solvers, and Engagers (Conti & Kolody, 1999).

Navigators are "focused learners who chart a course for learning and follow it" (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 9). They are high achievers who tend to concentrate on external learning processes. Navigators initiate a learning task "by looking externally to themselves at the utilization of resources that will help them accomplish the learning" (p. 18). These learners rely on strategies such as Planning, Attention, Identification and Use of Resources, and Testing Assumptions. Navigators are uncomfortable with changes and depend on instructors to waste little time. Navigators work well under organized deadlines, clear-cut goals, and

clearly-communicated expectations; they "plan their learning schedule according to deadlines and the final expected result" (p. 9).

Critical Thinking is the learning strategy most frequently associated with Problem Solvers (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 18). Like the Navigators, these learners look externally at available resources that will best assist their learning procedures. Problem Solvers "rely on a reflective thinking process which utilizes higher order thinking skills" (p. 11). They frequently test assumptions, generate alternatives, and use conditional acceptance strategies. Problem Solvers are handy at adjusting their learning processes and resources to fit their learning needs (p. 12). These learners are best evaluated with open-ended questions and activities that use problem-solving techniques rather than with multiple-choice problems. Problem Solvers learn best in environments that "promote experimentation through practical experience and hands-on activities" (p. 13).

Internally motivated, Engagers must be certain that a learning activity will be meaningful to them before they become involved (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 14). They are "passionate learners who love to learn, learn with feeling, and learn best when they are actively engaged in a meaningful manner" (p. 13). They thrive on the learning

process and the enjoyment gained while interacting with other people. Engagers consider their efforts "as an extension of themselves and are motivated by feelings of satisfaction and pride" (p. 15). Many times, these learners' self worth is affirmed by the work they do (p. 15). Engagers offer instructors an opportunity to be sensitive to their need for validation. They tend to focus on the process of learning rather than the content of material being learned.

New insights to the field of Adult Education have been added as a result of recent studies using ATLAS (Willyard, 2000, p. 75). James (2000) discovered significantly more Engagers than expected in a sample of high school noncompleters in an Adult Basic Education program. In an investigation of self-directed learning on the Internet, Spencer (2000) found an unusually larger number of Problem Solvers than expected. Willyard (2000) found a higher than expected number of Engagers in her study of first-generation and non-first-generation college students in a community college in Tulsa, Oklahoma. "An emerging trend in learning strategy research is the concept of the groups of learners possessing a proclivity toward a certain type of learning environment" (Willyard, 2000, p. 192).

Research in the area of learning strategies is continuing (James, 2000, p. 75). A study involving

community policing (Birger, 2000) has been completed. Studies using ATLAS that are in various stages of completion include studies of Wichita, Kansas police officers; African American church school participants; Oklahoma Department of Human Services Child Welfare employees; Oklahoma GED teachers; and university presidents in Oklahoma (James, 2000, p. 75).

### Culture and the Computer

#### The Digital Divide

The world is currently in an information and technology era characterized by "swift and stunning change" (Clinton, 2000, p. 1). Like the Industrial Revolution, the current Information Revolution is a huge shift that "alters forever the way we work, live, relate to each other, and those beyond our borders" (p. 1). The foundation which at one time "drove men to ideological battles, revolutions, and wars is slowly dying out in the wake of a new constellation of economic realities that is moving society to rethink the kinds of bonds and boundaries that will define human relations in the coming century" (Rifkin, 2000). This new technology is here to stay and will not go away (Apple, 1991). Much as the printing press impacted human consciousness during the past centuries, "the computer will likely have a similar affect on consciousness over the next two hundred years" (Rifkin, 2000, p. 12). Use of the

Internet is predicted to "do no less than virtually transform society" (Hoffman & Novak, 1998, p. 1).

The Information Revolution has been characterized and documented by personal computer use and access to the Internet. Computer use and participation in Internet activities has increased dramatically in the United States in recent years (National Telecommunications and Information Administration, 1998). In 1998, over 40% of American households owned computers, and 25% of all households had Internet access (National Telecommunications and Information Administration, 1998). A survey just two years later found that 50% of all U. S. households owned computers, and 41.5% have Internet access (Harris Interactive, 2000). In 1995, only 9% of this country's adults were on the Internet while 59% of adults are online in the year 2000 (Harris Interactive, 2000).

Access to computers and the Internet has come to represent "openings to whole new worlds of possibilities and opportunities" (Rifkin, 2000, p. 15). Access has "become the litmus test for connectivity in a wired world" (p. 229) and has developed into "the single most powerful metaphor of the coming age" (p. 15). Passage to new telecommunications techniques is driving our economy and is "key to individual opportunity in today's world" (Gladieux & Swail, 1999). Availability and usage of computers and Internet access

becomes "one of the most important considerations of the coming age" (Rifkin, 2000, p. 234).

Millions of people are experiencing the benefits of increased computer access and the Internet while such access eludes vast numbers of people. This has resulted in the phenomenon commonly referred to as the Digital Divide. Thus, the Digital Divide is the gap between people with access to computers and the Internet and those without it. Some see advanced usage of computer technology as a means to improve the lives of people who are marginalized and oppressed while others view such inclusion as irrelevant as long as economic access factors go unaddressed (Holt, 1998). New information technology has "demonstrated the power to include and exclude, to assimilate and isolate" (p. 67). This Digital Divide is challenging the meaning of democracy in the United States (Risinger, 2000). In the Information Age, new technology does not stand isolated but is rather "linked to transformations in real groups of people's lives, jobs, hope, and dreams" (Apple, 1991, p. 77).

In early 1995, Vice President Al Gore commissioned the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) to analyze telephone, computer, and Internet access in the United States. The NTIA's findings were reported in July, 1995, later updated, and re-released in February of 1998 (National Telecommunications and Information



Administration, 1998). The NTIA report is cited more often than any other report in literature addressing the digital divide. The 1998 NTIA report provided information about telephone, computer, and Internet access based on geographic location, level of income, race, age, educational level, and household type.

The NTIA report revealed a divide in computer ownership data in the United States that included geographic area, level of income, racial and ethnic data, as well as level of education of computer owners. The report found no significant difference between access to computers in rural, urban, and inner city areas. It did find that people with a higher income were more likely to own computers. The gap of computer ownership between higher and lower income households widened in the three years between 1995 and 1998 (NTIA, 1998, p. 6). Although personal computer ownership had grown throughout all racial groups, White American households were more than twice as likely to own a computer as African American, Hispanic American, or Native American households (p. 23). The college educated were 10 times more likely to own a computer as those without a highschool education (p. 28).

The NTIA report included findings that showed a marked lack of access to the Internet throughout various geographic, income, racial, and educational groups.

Internet access for people in urban and inner cities was comparable while people in rural areas were less likely to be online (NTIA, 1998, p. 31). Households earning between \$5,000 and \$10,000 annually were almost 10 times less likely to have Internet access than households earning over \$75,000 per year. Anglo American people's Internet access was nearly three times greater than African American, Native American, or Hispanic American people (p. 32). The educational level was the most pronounced discrepancy to Internet access. People with college degrees were 20 times more likely to have access to the Internet than those without a highschool education (p. 34).

Even when people from low-income brackets and minority populations gain access to the Internet, they face other significant barriers to complete access. These barriers include lack of pertinent local information, literacy barriers, language barriers, and lack of cultural diversity (Revenaugh, 2000). Those individuals prohibited from Internet access are "being pushed even farther into the margins of society because of their lack of access to telecommunications technology" (Kornblum & Julian, 1995, p. 500).

The Digital Divide is much more than a large gap between the information rich and the information poor in the United States. When 65% of the world's population has never

used a telephone and 40% have no electricity, the Divide takes on a more cataclysmic breath (Rifkin, 2000, p. 229). Many of these people live in poverty and despair in which their daily lives are dictated by sheer physical survival. (p. 229). Over 600 million people worldwide are homeless or live in unsanitary or unsafe housing (p. 231). These people are at risk of being pushed even farther behind "as the more affluent connect with one another, erect commercial and social networks of shared interest, and leave everyone else isolated" (Rifkin, 2000, p. 232).

Past world leaders have helped their poor and disadvantaged overcome extreme racial and social barriers. In the 1930s and 1940s, Mahatma Ghandi advocated non-violent protest as a means to empower poor and uneducated people of India against imperialistic British rule. In the 1960s, Martin Luther King, Jr. employed non-violent protest to lead African American and poor people in a civil rights movement which opposed racial discrimination and advocated peaceful change to the social structure through change in law. In the Twentieth Century, two leaders in education emerged who likewise assisted and empowered poor and oppressed people through new learning techniques which enabled them to accomplish significant and relevant change for the betterment of their lives and their society. These two leaders, Myles Horton and Paulo Freire, viewed education as

a "tool for making sense of the world and for preparing people to take action" (Conti, 1977, p. 42). They were radical educators who made it their lives' work to "fan the embers of hopelessness into a flame to fight" (Alinsky, 1971, p. 194). They lived, worked, and learned among their people. They were willing to risk imprisonment and injury for their people and their causes. These men were the "human torches setting aflame the hearts of men so that they passionately fought for the rights of their fellow men, all men" (Alinsky, 1946, p. 9).

#### Myles Horton

Freedom for all people and the right to achieve that freedom through self-liberation were the cornerstones of Myles Horton's philosophy (Horton & Freire, 1990). His work grew from the approaches of other educational leaders such as John Dewey and Eduard Lindeman (Horton, 1990a). Horton's goal was to work for real democracy "not just make believe democracy economic democracy, cultural democracy, as well as political democracy" (Horton, 1990b, p. 9). He asserted that real democracy starts with the grassroots effort of people who learn through their personal experiences.

Myles Horton identified adult learning strategies within the context of the contemporary social struggle for democratic change within which he worked. His approach to learning for social change was a process grounded in

real-life human struggles for democracy and guided by adult experiences and their capacity for positive change. Horton was well known for creating little "islands of decency, places for people to be human" (Horton, 1990b, p. 9) by providing opportunities for people to "learn in such a way that they continue to grow" (Horton, 1990a, p. 133).

Horton felt strongly about the learning power of people in the process of learning. His conviction always revolved around respect for people and the wisdom to allow people to "develop their own thinking without you trying to think for them" (Horton & Freire, 1990, p.149). A circle of learners where each person is part of a peer learning group in which they become their own experts, do their own research, take action that tests their ideas, and learn from their real-life experiences was the foundation on which Horton built (Horton & Freire, 1990, pp. 151-152). He believed that when everyday people meet together and share their experiences and problems, their problems would be solved.

Horton expressed strong convictions about the role of educators in the learning process. He maintained that educators guide the direct connection between the learners' experiences and the problem they seek to solve (Horton & Freire, 1990, p. 152). Horton insisted that educators have two roles. The first role is as an educator in relation to the situation, and the other role is as a person with

experiences to share with the learners (p. 159). Horton asked questions and then observed the non-verbal cues and body language of learners while respecting their ideas (Horton, 1990a, pp. 70-71). Horton believed that educators should never impose their ideas on other people, but instead they have a responsibility to relate relevant information in the context of the learners' society (Horton & Freire, 1990, p. 104). "Whatever you have to contribute has a social dimension" (Horton & Freire, 1990, p. 105).

Highlander Folk School was founded by Myles Horton and friends in Grundy County, Tennessee in 1932. They took the name from the mountain people of Appalachia (Adams, 1975). Supported by John Dewey's philosophy that "civil and political democracy were meaningless without equivalent economic and industrial democracy" (p. 13), Horton cultivated the school to be a haven where "people could make decisions on things that mattered" (Horton, 1990a, p. 58). The school was established on the principle that individuals were empowered through working in harmony to fulfill common needs (Adams, 1975, pp. 15-16). Highlander's initial purpose was to educate people "for a revolution that would basically alter economic and political power relationships to the advantage of the poor and powerless" (p. 205), which in short could "assist in creating leadership for democracy" (Highlander Executive Council, 1950). The birth of

Highlander Folk school exemplified "an adult education program that promised both to benefit the people of southern Appalachia and to transform the social, economic, and political order" (Glen, 1996, p. 24).

People associated with Highlander have impacted many social issues since 1932. In the 1930s and 1940s, Highlander focused on organizing labor unions especially in the textile and mining industries. During this time, the school gained a reputation as one of few schools in the South that were committed to organized labor and economic justice causes (Glen, 1996, p. 55). The Civil Rights Movement was the focus of Highlander's work in the 1950s and 1960s. The school was a leader in the war to end racism and gender discrimination in the South. In the wake of *Brown vs. Board of Education* in 1954 and in a time when many African American women were domestic employees in White households, the people of Highlander struck out against racial segregation and gender bias. Black and White people of both genders learned side by side in the Citizenship Schools and other important Highlander contributions. Such leaders as Martin Luther King, Jr., Eleanor Roosevelt, Rosa Parks, Andrew Young, and Septima Clark worked, learned, became empowered, and were impacted at Highlander (Adams, 1975; Horton, 1990a; Glen, 1996). Today, the Highlander Education and Research Center maintains an idea and a place

"where strategies for progressive change can be developed"  
(Glen, 1996, p. 282).

Paulo Freire

Myles Horton's philosophies are echoed in the work of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. Freire's practice of adult learning was developed in the 1960s and 1970s through revolutionary struggles in Brazil and Chile. Through his efforts to obliterate illiteracy, Freire (1970) fought to help poor and oppressed people overcome their sense of powerlessness and to function on their own behalf. People victimized by the censorship of illiteracy learned more effectively when the words and phrases mastered were charged with political importance. Freire believed that adult learning succeeded best in oppressive circumstances when it was a consciously political act in which the learners used their experiences to reflect and take social action. He believed that education not only empowered learners individually but served to change all peoples' social structures. From this viewpoint, adult learning "attempts to provide space for learners who have been marginalized or silenced by the power structures within which they live" (Amstutz, 1999, p. 21).

The term "pedagogy of the oppressed" was created by Paulo Freire (1970) who described it as "a pedagogy which must be forged with not for, the oppressed (whether



individuals or peoples) in the incessant struggle to regain their humanity" (p. 30). Pedagogy of the oppressed has two distinct stages. In the first stage, oppressed people recognize and expose the world of oppression and "through the praxis commit themselves to its transformation" (p. 36). Secondly, the transformed reality of oppression changes from belonging just to the oppressed people to belonging to all people through the process of lasting liberation (p. 36). Action that confronts the dominant culture is a common denominator in both stages of the pedagogy of the oppressed.

Freire concluded that education is never neutral. It either serves to oppress or to liberate, but it is never impartial or uninvolved. Education must be founded on the ethical and political principles that empower learners to control their own lives and histories (Freire, 1994, p. 128). Freire sought to empower oppressed people in South America and to transform traditional educational practices. He viewed oppressed people not as marginal or dwelling outside civilization but as leaders who have the responsibility to free themselves and their oppressors (Freire, 1970, p. 38). It is imperative that "the oppressed wage the struggle to resolve the contradiction in which they are caught" (p. 38) because this results in liberated people. Freire therefore concluded the task of oppressed people was to not only liberate themselves but also to

liberate their oppressors as well because oppressors cannot find "the strength to liberate either the oppressed or themselves" (p. 26).

Paulo Freire described two concepts of education in his reflections. The banking concept of education is based on the premise that learners are merely receptacles or the depositories of knowledge which the instructor chooses to fill. Banking education viewed students as "adaptable, manageable beings" who conform to the instructors' presented realities deposited in them. This concept concludes that "knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider know nothing" (Freire, 1995, p. 139).

Freire championed a second type of education called problem-posing education. This type of education helped people recognize, define, and clarify problems in their lives so they could critically think about solutions and take collective action. Through dialogue, teachers and students become learning partners as they "become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow" (Freire, 1970, p. 61). The problem-posing educational method finds educators in a constant state of re-forming considerations based on the reflections of students and in a constant state of unveiling consciousness and "critical intervention in reality" (p. 62). This method empowers learners to "examine

critically the assumptions, values, and beliefs underlying their perceptions of the world" (Brookfield, 1986, p. 235).

### Language of Technology

Both Horton and Freire viewed culture as inseparable from peoples' lives and from their learning. These two leaders believe that culture is a significant part of the learners' educational experiences. Learning events take place in the context of the participants' culture and are not separated and isolated from it. History-telling, dancing, singing, crafts, role-playing, and cooking are all significant elements in Horton's and Freire's work. "How is it possible for us to work in a community without feeling the spirit of the culture that has been there for many years, without trying to understand the soul of the culture?" (Horton & Freire, 1990, p. 131). Education must come from the learning styles of the people (Adams, 1975, p. 207), and it has to become an experience "both in and in terms of people's own culture" (p. 207).

Although many believe that language is a part of culture, the culture always comes from language (Kipp, 2000, p. 6). Language carries with it all the components of culture, and there is a "close connection between language and culture" (Still Smoking, 1996, p. 97). Language is the beacon for all aspects of culture. People's songs, stories, dances, foods, and "all essential things vital to the way of

life" (p. 135) are represented in the languages used. Language and culture are "virtually inseparable" (p. 97). All elements of culture are personified in language, and "it is through the language that knowledge comes about" (p. 111) for "language is the soul of the people who speak it" (p. 135). Thus, language serves to embrace and enfold all aspects of culture, is cooperative by nature, and carries the culture with it.

There are two ways to view the concept of language. First, the language that embodies all of culture is the traditional form of language. However, a new form of language has developed from the Information Age. The new language is a language of computers and advanced technology. It could become exclusive and could serve to isolate and divide people rather than to incorporate the inclusive and cooperative traits that belong to traditional language.

Not unlike Native American people forced to stop using their language, many around the world are being forced outside their language and culture. They are pushed to abandon their language in two ways. First, many are forced into technological illiteracy by virtue of being unable to access computers and the Internet. The Digital Divide supports this concept. The second way people are forced from the language of culture is the isolation which results from computer and Internet use. Just as many are forced

outside of the culture by limited or no access, people with access to computers and the Internet may be forced from a cohesive cultural community of traditional language into individual isolation. The language of the Information Age could not only separate people from using the new language, it also has the potential to separate people from each other. The language of technology could be driving people away from cohesive language-driven communities and away from their natural roots. Instead of bringing people together, the language of the Information Age may be gradually isolating people from one another and natural community with people toward a globalization of individual isolation.

Despite the possibility of separating people from the language of culture and from each other, communication and language could be enhanced by new technology. In the Information Age, the use of e-mail and other communications technologies may actually strengthen the bonds between people and their language, culture, and relationships.

Conventional wisdom tells us our mobility, heavy work schedules and growing reliance on technology estrange us from our family. But there is growing evidence that just the opposite is true. More and more, families use technology to help them connect, and when they do, many report that technology is changing--and often improving--their relationships with one another. (Dickinson, 2000, p. 6)

Thus, as more people gain access to the Internet and e-mail capabilities, less isolation and separation could occur.

The language of technology is powerful since it carries with it all the elements of culture. Like traditional languages, it has the power to include or isolate and the power to build up or destroy. The language of the Information Age and new technologies do not stand alone. They are "linked to transformations in real groups of people's lives, jobs, hopes, and dreams. For some of these groups, those lives will be enhanced. For others, the dreams will be shattered" (Apple, 1991, p. 77).

#### eBay

As a result of growing computer accessibility, developing technology, and increasing global Internet participation, a new subgroup of World Wide Web users has emerged. This group consists of Internet users known as online auction traders. These buyers and sellers of items on Internet auction sites make up a major segment of the growth of the Internet (<http://www.ebay.com>). They engage in commerce using state-of-the-art technology as they buy and sell goods through an Internet auction house. The largest group of high-tech traders is found on eBay, the world's largest Internet auction site (<http://www.ebay.com>).

This online trading community was named eBay, a name selected during founder Pierre Omidyar's search for an available domain name as he registered his new company. He recognized that people needed a central location to buy and

sell unique items and to interact with other people with comparable interests. eBay's constituency includes collectors, small dealers, bargain hunters, hobbyists, and browsers. People participating in eBay activities are called registered "users" (<http://www.ebay.com>).

eBay was founded upon a belief that people are basically honest and trustworthy. eBay's mission is simply to help people buy and sell almost anything on Earth (<http://www.ebay.com>). The people at eBay believe their customers, whether buyers or sellers, are entitled to respect. The 32-year-old founder together with company President, Meg Whitman, and the eBay staff, operate the online auction house the old-fashioned way: person-to-person (<http://www.ebay.com>). Combining old-fashioned, one-on-one contact with new technology is driving eBay's huge worldwide online marketplace growth (<http://www.ebay.com>).

eBay offers its users 13 categories in which to buy and sell their wares. Items auctioned in these categories range from the sublime such as an oil painting of the Sioux warrior and holy man Crazy Horse to the ridiculous such as a chewed piece of Dave Letterman's gum. eBay sponsors more than four million auctions on its web site at a time, and over 500,000 new items are added to the eBay line-up daily (<http://www.ebay.com>).

eBay provides its users with many opportunities to

communicate with each other. Users meet, discuss topics of mutual interest, and request information from one another electronically. The website provides bulletin boards, public forums, discussion boards, online newsletters, chat rooms, and technical assistance groups that encourage such communication. Feedback profiles are available that give ratings on each registered eBay user and comment on the quality of their business transactions. Many users have formed self-policing groups that guard against violations of eBay's policies. Several groups across the United States gather each Labor Day to celebrate eBay's birthday (<http://www.ebay.com>).

Participation in the eBay auction process has changed some people's lives. Many users have left traditional jobs to become full-time eBay traders. Others have created second businesses to supplement their income. Some people have made good friends on the eBay site. They vacation together, visit with each other, contribute to buy items for other users, and report to each other on milestones in their lives. They organize grassroots efforts to improve their work and play environments. Several married couples have met while participating in eBay activities (<http://www.ebay.com>).

eBay has received numerous awards and enjoyed much success during its short life. The Wall Street Journal



designated eBay as "a must-see Web destination" in 1998. Forbes magazine (July, 1999) chose eBay as one of "the e-Gang 12 mavericks who are rewriting the rules of the Web" and, in its December, 1999 issue, named eBay its Favorite Auction Site. eBay was tapped for the 2000 Computerworld Smithsonian Award in the Business Related Services category (<http://www.ebay.com>). With an average daily visitor population of almost two million, eBay enjoys an overall Internet daily reach of 6.5% of all people on the World Wide Web.

eBay's founder puts his money where his heart is. Despite earning over six billion dollars since 1995, Pierre and Pamela Omidyar live in a Nevada home furnished with items from Target stores. They drive a Volkswagen Cabriolet. Omidyar owns four suits, all purchased from eBay's public-offering road show. The couple worries that possessing large amounts of money will change them into "mindless, conspicuous consumers" (Forbes, 2000, p. 118) and will warp any children that may be born to them. The Omidyars' goal is to give away all but 1% of their newfound wealth by the year 2020 when Pierre will turn 52. One thing that is sure to remain in their possession is Pamela's collection of over 400 Pez™ dispensers (Forbes, 2000).

Maintaining that their wealth is not technology-based but human-based, the Omidyars established a foundation to

fund programs of positive social change (Forbes, 2000). The eBay Foundation was established in June, 1998. Desiring their philanthropy to be "as powerful an agent for social change as eBay and the Web are for commerce" (Forbes, 2000, p. 114), they seek to "rebuild a sense of community in America" (p. 116). Pierre Omidyar is interested in funding education and science issues while Pamela is interested in fighting childhood cancer and protecting the environment.

The eBay Foundation was introduced in late 1998 and was built on three guiding principles (<http://www.ebay.com>). The first principle is that the Foundation reflects the values and community orientation of eBay. The governance committee views the eBay Foundation as clever, unique, passionate, and eclectic. The second principle is to support organizations that provide tools, hope, and direction to those who seek new skills. The Foundation's third principle is to strengthen organizations with long-term implications thereby maximizing their ability to do well in the world.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### Design

This study utilized a descriptive research design. This research method tests hypotheses or answers questions concerning participants' current status, and it reports "the way things are" (Gay, 1987, p. 11). In addition, this design is "generally asking questions that have not been asked before" (p. 11). Descriptive research is used in many studies but particularly educational studies and studies that deal with attitudinal, demographic, and opinion based investigations (Gay, 1996, p. 249). "Descriptive research involves collecting data in order to test hypotheses or answer questions concerning the current status of the subject of the study" (p. 14).

This study investigated the uncharted waters of Internet learning on eBay and described the learning strategies adults use while engaged in the eBay auction process. Many educational research studies conducted at a distance traditionally use mailed written surveys or telephone contacts (Heflich & Rice, 1999). The Information Age, which is exemplified by growing access to computers and the Internet, has established a new method of data gathering. Therefore, this study used an online survey

which uses the capabilities of the Internet as the newest data collection tool.

Collecting data on the Internet is relatively new (Spencer, 2000, p. 77). While an increasing number of electronic surveys are posted on the Internet, "little outcome data is available" (Matz, 1999). Information about Internet surveys in the literature "does not currently contain many examples of scholarly research utilizing web-based data gathering" (Spencer, 2000, p. 77). The global network of computers has formed "a technology that promises to supply any information needed in any format, to answer any question, and to replace much of print media" (Clayton & Werking, 1998, p. 543). Collecting data by electronic survey is a development that "may prove even more profound" than the advances of random sampling in the 1940s and telephone interviews of the 1970s (Dillman, 2000). In spite of its enormous potential, little is known about how to use the Internet as a data collecting tool. Thus, caution should be used by researchers when gathering data in this way.

One major advantage to using the Internet as a data collection method is convenience for both the researcher and the participant. Particularly when utilizing e-mail, this method is fast and easy for recipients to access and to respond to (Bertot & McClure, 1996; Heflich & Rice, 1999;

Matz, 1999; Young & Ross, 2000). Traditional postal or personal contact surveys may be inconvenient and time consuming to prepare or to arrange.

An additional advantage is the speed of the data collection process. "The speed of electronic transmission allows messages to be transmitted worldwide in a matter of minutes as opposed to traditional mail which may take months to reach a country outside the U. S." (Heflich & Rice, 1999, p. 2). Electronic surveys sent directly to recipient's e-mail addresses have been found to be convenient to access and may be completed more quickly, often cutting researcher and participant time significantly (Stevens, 2000).

Researchers using electronic surveys spend little or no time on clerical functions such as copying, folding, stapling, and envelope stuffing required of paper surveys. Although response speed is an advantage to using Internet surveys, researchers must consider different cultural implications of time (Stevens, 2000). For example, timeliness is viewed differently in Latin America than in Japan.

Another advantage of using the Internet as a data collection tool is reduced cost. Particularly when using e-mail surveys, data collection on the Internet is inexpensive (Heflich & Rice, 1999; Matz, 1999; Young & Rice, 2000). Electronic surveys eliminate copying and postage expenses which potentially constitute major expenses in postal

surveys. Personal contact surveys may require copying and clerical support costs.

Another advantage to data collection using the Internet is transcription ease and efficiency. With electronic surveys, "data is easily transferred from a mail program to a program for analysis; and very little transcription is necessary" (Heflich & Rice, 1999, p. 3). Traditional mail or personal contact surveys are often laborious and subject to transcriber error or bias. Critical to the online survey is clarity and precise description of information sought (Heflich & Rice, 2000) which eases the transcription process.

Internet survey research affords anonymity to respondents who disclose personal or private information. In anonymous situations or in instances where identification numbers are used in place of individual names, the responses from electronic survey participants is progressive, meaningful, purposeful, and highly stimulating (Persichitte, Young, & Tharp, 1997). Distance and anonymity afforded by online research lends itself to honest, straightforward, and thoughtful participant answers.

One aspects of online data collection for the researcher to consider is the effect of sampling. The sample effects of surveys conducted on the Internet is a major factor for researchers who target an Internet

population (Matz, 1999, p. 6). Generally, the overall population of Internet users has different characteristics than the general population (Matz, 1999, p. 7). In studies investigating the learning strategies of adult learners, the distribution of the respondents in the three identified learning strategy groups on the ATLAS instrument was relatively equal (Conti & Kolody, 1999). However, data collected from a recent study using the Internet demonstrated that a higher number of people used critical thinking, generating alternative, assumption testing, and conditional acceptance skills when initiating a learning activity. That study on self-directed learning and the Internet found just over 50% of the participants used these strategies which was significantly higher than the expected 31.7% from the general population (Spencer, 2000).

A major consideration for researchers using the Internet is the issue of access. Although access to personal computers and the Internet is growing, many people from certain ethnic backgrounds, income levels, geographic areas, and educational levels are left with little or no access (Apple, 2000; Gladieux & Swail, 1999; National Telecommunications and Information Administration, 1998; Rifkin, 2000). Those people who do have access to computers and the Internet may have access issues of a different nature. Many people lack the necessary skills, equipment,

or software necessary to complete a particular survey online (Bertot & McClure, 1996).

The return rate of electronic surveys is one of the most important considerations for researchers to ponder when using the Internet as a research medium. Although some research indicates little or no difference in response rate between electronic or paper surveys, most of the literature points to a general trend of lower response rates for electronic surveys (Matz, 1999). The degree to which the two survey methods differ may vary according to "how well each survey is promoted, what followup and motivational procedures are employed, and the general responsiveness of the population surveyed" (p. 26). Electronic surveys may have a much higher response rate if sent to a specific audience that is mandated to complete the survey or is pre-advised of the survey and its intent. Unsolicited Internet surveys are extremely susceptible to being deleted from the recipient's e-mail box and may be viewed as the electronic equivalent of postal junk mail or telephone telemarketing.

For this study on the learning strategies of eBay users unsolicited e-mail communications were sent to 6,628 people requesting their participation. An extremely low response rate was received. Only 6% of the people e-mailed responded to the questionnaire. The effects of cold-calling on prospective participants was evident in this low response



rate. This low response rate "as a general trend for electronic surveys in comparison with paper surveys" is confirmed in the literature review (Matz, 1999, p. 26).

The medium in which surveys are administered provides no meaningful effect on the results of surveys administered on the Internet and those administered on paper (Matz, 1999; Young & Ross, 2000). Internet and traditional survey research methods "often yield similar results, both in quantitative and qualitative studies" (Yoffie, 1998, p. 16). As computer and Internet use continues to grow, Internet survey information becomes more critical as online survey use increases.

The historical success of survey research combined with modern computer and Internet technology has the potential to provide a powerful investigative option to researchers. The Internet survey is an "excellent tool for gathering pertinent data from a variety of people" (Young & Rice, 2000, p. 7). Surveying electronically has the capability of becoming the "wave of the future in communicating and gathering information, attitudes, and opinions from a wide variety of respondents" (Young & Rice, 2000, p. 4).

#### Sample

A population is a group that has a similar set of characteristics and the group to which the researcher would like the results of the study to be generalizable (Gay,

1987, pp. 102-103). This group "consists of all members of a group of individuals who are alike on at least one specified characteristic" (Spence, Cotton, Underwood, & Duncan, 1983, p. 4) and the group of interest to the researcher that has "at least one characteristic that differentiates it from other groups" (Gay, 1987, p. 102).

A sample is the number of people chosen from a target population so that they portray the characteristics of the target population (Gay, 1987, p. 101). A sample is "any number of cases less than the total number of cases in the population from which it is drawn" (Spence, Cotton, Underwood, & Duncan, 1983, p. 5). Assertions about a sample can be used to "make inferences about the characteristics of the population as a whole" (p. 5) if the sample is representative of the population.

Selecting a sample is a "very important step in conducting a research study" (Gay, 1987, p. 103). There are four ways of selecting a sample that can be generalized to the studied population. These four techniques of sampling are: random sampling, stratified sampling, cluster sampling, and systematic sampling (Gay, 1987). No matter which sampling technique is used, "the steps in sampling are essentially the same: identification of the population, determination of required sample size, and selection of the sample" (p. 104).

Stratified sampling was used in this study of adult learners on eBay. "Stratified sampling is the process of selecting a sample in such a way that identified subgroups in the population are represented in the sample in the same proportion that they exist in the population" (Gay, 1987, p. 107). The purpose of stratified sampling is "to guarantee desired representation of relevant subgroups" (p. 107).

At the time that data collection was initiated, eBay had over 5.6 million registered members. The sample was selected from auction participants of completed sales between August 15, 1999, and January 30, 2000. The appropriate sample size to be representative of a population of 5.6 million is 384 (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970; Mitchell & Jolley, 1988, p. 302). The 380 responses that were received from the online questionnaire approximated the 384 suggested to be 95% "confident that your results will be within 5% of the true percentage in the population" (Mitchell & Jolley, 1988, p. 302).

Items for auction on eBay are listed in 13 categories. Approximately 500 auction participants were identified from completed auctions in each category. These categories and the sample size for each were as follows: Antiques (510), Automobiles (504), Books/Movies/Music (535), Coins and Stamps (509), Collectibles (504), Computers (518), Dolls/Figures (506), Jewelry/Gemstones (496), Photo and

Electronics (517), Pottery/Glass (506), Sports (515), Toys/Bean Bag Plush (500) , and a category called Everything Else (508).

Each of these categories has numerous subcategories that change daily according to auction activity. The eBay users were also stratified by these subcategories.

Subcategories with high volumes of bidding activity were selected in three final sale-price levels: low items under \$10, medium items \$50-\$100, and high items over \$100. All of the bidders for a selected auction were included in the sample. Bidders from these three price levels in each of the 13 eBay categories were selected to form the desired representative sample of the target population.

#### Survey

Data were gathered by means of a questionnaire that was created and located on the researcher's website. This questionnaire consisted of open-ended questions and identified choices. It gave respondents an opportunity to describe how they: (a) learned about eBay and navigated the site, (b) formed and exercised their bidding strategies, (c) communicated with other people on eBay, and (d) felt about the skills they learned. In addition to these questions, demographic data on each participant was requested related to education, gender, age, and race. Finally, the Assessing The Learning Strategies of Adults (ATLAS) instrument was

imbedded within the questionnaire to determine the preferred strategies of eBay users.

The auctions on eBay use an open system in which the identity of bidders is posted with each auction. Therefore, the e-mail addresses of bidders in completed auctions from selected subcategories were captured electronically and downloaded into a database structure. These bidders were e-mailed a request to participate in the study. Those who consented to participate were instructed to click on an Internet address that linked them with the researcher's website where the questionnaire was located. After the participants completed and submitted their questionnaire, their responses were e-mailed to the researcher's website. These were then downloaded into an Access data management file. Quantitative data were transferred to SPSS for analysis. Qualitative data were transferred to a word processing program. Following organization and sorting, patterns were identified for each question on the survey.

#### ATLAS

ATLAS is a relatively new instrument designed to quickly identify learning strategy profiles (Conti & Kolody, 1998a, p. 109). Ordinarily, ATLAS is printed on color-coded pages bound in a booklet format. For this study, the ATLAS instrument was imbedded in the online questionnaire. Participants followed descriptive phrases by

clicking their mouse indicators on selected responses. Each response led the participants to eventually discover their learning strategy group of Navigator, Problem Solver, or Engager. Once they discovered their learning strategy profile group, participants were asked to indicate whether the learner description fit them or not.

ATLAS is a valid instrument for measuring the learning strategy preferences of adults in real-life learning situations (Conti & Kolody, 1998). Validity is "the degree to which a test measures what it is intended to measure" (Gay, 1987, p. 553). The ATLAS instrument was based on the research findings of the Self-Knowledge Inventory of Lifelong Learning Strategies (SKILLS) and carries with it the validity of the SKILLS instrument (Conti & Fellenz, 1991).

Three kinds of validity are important. They are construct validity, content validity, and criterion-related validity. Construct validity is "the degree to which a test measures an intended hypothetical construct" (Gay, 1987, p. 131). "The process of establishing construct validity for ATLAS was to synthesize the results of the numerous research studies using SKILLS and to consolidate these results" (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 16). SKILLS conceptualizes learning strategies for real-life learning as consisting of the areas of metacognition, metamotivation, memory, critical

thinking, and resource management (p. 3). "The construct validity of ATLAS was established by reviewing the literature of studies actually using SKILLS in field-based research and by consolidating the similar data from many studies" (p. 18). Cluster analysis was used with a data set of 3,070 of these cases to identify three groups of learning strategy patterns (p. 17). These groups were identified as Navigators, Problem Solvers, and Engagers; the three groups are distributed relatively evenly between Navigators--36.5%, Problem Solvers--31.8%, and Engagers--31.8%. (p. 18).

Content validity is "the degree to which a test measures an intended content area" (Gay, 1987, p. 129). Content validity for ATLAS was established using discriminate analyses to determine the exact learning strategies pattern used by each group when compared to the other groups (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 18-19) and each question in the instrument is based on one of these analyses. ATLAS appears to the learner in a flow-chart design with items on separate pages which guards against learners reading descriptions of other learning strategy preferences other than their own (p. 19). "Instead of multiple attempts to identify a characteristic, ATLAS uses discriminant analysis to precisely describe the content for each item" (p. 19).

Criterion-related validity is "validity which is determined by relating performance on a test to performance on another criterion" (Gay, 1987, p. 543). The authors of ATLAS are still collecting criterion-related data and have incorporated the results from this study in their data base (Conti, personal communication, December, 2000). Therefore, in order to compare the identified learning strategy on ATLAS to the actual criterion of how it exists in the real world, the eBay participants were asked to confirm if their ATLAS grouping accurately described them. The results from this study verify that at least 90% of the participants agree that ATLAS correctly identifies their learning strategies. This is consistent with "follow-up studies involving nearly 1,000 participants, approximately 90% of the respondents indicated that the ATLAS classification of their learning strategy preference is an accurate description of their actual behavior" (Willyard, 2000, p. 88). In addition, a study of high school noncompleters "consistently indicated their agreement with the ATLAS description of their learning strategies" (James, 2000, p. 92). One study involving Internet users has discovered 90% of the respondents declared that their ATLAS grouping accurately described their learning strategy preferences (Spencer, 2000).



Reliability is "the degree to which a test consistently measures whatever it measures" (Gay, 1987, p. 135). If a test is reliable, people can be confident that the same results will be reached each time an instrument is administered (p. 135). "The more reliable a test is, the more confidence we can have that the scores obtained from the administration of the test are essentially the same scores that would be obtained if the test were readministered" (p. 135). If a researcher "places his effort in shoring up validity, reliability will follow" (Guba, 1978, p. 71).

While the reliability of the ATLAS instrument is ongoing, "test-retest measures results are approximately 90% accurate for placing people in the same learning strategy preference category" (Willyard, 2000, pp. 88-89). In test-retest examinations covering periods of time from one-week to three-weeks, ATLAS has a reliability of .87 (Conti, personal communication, December, 2000).

#### Procedures

This study used the information and data collection advantages of the Internet to collect data about how adults learn using the Internet. In addition, several computer software programs and techniques were used in order to capitalize on the strengths of each to collect and analyze the data. eBay posts the results of each auction after the

auction is completed. This includes a list of all people who bid on an item along with the person's eBay user identification name. These names are linked to the person's e-mail address and history with eBay.

A representative sample of 380 eBay users was identified by electronically downloading the e-mail addresses of auction participants of completed sales between August 15 and December 30, 1999. The auctions were stratified by the 12 categories of eBay. During the sample identification process, eBay added a new category, and that category was also included in the study. Several subgroupings exist within each category. Therefore, one subgroup with a high volume of auctions was selected within each category. Within that subgroup, high volume auctions were selected in which the final sale price of the item was under \$10, between \$11 and \$100, and over \$100. This provided a sample in which various levels of financial commitment were involved. All those who participated in a selected auction were included in the sample.

Data were gathered electronically. Each participant's address was captured electronically from the public domain areas of the eBay website and downloaded into an Excel structure. A questionnaire was developed using Front Page and uploaded to an America On-Line account. Those identified in the sample were e-mailed a request to

participate in the study (see Appendix A). The participants clicked on the Internet address in the e-mail message that took them directly to the questionnaire. Participant responses were recorded electronically in files linked to the questionnaire. These files were automatically e-mailed to the researcher's account and then downloaded into a file in Access, which was tailored for the exact format of the returned responses.

Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected using the questionnaire. Most questions were open-ended while a few were responses to identified choices. Numeric data from the survey were analyzed by using Version 9.0 of the SPSS software package.

Responses for each qualitative item were transferred to a word processing file and analyzed. A separate file was created for each question. In order to retain the context of the responses, each response had the following information related to the respondent attached to it: learning strategy category, gender, age, educational level, ethnic background, and identification number. The qualitative data were analyzed by the constant comparative method. In this method,

The researcher begins with a particular incident from an interview, field notes, or document and compares it with another incident in the same set of data or in another set. These comparisons lead to tentative categories that are then compared to

each other and to other instances. (Merriam, 1992, p. 159)

The comparisons were made to first identify the themes for each item. After the themes were identified, differences due to learning strategy preferences were explored within each category.

## CHAPTER 4

### GETTING STARTED ON eBay

#### The Participants

The profile of the respondents supports the general stereotypes of a Digital Divide. Of the 380 participants in the study, the gender distribution of the sample was nearly equal with 188 males (50.1%) and 187 females (49.9%); only 5 participants did not report their gender. The group was fairly well educated; the highest educational level of nearly one-fourth (23%) was a high school diploma, of one-fifth (20%) was a post-secondary degree or certificate, of nearly one-third (30.5%) was a bachelor's degree, and of one-fourth (25.1%) was a graduate degree. Only five (1.4%) had less than a high school diploma, and these respondents were young enough to still be in school. The respondents ranged in age from 13 to 70 with a mean of 41.08 and a median of 43. Responses were received from 8 countries in addition to the United States; these 15 responses came from Australia (2), Canada (6), Germany (2), Denmark (1), Finland (1), Mexico (1), Russia (1), and United Kingdom (1). Although eBay has an international membership, the respondents were overwhelmingly White (93.3%); non-White ethnic origins were as follows: African--1.3%, Asian--1.0%, Hispanic--1.7%, Native American--1.0%, and Other--2.7%. Also, the responses were mostly from sites that indicated that private

individuals participated in the study. Over nine-tenths (93.1%) were from e-mail addresses that ended with .com (58.7%) and .net (34.35); the remaining responds were sent from .edu (3.6%), .org (1.5%), .us (1.5%), and .gov (.3%).

Although the three learning preference groups identified by ATLAS exist in nearly equal portions in the general adult population, a disproportionately large number of Problem Solvers use eBay ( $X^2=30.3$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p=.001$ ). The distribution on ATLAS in the general population, which was the expected distribution for this study, is as follows: Navigators--36.5%, Problem Solvers--31.7%, and Engagers--31.8% (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 18). However, the observed distribution in this study was as follows: Problem Solvers--45.2%, Navigators--28.5%, and Engagers--26.3%. Thus, there are a greater number of Problem Solvers using eBay than the other learning strategy preference groups. Problem Solvers rely on the critical thinking skills of testing assumptions to evaluate the specifics and generalizability within a learning situation, generating alternatives to create additional learning options, and embracing conditional acceptance of learning outcomes while keeping an open mind to other learning possibilities (Conti & Kolody, 1999). Another study which described the ways learners utilized self-directed learning on the Internet (Spencer, 2000) found

similar results in that 50.66% of the participants were identified as Problem Solvers.

While the reliability of the ATLAS instrument is ongoing, "test-retest measures results are approximately 90% accurate for placing people in the same learning strategy preference category" (Willyard, 2000, pp. 88-89). In test-retest examinations covering periods of time from one-week to three-weeks, ATLAS has a reliability of .87 (Conti, personal communication, December, 2000). This finding of an accurate description for 9-out-of-10 respondents is consistent with other findings for ATLAS (G. J. Conti, personal communication, December, 2000) and interview data using ATLAS (James, 2000; Willyard, 2000).

#### Learning About eBay

In order to research how the learning processes related to getting started on eBay were described by the participants, questions were asked that involved (a) how they learned about eBay, (b) how they learned about getting their eBay account started, and (c) how they learned about the different parts of the eBay web page.

eBay became familiar to the people who responded to the questionnaire in a variety of ways. They included media sources such as (a) television shows, (b) radio programs, (c) magazine and newspaper articles, and (d) advertisements in magazines and newspapers and on billboards, television,

and radio broadcasts. The participants also mentioned they learned of eBay through various Internet related activities or from a combination of sources. For many, their source of learning about eBay was other people.

No matter from what source the participants learned about eBay, it was clear from their descriptions that eBay was ubiquitous. The pervasiveness of eBay was described in such typical comments as "it's all over the place, television, news, Internet, etc." Another common example of learning about eBay came from "hearing about it in the media, seeing reports about it and talking to fellow postcard collectors who were both selling and buying on it". One participant revealed that "everyone is talking about eBay". People with diverse interests reported on the pervasive nature of eBay with one antiques dealer reporting that "everyone who deals in antiques spreads the rumors about eBay".

In fact, in its short lifetime, eBay has become so widespread that some people (3.1%) have forgotten how they learned about the site. Typical comments were

I'm unsure, it's ubiquitous, but a friend sells things on it, so when I had to sell something, I thought I would try it. (29-year-old female Problem Solver)

Honestly I can't remember. I've been looking at it for so long. (24-year-old male Navigator)



Many failed to remember where they learned of eBay but ventured guesses such as

I honestly do not remember. It was probably a banner on another site but it has been over two years and not fresh in my mind. (23-year-old female Engager)

I don't really remember. I think I found it in searching for Internet auctions on Yahoo. (19-year-old male Problem Solver)

I don't remember, I think I just ran across it a few years ago when it was still relatively small. (69-year-old male Engager)

Others (2.0%) cited general sources such as "at a dinner party someone mentioned buying glasses from eBay" and also "I overheard a few people talking about it. And thought I'd see for myself what it was like".

Just over 20% of the participants in this study revealed that they learned about eBay from some type of media story or advertisement. Some from this group learned about eBay from television or radio shows while eBay caught the attention of others in a newspaper, magazine, or a book. One participant learned about eBay from the financial newspapers.

It was making news as one of the few Internet companies that was making money. So, I decided to check it out before investing in it. It was wonderful. Without eBay, I would have to go to midtown Manhattan to purchase used photo equipment supplied by nearby states and be subjected to the mercy of dealers. But with eBay, I have the whole country in front of me. (34-year-old male Problem Solver)

Another participant remembered that:

All the buzz about e-commerce prompted me to check it out. I read numerous articles in newspapers and in magazines about the company and the concept behind it. (25-year-old female Navigator)

Advertisements about eBay included commercials on television shows, announcements on billboards and Internet website banners, radio pitches, and ads in magazines. For example, "I learned about eBay through radio commercials. I also saw several TV ads for companies like Oracle where eBay had a cross-over spot". A fisherman learned of eBay from "an advertisement in The Big Reel magazine". Another example came from a 34-year-old male Navigator who was searching for a particular item: "I've seen it advertised on the Internet, and an online auction system seemed interesting. I was looking for a mandolin at the time and, much to my surprise, I found several of them up for sale on eBay".

The Internet offers many methods to navigate and negotiate different websites. One way is through following specified paths from one site to another, a practice commonly called "linking". "Surfing" is a term typically associated with browsing or viewing different websites. "Listservs" and discussion groups are Internet services that enable Internet participants to communicate with lists of subscribers at one time. Many people (12.3%) learned about

eBay from their Internet related activities such as linking from other Internet sites, surfing the Internet, or participating in listservs or Internet discussion groups.

One woman wrote:

I'm on an Internet discussion group about the RMS Titanic-not a movie group, it's serious and mostly scholarly. The Listowner, who is also a friend, built a significant collection of steamship postcards through bidding on eBay, as has another Listmember. The two of them encouraged me to try it out, knowing my interest in ships. They said the dealers were almost always legitimate and easy to work with, and careful in their descriptions. They also suggested checking ratings before bidding. (47-year-old Problem Solver)

Another described her introduction to eBay when she wrote:

I use Webtv and when I first signed on eBay is listed in the shopping/auction listing. Out of curiosity I clicked on to see what it was like and I truly enjoy the auction part. I got everyone I know into it now. (31-year-old Problem Solver)

Fifteen participants remarked that they were using the Internet's search engines or were "browsing through the Internet", "exploring and learning about the Internet", or "surfing the Internet" when they learned about eBay.

Of the total participants, 65 people preferred to give detailed descriptions of the situations in which they learned of the Internet auction house or reported that they learned through a combination of sources. Instead of merely listing their eBay resource as many participants did, 10.1% took the time to describe specific illustrations that

surrounded their experiences. One woman pictured her acquaintance with eBay in this way:

I had found some old toys of mine but couldn't remember all the details. I checked the backs of them and one said Flatsy. I'm 33, by the way. I entered Flatsy into Yahoo and eBay came on. I put Flatsy in and 30 showed up. I was instantly hooked. I looked up everything I own that is even slightly old. Also, I had sold a Beanie Baby for \$156 on Yahoo in 1998. I understood the process a little from that. (33-year-old female Problem Solver)

My mother is a collector of giraffe paraphernalia and she explained it to me. I had also heard of it via both the media and other people. (33-year-old female Engager)

A young man gave another example when he wrote:

Well I was an intern at a bank. One day I asked a particular lady why she was getting so many money orders. She proceeded to tell me that she was an avid user of eBay and that I should try it sometime. Well, eventually I did. (18-year-old male Navigator)

Another 8.1% of the participants revealed that they learned of eBay from a combination of sources. While these 29 people may have listed common sources as the people in other groups, they all specifically recalled a combination of several sources. Their descriptions involved such combinations as "TV ads, through conversation with others, and visiting the site" and "via antique periodicals, peers and advertisements".

By far the most frequently reported means the participants learned about eBay was from other people. Almost 44% cited other people such as friends, relatives, co-workers, and other collectors as their source of eBay knowledge. Some of these (5.2%) said they learned of eBay from general sources involving other people as "I just heard about it from other people" or "at a dinner party someone mentioned buying glasses from eBay", but most recalled who first introduced them to eBay. The popularity of eBay was evident in the 23 (6.4%) people who remarked that they learned about the site simply by "word of mouth" with one person volunteering that his eBay knowledge was from "word of mouth mostly. It has been a huge computer geek hangout for quite sometime because many people were able to get new computer stuff for relatively cheap" (21-year-old male Engager).

Friends were clearly a source of awareness about eBay. Of the communicants who said they learned of eBay from other people, almost half (49.3%) attributed their realization to a friendship. One man proclaimed "I have seen that my friend plays at eBay during my visit of Florida (I'm from Moscow, Russia)" while a 41-year-old female Problem Solver reported she had become fascinated with eBay when a "neighbor told me that she had spent an entire weekend in her robe looking at pottery and learning about styles she

hadn't known about". Another volunteered "my friend told me about eBay since she knows that I love antiques and collectibles" (36-year-old female Problem Solver).

Relatives were also responsible for spreading the news about eBay. Just over 26% of the participants who learned about eBay from others said that a spouse, child, parent, sibling, or other relation was their source of knowledge. Responses such as "my son told me it was a place to find specialized used items" and "my brother-in-law told me about it" were common. A more detailed response was:

My first Internet experience was when my Mom first got AOL two years ago. She asked me to help so we got on together and did a search on "antiques" and eBay came right up. I have been hooked ever since. (48-year-old female Navigator)

Co-workers, business associates, and other collectors were a source of information for 14.2% of the participants. These participants relied on those with whom they conducted business to initially learn about the eBay auction site. "

A co-worker had told me about eBay upon me mentioning that I was looking for a particular item. (30-year-old female Engager)

I learned about eBay from a co-worker. (47-year-old female; no ATLAS group)

A participant from Mexico, whose awareness came from another collector, wrote "I was looking for an old book and a person in the United States wrote me that maybe I can find it on

eBay". Typical comments were "from another collector" and "from a fellow antiques dealer".

Rosie O'Donnell, a television personality with a popular daytime talk show, was specifically mentioned by seven respondents. Rosie frequently auctions items for charity on the eBay site. Characteristic comments about her included "by watching the Rosie O'Donnell television show. She talks about eBay" and "I heard Rosie O'Donnell talk about it on the television show she hosts". Also, this comment from a 45-year-old female:

I watched the Rosie O'Donnell show one afternoon in the summer of 1999 and she mentioned an the charitable auction. She mentioned that beanie babies were being offered to be auctioned and they were decorated on a desk. I am not a beanie collector, but I just wanted see the desk/beanies. Ironically, I never found the specific site.  
(45-year-old female Navigator)

### Learning Strategies

In addition to identifying the patterns in the participants' comments, their comments were also analyzed in relationship to their learning strategy preferences of Navigators, Problem Solvers, and Engagers. Some significant differences between learning strategy preference groups were identified. Navigators relied on external advertisements and were more likely to have learned of eBay from other collectors and Rosie O'Donnell than their Problem Solver and Engager counterparts. Navigators are masterful at using

such external resources such as books, magazines, and trade journals as they depend on the learning strategies of Identification of Resources and Critical Use of Resources (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 10). This is shown by a 45-year-old male who had learned about eBay when it was "mentioned to me by a stamp dealer who uses it as a sales medium". A Navigator antiques dealer learned about eBay when she noticed items were no longer available in antiques malls or shops.

My husband and I are antique dealers, and collectors also. We noticed that some of the special items we look for in antique malls and shops were no longer there. We started asking fellow dealers & mall owners about it and found several of them were listing their items on eBay. We'd find some items in the malls marked "display only, for sale on eBay". (47-year-old female Navigator)

Problem Solvers were much more likely to detail specific examples of how they learned of eBay instead of just giving a simple answer. Problem Solvers are "open to conditional acceptance of learning outcomes while keeping an open mind to other learning possibilities" (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 12). They are also learners who "generate alternatives and consider various solutions" (p. 12) and who feel comfortable with open-ended questions on traditional examinations. Of the 36 people who gave examples, 22 were Problem Solvers. Instead of just reporting that she learned of eBay from her husband, one Problem Solver wrote:



My husband came home from work one day and told me that the wife of one of his supervisors was buying product on eBay. She (Mary) was excited about the items she was getting and finding it to be a lot of fun browsing the different categories. (48-year-old female)

Another Problem Solver specified:

My best friend Donna has a computer and she found eBay. She tried selling a few things and found it was really fun and profitable. She sold a few things for me on commission and I got interested and started selling on eBay too. (37-year-old female)

Another person learned of eBay on a popular morning television show. Her rich description was typical of those who gave elaborate examples:

The first time I heard about eBay was while watching the Today Show. To test out how well it worked, the four stars of the show autographed a NBC jacket and then reported daily on how high the current bid had reached. I've always loved auctions and collecting, especially antiques and unusual items. I talked to a couple of friends who had used eBay. I signed on to AOL for the first time about a month ago. The very first site I went to was eBay and I've visited every day since. (47-year-old female Problem Solver)

Problem-Solvers were also more likely than Navigators or Engagers to list co-workers and Internet activities as their eBay origin. Of the participants who learned about eBay from co-workers or business associates, 61.5% of them were Problem-Solvers, 15.4% Engagers, and 23.1% Navigators. Of the participants who learned of eBay through an Internet link, 52.2% were Problem Solvers. Also, 60% of those who learned from surfing the Internet were Problem Solvers.

Problem Solvers made up 45.2% of the study of the population.

Of the participants who identified their learning strategy group as Engagers and named other people as their source, 75.8% say they learned about eBay from friends. This compared to 39.1% of the people identified as Navigators and 41.8% of the people identified as Problem Solvers reporting that they learned of eBay from friends. Engagers typically commented that they learned about eBay "from a close friend" or "through the eBay experiences of a close friend". Only 4.3% of Engagers declared that they learned about eBay from co-workers, Rosie O'Donnell, or general human sources.

While the Engagers who learned about eBay from others tended to learn from friends, Navigators (31%) and Problem-Solvers (32%) were more inclined to list a relative as their source for learning about eBay. For example, a 40-year-old male Navigator divulged that his "sister had been using eBay for about one year and finally convinced me to try it for myself". A 38-year-old female Problem Solver offered more detail when she said "my husband found it while searching for Major Matt Mason items about three years ago".

### Summary

eBay became familiar to the study participants in a variety of ways. The respondents described that their

beginning of knowledge about eBay came from such sources as different forms of media, advertisements, Internet activities, and other people. While their method of learning may have varied, it was clear that eBay was pervasive and its use was widespread.

Participants in the three ATLAS groups differed in the ways they learned about eBay. Navigators relied on advertisements, other collectors, and television personality Rosie O'Donnell to learn about eBay. Problem Solvers regarded co-workers and listed Internet activities as their sources of knowledge about eBay. In addition, Problem Solvers were much more likely to detail specific examples of how they learned of eBay than their Navigator or Engager counterparts. Engagers tended to report that their friends were the source of their acquaintance with eBay while Navigators and Problem Solvers were more likely to list relatives as their source of learning about the auction site.

#### Opening an eBay Account

eBay participants described how they learned about getting their eBay accounts started and becoming registered users. While other people may have been the most frequently given source of learning about eBay, very few participants' (3.4%) said they learned about setting up their eBay account from other people alone. It was clear from the participants

responses that they frequently used the different features of the eBay site to learn to set up their accounts.

The overwhelming resource the participants used to set up their initial accounts was the eBay site itself. Of the people responding, 73.1% said they set up their account by following directions, reading information, surfing the site, or using eBay's help feature. Most (56%) followed the directions given by eBay. Comments such as "I followed eBay's directions provided on the screen" and "I went to the home page and followed the directions eBay gave to become a registered user" were typical. One 40-year-old male Navigator reported "I followed the directions eBay presented. eBay was the first thing I had really become involved with in depth on the Internet" while a 53-year-old female remarked:

I followed the instructions, but I should explain that I had never used a computer before so I was starting from scratch. I didn't even know how to turn one on. I just sort of experimented my way through it.

Some people (10.9%) disclosed that they first learned how to become registered eBay users simply by reading the information provided on the website. Others (3.4%) said that they surfed around the website or used eBay's help feature (2.8%) to discover how to set up an eBay account. Usual comments from those who chose to read the information first included "I went into the eBay home page and read the

different pages about bidding, security, notification, etc.” 45-year-old female Problem Solver and “I learned just by reading the home page of eBay. It was very user friendly and easy to follow” from a 33-year-old female Engager. Twelve people reported that they browsed, or surfed, the eBay website to discover registration information: “I just surfed around the site until I found what I needed”. A typical comment from the 10 people who used eBay’s help service included: “I used the online help functions to follow directions and registration prompts” (45-year-old male Navigator).

Some eBay users revealed that they learned how to register from a combination of sources. Of the participants, 32 (9.0%) cited different combinations such as reading, following directions, asking other people, and surfing the website. “I went to the website, found the link to the registration page, and read the instructions” (42-year-old female Problem Solver); “I used trial and error. I scrolled through different categories, read the information posted, and played with it for a while before actually signing on” (22-year-old female Problem Solver).

Similar to the way they first learned about eBay, a group of 29 people (8.1%) chose to describe how they became registered users by giving detailed examples instead of merely answering the question. “My friend Donna set me up

with a Netscape account and ISP server e-mail account and I did it with her. She set me up at photo point to do pictures too" (37-year-old female Problem Solver). Others volunteered:

It was very easy. I found a phone card that I wanted to purchase and I just went and started an account. It was very easy to follow the steps. (24-year-old female Engager)

This was my first computer. I got it home and had to hire someone to help me set it up and get me started. After he left I still couldn't manage the images. My sister flew out 3,000 miles to help me. I left civil service employment and intended eBay to be my only source of income. (55-year-old female Problem Solver).

The first day I started using eBay, I began by looking at items under Antiques: Folk Art: Current Listings (the category was chosen because I love old things, particularly handmade or carved items). I don't have a lot of money to spare, so although I looked at the pricier items, I found an item that had just been added to the auction list and had a low opening bid amount-\$1 or \$2. Scanning down to the bottom of the screen, there's a blue underlined phrase that says "become a registered bidder". I clicked it and answered the questions, became official, and placed my first bid. It's fun! (47-year-old female Problem Solver)

One group of 20 eBay users (5.6%) just jumped in and joined eBay as a result of interest in bidding on an item. "I wanted to bid on something, so I put in a price. eBay told me I needed to be a member, so I ran through the sign up process" (21-year-old male Engager). Another volunteered "I tried to purchase an item and at the bottom of the page

it told me I had to register first" (38-year-old female Navigator).

A very small group of three people (.8%) elected to observe the eBay action before deciding to register. One of who chose to observe before registering wrote

I observed the site for several days before deciding to register. By that time, I had a very good handle on what was needed to register and activate an account. I completed the necessary information and submitted the information on-line.  
(35-year-old female Problem Solver)

### Learning Strategies

Variations in answers pertaining to registration between people who identified themselves as Navigators, Problem Solvers, and Engagers existed. Problem Solvers were overwhelmingly more likely to cite a combination of sources. Of the people who gave a combination of sources, 87.5% were Problems Solvers as compared with only 6.3% from both Navigators and Engagers. One 47-year-old male Problem Solver identified a combination of three sources of learning how to register when he wrote, "I visited the eBay website, read the information, and I also spoke to a friend who had opened an account".

Problem Solvers were also much more likely to give detailed examples than Navigators and Engagers as an answer to how they learned about eBay registration. These learners who prefer instructors who use real-life examples (Conti &

Kolody, 1999, p. 13) employed just such illustrations in their descriptions. Of those gave who examples for answers, 89.7% were Problem Solvers while 10.35% were Engagers and none were Navigators. One Problem Solver communicated

I simply entered eBay's site and then just started clicking and reading. eBay's site walked me through what I had to do to get an account. I do not remember this being at all difficult. Maybe people are afraid to click on things but I've been on the Internet for years and once in the eBay site I do not expect any bad surprises will occur if I explore freely because I trust you control your content. (47-year-old female).

Another 47-year-old female Problem Solver disclosed

I followed the directions on the site. Choosing a user name and password was a bit scary. I was concerned about keeping them secure. I also didn't want to be too readily identifiable as either female or interested in just certain types of items. So I chose a favorite bird as my user name. I've found that the people who run eBay are extremely helpful and quick to respond to questions.

These Problem Solvers demonstrated how they "thrive in a learning environment that promotes experimentation through practical experience and hands-on activities" (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 13) in their answers to this question.

Those participants who identified their learning strategy as Engagers were much more apt to have learned how to register by entering the bidding process. Of the people who reported they learned how to register by bidding on an item, 60% were Engagers as compared with 20% of both Navigators and Problem Solvers. Engagers "monitor the value



of the learning experience and the level of motivation on an economy of scale to determine if the expected reward is worth the effort" (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 14). In true Engager fashion, the Engagers were more likely to have registered on eBay after first trying to bid on an item for sale. A 21-year-old male Engager wrote, "I wanted to bid on something, so I put in a price, and it told me I needed to be a member, so I ran through the sign up process". Another Engager said, "I tried to bid and eBay said I needed to register before I could continue" (28 year-old male). No Engagers reported that they first observed the eBay activities before becoming a registered user.

Navigators were more prone to surf the website or use eBay's search feature to register as a user. Of the 12 participants who reported that they surfed or searched the website to register, seven (58.3%) were Navigators who used this method as compared to three Problem Solvers and two Engagers. Navigators are "slow to commit to an idea and want to weigh out or test the assumptions" (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 10). One 38-year-old female Navigator wrote, "I typed in ebay.com, and started looking around by typing a word or phrase into search and finding things that were available". Another reported that he first "actually surfed in and window-shopped" before registering on eBay (43-year-old male).

## Summary

Of the people participating in the eBay study, most listed following eBay's directions as the way they learned about getting their accounts started. While some read the eBay information and others went directly to attempted bidding, 56% of all respondents said they learned about becoming an eBay user by direction-following.

Navigators were more likely than Problem Solvers or Engagers to surf eBay's website or use the search options or give explicate combinations of sources when describing how they learned about registration. Problem Solvers were more prone to provide detailed examples when they described their registration processes. Aside from following eBay's registration directions, Engagers chose to go directly to the bidding process or read eBay's instructions to become users.

## Learning About the Website

Once their accounts were started and they were registered eBay users, the study participants described how they went about learning what was on the eBay website and its different parts. They communicated that they either used the website's features or their own techniques, experiences, and knowledge to investigate the eBay site.

Few participants noted they used eBay's help feature or other people while some said they used a combination of

sources to learn what was on eBay. Although the registered users utilized eBay's help feature some when learning how to get their accounts started, only seven (1.8%) of the participants mentioned they used the eBay help page alone when learning about eBay's website. In addition, while 44% of the participants learned about eBay from other people, only one person (.3%) reported that she learned how to navigate eBay's site from another person alone. However, several mentioned the help page and other people when they used a combination of sources to negotiate the site. Those using a combination (14.2%) of methods accessed a mixture of sources such as browsing, reading, searching, using the website features, practicing trial-and-error, and asking other people. A combination of sources included learning by "exploring on my own and having several friends who gave helpful hints", by "exploring the titles on the page and asking questions of a friend who already was familiar with the site", and by learning "some from books, some from friends, but mostly by experimenting online".

Several participants (50) specifically mentioned trial-and-error as the method they used to explore and learn about the eBay site. The 13.8% who said trial-and-error was their method made such comments as "I used mainly trial and error...mostly error" and "I learned about the different options on eBay by trial and error".

It was definitely trial and error, figuring out what words got the best response if there were too many entries in a general category. For instance, if you put in mermaid, there are thousands. Just too many. Then you have to figure out that mermaids counts as different as well. That stuff kind of sucks. (33-year-old female Problem Solver).

A few participants remarked that they used logic to peruse the site. The 10 people who relied on their own logic (2.8%) used both past experience and cognitive processes while some had "35 years of data programming experience so I put it to use" (58-year-old male Navigator) others just "used my common sense. It isn't that hard" (19 year-old male). This approach works because "one can get a good idea of structure from looking at the links available" (45-year-old female Navigator). One 47-year-old female Engager pulled from her own logic and commented on her husband's limited skills when she wrote

Each web page has information directing you for help. It is very easy to just explore and then use what you need. After a while it is very familiar. Even my husband, who is inherently dumb, can negotiate through it. In fact, he now spends hours on eBay. This was something that I never thought he would do. He does not even type.

Once again, a group of people (5.0%) chose to give an example to illustrate their answer to how they learned about the different parts of the eBay web page. These 18 people spoke directly about their specific experiences when answering the question.

I was rather like a kid in a candy shop! I honestly did NOT know where to go first, or what to look under. The first thing I did was to run a search on "Titanic", which resulted in an overwhelming amount of items, most of them not things I'd want to bid on. I then searched under "ship", and had much better luck. I discovered a category called "Transportation/Nautical", which was right where I wanted to be. After that, I always started out by looking up "Transportation/Nautical" and checking what which auctions were ending that day. Then, after I got more comfortable, I started to learn about specific types of items I could find, like portholes, lanterns, stateroom keys, even life jackets. I began running searches under those terms, first under "nautical". Then, when I discovered that some items I liked were listed under categories other than Nautical, such as "Antiques-General", I concentrated on running specific searches through all of eBay; i.e., I'd search all of eBay for "starboard" or "starboard light". (47-year-old female Problem Solver)

At first I was basically a Hot Wheels collector. So I set that up as a favorite category. To many items to go through, so I would add search words to narrow the focus. One day after a couple of months on eBay, I thought I would see if there were any of the Cox Chaparral slot cars I had as a child in the mid 60's. I also had a chaparral/ Jim Hall collection of books, models, and race programs. So I typed in "cox" and search all of eBay. I got a huge listing with about 5% Cox slot cars. After a few weeks I learned that if I was in one of my four "favorite" categories, I could narrow the search to that category only. On a typical day there are 45 to 75 items in this category. (45-year-old male Problem Solver).

Once they had started their accounts, the majority of the people participants browsed the website, used eBay's search feature, or otherwise used the eBay website to learn what was on eBay and its different sections. There were 85 people (22.9%) who said they browsed, surfed, navigated,

explored, or cruised the eBay site after becoming registered users. Typical approaches included "I pointed and clicked and I used the back button a lot" (35-year-old male Navigator) and "I pointed, clicked, and explored" (53-year-old male Problem Solver). Several in this category simply either "browsed through the site itself" or "simply explored".

More people (25.7%) said they used eBay's search feature than any other method to learn about the website. These 93 people did such things as: "I used the search capabilities on the site" (31-year-old male Navigator) and "I learned by using the search engine" (55-year-old male Problem Solver). With this process "the search button got quite a work out" 53-year-old female Engager. For one 26-year-old male Engager, his successful searches on eBay actually led him to become a registered user; "I typed in many, many keywords into the search engine. I actually did this before I registered". The very promising results of my searches let me to registering".

The remaining 12.1% of the cooperating people conveyed that they learned what was on the eBay site by observing, reading, and studying the eBay home page, site maps, and other eBay pages. The decision-making process worked well in this situation: "I spent time on the website. I used the various steps of the decision making process: Identify,

Analyze, Decide, and Execute. I just used the same processes I used with any other decision in life" (51-year-old male Navigator). Others "read and re-read everything" (57-year-old male Problem Solver) while some chose to "observe for a while and become familiar with the categories" (50-year-old male Problem Solver).

### Learning Strategies

The participants who described themselves as Navigators were much more likely than Problem Solvers or Engagers to use their logic when learning about the eBay site. Of the participants who relied on logic, 70% were Navigators as compared with 20% of the Problem Solvers and 10% of the Engagers. These "focused learners who chart a course for learning and follow it" (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 9) reported that they used their own skills while making their initial entries to eBay pages. One such Navigator commented that "it was pretty self-explanatory. Everything was organized logically. I used my logic to merely use the headings of categories to understand what was going on" (21-year-old male).

Problem Solvers counted on a combination of resources, trial-and-error, and contributing detailed examples to discover what was on the eBay site. Of the people who used a combination of sources, 67.3% were Problem Solvers as compared with only 15.4% Navigators and 17.3% Engagers. Of

the 50 people who used trial-and-error to learn about the site, 25 (50%) of them were Problem Solvers while 32.0% were Navigators and 18% were Engagers. The Problem Solvers demonstrated that they were quite comfortable generating alternatives, conditionally accepting outcomes, and keeping an open mind (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 12) while learning their way around the eBay site.

Problem Solvers were overwhelming more likely than the Navigators or Engagers to use a descriptive example to answer this question. Of the participants who used examples, 83.3% were Problem Solvers in contrast to the no Navigators and 16.7% Engagers who gave examples. For example:

As my main interest in vintage jewelry, I spent and still spend a lot of time looking through the various auctions, deciding which is the appropriate categories for certain items. The site is laid out in an easy to use format, so I experimented. I used the navigational links to guide my way through the entire site. I think now, years later, I could do it with my eyes closed!  
(35-year-old female)

I knew I wanted to go to the troll section, so I think I went to the address section on the HOME page & put in eBay. If I remember correctly that gave me a page of selections & I read them & decided which site I wanted. Then I read the instructions & went to trolls then a variety of other places. (43-year-old female)

Described as learners who traditionally avoid tedious details (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 14), the participating Engagers were more likely than Navigators or Problem Solvers



to go straight to eBay's search feature. Of the Engagers, 43.2% used the eBay search engine while only 21.1% of Engagers were known to browse the website first.

I just started searching for things that interested me. (24-year-old male)

I bookmarked the eBay search page and tried various searches. I mostly used keywords in the title search" (36-year-old-male)

Three other approaches were each used by about 10% of the Engagers. A combination of sources was used by 9.5% of the Engagers; another 9.5% chose to use trial-and-error; and 10.5% read or studied the eBay website. Only one Engager chose to use the help service, and another lone Engager indicated he used logic.

#### Summary

People participating in the eBay study reported that they went about learning what was on eBay web page by using an assortment of methods. While some browsed or searched the website, others relied on trial-and-error or a combination of resources available. Almost three-fourths (74.3%) of the participants browsed, searched, used trial-and-error, or the used website features to discover the different eBay parts.

Distinct differences between the ATLAS groupings were discovered. Navigators were more than seven times more likely to use their own logic to learn about the eBay website than their Problem Solver or Engager counterparts.

Problem Solvers relied on a combination of sources, trial-and-error, and specific examples when answering the question. Engagers were more than twice as likely to go directly to eBay's search engine than were Navigators or Problem Solvers.

## CHAPTER 5

### PARTICIPATING IN eBAY ACTIVITIES

#### Describing Typical eBay Sessions

To investigate how the participants described their learning processes that pertained to participation in eBay activities, the participants were asked to describe (a) a typical eBay session, (b) how they learned about the auction items, (c) how they learned about other auction participants, (d) how they learned more about other things related to the auctions, (e) their own bidding strategy, and (d) how they developed their bidding strategy.

The participants used an assortment of descriptors to describe a typical session they had on eBay. They used a variety of methods during their periods of time online including (a) browsing, (b) searching, (c) applying predetermined plans, (d) inspecting current auctions, (e) giving detailed examples, (f) varying their strategies depending on circumstances, and (g) combining a variety of methods.

While most described typical eBay sessions with no problems, four people had trouble describing a typical session. One 40-year-old male Navigator said "I don't think that is possible" while a 24-year-old female Problem Solver volunteered, "I'm a new account holder so I haven't been very active". A 47-year old female with no identified ATLAS

group who had trouble with a transaction said, "I will no longer use eBay for any reason". A 16-year-old male also with no identified ATLAS group used the time descriptor of "15-20 minutes" to describe his typical eBay session.

While almost 23% of the participants reported that they learned about the eBay web site by browsing, only seven of the people reported a typical session to be spent solely in browsing. These participants described browsing around the eBay web site as their primary activity during a typical eBay session: "I browse two or three favourite categories" (53-year-old male Problem Solver) and "I just do a lot of looking-it's quite informative" (58-year-old-female Navigator). Several people who described their typical sessions with combinations of methods did include browsing. These 50 people (13.8%) included combinations of browsing, searching, checking current auctions, bidding, selling, and checking their eBay feedback profile.

I am usually looking for something, so I search for it. Occasionally I browse. (50 year-old female Problem Solver)

Usually I will check after work for anything that looks interesting and to see how any bids I have in are doing. (44-year-old male Navigator)

I check the items I am bidding on to see if there have been any major changes in price and also to see what's coming due soon and then check items I'm not sure if I really want or remember what they are. Then I might browse through a search in the gallery because its time efficient. (29-year-old female Navigator)

Instead of merely browsing during an average eBay session, 78 people (38.9%) went straight to eBay's search engine to look for specific items or categories. These people mentioned accessing only the search feature of eBay or a search for a specific item or category of items during their typical eBay sessions. Typical comments from this group included:

I use it to search for items I desire. (54-year-old male Problem Solver)

I look for specific items I am interested in by typing their name in the search field. (53-year-old male Problem Solver)

I go straight for the search page. (28-year-old male Engager)

I spend my eBay sessions searching certain categories for particular items. (48-year-old female Navigator)

I searched stamps and coins under a half a dozen keywords. (45-year-old male Navigator)

I search for what ever I am interested at the moment, linens one day, pottery on another and what really first got me started was beanie babies. (54-year-old female Engager)

Some communicants described specific, deliberate plans for each eBay session while others reported that their time on eBay varied from session to session. The 87 people (24%) who divulged specific plans for their sessions revealed typical sessions that appeared to be predetermined and arranged. The learning strategy of Monitoring was an important factor in the approaches used by these

participants. Monitoring is an critical part of the metacognitive process where learners are "cognizant of their learning progress and closely monitor their learning by checking to see if they are on task and by comparing their progress to accepted standards or models" (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 4). One such person said,

I have my 'favorite places' on the first page that I always go to first. I then check item numbers that I have a bid on. After this, I do a search on different favorite articles that I usually check on. If I see something that I want to bid on, I go ahead and check out different parts of interest for that item up for bid. If I'm satisfied I then bid, if not I go to the next item and continue this until I have to stop, which is usually 2 to 3 hours later. (52-year-old male Navigator)

eBay currently is my full-time business. I have two different accounts, one devoted to one category of item, and the other to other types. I first check my auctions under both names. Then I read my e-mail which includes a list-serve devoted to my area of collecting. Some of the e-mails may take me to view other items on eBay. I read AuctionWatch. I check to see what items I have bookmarked for bidding (I buy for resale) and either place bids or mentally note later times for placing last-minute bids. I also have a wide variety of searches bookmarked to look for items I'm interested in buying. I tend to look for things that are misdescribed/misunderstood so I can get good deals. I can be on for hours doing these tasks. I then log off and take care of eBay-related business. Later in the afternoon I list items (sometimes after using an offline program). Every time I log on to eBay I repeat all the previous steps--this can occur several times a day and often can last until the wee hours of the morning. (39-year-old female Problem Solver)

I check current bid price or asking price to start and then call up the sellers description of the item and see if its what I would like to have. Then I check seller background of past sales. Then I enter a bid. Then I follow the bid on a everyday check until final day and then as it gets down to the final hour its more often until the last five minutes. Then I try to pay close attention to try catch any last minute bidder above mine. (67-year-old male Navigator)

Logon. Search for keyword(s). View results. Refine search if necessary. Select item that interests me. Note description, current price, and auction end date. If interested, determine maximum bid. Then do one of two things: 1. Enter maximum bid and observe results. If bid immediately goes over my maximum, stop. If not, continue to observe until auction end. 2. Wait until a few minutes before end of auction and observe price. If not over my maximum, enter bid and observe until auction end. (55-year-old male Problem Solver)

Some had predetermined plans but were less elaborate in describing their typical eBay sessions. These plans were much briefer but still reflected the elements of Monitoring. Examples of these are:

I always log in, check what's for sale in the category I'm interested in, make notes of the item and when it goes off, log out (56-year-old female Navigator)

1. check my sellers list for current bids. 2. check my bidders list for current bids. 3. check the ending today from the antiques categories. 4. check the new today from the antiques categories. 5. place bids on items of interest to me. (59-year-old female Problem Solver)

Among the respondents, 46 had no predetermined plan, but chose instead to keep their options open and vary their typical eBay sessions according to differing circumstances.

The 12.7% of participants who varied their activities on eBay frequently used words such as "if", "sometimes", "maybe", and "might" in their common session descriptions. These participants plans were contingent on different auction events and their different emotions. One 44-year-old female Problem Solver communicated that she "may bid and may not, it depends on my mood and the needs of the family at the time" while another participant said "it depends on what I'm interested in at the time. Sometimes I just surf different areas to see what may or may not be interesting" (47-year-old female Problem Solver). A 47-year-old male Problem Solver wrote, "it depends if I am in a seller mode, or a buyer mode. If I am selling, I am all business, check my auctions, send out e-mails to notify top bidders, make sure my feedback for others is up-to-date. If buying, I just explore some favorite categories". This 36-year-old male Problem Solver responded

My typical session on eBay lasts anywhere from 30 minutes to four hours. I keep several listings in my favorites on AOL and it can take quite a while to go through my searches. I try to find misspellings and misplacements to find exceptional deals. I've had pretty good luck with that. If I'm doing auctions, I might stay on for two or three hours solid trying to get my auctions tweaked. I try to list as I would want to find and read an auction. I've tried to learn my own brand of "marketing" to try and obtain the highest price on my sales.



A large group of respondents (65 people) described their typical sessions on eBay with an example. These people chose to give specific illustrations of eBay experiences instead of simply listing strategies or procedures. In the process, the people in this group detailed how they located, deciphered, and mastered the eBay website assistance features. They also focused their extensive efforts to gain new information.

I almost always now log on through "My eBay Page"; I have a link for it stored on my Personal Toolbar in Netscape, so all it takes is a single click. First, I check my upcoming auctions, to see if I need to re-bid, or if they're okay. (Red means I've been outbid, green means I'm winning.) I might re-visit an item I'm already bidding on, to see if there's been any other bidding, and to decide if I want to raise my bid any further, to insure a win. Then, I usually check my favorite categories, Transportation-Nautical, and Nautical Books--all stored in my "Favorite Categories" page. I always start with the items ending that day and page through, to see if I've missed anything interesting. Then, I check the "New Today". If I have time, I might then review current listings. Often, I'll run a search on something else I'm interested in, just to see if anything new is available. I also check the sorts of items my friends are bidding on, usually postcards, to see what they're up to and if there's anything I need to tell them about. (47-year-old female Problem Solver)

I collect Nebraska Cornhusker memorabilia so I search for these. I also am looking for art to decorate my apartment and am interested mostly in Alaska wildlife so I search for these (30-year-old male Problem Solver)

I have only been buying coins for my coin collection. I chose a particular coin type that I knew something about already. At first I went

through the entire selection of these coins. I have learned that many buyers don't buy until the last few minutes. Several coins I bid on with a few days to go, or even hours to go, were purchased later by last minute buyers. I decided that I can scan ahead a few days, see something that appears interesting, and come back near that time. Or, if I have time, I will check out what is on sale today and tomorrow. I check for the particular type of coin I'm looking for. If I see something I like then I will do an eBay search for that particular year and type of coin to see what else may be coming in a few days and to give me a better idea of price and quality. If I am very interested in a coin, I now try to bid on the coin in the last few minutes of the auction. If I have another obligation at that exact time, then I bid at the last minute that I can. (42-year-old male Problem Solver)

Finally, a small group of 22 participants (6.1%) used their time on eBay primarily to check on their current auctions. Whether bidders or sellers, these people went only to their current pending auctions during their described rounds on eBay. Typical comments from this group included "I check on all my active auctions" (46-year-old male Navigator), "I check my bookmarked auctions in progress" (38-year-old female Problem Solver), and "I usually check on my own page to see how my bids are doing by bringing up all my bids to see whether I'm high bidder or not" (64-year-old female Engager). A 23-year-old male Engager wrote "I check the status of my current bids (My eBay) and place higher bids if I am still interested in the product".

#### Learning Strategies

Along with a few similarities, additional differences between participants and their identified ATLAS groupings were distinguished. Almost half (43.7%) of the Navigators chose to implement a prescribed plan each time they participated in eBay activities. Of the Problem Solvers, 22.7% chose the same strategy along with only 5.3% of the Engagers. Of the people who used a plan, 51.7% were Navigators. These learners tend to "plan their learning schedule according to deadlines and the final expected result" (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 9) which is ideal for the auction deadlines and bidding rewards of eBay. For learning new material and monitoring previous activities on eBay, Navigators tend to have well-defined, sequential plans. For example:

I start up on "my eBay" home page. From there, I always check out auctions that are closing soon which are of interest to me. The second thing I check is the automotive section. Then I check the hunting, music, and the coin operated games sections. I am always searching for specific items and use eBay's search engines quite frequently. If there is a new auction which I am interested in, I will usually bid on it right away, but sometimes I wait until it will soon close. (40-year-old male).

In the case of mint stamps of the 20th century, I find a Scott number of the stamp or stamps I am interested in a start with page one and scan it for any of the numbers of Scott until I find one. I check current bid price or asking price to start and then call up the sellers description of the item and see if its what I would like to have. Then I check seller background of past sales. Then I enter a bid. Then I follow the bid on a everyday

check until final day and then as it gets down to the final hour its more often until the last five minutes. Then I try to pay close attention to try catch any last minute bidder above mine. (67-year-old male).

Although very few people (seven) reported that they limited their typical eBay sessions to browsing, 71.4% of them were Navigators. Typical comments from Navigators included this from a 55-year-old male: "I browse the section interested, usually restrict to going, going, gone".

Problem Solvers were much more apt to vary their approaches between sessions. Of the people who tried different tactics for different eBay sessions, 82.6% of them were Problem Solvers as compared to 6.5% of the Navigators and 5.3% of the Engagers. These people tended to use conditional words such as "if", "might", "depends", and "sometimes" which is apropos for these learners who generate alternatives and test assumptions (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 12). Comfortable with a "learning environment that promotes experimentation through practical and hands-on activities" (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 13), Problem Solvers appeared to feel at ease experimenting with different tactics during their eBay sessions. One 47-year-old female Problem Solver wrote that her typical eBay session "depends on what I'm interested in at the time. Sometimes I just surf different areas to see what may or may not be interesting". Another

47-year-old female Problem Solver revealed that she kept her session options open:

I usually call up our bidder list page to see how our auctions are going. If I have an upcoming or important auction, I click on that item to see the price and how many bidders there have been. If I need to make a bid, I do so. Sometimes I use the search feature to look at some more items and make more bids.

A 21-year-old male Problem Solver described his typical session as "I go on, check for a couple of items or two, and either place a bid on those or maybe something else that catches my eye. Otherwise, nothing".

Problem Solvers were once again more likely to give detailed examples of their typical eBay sessions than their Navigator or Engager counterparts. These people chose to use specific samples of typical sessions instead of general descriptions and appeared to appreciate private time to immerse themselves in their eBay activities. Of the people who used examples, 53.8% were identified by ATLAS as Problem Solvers. One Problem Solver not only gives an example of her typical eBay session, but she also provides an outline of her typical day.

eBay is my favorite site to go to on the Internet. Several times a day, I click on my Favorite Place and go to Folk Art. The first thing I do is look at the items whose auctions are ending within five hours to see if there's anything I want to jump in on. If I have time after that, I'll go to "Ending Today" and investigate further. Sometimes I place a bid or two, or else I mentally note the time of the end of the auction for an item I'm not certain

about (if I can afford it, if I really want it, etc.) and I'll return to it the next time I log on. I usually do this after my youngest child leaves for school about 8:30AM, maybe again in the afternoon around 1:30, and then in the evening after dinner, dishes, and homework are completed. My main time is from around 10:30PM until 12:30AM because everyone's asleep and my obligations for the day are completed. (47-year-old female).

A 70-year-old male Problem Solver gave a detailed sample of his desire for ancient coins. He demonstrated his ability to analyze and monitor his learning process as he reflected and adjusted his bidding strategy approaches. Along with the example, he gave a warning about the potential for addiction to eBay and some advice about the benefits of good communication and trust between eBay participants.

Have you got an hour? Seriously, a typical session would consist of the selling part and the bidding part. Analysis of what I have to sell, coupled with what a prospective bidder might want, is the bedrock of selling on eBay. Determining a starting price and whether I would want to declare a reserve bid amount is also a consideration, depending on the value of the item I am selling. When it comes to bidding, there is usually a list of items within a narrow category, for example, coins or stamps that I would want to examine. Then it is narrowed down to countries, and subcategories; for example, I may want to bid on copper and silver ancient coins but not on gold coins. If no one has bid yet, I would normally bid the starting minimum bid. If someone has already started the bidding, and I want that item, then I would jump several notches to a level I could afford if I were to win at the end of the auction. This process gets very addictive and one can become beholden to a large cash outlay before one is aware of what has happened! If I win something, then I contact the seller as soon as possible. This is important in order to maintain good relationships with a possible repeat seller.

Trust is built up this way. One also gets a feel for the seller's character by the answer he gives you. Likewise, a correct payment that doesn't bounce is a must!

Engagers were more inclined to check their current auctions or to directly search for specific items than Navigators and Problem Solvers. Just over half (50.5%) of all participating Engagers used one of these two strategies when describing a typical eBay session. These learners who generally find "superficiality and details to be painfully tedious" (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 14) reported that they skipped some of eBay's other pages and went straight to what they were bidding, selling, or interested in.

Of the participants who reported they used the search feature during a typical session, 47.4% were Engagers. The search function allowed these Engagers to efficiently locate items of interest.

I key in the subject of an item I'm looking for and I look through each item in the subject. (28-year-old female)

I go right to Books, Music, and Movies first. (37-year-old male)

I search for collectibles for my husband or things that interest me. (41-year-old female)

I typically look for items that I am interested in and go to auctions that have the items. (34-year-old male)

Exactly half (50.0%) of the participants who reported a typical eBay session was spent in checking their current



auctions were Engagers. This was compared with the 22.7% who were Navigators and 27.3% who were Problem Solvers. These participants communicated that they either checked their current auctions, bookmarked their current auctions, or went directly to an eBay page called "My eBay" that is a direct access page to the user's current auctions.

I go to My eBay page and check my auctions, feedback, and items I'm bidding on. (41-year-old female)

I go to My eBay to see what is happening with my sales then I check on the things I have bid on. (69-year-old male)

I check my account to see if any auctions I have been bidding on have closed or if I have been outbid. (54-year-old female)

#### Summary

To describe a typical session on eBay, the participants used methods that were grouped into eight basic categories of checking current auctions, browsing, giving detailed examples, executing predetermined plans, searching keywords or items, using a combination of strategies, or varying their sessions to meet their needs.

Navigators were more likely than Problem Solvers or Engagers to browse eBay and use calculated plans during a typical session while Problem Solvers more often chose to vary their sessions and give detailed examples than people in the other two groups. Engagers tended to go straight to



their current auction sites or search for specific items of interest.

### Learning About Auction Items

Participating eBay users were asked to think about an auction within the last 6 months in which they took action to learn more about a particular item. Their responses included (a) conducting research, (b) using their own knowledge, (c) examining the item description and pictures, (d) giving examples, and (e) using a combination of methods. Regardless of the methods they used to learn more about a particular item, many of the respondents commented that pictures of the items on the eBay web site were very important.

I only buy stuff that has a picture. (29-year-old female Navigator)

The pictures were a terrific help. (52-year-old female Engager)

Generally, if a person does not include a picture of the coin being auctioned, I don't bid. (21-year-old male Navigator)

The photo is very important! I don't bid on anything I can't see. (50-year-old male Navigator)

I decide whether or not to bid based on the picture of an item. (23-year-old male Engager)

If the item didn't have a picture, I usually clicked back and didn't consider it". (42-year-old female Problem Solver)

Several of the responding people reported that they learned about particular items by either looking at the item

page and reading the description and viewing the picture or by contacting the seller by e-mail or telephone. Of the people responding, 19.5% said they looked at the item description and accompanying picture in order to learn more about an item that interested them.

I learned by looking at the picture and reading the description. (34-year-old female Navigator)

I read the description and looked at the picture. (36-year-old female Problem Solver)

After the search described above, I would select an item and read the description. I look carefully at the photos. (59-year-old male Engager)

Almost 12% (11.8%) of the people who answered said they contacted the seller either by e-mail or by telephone to get further information about the items. In order to facilitate communication between its members, eBay offers access to the e-mail addresses of registered users with a current subscriber name and password. One person wrote, "the seller provided a photograph but not much information, and was obviously not a specialist. I sent an email with several specific questions about the item and waited to bid until I heard back. I also asked this seller if they had any other similar items that would be listed in the future" (47-year-old female Problem Solver). While several respondents said that "I e-mailed the seller", one 32-year-old male Navigator explained, "I e-mailed the seller. Everyone I've e-mailed

has provided excellent descriptions. If there is a difference, they have all been quick to fix it".

Several (27.1%) participants remarked that they learned more about auction items by combining techniques. Included in the techniques were: looking at item description and picture; researching on the Internet; researching books, magazines, and trade manuals; and checking with manufacturers or retail stores. Some of these participants (18.2%) used other people in their combinations while another group (8.9%) used combinations that did not include other people. Responses from the group 66 people who involved other people in their combination of techniques included:

I have used email to ask the vendor questions about the history of an item, and checked to see that there was a certificate of authenticity to accompany the item. I also have checked in books to see that the item I was looking at was in compliance with the norms of the culture from which it is supposed to have come. For example, specific pre-Columbian cultures of Latin America. (38-year-old female Engager)

I e-mailed the seller to find out the condition of a particular item and whether it was an original or re-issue. I also did some research at the library on the album to determine its value on the collectors' market. (26-year-old male Navigator)

Some participants used a combination of techniques that did not include other people to learn more about auction items. These 32 people reported that they utilized non-human sources such as resource books, completed eBay

auctions, or other Internet websites in their search for more information.

I will look at the description. I also have some resources at home with price guides and books on memorabilia. If I am uncertain about an item's price, I may look at finished auctions to see what similar items have sold for. (59-year-old male Navigator)

By reading the sellers description then looking at other things like it that were on eBay. I also have several books about antiques that I have read. (44-year-old female Problem Solver)

Of course by reading the description in the auction, then by looking at my books and at Internet sites to see about the value of the item. (69-year-old male Engager)

Of the people responding, 49 (12.9%) said that they conducted research alone to learn more about items up for auction on the eBay web site. These participants used research to enhance their learning processes before they took action in an eBay auction. While a few (2.9%) said they used outside resources such as libraries, reference books, catalogs, and expert people, most (10.0%) of this group used the Internet to obtain additional information on items of interest. These people included other web sites, online marketplaces, and the eBay site itself.

If that listing did not have a picture, I looked at similar listing that did to make sure of what I was bidding on. I searched completed items to check current pricing. I searched other auction sites for availability and comparable pricing. I searched other auction sites' completed auctions for current pricing. (39-year-old female Navigator)

I did considerable research on the Web to learn about the item before I went to eBay. I searched on the name of the item and read the matches. I looked for a place that sold the item but I could not find one. (55-year-old male Problem Solver)

I usually do my digging on the Net. I find a site that has a good write up with prices. (25-year-old male Problem Solver)

I learn by browsing eBay every day and following the auctions related to my collection (29-year-old male Problem Solver)

Many of the responding people went to great lengths to describe how they went about learning more about an item on eBay. These people used detailed examples that specifically mentioned certain items. While these people frequently used a combination of techniques, they were set apart due to their attention to detail and their desire to give illustrations of their experiences. Of the participating people, 19.5% gave an example as their description that frequently included additional information from their experiences. For example,

I first bid on a couple of ties for my husband because he likes Snoopy and had seen a couple that he liked in a Snoopy catalog. I missed both ties because I underbid, and had not checked my email in a few days. I was very disappointed and did not want to miss the next one, so I bid on several more and left more room in my bid so I would not have to check back as often. Well I guess I got a little carried away because my husband now has 10 Snoopy ties! I also will email a seller back to ask questions about the item, such as how it is made, what are shipping charges, etc. what I have learned is 1) check the shipping before you bid to make sure it doesn't inflate the price too much 2)

I hate going out of my way to buy money orders, and may choose to pass on an item if I have to get a money order 3) sometimes the mail leaves earlier than others from my building 4) there are lots of sites selling Snoopy items, and even a Peanuts fan club that charges \$25 a year (this I found by searching AOL for "Snoopy". (38-year-old female Navigator)

I bought a book about history of jewelry to find values of some items I want to dispose of, most of my purchases have been to add to my collecting interests for a Bose radio. I called Bose and had them send me their sales literature to see all the features and their terms. I compared all the info and then decided to start bidding to get item at 2/3 the retail price. (58-year-old female Engager)

For example, I'm looking for a tent because I would like to do a bit of camping. I had seen quite a few tents but I know very little about tents and their prices. What I did to learn more about them was go to Wal-mart (A store that would maybe not have top of the line camping supplies but fair prices) and look at their tent. From this I could come to a better conclusion as to if I was paying too much or how the quality of the tent was. (18-year-old male Navigator)

Harker Pottery. I didn't know anything about Harker. Pottery is not my thing. But I listed a tiny, very old, interesting cup/mug that had a great landscape scene with sheep transfer on it and a mark on the bottom that my book showed to be a Harker mark. I bought it for one dollar, listed my opening bid at \$5., hoping to sell it for \$10. Most items don't get their first bid until about day 2 or 3. But 2 hours into day one I found the bid was up to \$53 on this little mug! After it sold for close to \$80 I contacted everyone who had bit on it and asked them why it was so valuable. Fellow eBayers are very kind and always willing to share their knowledge. Now I know about Harker. I was fascinated to find out that the man who won the bid collects miniature rolling pins by Harker Pottery, something I didn't know existed. So I ended up learning about an entire collection

category that was new to me! (47-year-old female Navigator)

Another group of respondents relied solely on their own current knowledge and experience when it came to learning more about an item. These 25 people (6.8%) related that they only were interested in items with which they were familiar or that they needed no other research or resources other than themselves when tackling an item investigation. Typical comments from people in this group included "I usually know about the product before I bid on it" (20-year-old male Navigator), "I only bid on things I'm familiar with. I wouldn't bid on something I didn't know much about" (24-year-old female Problem Solver), "the items I bid on are ones I either buy for resale or for my own collections, so I already know a lot about them" (39-year-old female Problem Solver), "I must say that I only bid on items that I already know a good deal about. I am a collector of many different collectibles and I know exactly what kinds of things I am after" (43-year-old male Engager), and "I already know a lot about most of the items on which I bid" (53-year-old male Problem Solver).

Not all of the participants reported pleasant experiences on eBay. Even for those who conducted extensive research, the likelihood of being cheated still exists. Of special note is a communication from a 47-year-old female

with no identified ATLAS group who had an unpleasant experience with eBay.

The seller contacted me. I was not the high bidder. I agree to purchase the item based on numerous assurances, via e-mail, that the piece had been appraised and was authentic. The pictures were misleading. When the item arrived, it was immediately obvious that it was not French, not an antique, and certainly not from the period stated. The people are conducting scams on eBay.

### Learning Strategies

Among the study participants, significant differences in the methods used to learn more about auction items on eBay were found between the ATLAS groupings of Navigators, Problem Solvers, and Engagers. While the percentages of people in each group were close among those who chose to contact the auction seller (Navigators-31.8%, Problem Solvers-36.4%, and Engagers-31.8%), there were marked variations in other areas.

Navigators were more likely to conduct research that included sources outside the Internet offerings than were Problem Solvers or Engagers. Of the participants who used sources such as libraries, manufacturers, retail stores, and books or magazines, almost half (45.5%) were Navigators. These learners who know how to locate and use the best information "rely heavily on the learning strategies of Identification of Resources and Critical Use of Resources" (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 10). Along with their Problem-



Solving counterparts, Navigators were also more inclined to use the Internet to research items than Engagers. Of the people who used the Internet to investigate items of interest, 40.5% were Navigators, 48.6% were Problem Solvers, and only 10.8% were Engagers.

The most popular tools used by Navigators to learn more about a particular eBay item were a combination of descriptions that both included and did not include people as a resource. Almost 30% of Navigators (29.1%) chose a combination of techniques with 8.7% of Navigators using a combination with no human resources and 20.4% using a combination with people. Examples of Navigator comments which included a combination utilizing human resources are:

I bid low on an item so that I could get it on my list. I then contacted a dealer, described the item to him and sent him a copy of the item. I later looked it up in books, both by myself and with the dealer. (44-year-old-male)

I go to "feedback forum" and try to contact people who have either purchased an item in my category or are a seller and ask a lot of questions. I also consult pricing guides. (35-year-old female)

The participants who identified their ATLAS grouping as Problem Solvers differed remarkably from Navigators and Engagers in three ways. These learners were over twice as likely than Navigators and almost five times more likely than Engagers to use a combination of methods that did not include people to learn more about particular eBay items.

In addition, Problem Solvers were over twice as inclined as Navigators and Engagers to give detailed examples in their descriptions of how they went about learning more about auction goods. Also, Problem Solvers were three times as likely to rely on their own knowledge about an item as a learning choice.

Many Problem Solvers in the study reported using a combination of sources that included no other people to learn more about eBay items. They frequently listed such sources as Internet sites, eBay auctions, and reference books in their descriptions. Almost 60% (59.4%) of the people using a combination that did not include other people were Problem Solvers while 28.1% were Navigators and 12.5% were Engagers. Typical Problem Solver comments included:

I searched through what was already on eBay for sale, went to the library, and looked at books.  
(41-year-old female)

After reading the description of the item on eBay, I did a Dogpile or Yahoo search for the item. I then look for information on other web sites about the item. Either its value on for sale web sites or just general information about the item. (36-year-old male)

I read the item being auctioned and then usually checked-out other similar items whose auctions are being held simultaneously. (60-year-old female)

The most popular choice for Problem Solver participants was to give a detailed account describing how they learned more about the eBay auction items. Of the Problem Solvers

who responded to the questionnaire, 22.1% chose to provide detailed examples in their descriptions. Of these people who gave descriptive illustrations, 52.9% were Problem Solvers, 23.5% were Navigators, and 22.1% were Engagers. . One 57-year-old male Problem Solver vividly described this quest to learn more about ancient coins:

Spanish colonial coinage or cobs--became interested--studied/obtained and still obtaining information on--rapidly becoming a serious hobby--web site being formed and completed to this study with tidbits of general info.--i.e. coins of the lost galleons, just purchased 10 different National Geographics with articles of info.--"The Practical Book of Cobs" Physical study of actual obtain items and identification. Study far from over, never know it all on this particular subject, even the experts are lacking a great percentage of this knowledge.

Although some Problem Solvers provided shorter responses, their examples still included illustrations and details.

My wife was looking for a Kitaro Live CD. An old boyfriend of hers had it. It was very old, but I managed to find it on eBay" (22-year-old male).

My husband bought a pipe and before he purchased it, he e-mailed the seller with any questions and then since he liked it, he bid on the item. This was an Indian pipe. (37-year-old female)

The only one I can think of at this point was an Australian Schilling. It had been hammered out and now resembled a locket. It had a photo in it of an Aussie Digger. I e-mailed the seller to try and find out more about it but she knew nothing of it. I came to a stand-still after that because I really didn't know where else to go. (37-year-old female)

There were several study participants (25) who reported that they relied on their own current knowledge as a learning resource about particular items. Problem Solvers were three times more likely than Navigators or Engagers to list themselves as a learning reference. Of these people who counted their personal knowledge as a resource, 60% were Problem Solvers, 20% were Navigators, and 20% were Engagers. Although they may have listed other ways to learn about an item, these participants were grouped together because they specifically mentioned their knowledge as an asset.

I am knowledgeable enough to know what I am looking for and interested in. If I have specific questions, I will e-mail the seller and request additional information. (42-year-old female)

I have been a collector for about 25 years and have some knowledge of current values. (55-year-old male)

The answer is that I already know a lot about most of the items on which I bid. (53-year-old male)

More often than not, what I'm bidding on is something I'm familiar with, so I know what I'm getting. (19-year-old male)

Engagers participating in the eBay study were inclined to learn more about an eBay item by looking at the description or picture or by using a combination of techniques. Over half (53.6%) of the Engagers said they learned about auction items by reading the description and examining the picture or by using combinations such as reading the item description, looking at the picture, e-

mailing the seller, searching other websites, using reference materials, or asking other people.

Of all the participants who learned about auction items by looking at the picture or reading the description, almost two-fifths (39.2%) were Engagers. These people were slightly more likely than Navigators (23.0%) or Problem Solvers (36.5%) to use only the item description or picture to learn more about an item. Of the responding Engagers, almost one-third (30.5%) used this method. This was almost twice the number of Navigators (16.5%) and Problem Solvers (16.6%) who chose to learn about an item by only viewing the description and picture.

I'm not a detail person....If I want to find out about an item I usually take a chance on something that looks good....I know very little about this wonderful computer, but I'm learning. (53-year-old female)

I learned by reading the description and looking at pictures. (53-year-old female)

I clicked for the auction details and read the description and/or looked at the photo if it was available. (29-year-old male)

I read the description and study the photo. (41-year-old female)

Engagers also learned more about eBay auction items by describing a combination of methods. Of the responding Engagers, 23.1% used a combination although 82% of these people included other people in their combination. Of the Engagers who used a combination of methods to learn more

about an item, 18.9% mentioned other people as a resource while only 4.2% used a combination that mentioned no other people. In fact, Engagers were least likely to use a combination that included no other people (4.2%), the Internet (4.2%), outside resources (4.2%), or their current knowledge(5.3%) when learning more about items.

I used books and reviewing other similar items on eBay, also sending email to seller or someone I knew familiar with type of item in question. (55-year-old female)

I either ask the person who I'm bidding from or I have the collector's encyclopedia and learn from there. (44-year-old male)

If I am not satisfied that the description is complete enough or there is no picture, I will then go through the process of getting the sellers e-mail address and writing to them with whatever questions I'd like to have answered. (59-year-old female)

First by reading the description. If I had a question I would email the seller. I also would check the seller's feedback comments to see if he or she could be trusted to tell the truth about their product. (47-year-old female)

### Summary

In order to learn more about eBay auction items, the participants used an array of methods to conduct an extensive amount of research. While some briefly mentioned reading the item description or viewing the item picture, others progressed into intimate details and elaborate examples. Some relied on outside resources such as the

auction item seller, the Internet, or reference books while others depended on their own knowledge.

Navigators were much more likely to use the Internet while researching information about items and were more apt to make use of such outside sources such as reference books, catalogs, and trade journals than were Problem Solvers or Engagers. Problem Solvers tended to offer more detailed examples of their learning experiences than the Navigators and Engagers, and they were much more likely to depend on their own current knowledge to come to their aid. On the other hand, Engagers chose to look at the item descriptions or pictures or to use a brief listing of a combination of techniques which usually included other people.

#### Learning About Other eBay Users

eBay users learned about other eBay users in many ways. They learned about the other auction sellers and buyers by using (a) e-mail, (b) features of the eBay web site, (c) a combination of methods (d) answers with descriptive remarks, (e) their instincts. Some participants were disinterested in the other people involved in the auctions.

A few of the participants confessed that other eBay users were unimportant to their eBay experience. These 24 people (6.6%) chose not to learn more about other users or admitted that they have not taken the opportunity to learn

more about the people involved in the auctions. Some of their comments included:

I don't usually consider the people. (34-year-old female Problem Solver)

I never really have much of an interest in the people involved. (36-year-old male Problem Solver)

I really never learned about the people selling the product. (22-year-old female Navigator)

I really never learned about the people selling the product....The item is what interests me, not the seller. (32-year-old male Engager)

People are not important when it comes to the auction. (54-year-old male, no ATLAS group identified)

E-mail, outside sources, and personal instincts played a part in the method some participants used to learn about other people on eBay. Corresponding by e-mail with buyers or sellers and using such outside sources as local chambers of commerce, yellow pages, or considering the geographical location to learn more about other eBay users was the method selected by a few (17) of the participants. Another small group of people (23) depended on their particular instincts to learn more about other eBayers. While these participants may have used other methods, they specifically mentioned trusting their instincts when dealing with other people. For example,

I simply ask the seller to describe themselves to me. If they do not furnish me the info I desire, then I simply do not buy from them. Most seem willing to let you know who they are, and what



type of people they are. Most, I believe are very good honest folks, but I am sure there are some rotten apples out there too. You know, kinda like some of my Democrat friends-you just cannot trust them. (63-year-old male Engager)

Some participants used their instincts when learning more about other eBay users. The 23 people who used their instincts have a fundamental trust in other people. They believe that people are basically good and this honesty is extended to eBay.

I am the type of individual who is sometimes too trusting, I believe you are innocent and good until proven otherwise. (35-year-old female Navigator)

I've been primarily going on honesty. (41-year-old female Problem Solver)

Everyone has been so nice that I don't worry too much about that. (41-year-old female Engager)

By far the most popular method the participants used to learn about other people in the auctions was an eBay feature called the Feedback Forum. Each eBay user has a page dedicated to them that lists feedback from other eBay users who have had experience buying from or selling to that user. Feedback is listed in the form of positive, negative, or neutral comments, and any eBay users may use the Feedback Forum to learn more about another user's history. The number of feedback comments is listed beside each eBay user's name whether they are a buyer or seller. Of the study participants, 127 (35.1%) took advantage of this

aspect of eBay to learn more about other users. Several people merely remarked that they "checked the feedback pages" or "read their feedback" while others offered more detail:

If interested in an item, I usually check out the user feedback to determine if it is a legitimate offer. I also rely on the feedback of the others bidding on the item, especially those who have lots of experience. (51-year-old male Navigator)

I always check a seller's feedback. If the seller has more than one negative feedback, I will research every feedback to discover the negative comments. The tone of the comments will determine if I am willing to chance dealing with a possibly negative situation. (53-year-old female Problem Solver)

Also important to several (93) respondents was using a combination of techniques to learn more about other people participating in eBay activities. These 25.7% of the people responding combined such actions as e-mailing other people, checking feedback ratings, and investigating the auctions' bid histories. The eBay website provides a bid history page for each completed auction that reveals such details as the auction item, item number, highest bidder, the highest bid price, and all bidders with their corresponding bid amounts. Registered eBay users may access these bid history pages in order to learn more about the completed auctions and their participants.

I mainly look at the number of feedbacks they have. Occasionally I read the feedbacks, especially the neutral and negative feedback

responses. Only when I've had problems do I delve any deeper, such as look at when they when online on eBay and if they have changed their ID (user name). (42-year-old Problem Solver)

I looked at their feedback to gauge their credibility. After the action, I cross referenced their phone numbers with their addresses. (24-year-old male Navigator)

Reading feedbacks and bid histories. Sometimes email. (32-year-old male Problem Solver)

I usually investigate someone's feedback if their rating is less than 50. If someone is bidding on something I have bid on, I may research what current auctions they have open (30-year-old female Engager).

Special features of the eBay web site were mentioned by some of the respondents. These features are known as About Me pages or histories of auctions, bidders, or sellers, and they provide eBay users with the chance to find out more about others in a convenient easy-to-access format. eBay offers each user the opportunity to create a personalized page called About Me pages. eBay users may use these pages to do such things as tell others more about themselves, advertise their goods for sale, advertise websites, or offer additional information to inquirers. Of the people responding, only six chose to learn more about others on eBay by only accessing the About Me pages. Another 16 people elected to learn about other eBay people by accessing the pages which detailed the history of auctions, the

history of auctions in which bidders have participated, and the auctions in which sellers have participated.

I looked at bid history to see if I was bidding against the same people or different people. (36-year-old female Navigator)

Through the prior history of the seller and possibly the bidding history on the item. (21-year-old male Engager)

Finally, several of the study participants chose to make detailed remarks when describing how they went about learning more about other people involved in eBay auctions. There were 50 people (13.8%) that constructed their answers to this question around helpful remarks. Several of these remarks were aimed at giving advise while others told stories of their experiences. One explained,

I had an undeserved bad rating put against me so I tend not to believe what they say about other people. I have no bad experiences on eBay and I have bought over 200 items. Of course, I rarely buy anything over \$25. If I was spending more money I might be more diligent in finding more about the seller. I have also got excellent ratings that I thought were overblown. I mean do you ever read "Buyer was sort of good" no, they always rave about you, crying wolf, I'd say. (52-year-old female Navigator)

Another person wrote about his relationships that have developed with other eBay users. "I have developed an external relationship with several of the sellers I deal with. We trade information, answer each other's questions and point each other to items which might be of interest" (52-year-old male Problem Solver). Another described in

great detail her process for learning more about other auction participants and her process for letting them know more about herself:

It's always fun to see the names people select for themselves for eBay and wonder why they made that particular choice. After becoming the successful bidder in an auction, I immediately e-mail the owner of the item to tell them how happy I am to have won. I also tell them why I want the item, what I plan to do with it, and then discuss the money transaction. Sometimes my notes are pretty lengthy. Some people might not like all this unnecessary communication, but so far my experiences have shown that people like to read what I have to say to them and I've always gotten warm, sometimes lengthy responses in return. After purchasing a piece of artwork from an artist on eBay, she e-mailed me and asked me to give her ongoing feedback (my opinion) on future items she's offering so that she'll know if her art is going in the right direction. How nice! I most certainly agreed. (47-year-old female Problem Solver)

### Learning Strategies

Navigators, Problem Solvers, and Engagers tended to rely on divergent methods to learn more about other people involved in eBay auctions. Almost half (48.5%) of the Navigators reported that they used eBay's Feedback Forum to learn more about other people which is compared to 29.4% for Problem Solvers and 29.5% for Engagers. Navigators may become impatient with inefficiency and tend to need independent control of their learning (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 10). Therefore, they chose to go straight to others'

feedback ratings to learn more about people involved in auctions.

To learn about the people in a particular auction I go to that person's feedback to see what others that said about that person. (60-year-old female)

If I have a question about the seller of an item, I click on their feedback to review what other people have said. I need to see about 10 positive feedbacks to feel comfortable about the seller. (37-year-old female)

I looked at the seller's rating, plain and simple, and then judged for myself, based on the quality of responses of buyers and the number, whether I thought this person was someone with whom I wanted to do business. (26-year-old male)

Problem Solvers are comfortable in environments such as eBay that promote useful, hands-on experimentation where they can practically apply what they have learned (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 13). This type of learning was evident in the responses of Problem Solvers as many (49) described the methods they used when learning about other eBay users as a combination of techniques.

I checked their feedback ratings and the other items they had for auction. In the case any negative feedbacks, I would often check the feedback of the person who left it to see whether the feedback was bogus or retaliatory in nature. (35-year-old male)

E-mailed sellers. Looked at bid histories before and after auction closed. Search members by user name to see what types of items they have bid on. Looked at seller's other auctions to see types of items they offer for auction. (Female; no age given)

I occasionally look at the seller's other auctions to determine if the seller is a generalist or a specialist in the category I'm interested in. I may also visit the seller's website if it is listed. I rarely research the opposing bidders other than to note their names and see if they have been bidding on a lot of the same items I'm interested in. (64-year-old male)

Problem Solvers were also more apt to use remarks which gave additional information in their responses than were Navigators or Engagers. Problem Solvers were three times more likely to use detailed comments than people from the other two ATLAS groups. Of the 50 people who offered specific remarks related to their experiences while learning more about other eBay people, 30 (60%) were Problem Solvers. This compared with 10 each from the Navigators and Engagers. Problem Solver comments that included detailed explanations entailed:

When one buys the same types of items repeatedly, it's quite common to run into the same competing buyers. :-) Generally, I'll email one of my friends to see if they know who the person is. While it's against eBay rules to "conspire" to keep prices low or to collude on bids, most friends and I will NOT bid against a good friend, assuming we know it's them bidding. One friend will bid on something he wants, no matter who is bidding against him. My postcard-friends have certain "regular nemeses" that they must compete with all the time for special cards. That happens to me far less often, as I bid on so many different sub-categories of nautical items. One can find out more about a particular bidder, or seller, by running a search on their user name, which I will do to see if it's someone I know. Many of my friends use their email addresses or their nicknames as their user names, making it fairly easy to spot them. That's one difficulty



I've encountered with my own choice of user name: most friends do not recognize. (47-year-old female)

I check the feedback ratings of the seller. If satisfactory which usually means no negative ratings unless the overall feedback number is really high such as in the thousands. After much bidding, you see a lot of the same sellers and can tell which ones are serious sellers versus part time sellers. If the item is a MUST have I will check the bidding of my competitors. I check the bid history of the current item. I also check the bid history of the competitors looking for items they have bid on or have won. This gives me a feel for how much they usually spend and are willing to spend on an item and what general category of collecting they do. This helps me determine how much they might want this item. (36-year-old male)

As I sell to the same buyers over and over again, you get to know them intimately without ever meeting them. I also use other strategies to meet new buyers and network with other sellers. I have a mailing list to notify buyers of upcoming auctions. I also wrote a weekly article on Vintage Jewelry, and that brings me closer to the buyers. (35-year-old female)

Problem Solvers also leaned toward using the most common response to this question which was eBay's Feedback Forum. Almost 30% (29.4%) of the Problem Solvers listed this forum as a way to learn more about others.

Similar to Problem Solvers, the participating Engagers relied on a combination of methods and eBay's Feedback Forum to learn more about the people engaged in auctions. Exactly 59.0% of the Engagers said they used either a combination of techniques or feedback when understanding their fellow eBay users better.



I do a lot of looking and know numerous folks that collect lots of things. I send off 45 or so links a day to different folks. (53-year-old male Engager)

eBay makes it very convenient to learn more about them by providing feedback ratings about every user that has completed a transaction. It is always located next to the user's name. (23-year-old male Engager)

Unlike both Navigators and Problem Solvers, the Engagers were more likely to rely on their instincts when learning more about other eBay users. Although Engagers made up only 25% of the overall respondents, 43.5% of the people who reported they used their instincts were Engagers. Engagers generally are emotionally invested in their learning and rely on their internal needs instead of external standards (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 15). This is evident in these Engagers who relied on their own instincts rather than depending on others' reactions:

I find that I respond to a certain type of presentation, and am turned off by others. A seller that has an intelligent persona, a clever turn of phrase or a sense of humor is often one that I will research further to see what else they have for sale (because they may well have the same taste I do). This instinct has often proven correct. I also just plain appreciate the entertainment value of some of these sellers. I don't really worry about the "feedback." I do like to see a high number of transactions, though. (33-year-old female)

This is tough and I have been burned by a scam artist who took the money and ran. He has since been booted off from eBay but of course there will be more. However, I continue to trust my fellow man and hope for the best. (54-year-old male)

I won't bid until I have e-mailed to get a feel for what type person it is. I'll even ask for example: Are you a doll shop or an individual? (54-year-old female)

### Summary

eBay users rely on various methods to learn more about the other people in the auctions. The most common response to how the study participants learned more about other eBay users was the Feedback Forum (35.1%), followed by a combination of techniques (25.7%) and detailed remarks about their experiences (13.8%). Others used e-mail (3.6%), auction histories (4.4%), eBay's About Me pages (1.7%), and outside sources (1.1%). Some people (6.6%) reported that they either did not learn more about other people or that others were insignificant in the eBay process.

Learning strategy groups showed some differences and a few similarities in the way they went about learning more about other eBay people. While all three ATLAS groups used eBay's Feedback Forum, almost one-half of the Navigators used the feedback evaluations as compared to 29.4% of Problem Solvers and 29.5% of Engagers. The Problem Solver participants continued to give more detail and information than the other groups. They were three times more likely than Navigators or Engagers to give detailed remarks in their answers to this question. Although Engagers made up only 25% of the respondents, close to half of the people who

used their instincts while learning more about other eBay people were Engagers.

#### Learning About Other Things

Participants in the study were asked to describe how they proceeded with learning about things related to eBay other than the items being auctioned or the people involved. Although some listed various reasons for not answering the question, others reported using the (a) eBay site itself, (b) other people, or (c) their own research. One group preferred to give (d) detailed comments, advise, or examples as an answer. While the participants relied heavily on eBay's Feedback Forum to learn more about the other people involved in auctions, they did not use the forum to learn about other things related to the auctions. Only five people (1.4%) reported that they used eBay's Feedback Forum to gain additional information.

For a variety of reasons, some respondents did not give answers to this request. Of those responding, 28.5% (103 people) gave no answer or gave a reason why they were not answering. Reasons for not giving an answer included the participants stating that they had not learned anything additional, they answered the question previously, or that the question was "not applicable" to them. Some indicated that they misunderstood the question; this may have been due to an unnecessary word in the question. Several people

chose to record no answer whatsoever. "This does not apply to me" (40-year-old male Navigator), "there were no other things I needed to learn" (40-year-old male Problem Solver), and "there isn't much else to say on the subject" (54-year-old female Engager) were some examples of people who gave no further descriptions of what they learned additionally about eBay auctions.

While some gave no answer to the question, others chose a completely different approach. These people preferred to provide detailed comments, advise for the researcher or other eBay users, or specific examples of their experiences while learning additional things about the auction site. Of all those who responded, 32 people (8.8%) took the time to offer such comments, advise, and examples. Samples from this group of respondents included:

I sat at my computer studying eBay for two months before investing in the digital camera. I closed two shops I had in antique malls so I could sell from home. I had to just study everything available on that site because I didn't know anyone who was selling on eBay, so I had to teach myself. I continue to learn everyday. (47-year-old female Navigator)

It seemed to be a natural progression. When you spend as much time on eBay and on line as I do, you don't miss much that is going on. I make it a point to keep current and up-to-date on all new things going on at eBay, and learn them thoroughly. It is the only way to stay competitive. (35-year-old female Problem Solver)

I've spent lots of time sitting here at the computer letting my fingers do the walking and my

mind do the talking. I know I am ahead and can think faster than I can talk so I would rather talk with my fingers than my mouth. I look forward to selling my first item by Dec. 1 on eBay and will be learning a lot more I am sure in the next week or two. (58-year-old female Engager)

Many participants chose to use different aspects of the eBay website when learning more about the auctions. People used the website by observing the auctions themselves, browsing the website, viewing the auction items or pictures, or using certain other eBay features such as eBay's help page, search engine, and other website links. Of the people who responded, 32.3% found the eBay site a help while they learned more about the other aspects of the auctions in addition to the auction items or the auction participants. While some decided to watch the auctions in progress or completed auctions, others returned back to the item descriptions or pictures offered for additional information, while still other people used the features of the eBay website.

In this study, most of the people who used the eBay website to gain additional information about the auctions used either current or completed auctions or other features of the eBay website. Of all the participants, 46 people (12.7%) either observed the current auctions in progress, reviewed completed auctions, or checked the auction bid histories to acquire further knowledge about the eBay

auctions. The eBay website offers each user a link to each auction's bid history which shows the item, auction number, seller, highest bidder with current bid amount, and each of the previous bidders and bids chronologically.

I observed the auction closing time and how many people had placed a bid on the item and if it had a reserve price. (25-year-old male Navigator)

I reviewed all the eBay auctions for this item and selected the one that had the lowest current bid price. (55-year-old male Problem Solver)

I checked to see how many people had bid on the item as well as seeing what similar items were going for. (57-year-old female Engager)

The participants who used other features of the eBay website relied on eBay's help pages, search engine, or links to other information. The 55 people (15.2%) who reported using the website in this way to gather additional information were likely to include comments such as:

I just learned by searching the site. (20-year-old female Problem Solver)

Mainly just jumping around in the different fields eBay has available. (37-year-old female Problem Solver)

One of the most useful things to me is the search feature. I like to search on a particular item number. This reduces the time that I need to spend on eBay if I don't have time to look through everything and want to check the status of an item. (24-year-old female Navigator)

As with previous responses, some participants used a combination of methods while others chose to use what they described as trial-and-error to learn any additional

information about eBay auctions. Out of all the study participants, 18 people (5.0%) listed combined methods to learn more about eBay auctions rather than the auction items or the people in the auction. Participants combined methods such as reading the items, viewing the pictures, conducting further research, and using the eBay website.

I read the description and the terms. If in doubt, I e-mail the seller. (37-year-old female Problem Solver)

I looked at and tried other auctions (eBay is about the best). I mainly just explore the site or talk to other users. (40-year-old female Problem Solver)

I asked the seller questions, used the search engines as stated above and read the feedback. (33-year-old male Engager)

Those participants who specifically stated they used "trial and error" also included those who mentioned they learned more by experimentation. In response to this question, 20 people (5.5%) said that they learned more about eBay auctions through trial-and-error or by experimenting. "I learned by using trial and error" (30-year-old female Problem Solver) and "by sheer experimentation" (67-year-old male Navigator) were typical comments from this group of people. One man added an additional comment about his learning process when he wrote "mostly trial and error....That's the way I acquired most of my computer

related skills. Nothing has exploded yet" (54-year-old male, no identified ATLAS group).

In order to learn more about eBay auctions, some people chose to perform additional research. Several people (37) did research outside of the eBay website that did not include other people. Another group of 35 people conducted research that involved only other people. Of the 10.2% of the respondents who performed outside research, many sources were accessed as is evident in their comments.

I did a search on Barnes and Noble for a book I bid on to compare prices. (27-year-old female Problem Solver)

I use external web sites and books (if I have them). (21-year-old male Navigator)

I searched the web and looked at library books at local library. (38-year-old female Problem Solver)

The group of 35 people (9.7%) who accessed other people to learn more about eBay auctions mentioned no other research sources than other people. While the people referred to may have been eBay participants, the respondents in this group mentioned other people as a sole source of additional knowledge. Comments from participants in this category included:

I e-mail another eBayer with a lot of experience. They are more than willing to help. (55-year-old male Engager)

My friend made suggestions. (49-year-old male Problem Solver)



I use the eBay Chat Room. (41-year-old male Engager)

### Learning Strategies

In response to a request of additional methods used to learn more about eBay, distinctions were recognized between participants who identified themselves in the three ATLAS groups. Not including the Navigators who gave no response (25.2%), the most prevalent method that Navigators used to learn more about the auctions was the eBay website itself. Of the responding Navigators, 23 people (22.3%) listed eBay as their sole source of additional information. While 23 Problem Solvers also used the website, Navigators comprised only 28.5% of the total study participants and Problem Solvers comprised 45.2% of the total. Of the participants who used the eBay website for additional information, over 40% (41.8%) were Navigators. These learners who "plan their learning schedule according to deadlines and the final expected result" (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 9) connected frequently to this website that utilizes auction deadlines and provides detailed information. Typical comments from the Navigators who used the website included "the site is very detailed and informative. Answers to any questions could always be found in one of the many instruction pages" (51-year-old male) and "I use eBay help menus to learn about terms I didn't know about" (50-year-old male).

Navigators were also three times as likely as Problem Solvers and twice as likely as Engagers to list the item description or picture as a source of additional information. Of the people who described reading the item description or viewing the item picture as the way they learned more about auctions, over half (54.5%) were Navigators as compared with 18.2% Problem Solvers and 27.3% Engagers.

I read the online information that is provided by eBay on the subject that I was interested in learning more about. (43-year-old male)

I find that everything I need to know is covered on the item page. (26-year-old female)

I reviewed the description of the item which includes shipping & handling costs. (55-year-old male)

When describing the way they went about learning additional information about auctions, the Problem Solvers distinguished themselves in two main ways from Navigators and Engagers. First, they were almost twice as likely as Navigators or Engagers to provide detailed comments, remark about their experiences, and offer advice for either the researcher, other eBay users, or the eBay website itself. Of the people responding in this category, almost half (46.9%) were Problem Solvers. These people chose to describe how they learned additional information about the auctions that were unmentioned in their previous responses.

Examples indicative of responses from this group of Problem

Solvers were:

Isn't this where you authors of this survey come in? Seriously, where can I start? Anything we do to touch someone will bring back a reaction. If we are positive, the reactions would almost always be positive and be appreciated--kind of making our day, sort of. (70-year-old male)

I do a lot of research on the actual items I sell. I purchase price guides and consult them regularly. I subscribe to several collectibles magazines. I will often do searches of similar items for sale or completed auctions. I sometimes post questions to the list I belong to, or sometimes the eBay sponsored discussion forums pertaining to certain collectibles. As far as things concerning other aspects of eBay, I often read the AuctionWatch boards and I read related webpages such as Honesty.com. I am also a member of Voices 1, a customer focus group that visited eBay in May, and ever since has regular phone meetings with eBay management. So I have a direct "in" to getting questions answered on eBay. In addition, I do make use of the Powersellers customer support e-mail. (39-year-old female)

If I'm interested in an item, I check to see if there's a reserve price, which always makes things more difficult. I also check the start and ending times, and check how many earlier bids have been logged--to gauge how likely it is that the price will go too high. I also look to see if any of the earlier bidders are ones I know to be persistent or difficult to bid against. I have a horror of "snipers", people who bid at the last minute and basically steal the items. I also check to see what sort of payment terms are available, i.e., do they accept credit cards, or checks, or just money orders. I also check to see where the seller is from; if the person is outside the US, postage costs can get very high. I also check to see how complete the item description is; the more information, the more comfortable I feel about bidding on it. And, I also check for "hype", i.e., is the seller trying to capitalize on a connection with a famous incident, like a shipwreck, or are

they simply allowing the market to set a priority.  
(47-year-old female)

I learned by sharing with other eBayers and surfing eBay. I find the descriptions of the items an excellent source of information. I will often bring up an exciting item to learn about it, even when I can't afford even the opening bid. eBay is an Internet museum, where you can buy the items being displayed. (53-year-old male)

The second way Problem Solvers differed from Navigators and Engagers was in the way that they characteristically tested assumptions and generated alternatives (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 12) when learning more about the eBay auctions. One group of respondents reported that they used trial-and-error or experimented in order to learn more about the auctions. Of this group, 65.0% were Problem Solvers, although Problem Solvers made up only 45.2% of the study participants. The Problem Solvers in this category were over three times more likely than Navigators and more than four times more likely than Engagers to use experimentation or trial-and-error as a discovery method. Problem Solvers have a strong tendency to use the term "trial-and-error". While this term may imply failure, Problem Solvers use it synonymously with experimentation and focus on the positive outcomes of this experimental process. The term "trial-and-error" may also connote that the learning approach is haphazard. This is not true for Problem Solvers. Like a good experiment, their "trials" are well planned, and the Problem Solvers learn from the outcome. Thus, the term

"trial-and-error" is the common way that Problem Solvers describe their experimental process of testing assumptions and generating alternatives (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 12).

The very same way as mentioned in previous answers: trial & error & lots of mistakes and every so often actually figuring out. (38-year-old female)

I learned about it by trial and error or by merely exploring. (24-year-old male)

I would say whatever else I may have learned was by the same manner: experimentation. (53-year-old female)

Again, I used trial and error. For instance, my hometown is Wabash, Indiana, and I discovered that if I run 3 searches (1-Wabash, IN; 2-Wabash, Indiana; 3-Wabash Ind.) it will net me more results than simply trying one of them. I've also discovered that running a search of the entire database nets more results than limiting the search to some category such as "antiques" since the seller may have an item classified a different way. (42-year-old female)

Trial and error. For instance, as I mentioned, I look for brands I buy at the stores and noticed that when I was scanning through the listings, some of them mentioned "New" in the title. Now, before I look at the whole list, I will say, for instance "Polo Sport New". I also found that you can list a size and find everything that pertains to that. I am constantly surprised at how specific you can be and get a response. (49-year-old female)

Trial and error. I learned that if I really want something I had better be at my computer at the time the auction closes and have my best bid ready to go within the last five minutes of the auction. For items I don't care that much if I win or not, I just place my bid and whatever happens happens & I don't go back to bid again. (Female; no age listed)

Engagers delivered some answers with contrasting patterns from Navigators and Problem Solvers. Of the participating Engagers, almost two-fifths (38.9%) either gave no answer, could not answer, or reported the question was not applicable to them as they learned more about eBay auctions. Although Engagers made up only slightly more than one-fourth (26.3%) of the total participants, 35.9% of the people who chose to make no response were Engagers as compared with 25.2% of Navigators and 24.5% of Problem Solvers. It was clear that these learners who decide if a learning activity is worthwhile and who find details to be tedious (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 14) preferred to spend their time describing their responses to other questions rather than this one. Other than those in this group who did not answer at all, typical Engager comments to this request were: "I don't" (47-year-old female), "such as what?" (20-year-old male), and "huh?" (51-year-old male; 53-year-old male; 45-year-old female).

Engagers also found other people as a valuable resource when learning more about the eBay auctions. Although Engagers represented 26.3% of the total participants, 37.1% of the people who reported that they specifically learned more about the eBay auctions from other people were Engagers. Learning more about the auctions from others was the second most frequently given answer from Engagers.

Examples of Engager comments about how they used other people as a resource to learn anything additional about the auctions were:

Now that I have some eBay friends, I occasionally e-mail them and ask them about a piece that is running. Their knowledge and experience has been a great help to me and I have probably learned more from them than from my own plodding actions. (42-year-old male)

Through email, we communicate with the seller. (61-year-old male)

I have e-mailed the seller before with additional questions I have had about the auction. (23-year-old female)

Contacting other people is also used by Engagers for more things than just learning about eBay auctions. This contact can be used to promote human interactions that would normally take place with others in the everyday world. This includes actions related to both negative and positive events.

Anytime I would have a question, I would ask a seller. Sometimes when I saw reproductions that were not listed as such, I had an urge to tell the unsuspecting buyer and would warn the prospective buyer. eBay wrote and told me that doing such was not allowed. (46-year-old female)

I was in a fierce bidding war with one person... whom I eventually lost to. But I took the time to congratulate him--by first finding his email address which is available to members. (26-year-old male)

### Summary

When asked to describe how they went about learning more about any other things related to the auctions, the

participants divulged that they gleaned additional information in several ways. Some (32.3%) relied on different aspects of eBay's website such as the auction pages, item descriptions and pictures, website features, and available feedback pages. Others chose a combination of methods (5.0%) or trial-and-error experimentation (5.5%) to learn more. Still others used research that either involved people (9.7%) or mentioned no people (10.2%). One last group (28.5%) gave little or no answer at all.

Within the ATLAS groups, differences were discovered between the participants' answers to this request. Navigators found the eBay website to be the source of additional information along with reading the item descriptions and viewing the item pictures. Problem Solvers were twice as likely as Navigators or Engagers to give specific comments or examples of their experiences which frequently included advise for the researcher or the website. These learners were also three times more apt than Navigators and four times more likely than Engagers to experiment or use trial-and-error when learning about further auction information. The Engagers' most popular choice was to decline to answer or to give a brief reason while they could not or would not answer. Of the participating Engagers, almost 40% reported little or no answer. Engagers were also proportionally more likely to



depend on other people when learning more about other aspects than the items or the people of the eBay auctions than their Navigator or Problem Solver companions.

### Bidding Strategies

The participants in the study were asked to describe the strategy they used for bidding on eBay items. While many had varied methods to describe their strategies, most of the participants used one of five basic strategies. These five strategies were (a) bidding early in an auction's life and then placing an additional bid in the final minutes or seconds before the auction closed, (b) bidding late in the auction only, (c) placing a maximum bid on an item during the auction, (d) implementing a predetermined strategy plan, and (e) using a variety of techniques depending on the auction circumstances. Although some considered information about their bidding strategy to be confidential and a few had unique comments to make, most of the participants eagerly shared the strategies they used when bidding on auction items.

Some among the participants chose to keep their bidding strategies secret and some made comments that had little or nothing to do with their auction bidding strategy. Among the respondents, 20 people either had no strategy, did not answer, or stated that their strategy was classified. Two people specifically reported that their tactics would not

become common knowledge. One man declared, "Sorry, top secret" (52-year-old male Problem Solver) while another said "sorry, I'm not willing to share" (64-year-old Problem Solver). In addition, some interesting comments came from a few of the respondents when asked to share their strategy. "I get out bid every time" professed a 28-year-old female Engager while another person remarked, "in my opinion, any material item is not an important part of my day to day happiness" (32-year-old female Problem Solver). Additionally, one man shared his philosophy that appeared to include more than only eBay auction strategies when he wrote, "like the stock market, strategies on bidding can fill William Keeton's biology text (I went to Cornell in the eighties). I always think less is better than more and simple is the king" (34-year-old male Problem Solver).

One of the major strategies that was revealed by the participants was the technique of bidding on an item early in the auction and then combining that early bid with a bid just before the auction closed. Of the entire group, 54 (14.9%) chose this particular strategy. When eBay users place a bid on an auction item, the website will automatically notify them of their progress which is a service that lets bidders know if they are the highest bidder or have just been outbid. An additional option eBay users have is to place the auctions they are bidding on in

their own personal page called My eBay. This page lists the user's auctions by item number, closing date and time, and bidding status. Typical descriptions from people who used this combined strategy of bidding early and bidding late were:

I make a bid early in the process so that I will have an e-mail reminder from eBay about the item. I check my e-mail reminders every day, then check eBay to learn the current bid. If, on the last day, the bid is within acceptable limits for me, I will log on and wait until the last minutes of the auction to place my bid. (50-year-old male Navigator)

I make a minimum, very low bid, early in the auction just so it is easier for me to monitor the auction. If it gets close to the end of the auction and the price is still below what I am willing to pay for it, I try to place a bid with my true maximum in the last 45 seconds of the auction. I learned that by losing some auctions in the last few seconds. (51-year-old male Problem Solver)

I bid as low as possible to get it in my "bidding on" list. As the last few minutes approach I put in the very highest price I am willing to pay and enter all of the information but do not push the final enter button until there is less than 60 seconds to go. This way there is no time for someone else to bid again. (45-year-old male Problem Solver)

If there is an item that I am really interested in, I'll put in an early low bid. I have a bookmark that brings up the items that I'm currently bidding on, and I can keep an eye on it. Then I usually wait until the end of the auction to put final bids in. I don't like putting in my high bid too early. It seems that I always get outbid or I end up adding to it at the end anyhow. (42-year-old female Engager)

Another prevalent bidding strategy described by the participants was a system that involved waiting to bid on an auction until the last minutes or seconds before the auction's end. This procedure was typically called "sniping" by eBay users and its perpetrators were frequently referred to as "snipers". Of the participants, 68 people (18.8%) reported that this was their bidding strategy. Examples from the people who used only a late bidding strategy were:

After many months I now write down the close date of the auction and bid in the last few minutes. If I don't win, I don't win. (26-year-old male Engager)

I decided that the best way to win some auctions was to go in during the last minute or less and bid because that was consistently happening to me. I also learned not to keep bidding higher as that jacks the prices up too soon. (43-year-old female Problem Solver)

I normally bid maybe a minute to 30 seconds before the auction is up. This way I am almost guaranteed to get the item. It leaves others little time to bid over me. (24-year-old female Navigator)

I have some sniping software (Cricket, Jr.), but generally don't use it. I place a minimum bid, watch it as the price raises, if I believe it will be real competitive, I snipe. If I really want the item, I try to be there "live" to do my own sniping. (59-year-old female Problem Solver)

Another technique repeatedly described by the participants was the method of placing only a maximum bid on a desired auction item. This bid was reported to be placed manually by the bidders or automatically by another eBay

service known as "proxy" bidding. In the bidder's absence, the eBay website will automatically continue bidding up to the maximum amount set by the bidder. This technique was described by more respondents than any other technique. Of all the respondents, 92 (25.4%) described their bidding strategy as one that involved only placing a maximum bid.

I have a set price I'm willing to pay. If it goes past, then I'm not interested. I don't get caught up in the "THRILL". I have my price. If I win, great. If not, no big deal. (32-year-old male Navigator)

Basically I know the maximum amount I want to spend and bid that amount and let the eBay proxy bidding service handle the rest. If I win the auction fine, if I don't then I look for another item. (44-year-old male Navigator)

Proxy bidding is of course handy and lets you relax to an extent. Bid the highest amount you want to spend. Unfortunately a problem has arisen using this method for myself and I'm sure others. If I bid on a half dozen binoculars with the idea that I may get one or two pairs and win the bid on all of them, I must come up with a pretty sizable chunk of cash. (54-year-old male Engager)

I use the proxy bid for any item that I am interested in and base my bid upon the dollar amount I am willing to pay. Once that dollar amount has been bid, I generally do not increase my bid. (24-year-old female Navigator)

No major strategy, if the price is right and I can use the item I will bid on it--I preset a limit to spend on the item--if it goes over that then I quit bidding--I do not get caught up in the chase--people who do that usually end up spending more than its worth. (56-year-old male Navigator)

An added strategy described by some participants was a method that detailed a predetermined plan which was carried

out with each auction. The people who used this strategy depended on a contrived plan each time they bid that did not vary by auction circumstance. Of the total participants, 13.3% (48 people) used this method. For example,

1) Select the item. 2) I know if the seller put a very low first bid and a reserve price too high. 3) I introduce my bid with a reasonable high bid. 4) I wait to see the demand for that item. 5) I follow with attention in the last minutes. (30-year-old female Navigator)

I research the retail price of the item, I check to see the shipping and handling charges, I check to see where they are shipping from, I then pick a price at which I will not go above and bid up to that amount. (25-year-old male Navigator)

I do it in two steps. I place my bid and then keep looking to see if there is any other similar items that have bids on them to give me an idea of the value. (51-year-old female Problem Solver)

Once I have done research on an item, I have an idea about its approximate cost. My bid amount is then established accordingly. (49-year-old female Navigator)

Yet another group described a different strategy when illustrating the approaches they used for bidding in eBay auctions. This group embraced a variety of strategies according to the circumstances of the particular item or auctions in which they were interested. These participants tended to include words or phrases such as "sometimes", "if", "may", "might", or "it depends" in their bidding strategy accounts. Of all the participants, 71 (19.6%)

reported that their bidding strategy varied according to different situations.

It depends on how badly I want the item...if I really don't care if I win or not I will bid the most I am willing to pay and then wait and see if I have won. If I very much want the item, I will make sure that I am online during the final ten minutes and see if anybody tries to outbid me.  
(31-year-old female Navigator)

I bid depending on item, price, date/time. If there is several days till the end of the auction, I wait to bid until it gets closer to the end and monitor the prize. Only once did I get caught up in the minutes and still lost. If someone is really hot for it outbidding me, I'll step back.  
(40-year-old female Problem Solver)

If I do not want to draw interest to the fact that I am bidding on an item, I may use an alternate user ID that is not easily identifiable as me. Or, I may bookmark the auction and not bid til the end (too easy to forget, so I don't use this method often). Mostly, I place the minimum bid and then track it through my status page. Near the end of the auction, I decide if I want it or not, based on the current price, etc. If I think the item may be of great interest to a competing bidder, I research their bidding habits in an effort to DEFEAT them. (SO much FUN!) If I really WANT it, I wait until the last 10 or 15 seconds to put in a high bid (using a digital kitchen timer). I usually win when I do this. (43-year-old female Problem Solver)

### Learning Strategies

There were definite differences in the methods that were used by Navigators, Problem Solvers, and Engagers. Each learning strategy group had a distinctly favorite strategy which was unique to that group. However, the participants in all three ATLAS groups reported that one of their preferred bidding strategies was bidding the maximum



amount. Of the total group of respondents, 28 Navigators (27.2%), 37 Problem Solvers (22.7%), and 27 Engagers (28.4%) selected the strategy of bidding a maximum bid by either manually entering the bid or by allowing the eBay proxy service keep track of their maximum bid. In spite of this similarity, each group distinguished another favorite bidding strategy unique to their group.

The Navigators favored using a predetermined plan as a bidding strategy more often than did the Problem Solvers or Engagers. Although Navigators constituted only 28.5% of the total participating population, 66.7% (32) of the people who reported that they used a preset plan were Navigators. This compared with the 14 (29.2%) Problem Solvers and two (4.2%) Engagers who had a prearranged bidding design. Navigators rely heavily on the learning strategy of Planning and they "plan their learning schedule according to deadlines and the final expected result" (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 9). This characteristic was emphasized by the participating Navigators and was reflected in the following descriptions:

Research items last known selling price in manuals and auction reports. Make initial bid and then, each day, review what I bid on that is ending and its current bid. I then wait till 10 seconds before the end of the auction and place my bid. I have several windows open to the item. One to check its current price and the others ready with different bids. (58-year-old male)

I will bid 50% + \$1 for an item that I have determined the actual value of. There is a dollar



limit over which I will rarely bid. (67-year-old male)

I bid 1 or 2 cents over a bid increment to get the bid over a proxy at a standard increment. (43-year-old male)

The most often reported bidding strategy of Problem Solvers was the strategy that varied according to the auction circumstances. Of all participating Problem Solvers, 45 (27.6%) listed a bidding strategy that consisted of a variety of tactics according to the conditions. Problem Solvers were over three times more likely to use this strategy than were Navigators or Engagers. Of those that reported using this varying strategy, 63.4% were Problem Solvers, 18.3% were Navigators, and another 18.3% were Engagers. A quality of Problem Solvers is that they are comfortable testing assumptions, generating alternatives, and considering various solutions (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 12). These attributes were clearly communicated in these examples of Problem Solvers who used a variety of strategies when bidding on eBay auctions:

Sometimes I make an early, low bid and just wait to see how the pricing goes. If it gets close to the end of the auction and I want the item, I will make further bids to try to win. If the item is very important to me, I watch the auction very closely right up to the last few seconds and make a last ditch bid and at the very end. At other times, I decide what is the very highest amount I would pay for something and bid that amount, and then don't particularly watch closely and wait till the auction is over to see if I won. (47-year-old female)

It all depends on how badly I want the item. Usually if its something I wouldn't mind having-- if I think the price is really good--then I go ahead & bid early. If its something I really want--I bookmark it and bid very late in auction. One problem is having a certain group of folks who only bid at last second and only get in on a frenzy of wanting and out--bidding what others are bidding on--without really thinking of what they would really want to pay for the same object if there wasn't a bid-war going on. Sometimes I just surrender--thinking it's not worth more than "blah-blah-blah" amount TO ME so, they can have it! I suspect they are new eBayers. (44-year-old female)

I have not stuck with one particular strategy. There are two main ones that I have used. One is to bid at the last minute to when an item (sniping). The other is to bid on new items and put in a moderate amount that I wouldn't mind paying. I'm sorry to say that sniping is the best way to ensure getting the item, but the "heat of the moment" causes me to spend more than I would normally. Bidding on a new item is less sure of winning, but more likely for me to not pay too much. I currently am using the latter more since a recent "spree" in which I spent way too much. (42-year-old female)

Engagers tended to designate a different strategy from Navigators and Problem Solvers as their favorite. Engagers preferred to wait until the last remaining minutes or seconds and place a bid on a particular auction which is an operation typically referred to as "sniping". Although Engagers made up only 26.3% of the responding population, 36.8% of the people who used this strategy were Engagers. Of the Engagers who responded, over one-fourth (26.3%) chose this as their bidding strategy. It was clear that these learners had determined that they wanted a particular item

and were willing to do most anything be the highest bidder when the auction closed. One exclaimed, "If I want it, I get it!!!" (21-year-old male Engager). This characteristic is typical of Engagers who will "completely immerse themselves in the activity to be able to fully experience the joy or satisfaction of a job well done" (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 14). Additionally, when an Engager "makes a decision to enter into a learning activity, it is usually well contemplated and a commitment is made to achieve the goal originally intended" (p. 14). Examples of Engager descriptions regarding their last-minute bidding strategies were:

It is the same strategy that most eBayers use--bid late in the last few seconds of the auction using a stopwatch and quick fingers! I used to do this a lot when I first got on eBay. It does work, but now lot of people do it and I don't get caught up in it anymore. The only way to get a very popular item that has had lots of bids is to be there in the last seconds with a high bid. Don't figure on buying it "right" if the item is nice because there are those out there who will pay too much for that nice item. (55-year-old male)

If there is an item of interest to me, I wait until the last minute of the auction to bid. That way I don't have to get into a bidding war with others. The best thing to do is time it right. If you get your bid in right before the end of the auction, you can ensure you get the item. (32-year-old male)

After getting beat out of a few Halloween costumes for my daughter...I realized that if I really wanted something, I had to be right on top of the bidding. So if it's something I really, really want, I just wait til the last minute, decide the max that I'll pay, and pay .50 more than my max.

Then if I'm overbid, so be it. (40-year-old female)

I have a file on the favorite list of eBay. These are items that interest me. I track them and bid in the last ten seconds or less, then and only then. (53-year-old male)

Only two (2.1%) of the participating Engagers reported that they used a predetermined plan as a bidding strategy as compared with 31.1% of the Navigators and 8.6% of the Problem Solvers. Instead, Engagers prefer to engage the bidding process in the last few seconds of the auction and once again rely on their emotions to guide them.

#### Summary

The participants in the study of adult learning on eBay revealed their strategies for bidding on auction items. While a few people chose to make comments and a few did not answer, the others described bidding strategies that were clustered into five basic groups. The five bidding strategy groups were those people who bid early then accompanied that early bid with a late bid, bid late in the auction only, placed a maximum bid, implemented a predetermined bidding plan, or varied their bidding strategy according to the circumstances.

Participants in the three ATLAS groups reported differences in the methods they used when bidding. Although all three groups of Navigators, Problem Solvers, and Engagers used the strategy of placing a maximum bid on an

auction item, there were distinct difference among the groups in regard to other strategies. The participating Navigators were over twice as likely as Problem Solvers and were then 16 times more likely than Engagers to use a predetermined plan when bidding. Problem Solvers were three times more apt to use a variety of strategies than were their Navigator or Engager counterparts. Engagers favored the method of placing bids in the emotionally intense last few minutes of an auction and in only two instances reported using a preset plan.

#### Developing a Bidding Strategy

Each participating eBay user was asked to describe how they went about developing their bidding strategy. Although a few (20) did not or could not answer, the great majority of participants provided either a description of how their bidding strategy came into existence or a description of why they created the strategy they used. Some developed their strategy as a result of (a) practice while others developed their current strategy as (b) a result of being constantly outbid on auction items. Other participants' bidding strategies were formed as a result of (c) live auction experiences, (d) of studying the eBay auctions in progress, (e) of necessity due by finances. A few participants responded that their strategy was shaped (f) by their own logic or advise from other people.

Overwhelmingly, the two methods that the participants used to construct their eBay bidding strategy was by actually bidding in eBay auctions or by being outbid by other eBay users. From the total of 362 people who described how they created their strategy, 167 (46.1%) reported that they either learned by performing the bidding process or they learned by being defeated at prior auction closings.

Of these two groups, 95 (26.2%) revealed that their bidding strategy came about as a result of the concrete act of bidding. Practical application of knowledge is important to adult learners, and that they continue to rely on their experiences while engaging in a learning activity (Knowles, 1970). Typical comments from those who devised their bidding strategy by actually bidding included:

I learned gradually through my own bidding. (54-year-old female Navigator)

I developed my strategy for bidding by just bidding on items and seeing if waiting was the best way or if just bidding a high amount was the best. I like waiting until the end better. (31-year-old female Problem Solver)

I quickly learned that there wasn't a lot of point in bidding too early, so I guess my main strategy is to wait until the final few hours before the auction was set to close and wait until that time to begin bidding. (52-year-old male Engager)

One man has discovered a little-known benefit to placing a higher bid.

To tell you the truth, I stumbled upon my technique. I usually reserve my final bid until the last two minutes of the auction, and if the item is within my price range, and I want it, I will bid a few dollars more and give the other bidders a headache while they try to figure out how many dollars I bid above them in the 45 seconds they have left. I haven't lost a bid yet using this method. The funny thing I discovered is that if, say, I bid 10 dollars higher on an item and people don't bid it up that 10 dollars, eBay will tell the seller that the item sold for the next highest bid increment and not the price +10 dollars. This allows you to bid a reasonable price the last few seconds of the auction, and not have to pay the full \$10 amount unless it was bid up that high. I'm not sure if this is a flaw in the program or if it was designed that way, but it is very useful in last minute bidding. Many people wait until the last second to bid, as not to get the prices up to high in the week or so that the item is. (31-year-old male Navigator)

The personal experiences of the participants influenced the development of this bidding strategy. This is shown by the delightful story from a lady who unknowingly got caught in a bidding war with a friend:

I do what I do as a result of learning from experience. With a few items, I learned about them days ahead of time and lost out because I didn't bid right away and forgot about them. I also learned, to my sorrow, how important it is to check and see who else is bidding, after an unfortunate "bidding war" with a close friend whose username was unfamiliar to me. We were both trying to buy the same item for a mutual friend, but I was actually bidding on it FOR her! (47-year-old female Problem Solver)

The remainder of this group created their bidding strategy as a result of being outbid during eBay auctions. Of all the responding participants, 72 people (19.9%)



developed their strategy after being defeated in at least one auction war.

My strategy was developed mainly from losing and seeing why I lost. Living in Australia, I also frequently suffer a time zone disadvantage, so I have to adopt time related strategies. (45-year-old male Navigator)

I'd lost out on a few items that I'd really wanted...noticing that I was outbid at the last moment by bidders who really hadn't been involved in the auction until the very end (or so it seemed). (26-year old male Engager)

Because I was getting frustrated being outbid. My intention to bid is to make my kids happy for Christmas and try to surprise them because they have no idea that I got this item for them! (35-year-old female Engager)

Made a few bids that were immediately outbid by other bidders. Made a couple of bids that were outbid at a later time. Didn't like the way that worked out. (55-year-old male Problem Solver)

I was disappointed a lot because people would outbid me. I think people are determined while bidding and if they bid on an item and their bid remains under the maximum, they continue bidding until they are "winning". I guess it is greed and capitalism at work. Anyway, I like to hold on to the item for awhile (also so I don't forget about it) and I can always go back and put a higher bid. I guess it sounds kinda stupid, but I am in medical school and don't have time to amuse myself any other way!! (22-year-old female Problem Solver)

An additional group of participants used their experiences with live auctions to formulate their eBay bidding strategy. Of the respondents, 46 people (12.7%) described their online strategy as coming from their live auction habits. One man remarked



I go to a number of live in person auctions and bid the same way on line as I do in person. (52-year-old male Engager)

It parallels my bidding at "real" auctions, which I have attended and participated in for many years" (55-year-old female Problem Solver).

I developed by strategy from regular auctions. I attend five to eight a week. (58-year-old male Navigator)

Whatever their bidding strategy was, one group of respondents declared that their strategy was formed purely by their financial circumstances. These 43 people (11.9%) revealed that money or the lack of it played a strong part in shaping their bidding strategy.

This "strategy" is really born out of the fact that I don't have a lot of money to bid with so I bid what I can afford or think the item is worth. If I get outbid, then I re-evaluate. (23-year-old female Engager)

I know how much money I earn in an hour at my job. I just ask myself, "Would I work "x" hours or fraction of an hour to own this item??" Sometimes, if I judge the value to be say \$100, and I think I can re-sell it at that price, and I can get it for a fraction, I bid just for resale purposes. I think lots of people are ignorant about the value of their items on eBay. (47-year-old male Problem Solver)

I don't want to go broke. :) If I keep raising my bid, I can eventually guarantee I win everything, but I also would end up owing a LOT of money. (29-year-old female Navigator)

Simple economics. I only have so much "FUN" money to spend on coins. (32-year-old male Navigator)

Another group of respondents reported that they formed their eBay bidding strategy by watching the auctions in

progress and by studying the actions of eBay bidders. Of the total group, 40 people (11.0%) molded their bidding strategy as the result of examining eBay auctions and scrutinizing the bidders' actions.

I learned by watching others. (35 year-old male Navigator)

My strategy came from observing other bidders and combining their ideas and mine. (43-year-old female Problem Solver)

By watching others win the final bid due to extra 1 to 5 cents thus causing the next bid amount to be rejected because of the extra 5 cents. (51-year-old male Engager)

The remaining few participants told how their bidding strategies were formed by other people (3.3%), by instinct (1.9%), or by using their own logic (6.6%). Expressions from people in each of these groups included:

I just heard a friend talking about how they got outbid at the last minute...got the hamsters whirling in my head!! (25-year-old female Problem Solver)

You just kinda get a "feel" that's all I can tell you about that one. (64-year-old female Engager)

It just seemed like a logical method. (51-year-old male Navigator)

### Learning Strategies

Although the Navigators, Problem Solvers, and Engagers had actual bidding strategies that differed remarkably between the three groups, their reported methods for developing those strategies were similar in many respects. People in all three groups disclosed how they developed

their bidding strategies by bidding, being outbid, considering their finances, using their auction experiences, and studying eBay's auctions and auction participants. However, differences were discovered in the three groups which included people who used logic, other people, or their instincts to develop their bidding strategy.

People in all three ATLAS groups reported that they developed their bidding strategy as a result of either the action of bidding or the act of losing an auction. Based on the total participant division of 28.5% Navigators, 45.2% Problem Solvers, and 26.3% Engagers, the differences between learning strategy groups were unremarkable. Of the 95 participants who disclosed that their bidding strategy was formed by actually bidding on auctions items, 21 were Navigators (22.1%), 51 were Problem Solvers (53.8%), and 23 were Engagers (24.2%). Of the 72 (19.9%) whose strategy was formed as a result of being outbid during auctions, 37.5% were Navigators (27 people), 36.1% were Problem Solvers (26 people), and 26.4% were Engagers (19 people).

Unimportant differences between the ATLAS groups were also shown in some of the other methods used to develop a bidding strategy. The participants who said that their bidding strategies were developed as a result of financial circumstances, personal experience, or auction observation showed little difference among ATLAS groups. Of those who

declared that their strategy was shaped with their finances in mind, 25.6% (11) were Navigators, 41.9% (18) were Problem Solvers, and 32.6% (14) were Engagers. Experience played a key part in the strategy development of 15 Navigators (23.1%), 21 Problem Solvers (45.7%), and nine Engagers (19.6%). Of the respondents who recounted their bidding strategy came about as a result of studying auctions or watching bidders' actions, 12 (30.0%) were Navigators, 20 (50.0%) were Problem Solvers, and eight (20.0%) were Engagers.

Although the ATLAS groups did not differ in the methods used to create a bidding strategy, they did use different approaches to describe the creation of a bidding strategy. These differences came from those people who reported that their bidding strategy was developed using their own logic, their own instincts, or other people. Navigators and Problem Solvers were, respectively, almost three times and over twice as likely than Engagers to count on their own logic or common sense when developing a bidding strategy. Of the 24 people who reported using this method to create a strategy, 11 (45.8%) were Navigators, nine (37.5%) were Problem Solvers, and only four (16.7%) were Engagers. Although Navigators and Problem Solvers groups both reported using logic or common sense, the way they chose to describe

their strategy-developing methods differed in important ways.

Navigators are learners who "favor making logical connections" (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 9) and they relied on logic to create their bidding strategy. Comments from the Navigator group included simply "I just do what's logical for me" (37-year-old female) and "I used my brain" (52-year-old female). On the other hand, some Problem Solvers developed their strategy as a result of using common sense. Since Problem Solvers "thrive in a learning environment that promotes experimentation" (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 13), exploring different strategies and trying different tactics came easily to them and they labeled their efforts as second nature common sense.

I really just used common sense. (35-year-old female)

Just pure common sense. The way I remember it, about the first item I ever bid on was a candelabra. Another bidder had maybe \$250 on it. I jumped in at \$300 instead of \$251. The screen went above \$300 to reflect her max. I bid up again. I think the reserve was met at about \$350. As I remember it, this lady won the candelabra at about \$800, and the seller later contacted me and told me she didn't want it and wanted to know if I did. I told him no--that this was my first time bidding and I'd overbid and was glad not to win. I offered to take it at about \$350. Since that time I learned that the best thing to do is to determine a bid based on the value of the item. This includes how much this type of item has sold for on eBay in the past, how much I want the item, how much the piece would be worth compared to something new. I place my bid in the last 15 seconds to keep myself and others from the bad

type of situation I experienced early on. If I win, I win. If I lose, I lose. (47-year-old female)

In addition, Navigators were more likely than Problem Solvers or Engagers to use self-control and discipline or external research tools. Being in control of their learning processes is important to Navigators, and the ability to access appropriate external resources such as books, catalogs, and reference manuals is helpful to them (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 10). Examples from Navigators who used self-control and external resources when developing their bidding strategy included:

I quickly realized that I had to curb my irrational desire to win at all cost by imposing a rational limit on my bids. I stick to a rule of setting a maximum and not going beyond it, even if the item is something that I have been looking for for a very long time. (26-year-old male)

I establish a set amount from book value or value established by a source you can depend on and bid from that knowledge. (35-year-old female)

Problem Solvers and Engagers were much more likely to disclose that other people had played a significant part in the development of their bidding strategy than were Navigators. Problem Solvers "rely heavily on human resources and prefer expert advice rather than referring to manuals" (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 12). Engagers are learners for whom "interaction and collaboration" (p. 14) is extremely important. Of the 12 (3.3%) people who created their strategy with the help of others, five (41.7%) were

Problem Solvers and six (50.0%) were Engagers while one lone Navigator (8.3%) did so. Typical Problem Solver and Engager reflections in this area contained these comments:

My son was bidding on several Star Wars items and really wanted them. It was getting within minutes of closing, he said try a higher bid. It got pretty intense as we placed the last second bids. (62-year-old male Problem Solver)

It was my husband's wisdom that led me to that and I trust his abilities. It has done well for me, sure I have been disappointed but I've also learned. (53-year-old female Engager)

Believe this or not....I wrote to another member and asked them how they did it and they were more than happy to share. It's called sniping. (37-year-old female Problem Solver)

Just simple strategy like anyone would use at an auction, but you have to know what something is really worth, so I often call a friend and ask of their opinion. (63-year-old male Engager)

A friend taught me everything I wanted to know. (33-year-old female Engager)

According to the data provided by participating Problem Solvers, trial-and-error was a useful tool that helped them construct their bidding strategies. The Problem Solver's ability to "test assumptions" and "generate alternatives" (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 12) apparently was beneficial to these learners as they built their bidding strategies. Although some Navigators and Engagers also mentioned the trial-and-error method, the Problem Solvers elaborated on their processes and described them more thoroughly.

Trial and error. I lost out on auctions I really wanted because I put in a bid too late or bid too



low. The more bidding I do, the better I know the market and what will be popular (what I will need to bid high on if I want it). Of course, if I want something really bad, it just becomes a matter of how much I'm willing to pay for it. Some items just get too expensive no matter what strategy you use. (40-year-old male)

Trial and error, like everybody else, and if you're bidding real late on an object and others are after the same, you just have to put in your maximum and send it in as late as you can & hope for the best & not take it hard if you lose. Often another same object will come up on the auction again-no matter how rare you think that book or object was. (44-year-old female)

Whatever method the Problem Solvers used to develop their bidding strategies, it was clear they learned that bidding early in an auction on an item only served to drive the price of the auction item higher. They learned that "there's no point in being top bidder until the auction's done, I have better things to do then to make sure I'm top bidder every day" (25-year-old male).

A final difference between ATLAS groups was among those who declared that their strategy was created as a result of using their instincts. Problem Solvers and Engagers were much more apt to use their instincts than Navigators were. Engagers are learners who typically "learn with feeling" (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 14) and Problem Solvers are intuitive learners who are quick to identify the best learning resources (p. 12) while "emotions have little to do with learning for Navigators" (p. 10). Of the participants who distinguished their instincts as a tool for creating



their bidding strategy, none were Navigators, three (1.8%) were Problem Solvers, and four (4.2%) were Engagers. These findings support the results of research which examined the relationship of ATLAS to personality style (Conti & Kolody, 1999). In addition, the Engagers were more inclined to use emotionally-laden words to describe their strategy-building process. These included words such as: "steals", "feel", "scared", "gut reaction", "fun!", "love", "crap", and "tooooo".

I used trial-and-error and gut reaction to numbers and times of other bidders. I used my intuition and feelings....I bid and got a cute quail for our school mascot collection because his photograph on line was so darn cute and personable, I said out loud, "Wow! He is adorable, we got to have that!" (58-year-old female)

Try to decide what something is worth and then how much more you are willing to pay (if any). I feel that bidding that amount up front is just encouraging someone else to bid more. On a popular item, that up-front theory never works unless you bid something crazy. (55-year-old male)

### Summary

Many methods were used to develop bidding strategies on eBay. Almost one-half (46.1%) of the people developed their strategy as a result of either the actual act of bidding or by being outbid. Other groups of people developed their strategies as a result of financial considerations (11.9%), personal auction experience (12.7%), and studying the auctions and the bidders' actions (11.0%). A few participants acknowledged that their strategies came to them

by using logic (6.6%), other people (3.3%), or their own instincts (1.9%).

No differences were discovered in how the Navigators, Problem Solvers, and Engagers cultivated their strategies. However, contrasts between the ATLAS groups were discovered from those who reported their strategies were developed by using their logic, other people, and their own instincts.

Differences were also discovered in the way the participants in the ATLAS groups described how they went about developing their bidding strategies. Although Navigators and Problem Solvers both reported using logic and common sense, these methods were described in different ways. Navigators merely reported that they used logic while Problem Solvers tended to elaborate at length about their use of common sense. Navigators also were more inclined than Problem Solvers and Engagers to use self-control and external resource materials when developing their bidding strategies. Although participants from all three ATLAS groups reported using trial-and-error to create their bidding strategy, the Problem Solvers reported using it more frequently and tended to elaborate in more detail in their descriptions. In spite of the fact that the Problem Solvers and Engagers both reported using their instincts to form their bidding strategies, the Engagers tended to use more

emotionally-laden words in their explanations than their Problem Solver counterparts.

## CHAPTER 6

### COMMUNICATING ON eBay

#### Introduction

In order to increase the personal nature of its website and business process, eBay encourages bidders, buyers, and sellers to interact via e-mail. eBay has instituted a feedback system in which buyers can post ratings and comments about the seller, the quality of the item purchased, and the quality of the communication and interaction with the seller. Likewise, the seller can post comments and evaluations about the buyer. These comments are important to sellers if they are to continue to sell products on eBay. A review of the messages posted on eBay reveals that a large volume of civil and courteous communication takes place through these messages that facilitates the auction process. Messages from respondents and the personal experiences of the researcher support this overall view of the importance of the e-mail communication process in making the use of eBay more personal. Therefore, participants were asked both quantitative and qualitative questions concerning their use of e-mail in connection with eBay.

The opportunity to communicate with other eBay participants is a service that is offered and encouraged by the eBay website. This service is extended to participants

by making available the e-mail addresses or personal websites of eBay users to other users who desire such information. Registered eBay users may access the listed e-mail address of another user by entering their own user identification name along with their chosen password and accessing eBay's information page for each registered user. Some people who sell their wares on eBay even list their e-mail addresses directly on the item description pages in an effort to be accessible to prospective bidders.

The eBay users who joined in the study were requested to describe their perspectives of several different aspects of e-mailed communication in relation to their eBay activities. The study participants were asked to reveal (a) how much they communicated with others using e-mail, what their perceptions of the (b) advantages and (c) disadvantages of using e-mail were, and (d) how they would describe their overall feelings concerning e-mail communications with others on eBay.

#### Advantages of E-Mail

The participants were asked how much they communicated with other eBay users using e-mail. Their responses were recorded on a 5-point Likert scale presented in online format. The answer options offered to the participants were: Never, Seldom, Some, Much, and Very Much. Over one-half (54.4%) reported that they used e-mail Much (20.8%) or

Very Much (33.6) when communicating with other eBay users by e-mail. Another 100 people (26.7%) declared that e-mail was an option to them that was used Some of the time. The remaining 71 people (18.9%) said that they used e-mail either Seldom (14.4%) or Never (4.5%). Thus, e-mail is an important tool that is used by most eBay users which helps them operate efficiently during website activities.

The participants were also asked to rate their overall feelings concerning their e-mail communications with others on eBay. Their answers were also recorded using a 5-point Likert scale in an online format. Participants were offered choices which were specified as Extremely Positive, Positive, Neutral, Negative, or Extremely Negative. A clear majority (83.8%) viewed their overall feelings about e-mail as either Extremely Positive (33.7%) or Positive (50.1%). Others looked at e-mail as Neutral (14.8%), while an extremely small group deemed e-mail with other eBay users as Negative (.5%) or Extremely Negative (.8%). Therefore, e-mail is an extremely positive part of the eBay auction process for an overwhelming majority of the website's users.

When asked to describe the advantages of using e-mail to communicate with others on eBay, the participants gave a medley of responses. These responses and the frequency of use indicate that e-mail is an important tool for learning for eBay users. While a few (31) reported there were no

advantages or did not respond to the request, most of the participants declared that e-mailed communication was either quick and convenient or was an advantageous way to gain information and facilitate further connections. One group of 35 people said that the speed of contact and response was the sole advantage of e-mailed communications. Advantages to some (9.7%) whose time was precious to them was the speed that e-mail affords. Remarks from the people in this group included:

If you need a response you can get it faster. In a word--speed. (44-year-old female Navigator)

It is very quick, sometimes almost immediate. (44-year-old male Navigator)

It's a whole lot quicker than "snail-mail". If an auction like this was dependent solely on the U.S. Postal service (for example) it would take forever to conclude deals. (23-year-old male Engager)

A large group of participants commented that the benefits of communication with other eBay users by e-mail was a great way to exchange additional information. Some found e-mail (a) advantageous taking care of post-auction details. Others used e-mail (b) exclusively to learn more about the particular auction items while another group found e-mail (c) to be a handy way to learn about items that were not currently being auctioned.

One group of people found that e-mail was beneficial when taking care of post-auction details. Much information

between buyer and seller needs to be exchanged in order for the transaction to be consummated. Some of this information includes the buyer or seller confirming the high bidder award, payment arrangements, shipping and handling details, address exchange, and other terms particular to the auctions. Of the total people responding, 16 (4.4%) reported that the only advantage to communicating with others about an eBay auction was to take care of after-auction details.

Notify winning bidders and non winning bidders of my reserve price. Notify them as of the shipping cost and my address to sent payment. Notify them when I ship the item and ask them to notify me when they receive it. (56-year-old male Navigator)

I let sellers know when I send payment. They keep me informed of shipping. (38-year-old male Problem Solver)

The only time I would communicate with someone would be to see if they had received their merchandise. (57-year-old female Engager)

Many (75) participants described e-mail as helping them learn additional information about a particular auction item that was not originally provided with the item description or picture. This group of people (20.7%) found e-mail valuable only when learning more about an item in which they were interested.

A seller can't always give you all the details you need to know, like what is the shelf life of coffee beans that is being auctioned? Or what kind of waistband does a dress have? Or is it dry clean only? (54-year-old female Engager)



The only time I communicate with other users is if I'm bidding on an item and want more info from the seller. I don't communicate directly with anyone else. (44-year-old female Problem Solver)

If you have questions about an item up for sale, you can use the e-mail to find answers to your questions. (50-year-old male Problem Solver)

If I have a question as to the condition or questions relating to the item, how it has been taken care of, the history of the item, authenticity, questions help before I decide whether to bid or not bid. Photographs do not always tell the true story. They can be enhanced. (45-year-old female Navigator)

Another group who listed information-sharing as the advantage of e-mail on eBay found that such communication provided them with additional resources. These 25 (6.9%) people delineated their e-mailing experiences as beneficial because they either got information about another auction, another website, or an item not yet for sale on eBay.

You can obtain merchandise at a better price or equal price without bidding. If a seller contacts you and supplies pertinent information about their standing, you might want to make an outside purchase. (54-year-old female Engager)

You can find out what is available. I have gotten e-mails about other products that the seller has available for sale and not necessarily on eBay. I also have received e-mails from people who have auctions going for the same item that I bid on, trying to entice me to bid on their item. (22-year-old female Problem Solver)

Some people have contacted me about finding a certain item if I don't have it and I come across it on eBay, I let them know the auction number. This works the same way if I am looking for something. (34-year-old female Navigator)

There are two additional categories of perceived advantages of e-mailing other eBay users. One category is the benefit that e-mail brings to sound communication. The few people (14) in this group noted that trustworthy communication between all eBay parties is crucial to smooth auction transactions. "Communication is essential to life to avoid or minimize mistakes" (52-year-old female Navigator). "Communication is THE key to understanding, and THE key to avoid misunderstanding" (51-year-old male Navigator), and "communication is always beneficial" (45-year-old female Engager).

Another advantage to e-mail is the added asset of getting to know other people on eBay. Several people (41) proclaimed that e-mail helped them get to know other eBay users better. This group of people (11.3%) made such comments as:

The best thing that's happened is I have a new friend on the East coast. He e-mailed me because he noticed that we bid against each other constantly on needlepoints. He found it fascinating that out of approx. 1,800 needlepoints per day on eBay, we were bidding on the same 2 or 3 pieces and he thought it was neat that we had the same taste! He and his life partner have become great email friends and we make sure we don't miss anything good. We're sending item numbers back and forth all week. It's fun. (47-year-old female Navigator)

You meet people you never would have had it not been for e-mail. (27-year-old female Problem Solver)

I can sense honesty and openness, the scammers (very few) become obvious. (53-year-old male Problem Solver)

You can get a feel for what the person is like and if they're honest by their answers. (40-year-old female Engager)

Of all the participants, over one-third (125) detailed that there was clearly more than one advantage to communicating with others by e-mail. The people in this largest group (34.5%) enumerated a list of advantages to communication using e-mail. Some of the lists were brief such as: "notification, clarification, reinforcement, speed and ease" (53-year-old male Problem Solver), "speed, cost, convenience and rapid turn around for questions" (67-year-old male Navigator), and "it's fast, easy, and less time consuming-probably cheaper than calling, too" (31-year-old female Problem Solver). Other lists of advantages to using e-mail communication such as these were more lengthy and detailed:

You can ask a seller to clarify points about their auction, which I have done occasionally. If things go bad, you can communicate with others and try to remedy the situation. Also, after an auction ends, the seller and bidder can exchange want/have lists --I've gotten additional items with my auction item by e-mailing a want list to the seller. (38-year-old female Problem Solver)

Email is a prompt and informal way to receive information. Sometimes I will see something outside of my knowledge area and will ask for information; people are very helpful and informative and I've learned a lot about all kinds of things--even not in my own collecting areas. I

have used the help desks for specific questions. I do not contact other bidders, although I will respond if someone asks a question of me. (47-year-old female Problem Solver)

Well, the advantage is often not mine. I've seen auctions of Dell notebooks where I knew the machine was misrepresented. If the misrepresentation is serious I'll often warn the auction winner. In at least one case the winner used the new knowledge to back out of a bad deal. I've also written sellers when I knew they had misrepresented items. Some ignore me, a few get angry, but many correct their ads and seem to appreciate it, indicating that most errors are inadvertent. (53-year-old male Navigator)

I have communicated with people regarding shipping matters or when I was new about reserve auctions, or to get more information about an item. I have found every response I've gotten to be prompt and courteous. Also, when I was bidding once on an item I really wanted and had bid on it several times and each time it came to auction I got outbid--other users on eBay e-mailed me with a lower price for the item. I eventually forgot about bidding for it and purchased it from a user who had e-mailed me. (23-year-old female Engager)

#### Disadvantages to E-mail

In addition to describing the advantages to using e-mail on eBay, the people who responded to the questionnaire were also asked to describe the disadvantages. Some felt at a disadvantage because they (a) perceived additional risks or because they (b) believed electronic junk mail increased as a result of communicating by e-mail on eBay. Others described disadvantages of e-mail as being (c) slow or (d) lacking human contact. Although many people (211) listed at least one disadvantage, almost one-half (169) said they

discerned no disadvantages to communicating with others by e-mail. In their experience on eBay, this group of people (44.5%) revealed that they perceived no disadvantages to communicating by e-mail with other eBay participants.

"None" was a common response from many participants while others expounded by saying "I can not really think of one" or "I don't believe there are any".

Some participants described the disadvantages to e-mail as a process that put them at added risk. These 84 people (23.2%) revealed that they felt susceptible either to other people having access to personal information, other people's hostility, or to competitors' knowledge of their bidding strategies. In his five assumptions of self-directed learners, Knowles' (1975) second assumption asserts that self-directed learning values the learners' experiences as an important learning resource (p. 20). Through varied experiences, these eBay users recognized the risks involved in communicating with others using e-mail. The people in this study indicated their thoughts on the risks of e-mail when they wrote:

There are some out there in the electronic world who can try to cheat others for profit. Who would care, we will never meet them, right? (45-year-old female Navigator)

Well, maybe when you have to deal with a real jerk or a know it all. (50-year-old female Problem Solver)

One could trip your hand about a certain item to someone who has not seen the item and might outbid you or raise the bid. (55-year-old male Engager)

Some respondents listed unsolicited electronic mail as a disadvantage to e-mailed communications with others. Their concerns included being placed on advertisers' e-mail lists and being vulnerable to such other unpleasant unwanted mail as computer viruses and pornography. The participants frequently referred to the unwanted e-mail communications as "spam". In the Information Age, spam is a term that has become commonly associated with unsolicited e-mail. Spam gets its name from a canned meat product of possibly suspicious origin. These 24 people (6.6%) found e-mailed communications with other eBay users to be a disadvantage because of the inconvenience, irritation, and possible danger unsolicited e-mail brought.

The only disadvantage I have found is that sometimes you get unsolicited e-mail or even hounded about an item that someone wants to sell. If they've noticed you are bidding on something, they sometimes contact you and say that they have an item which is the same as or similar to what ever you are bidding on. You also get asked to participate in college research projects! (You're lucky I'm a non-trad college student so I know all about research projects!) (40-year-old male Navigator)

Some sellers put you on their SPAM list. (38-year-old female Problem Solver)

Sometimes you communicate with unknown people with unusual ideas--once I was sent a virus by an eBay user I had communicated with. (52-year-old male Engager)

Another group of respondents described the disadvantages of e-mail from a time perspective. The slowness of eBay users' responses, problems with Internet Service Providers that delayed e-mail transmissions, and the consumption of periods of time spend e-mailing were all concerns listed by the people in this group. Although 35 (9.9%) of the people listing the advantages of e-mail said speed was a benefit, this group of 65 (18.0%) described e-mail as slow or inefficient. Some found e-mail frustrating due to technical problems on the part of the Internet Service Providers while others found the slow response rates from their correspondents difficult to deal with. Other people in this group portrayed e-mail as a time-consuming job for themselves or other eBay users.

Sometimes the email runs slow and they don't get the information on time or if their not on their computer then its pretty useless. (26-year-old female Navigator)

Sluggish replies occasionally; which sucks when you have a question about an auction that is ending soon. (20-year-old male Engager)

Time consuming--and obviously some sellers who sell a lot find it very time consuming and don't respond very much to questions after the auction is over. (29-year-old female Problem Solver)

Lack of face-to-face human contact was a final disadvantage that was described by the participants. These 27 people (7.5%) found the inability to see their correspondents' faces, to read body language, and to listen

to the intonations of speech to be a disadvantage. One of the distinct differences between learning in an academic setting and a real-life setting such as eBay has to do with personal interaction (Sternberg, 1990). Learners in formal educational settings are rarely encouraged to problem-solve together while learners in informal settings frequently rely on each other to solve dilemmas (p. 40). Typical comments from the people who found e-mail to be a disadvantage due to its impersonal aspects contained:

No personal contact. No face to put with the name. Something a little impersonal about it. I tend to be a "people person". (24-year-old male Navigator)

Can't read the other person as well as face to face. (36-year-old male Problem Solver)

We don't have a one on one conversation. (31-year-old male Engager)

### Learning Strategies

Navigators, Problem Solvers, and Engagers described their different perceptions of the advantages to using e-mail to communicate with others about an eBay auction. People in the three ATLAS groups cited e-mailing others to gain information about items not yet available on eBay or information about another auction or another website. The people in each ATLAS group who responded to this question were in close proportion to the percentage of people in each ATLAS group in the overall study. In the study, 28.5% of



the respondents were Navigators, 45.2% Problem Solvers, and 26.3% Engagers. The people who said an advantage to communicating with others using e-mail was to gain additional resources were 32.0% Navigators, 40.0% Problem Solvers, and 28.0% Engagers. In all other respects of the advantages listed, the responses from people in the ATLAS groups were different.

Navigators tended to say that a lone advantage to conversing by e-mail was to learn more about a particular item up for auction. Of the Navigators answering this question, 35.0% said that e-mail was useful when they needed more information on an item. Indeed, of the people who replied in this fashion, almost one-half (48.0%) were Navigators.

Obtain more information on the item. I have chosen either to bid or not to bid on several items as a result of e-mail. I have also requested shipping charges that would be applied to ship the item to my house. Some apparent bargains were not so attractive after adding the shipping from distant locations. (51-year-old male)

To obtain further details about an item you're interested in bidding on as it's hard for the seller to include every little nuance about an item. It also lets the seller know that you are a SERIOUS bidder and not someone running up the bid only to back out when it's time to pony up the money. (52-year-old male)

Answers your questions so you can avoid bidding on things that are not really what you want. (38-year-old female)

One Navigator created a name for his type of learning as he used e-mail:

I have bought a few items & been disappointed when the sale was completed (S&H or item details, etc...)I taught myself (I call it Learning Through Burning) to contact the sellers & ask a few specific questions if their descriptions were lame. (43-year-old male)

Navigators are learners who have little tolerance for wasted time (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 10). This characteristic was evident in the 18.4% of Navigators who said that speed was an important advantage to using e-mail when communicating about eBay auctions. Of the people who maintained that speed was an issue, over one-half (54.3%) were Navigators. One Navigator wrote, "It is quick and direct. I do not get pulled into chatty phone calls. E-mail is much quicker than regular mail or phone tag" wrote one participant (48-year-old female). Another replied, "I try to get in touch with the seller right away if I win an auction and e-mail provides a fast easy way to do that" (54-year-old female).

On the other hand, Problem Solvers were more than willing to take time to provide a list of advantages to using e-mail to communicate with others on eBay. Problem Solvers have the "ability to generate alternatives and consider various solutions" (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 12) which may lead to "difficulty in making decisions" (p. 12).

Instead of choosing one particular advantage to eBay communication via e-mail, the responding Problem Solvers listed several advantages. Providing a detailed list was the most popular method the Problem Solvers used to describe the benefits of e-mail on eBay. Over one-half (51.5%) of the Problem Solvers listed an index of advantages instead of merely providing one advantage. Of the participants who provided a list of advantages, 84 (67.2%) were Problem Solvers. Characteristic enumerations from the people in this group were:

It's very easy and quick, does not require the formality of a letter or even a phone call. In a few quick e-mails, I can introduce myself to a seller and vice versa, and arrange payment and shipping. I can also find out about items up for auction quite easily that way. I also use email to alert my friends of postcards or other items I think they might be interested in. Given that most of my "Internet friends" live across the country, and also as far away as Australia, e-mail is the only feasible way for us to communicate without running up astronomical phone bills. (47-year-old female)

Gain more information--obtain shipping costs--addresses methods of payment--forward my own address--and keep in touch to determine when payment arrives and when and how goods are shipped. (70-year-old male)

The response is normally very fast and the others have been very helpful. I like to find out the history of the item I am buying, if known. After a successful auction, I immediately e-mail the seller to tell them I want to go through with the transaction. After they figure out the total cost to ship, then I e-mail again when I put the money order in the mail. I usually hear back from the seller as soon as they get the money order and

ship the package. When I receive the package, I send a confirmation e-mail back and post comments. (45-year-old female)

When it came to describing advantages of communicating by e-mail, the Engagers' perceptions differed from those of the Navigators and Problem Solvers, particularly in one area. Engagers were much more apt than the people in the other two groups to remark on the value of good communication rather than actually listing a particular advantage or a group of advantages. These learners who "love to learn, learn with feeling, and learn best when they are actively engaged in a meaningful manner" (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 13) were twice more likely than Navigators and four times more likely than Problem Solvers to defend the merits of good communication while engaging in eBay e-mail. Of the people who responded in this manner, 57.1% were Engagers as compared with 28.6% Navigators and 14.3% Problem Solvers. Engagers in this study revealed similar reflections on this topic when they said:

If there is no communication, then trust is not a must!!! (33-year-old female)

Clear communication keeps everyone happy and stops problems shortly before they become disasters. (46-year-old female)

Most people like communication, when they are buying something....That's why there is a salesman at the car lot. I have been in sales all my working life. They want to be sold and they like the communication afterwards to make them feel good about their purchase. (54-year-old male)

Respondents from all three ATLAS groups also described their perceived disadvantages to communicating by e-mail with other eBay users. People in all three groups said that they found either no disadvantages or listed such disadvantages as the risk factor, unsolicited mail, time consumption, and lack of personal contact. Although Navigators, Problem Solvers, and Engagers alike all reported experiencing these disadvantages, the methods used to describe these disadvantages differed between the people in the three ATLAS group.

Of the group who mentioned that a disadvantage to e-mailed communication was the possible risk involved, 26.2% were Navigators, 45.2% were Problem Solvers, and 27.4% were Engagers. These percentages showed a clear parallel to the percentage of total study participants of 28.5% Navigators, 45.2% Problem Solvers, and 26.3% Engagers. Even though representatives from each group found e-mail to be risky, they described the risk in distinctive ways. Navigators tended to describe their ability to see the negative end results of e-mailed communications when speaking of the risks involved. They seemed to be concerned by negative, external worries such as involvement in the legal system or losing money. Navigators like to view the overall picture and become distressed if their plans are disturbed as they prefer to know what to expect and dislike surprises (Conti &

Kolody, 1999, p. 9). Navigators described the risk of e-mail in these examples:

The problem with doing email bidding is that the other person is so far away, if you have a legal problem with them, it would be difficult to recover your money in small claims court, as you could do locally. (31-year-old male)

The disadvantages, I guess, are not knowing the people--because they are from all over the US. There is always the possibility that you send the money to someone and they do not send the product, although this has NEVER happened in my area, but I have "spoken" to people that it has happened to them. (35-year-old female)

I don't really want to gain friendships through people on eBay. I never know who I may be talking to. That kind of freaks me out. (24-year-old female)

On the other hand, the participating Problem Solvers were concerned about the risk of e-mail in another way. They appeared to be bothered by the possible unpleasant communications that could take place as a result of e-mail exchanges with other eBay users. They tended to be disturbed about internal concerns such as encountering disagreeable people or hurting their eBay friends' feelings. Problem Solvers "rely heavily on human resources" (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 12) instead of websites or guidebooks for information. Thus, the information Problem Solvers may glean from communicating with other eBayers via e-mail is important to them.

Some people are uncommunicative, or downright rude, or occasionally just stupid, but a lot of

the time it's just because they have bad e-mail (writing, typing, etc.) skills. If you're a shy person, like I used to be, you can hesitate to talk to others unless it's necessary. I got over it after I'd done enough auctions and knew what I was talking about. (40-year-old male)

Some Sellers have a lousy attitude and you do not wish to purchase from them at all. (47-year-old male)

Just the relative anonymity makes it easier for people to not be as nice sometimes as they would in person. (39-year-old female)

Very few. About the only problem is the flip side of the above response. When you have friends [other eBay users] who you have agreed not to bid against, sometimes you have to pass on things that you want. (35-year-old male)

As you meet the people who are bidding on similar objects, you are hesitant to bid against them. Many times this lowers the amount that the seller receives and precludes you from getting something you really want. (59-year-old female)

While many Engagers also regarded the possible risks of e-mailing, their reasons for concern differed from the Navigators and Problem Solvers. The Engagers appeared to be preoccupied with meeting their personal requirements and desires. The people from this ATLAS group were frequently attentive to the problems that e-mail could create by interfering with the auction in which they were involved. Because Engagers are internally motivated and their concentration is on internal needs (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 15), these learners were concerned that e-mailed communications carried a risk that could de-rail their

reason for participating in the auction which was to be the highest bidder and win the auction. Typical Engager comments about the possible risks of e-mail were:

They could out bid you if they know what you are bidding on. (49-year-old male)

Letting someone else know about your interest in some item. You need to count on that person to leave your item alone for you to go after. (53-year-old male)

They like what you're bidding on and bid. (53-year-old female)

The seller knows how much you like an item and can use a "bidder" to up the bid. (45-year-old female)

I am not too happy about the seller adding information to an item based on a question I asked. Some stuff is worth more than meets the eye but once you describe the fact that isn't obvious, it draws attention to the item and knowledgeable collectors who overlooked something are back in the game. (59-year-old male)

They know what items you want. (19-year-old female)

Another group-perceived disadvantage of e-mail was an increased susceptibility to receive unsolicited e-mail messages. Of this group, there were eight representatives from each ATLAS group of Navigators, Problem Solvers, and Engagers. Although people from all three ATLAS groups found a disadvantage to e-mail to be unsolicited e-mail, the techniques they used to describe this disadvantage were apparent.



The Navigators in this group tended to offer a list of potential types of unsolicited e-mail. Making lists and prioritizing items in order of importance is critical to Navigators (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 10). Comments from Navigators who made lists of the disadvantages of unsolicited e-mail included:

Mass mailings for advertisements, get-rich-quick schemes, virus programs, or surveys. (29-year-old female)

Potential spam, porno, etc. (53-year-old female)

I have ended up on a few spamming lists that I cannot prove came from eBay sellers but my spam has increased drastically since I started using eBay (present company excused & accepted). (43-year-old male)

In order to effectively communicate their problems with unsolicited e-mail, Problem Solvers found it necessary to elaborate and chose to describe their concerns in detail. Problem Solvers are inventive learners who tend to experience difficulty in making decisions (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 12). Instead of merely making a brief statement or short list, the Problem Solver participants provided further explanation.

I have gotten some unsolicited inquiries and notices; I usually prefer not to get these. I have gotten about 3 in the past 3 months of using eBay, only one was genuinely useful information about alternate source for an item I had been outbid on. (41-year-old female)

Since I do use my office computer it's a little intrusive to receive outside email but such

inquiries are rare. I have also received spam from companies or individuals offering services, which I delete unread. One is also dependent on the accuracy of descriptions and is not able to see items in person; however I have seldom found this to be a real problem. (47-year-old female)

Some people, no matter how well you explain things, you still get e-mails asking questions whose answers they already have. (27-year-old female)

Engagers are learners who respond enthusiastically to learning activities with meaning to them but who respond with boredom when a task is uninteresting (Conti & Kolody, 2001, p. 14). The participating Engagers felt that coping with unsolicited e-mail was a waste of their time, and they frequently referred to this type of mail as "spam". Unsolicited e-mail was viewed by Engagers as tedious and boring and, thus, was uninteresting and labeled as a disadvantage of using e-mail via eBay. The extra inconvenience of dealing with the details of added e-mail was distasteful to the Engagers:

I am starting to get junk email from people who picked up my address from eBay. (38-year-old female)

Some dealers will add you to their email list, so you can end up with some spam after bidding on an item. (47-year-old female)

With eBay users having access to you're e-mail address, spam is easy to get started. (20-year-old female)

You get added to weird e-mail list that you never asked to be added to. (28-year-old male)

Too much SPAM. (55-year-old male)

A group of 25 Navigators, 27 Problem Solvers, and 13 Engagers viewed communicating with other eBay users by e-mail as a slow process. Although people from all three ATLAS groups listed slow e-mails as a disadvantage, they described the tardiness in different ways. Navigators appeared to be most disturbed by the inefficiencies that slow e-mail affords. Since they are "conscientious, results-oriented high achievers who favor making logical connections" (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 9), it is important for Navigators to make efficient use of the tools available to them. Thus, when electronic mail communications are slowed for any reason, the participating Navigators became frustrated. These comments from Navigators illustrated their frustrations:

Failure to answer e-mail messages, computer failures at either end severe interface. (67-year-old male)

Sometimes there are users who do not reply. (48-year-old female)

Sometimes the address are incorrect and some have 2 or 3 addresses. Some don't answer their email. (60-year-old female)

I recently moved offices and PC's and networks got messed up. I do depend on others, so a lot of delay in communication and transaction was the immediate result. (42-year-old male)

They're never on-line when I am, or I'll get a reply to the email after the auction is over. (35-year-old male)

Questioning is an important part of learning for Problem Solvers (James, 2000, p. 112). Problem Solvers were discouraged with the slowness of e-mail for a different reason than the Navigators. The Problem Solvers who said that a disadvantage to e-mailed communications was slowness seemed to be bothered by waiting for answers to their questions.

Like Tom Petty said "The waiting is the hardest part". (22-year-old male)

I've not gotten any response to some items that I've wanted information about. (49-year-old male)

At times, persons do not answer the e-mails sent to them or do not do see in a prompt manner. Also multiple questions may not be answered and thus repeated e-mails occasionally must be made. (42-year-old female)

Waiting for them to email you back. It can make you lose the bid. (33-year-old female)

The negative is when you DON'T get the communication from a buyer or seller. (52-year-old male)

Engagers who participated in the study also reported slow e-mail as a disadvantage. However, the people in this ATLAS group tended to described their emotions or feelings more than Navigators or Problem Solvers did. When they determine that a learning activity is worth their energy, Engagers are committed to achieve the goal, and they place "great emotional investment in their learning" (Conti &

Kolody, 1999, p. 15). Some Engager emotions and feelings about slow e-mail are represented by these comments:

If the other party fails to frequently check their email...you could spend several days frantically checking your email, waiting for their reply.  
(23-year-old male)

Sometimes there can be a 2 to 3 day delay in communication. I'm assuming that this is due to different time zones, peoples life and work schedules, and so on. I'm home all day so I'm always available to respond right away to an E-mail. I have to realize that most everyone else is at work or school all day long and when they get home they're busy with other things to do so responding to their E-mails may take awhile. Really this is a good thing because I need to learn to practice more patience!! (31-year-old female)

Well it's when people won't answer your e-mails, or they give off the image that they don't want to be bothered. (27-year-old female)

When there is a problem with the mail server, your email never gets through and their email never gets to you. This tends to make them leave negative feedback on eBay because they think that you are just ignoring them. NOT GOOD!!! (35-year-old female)

Sometimes people use it for insipid obvious questions and it can waste a lot of time trying to respond to those questions. (24-year-old female)

The final disadvantage to communicating by e-mail was described by participants in all three ATLAS groups as lack of human contact. However, the Problem Solvers and Engagers were twice as likely as Navigators to describe lack of human contact as a negative to e-mail. Of the Problem Solvers, 8.6% said lack of personal contact was a disadvantage and

8.4% of the Engagers said so. This was compared with the only 4.9% of Navigators who reported that lack of human contact was a disadvantage. Problem Solvers and Engagers are learners who both rely on human resources (Conti & Kolody, 1999, pp. 12-15). In addition, the Problem Solvers and Engagers tended to use words that described their internal emotions such as "feel" or "meaning". The Navigators used words that showed the value they placed on external signs such as body language or facial expressions. "Emotions have little to do with learning for Navigators" (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 10). Examples from participants in all three ATLAS groups that showed discontent with lack of human contact included:

You do not get the benefit of body language to assess the person's general personality or to establish whether or not you like this individual as a person. (44-year-old female Navigator)

No face to face. (32-year-old male Navigator)

When talking through e-mail you cannot see the person so you don't really know how they are feeling or their tone of voice. (31-year-old female Problem Solver)

Don't know anything about them. Still leaves me with a hollow feeling. (57-year-old male Problem Solver)

Can't get a feel of what the person is really like. (34-year-old female Problem Solver)

When not able to "hear" the words of others, we miss so much of the meaning. Words are one thing, but most meaning is derived from how the words are intended. I guess that's the only disadvantage.

The way technology is growing, I have no doubt that EBAY will one day allow it's users to communicate actually "hearing". (43-year-old male Engager)

Cannot communicate in person. much prefer to deal in person via phone. (67-year-old male Engager)

### Summary

Communicating via e-mail is an important part of participating in eBay activities for the respondents. The people participating in the study were asked to describe how much they communicated with other eBay users via email and to describe their overall feelings concerning e-mailed communications with others on eBay. The participants also recognized and reported on their perceived advantages and disadvantages to communicating with other eBay users via e-mail.

The participants revealed their perceptions on frequency of e-mail use and their overall feelings concerning e-mailed communications with other eBay users. Over one-half (54.4%) used e-mail either Very Much or Much and another one-fourth (26.7%) of the participants used e-mail on eBay Some. Over four-fifths (83.8%) found e-mail communication to be either Extremely Positive or Positive while only 16.1% found their feelings about e-mail to be Neutral, Negative, or Extremely Negative.

When revealing their perceived advantages to communicating via e-mail, the participants listed several

different advantages. Some said that a major advantage to e-mailed communication was speed (9.7%) while others (34.5%) provided a detailed list of advantages. Still other participants reported that post-auction information (4.4%), additional information about the auction items (20.7%), and information about items or websites not on eBay (6.9%) made e-mail advantageous. Getting to know other people was a bonus to e-mailed communication to 11.3% of the participants and 3.9% celebrated the virtues of communication while answering the question.

Upon reflection of their discerned disadvantages to e-mail, almost one-half (44.5%) of the respondents divulged no disadvantages to e-mailed communications with other eBay users. Others reported that the detriments to e-mail were the risks involved (23.2%), unsolicited correspondence (6.6%), time constraints (18.0%), or lack of personal human contact (7.5%).

Participants in the three ATLAS groups differed in the ways they perceived e-mail advantages on eBay. These differences supported the general differences in the descriptions of three groups. Navigators appeared much more interested in the speed of e-mail and in getting additional details about an auction item than their Problem Solver or Engager counterparts. Problem Solvers offered detailed lists of advantages instead of just providing one benefit to



communicating by e-mail on eBay as most Navigators and Engagers did. Engagers felt much more strongly than Problem Solvers or Navigators about the merits of strong communication and thus listed those feelings in lieu of a direct answer.

Although the disadvantages of e-mail that were listed by Navigators, Problem Solvers, and Engagers were similar, the methods that were used by the people in each group differed greatly. These too supported the general differences in the descriptions of the three groups. Navigators tended to look at the external problems that could arise from e-mailed correspondence such as legal problems, inefficiencies of others, and lack of the external remedies of face-to-face contact. Problem Solvers were more likely than Navigators or Engagers to elaborate their answers, be concerned with unpleasant interactions, and have trouble waiting for answers to e-mailed questions. Engagers were more apt to be concerned with competition with other bidders, boredom with details, and expressing their feelings than their Navigator and Problem Solver counterparts. Both Problem Solvers and Engagers were more likely to place a high value on using people as a resource than Navigators were.

## CHAPTER 7

### LEARNING THROUGH eBay

#### Feelings About Computers and the Internet

To investigate the descriptions of the participants that related to their learning on eBay, they were asked to describe (a) how eBay has influenced the way they felt about computers and the Internet, (b) how eBay has influenced the way they used computers and the Internet, (c) a list of things learned as a result of eBay participation, (d) how participation in eBay has influenced their attitudes about the Internet, (e) their own skills, and (f) themselves as a person.

Participants in the study were asked to describe how using eBay has influenced the way they feel about computers and the Internet. In order to describe the influence that eBay has had on the way they felt about computers and the Internet, the participants offered many explanations. Although their descriptions were different, it was clear that eBay has had a strong influence on the way most of the participants feel about computers and the Internet. Many participants across all the learning strategy groups reported being in awe and amazement at the power and international reach of computers and the Internet. People in the study also discussed the value of using computers in a useful way as computers are "windows to the world" and

serve to help provide glimpses of what the future will be like. No matter how they described how eBay has influenced their feelings about computers and the Internet, the participants consistently reported how they developed lifelong learning skills in the comfort and friendly harbor of eBay.

The participants' perceptions of eBay's influence was described in terms of (a) having fun, (b) describing internal feelings, (c) experiencing change, (d) remarking on status of computers and Internet, (e) giving more options, and (f) telling stories about experiences. A few of the participants (25) felt that eBay has had no influence on their computer and Internet feelings. A common response from people in this group was "none" or "no". Another group of 46 people (12.7%) also described their feelings as unchanged by eBay. However, the people in this group chose to provide an explanation of why they felt eBay had no influence. Most of the people in this group delineated themselves by listing their prior experiences with computers or the Internet. Experience plays a crucial part in the learning process adult learners use. In his assumptions about self-directed learners, Knowles (1975) asserted that an important learning resource is the learners' experiences (p. 20). The prior experiences of the people in this group were illuminated in the following samples:

Being that I worked with computers while working for the government, I don't think that the Internet and eBay has increased my influence with the way I feel about my computer and the Internet. (52-year-old male Navigator)

No change, I've been a power user for years. (48-year-old male Problem Solver)

It has not influenced my feelings in any way since I have an AS degree in computer science and have been on the net for 5 years. (51-year-old female Engager)

eBay influenced some of the participants' feelings about computers and the Internet by making the process more fun or by provoking internal emotionally-laden responses. Motivation is a key component in adults' learning process, and is a basic element of adult learning (Knowles, 1998). The most powerful motivators were internal forces such as satisfaction, quality of life, and self-esteem (p. 68). Some (16) participants felt influence by eBay as a result of having more fun or experiencing more enjoyment.

eBay is fun! I work on a computer for my living, so usually, computers are work. (53-year-old female Navigator)

Its made my computer experiences much more fun and exciting, and if it wasn't for eBay I probably wouldn't be on the computer much and now I am on it A LOT, either doing eBay or getting e-mail that has to do with eBay! (Female Problem Solver; no age reported)

It's just another site that makes the Internet that much more exciting and useful to me. (26-year-old male Engager)

Responses from 19 (5.2%) participants disclosed how internal feelings were an important influence to the way they felt about computers and the Internet. The people in this group shared responses that used emotionally-laden words and phrases and included:

I hate computers and the Internet. I feel they are dangerous to society. You must be careful and determine boundaries and budgets and have the self-discipline to stay within your plan. eBay is a vehicle that for the vulnerable helps them to live their life out of control. (45-year-old female Navigator)

I love it. I am a 44 year old woman who just learned how to use a computer this past summer. I am awed by the technology. I returned to college to retrain for a computer career in Information Technology! (44-year-old female Problem Solver)

I love eBay, would be lost without it! (39-year-old female Engager)

A large group of people told how eBay had influence the way they felt about computers and the Internet in another way. This collection of 106 people (29.2%) reported that engaging in the eBay process had changed their life in some meaningful way. Some reported that eBay had altered their self-confidence, opinions, or skills while others said that eBay had changed the amount of time they spent with computers and the Internet. The people in this group articulated taking an abstract concept and turning it into real-life learning that was meaningful to them. Responses from these people consisted of these examples:

Now I write more in English. (30-year-old female Navigator)

It has made me be more proficient and comfortable using a computer. The Internet just amazes me because of all the information one can get and that it is world wide. I am communicating with people all over the world just as if they were in my city. It is great. (60-year-old female Navigator)

I use to think computers and Internet were just a big hype but now it has become a huge part of my daily life. (30-year-old female Problem Solver)

eBay has taught me that I can use the Internet to conduct a in-the-home business. (60-year-old male Problem Solver)

Improved it a great deal. Before e-bay, which admittedly for me is a toy, my opinion of computers was they were hunks of plastic (although of some use)I could understand that--I am an attorney and my secretary uses a computer as do others in my office suite I personally had no use for them at all. I've gotten a lot of teasing about turning into a computer junkie! (53-year-old female Problem Solver)

eBay is a riot! I work with computers all the time anyway, but eBay has made me much more comfortable with on-line shopping in general. (42-year-old female Engager)

While some respondents revealed how eBay had influenced them by changing their lives, another group reported that eBay had influenced the way they felt about computers and the Internet by confirming their opinions or beliefs. The values that the people in this group had were confirmed by participating in eBay activities and, thus, had an important influence on them. This group of 74 (20.4%) people either

recounted their opinions or beliefs or they revealed their thoughts on eBay's influence when they wrote:

I think eBay is an example of what the Internet should be, that is, something democratic, useful for ordinary individuals, something that brings people together, and extension of the stoop sale. (26-year-old male Navigator)

eBay has confirmed my feelings that we still live in a world where communication is important-- person to person. (50-year-old female Problem Solver)

It has made me realize that people are basically the same everywhere, even in other countries. (41-year-old female Engager)

For several, eBay had influenced the way they felt about computers and the Internet in a different way. The people in this group described the eBay influence as one of giving them more options or more tools to use. Of the total study participants, 50 (13.8%) chose additional options or tools as being the influence of eBay.

I feel it is only a tool and that the Internet and computers will hold much more promise than what eBay has to offer so far. I can imagine an Internet "broker" doing a lot of business for you in the future. (44-year-old male Navigator)

The Internet is a useful tool. It helps me acquire items that I wouldn't have access to otherwise. (49-year-old male Problem Solver)

It just demonstrates one more avenue for obtaining goods. (47-year-old female Engager)

Opens up a lot more things to look at...kind of like a big swap meet. (35-year-old male Navigator)

Another group of study participants were affected by eBay in such an important way that they preferred to tell a story about the influence. These 27 people (7.4%) provided detailed anecdotes about how eBay had influenced the way they felt about computers and the Internet. Their stories involved a variety of influences such as other people, particular auction items, or personal experiences, but all those in this group took the time and effort to relate an elaborate story of importance to them.

I liked them before I used eBay. I like it more because on eBay I can find particular items I'm looking for that are hard to find in MUCH less time. Also I can learn about an item that I'm interested in from reading the descriptions (I'm talking about an item that comes up repeatedly, so there are descriptions from a number of sellers over time.) I can even find out about items I never knew existed. Something I'm looking at right now is a particular kind of lamp. The lamp depicts Niagara Falls and the inside cylinder rotates from the heat of the light bulb, making it look like the water is going over the falls. We had one at home when we were kids and I want one. They are hard to find. I find it under the search "Niagara Falls lamp." By looking over the search results, I can find out about the different kinds that were made, names of different manufacturers and some time periods when this type of lamp was made. I didn't know this much about the history of this item when I started. (45-year-old female Navigator)

It's added a whole new dimension to my computer-use. I've always loved going to auctions, and buying books and collectibles. But before eBay, all of us were extremely limited geographically. It's wonderful to purchase, say, a life jacket from someone in California whom I would not otherwise have encountered. Or a book from Ireland. I recently won a book from a seller in



New Zealand, who sent it faster than most local shops could ship. It's a great tool for both sellers and buyers, and has also brought me a number of new friends. I recently purchased a practice telegraph key, for instance, from a seller who was kind enough to tell me how he and his family learned to use one, and where I could get instruction. (47-year-old female Problem Solver)

In a positive way, but more than that, eBay has influenced the way I feel about people in general. I have had over 800 successful transactions, with NO problems at all. Now that is really something. I come from NY, where nobody trusts anybody, and I've found people through eBay who are trustworthy, reliable, honest, and who send items to me before I even send them their payment. And I do the same! (38-year-old female Problem Solver)

Reno is an old car oriented town. It has something called "Hot August Nights" where old cars are paraded around town in August, and people come from all around with their restored vehicles. Consequently, the shops and parts stores here cater to a population with lots of money being spent on their automobiles. In my opinion, Reno is very unreasonable in its pricing of new and used parts, and it is nice to have a competitive source for my parts. (31-year-old male Navigator)

### Learning Strategies

Navigators, Problem Solvers, and Engagers revealed differences in the way they described how eBay had influenced their feelings about computers and the Internet. The Navigators reported that their options had been increased by the use of eBay. The 22 people in this ATLAS group were slightly more likely than Problem Solvers and much more likely than Engagers to say eBay had changed the way they felt about computers and the Internet by giving

them more tools or options. Since the accessible use of such external tools as pens, pencils, or note paper is important to Navigators in formal educational experiences (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 10), it was no surprise to find a similar pattern displayed by the Navigators in this study. Several Navigators divulged the influence that options had on the way they felt about computers and the Internet as they wrote:

Very exciting--I was trying to think of a way that I could sell something without having to be tied down for hours at a time to either a desk, storefront, or telephone. This is a great venue--now I just need a product! (38-year-old female)

It has been a great tool for me to pursue my collecting interests. (40-year-old male)

It's a tool to find more material world wide. Prices will be more in line with what you see because of like items on the system. (67-year-old male)

I really like the opportunities eBay gives to purchase a wide variety of items. Using eBay and comparing it with other sites, gives me a broader range of the Internet. (37-year-old female)

Problem Solvers differed from Navigators and Engagers in two main ways. The Problem Solvers were more apt to provide detailed examples of how eBay had influenced the way they felt about computers or the Internet. Also, they were more likely than Navigators or Engagers to elaborate on the reasons why they felt eBay had no influence on their feelings. Of the total participants who gave detailed

examples of their feelings of eBay's influence, over four-fifths (85.2%) were Problem Solvers while 14.8% were Navigators and none were Engagers. These Problem Solvers shared many influences of eBay, but they all took the time to describe details or specifics that the people in other groups did not. They had these things to say about how eBay has influenced the way they feel about computers and the Internet:

I feel much more connected to the world at large since using eBay. I buy gemstones from a gentleman in Thailand at wholesale prices. I sent some Canadian kids video game accessories. I bought rare recordings from a cool shop in California. I really feel like I can shop the world on eBay. I also like the flea market aspect. Some of my favorite deals were from average people cleaning out their attic. I used to love going to flea markets, but eBay is better. (38-year-old female)

Positive in that for the most part people can buy and sell and have fun with it--getting things that they normally wouldn't have time to go look for but can browse and find a good book or something special that interests them and they know they can recycle it and sell it themselves if they no longer want it or have finished reading the book, whatever. (44-year-old female)

I've been using microcomputers since 1981 when they first came out. In fact the first I bought was a Sinclair, do you remember those? The Internet is fairly new to me, but I am learning it can be a one stop shop for goods, services and information. (54-year-old male)

Extremely positive--this has really changed the way we do business. I quit a "governm 9 - 5" job to do eBay full time. I don't make as much money (yet) but I can be at home and have a more relaxed schedule. Plus I LOVE antiques/collectibles and selling on eBay. I love the fact that I can sell

to clients abroad, don't have nearly the overhead expense I would with a mall space or shop etc.  
(39-year-old female)

Another group of Problem Solvers said that using eBay had not influenced the way they felt about computers and the Internet. However, instead of merely saying "no" or "none" as several Navigators and Engagers had done, the Problem Solvers chose to elaborate or explain their answers. Of the 46 people who elaborated on how eBay had no influence on the way they felt about computers and the Internet, 33 (71.7%) were Problem Solvers as contrasted with 9 (19.6%) Navigators and 4 (8.7%) Engagers. In formal educational settings, Problem Solvers are concerned with giving thorough answers on traditional examinations. They "do not generally do well on multiple-choice exams and are better assessed with open-ended questions and problem-solving activities" (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 12). Characteristic comments from the Problem Solvers in this group were:

It has not changed my thinking one way or the other....I have used computers since 1976 in my job so I love my computer. (44-year-old female)

Doesn't influence it one way or the other. Always liked computers, never been afraid of them, however, never had formal training. All self taught for the most part. Still learning and exploring. (57-year-old male)

Not at all, It can be a rewarding and a frustrating experience. (49-year-old male)

It hasn't....I am a computer geek to begin with and eBay is an avenue to buy the dolls I can't

find in my town for lower prices than retail.  
(36-year-old female)

"Engagers are passionate learners who love to learn, learn with feeling" (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 13). The Engagers participating in the study revealed descriptions of how using eBay had influenced the way they felt about computers and the Internet that were distinctive from those of the Navigators or Problem Solvers. Their descriptions differed in two ways. First, Engagers were more likely than Navigators or Problem Solvers to describe the eBay influence exclusively as "fun". Secondly, they were more apt to use internal, emotionally-laden feelings as their sole descriptors. Of the participants who said the only influence of eBay on the way they felt about computers and the Internet was fun, excitement, or enjoyment, 62.5% were Engagers as compared with 25.0% Navigators and 12.5% Problem Solvers. These learners who focus on issues of reward/enjoyment (p. 14) offered such comments as:

It is "Great Fun". (64-year-old female)

See that Internet can provide a lot of cheap fun and entertainment. (55-year-old male)

It is one of the most fun uses of the Internet.  
(33-year-old female)

I sometimes have a feeling of anticipation when I sign on to the site. (38-year-old female)

It's a fun thing. (45-year-old male)

Engagers were also likely to list internal feelings and emotionally-charged phrases to describe how using eBay has influenced the way they feel about computers and the Internet. Of the people who responded in this manner, over one-half (52.6%) were Engagers while 15.8% were Navigators and 26.3% were Problem Solvers. They tended to use such words as "love", "hate", and "guilt", and Engagers' learning is "governed by emotional commitment" (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 15) so they focus on their emotions when involved in a learning activity. Engager comments that included internal feelings or expressions of emotion included:

Hated both of them previous to eBay. (55-year-old male)

eBay has influenced me greatly! Now I have a full time job with good pay because of eBay. I love it! (40-year-old female)

I love my computer and spend a lot of time on it. I don't think I could have it any other way. (35-year-old female)

I have become terribly frustrated with my computer at home as it takes so long to download eBay images compared to my office computer (modem versus t-line). I do feel guilty about using my office computer though so I put in extra time to compensate for it. (42-year-old male)

Although both Navigators and Problem Solvers frequently cited additional options when describing how eBay has influenced the way they feel about computers and the Internet, they did so for different reasons. The Navigators were inclined to say they had additional options that were

external tools for their or others' use while the Problem Solvers tended to say the options provided them with an additional way to communicate with people or learn more about other people. Possessing the appropriate tools for learning is important for Navigators (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 10) and Problem Solvers "frequently rely on human resources" (p. 12). The following are examples of the contrasting reasons Navigators and Problem Solvers gave concerning how increased options influenced the way they felt about computers and the Internet:

It gives me topics to research on the Net and sometimes find a friend. I am no longer "in the dark" when someone gives a "WWW.com" address. (35-year-old female Navigator)

The future is here. Learning about funding raising auctions & sales tactics have been a delightful bonus to using eBay. (43-year-old male Navigator)

Still think of this as a good tool that will eventually change the face of commerce, and should --ideally--create the perfect marketplace, one in which every seller can find a market for their products and every buyer pays only what he or she is willing to pay for that product. (50-year-old male Navigator)

I think eBay is an incredible tool on the Internet. It brings people together who are either looking for something, or selling something. The site runs on the honor system, so it forces us to be honest. (24-year-old female Problem Solver)

Seeing the cross section of users has confirmed the potential of the Internet as a communication tool. (52-year-old female Problem Solver)

### Summary



The participants were asked to describe how using eBay had influenced the way they felt about computers and the Internet. Some (9.8%) described the influences as fun or by using emotionally-laden words or phrases. Others (28.7%) described the extensive changes that have come about from using eBay, and others (20.5%) remarked on receiving confirmation of their beliefs or opinions of computers and the Internet. Still another group (7.1%) preferred to give detailed examples of the ways eBay had influenced the way they felt about computers and the Internet. While several (75) people said that there was no influence, 46 of those people explained why there was no influence.

Distinct differences were discovered between the three ATLAS groups as the participants described how using eBay had influenced the way they felt about computers and the Internet. The Problem Solvers were six times more likely than Navigators and 23 times more likely than Engagers to give an explicate example for their descriptions. Engagers were more likely to list their feelings as "fun" or to use internal feelings to label eBay's influences. Although both Navigators and Problem Solvers listed an influence of eBay as giving them more options, the Navigators used this term more frequently. Also, people from both these ATLAS groups described different reasons for viewing options as a way eBay had influenced their feelings about computers and the



Internet. The Navigators were inclined to report that their options were external tools for their or others' use while the Problem Solvers tended to say the options provided them with an additional way to communicate with people or learn more about other people. In spite of the fact that some people said there was no influence on their feelings about computers or the Internet from eBay, Problem Solvers were much more likely than Navigators and Engagers to give an explanation for their answer.

#### Influences on Computer Use

The findings revealed that using eBay had a strong influence on the way the participants used computers and the Internet. "eBay IS the influence!" exclaimed one participant (52-year-old male Engager). eBay influenced some by making computers and the Internet more (a) fun and friendly while it affected others by (b) offering them more choices for (c) research and (d) opportunities to earn or spend money. The website also (e) inspired some people to make important life changes or to (f) cultivate new skills while it (g) encouraged many to spend more time using computers and the Internet.

Evidently, eBay had no great influence on the computer and Internet use of some participants (23.3%). Most of those that reported eBay had no influence on their computer and Internet use said that they were already experienced

computer and Internet users prior to eBay's existence. "I'm not sure it has influenced it in any way because I was using the Internet and computers before I even knew about eBay" volunteered one from this group (43-year-old male Navigator). Another wrote, "none really, but I find it amusing when I see people selling their kidneys or little brothers" (20-year-old male Navigator). "It didn't effect my use at all. I use computers and the Internet the same way before and after eBay" (22-year-old male Problem Solver).

eBay had a robust affect on the finances of many of the respondents. These 57 people (15.8%) found that they either made more money or spent more money as a result of eBay's influence on their computer or Internet use. Adult learners have a proclivity to immediate application of learning to meet a present need in their life (Knowles, 1980, p. 53). Buying or selling on eBay or using computers and the Internet to buy or sell was a particular task on which the people in these groups focused on. Of the 23 (6.4%) people who said eBay helped them make more money, most mentioned that eBay was an important reason why they began an online business or why they began selling items on the auction site.

It has influenced how I buy and sell for my part time antiques business. (48-year-old female Navigator)

I use computers and the Internet as a business tool in making money. I see many advantages in it. (18-year-old female Problem Solver)

It's a money making opportunity. (24-year-old male Engager)

Instead of making money, computer and Internet use became a method for another group of people to become more easily separated from their money. Of all the participants, 34 people (9.4%) were attracted to online shopping as a result of participating in eBay or they found that they lost money as a consequence.

It has caused me to spend too damn much money!  
(27-year-old male Navigator)

eBay can be quite addicting and I have to be careful I don't overspend, which is just what happens when I go to a regular auction. (49-year-old male Problem Solver)

I've bought online from a variety of other vendors since I've started on eBay. (36-year-old female Engager)

I buy online more since using eBay. (29-year-old male; no ATLAS group revealed)

Participation in eBay activities had another influence on some respondents. Some found that eBay influenced their use of computers and the Internet by making it more enjoyable while others found it to be a great way to communicate with other people. Motivation to learn is a basic assumption about adult learners (Knowles, et al., 1998). These participants were motivated to enjoy themselves or to communicate with other people as a result

of eBay interaction. Five people in the study declared that using eBay has made their computer and Internet experiences more fun. They found that they were having more fun or enjoying themselves more as a result of being an eBay user. "It's fun" exclaimed a 24-year-old female Problem Solver while another person labeled it as "enjoyable relaxation" (50-year-old female; no ATLAS group). "It's always fun to see what you can actually find" echoed a 50-year-old female Engager.

eBay provided additional participants (11) with a method of communicating more with other people. They described how eBay had influenced them to meet new people or to communicate with people they currently knew.

By telling about my experiences, I have influenced numerous others to use the Internet. (51-year-old male Navigator)

I love talking to people. This gives me another medium to use. (48-year-old female Problem Solver)

Well, the only reason I even got on the computer was to send email to my children and grandchildren. Then, I located old friends, made new friends then...old Rosie told me about eBay and I have been hooked ever since!!!!!! I like sending those cute musical messages to my granddaughter...for free! (54-year-old female Engager)

Several of the participants offered examples or lists of how eBay had influenced the way they used computers and the Internet. Out of the total participants, 16 people (4.2%) described eBay's influence by telling a story or

giving an example. Instead of merely answering the question with a brief comment, these people provided prolific examples:

I had already ordered a number of times from Amazon books and even bought by first pair of Birkenstock sandals strictly from the information at that site (never had seen them in a store before, but knew in general what they were, never had a pair on my feet before these showed up :) (45-year-old female Navigator)

Along with comments from these story tellers:

The obvious wave of the future. It's now more a necessity to use and be aware of as opposed to a luxury or for entertainment use only. Those who don't hop on the computer express will be left out until forced into learning the computer and for those individuals, it'll be way to late. The old ways of shopping, communication, transportation, etc. all those things will be forever and are now forever being changed. Eventually, our entire way of life will be run from the computer. More time is spent on the computer because of the unlimited access to information and convenience of not having to leave your home. IE Shopping, banking, groceries, travel, etc. all at your fingertips without losing a lot of time traveling. (57-year-old male Problem Solver)

I look up everything on the Internet--from recipes to information about anything in medicine, to the most current price on a collectible. (45-year-old female Engager)

Making a list was the preferred description method for another group. These 35 people (9.2%) found more than one influence that eBay had on the way they used computers and the Internet. Thus, each of the people in this group created a list of ways that described eBay's affect. While

some lists were short and other were long, they were all inventories of two or more of eBay's influences.

I've learned more about putting images on the web, using and maintaining a website, how to do photo editing, and basic HTML. (28-year-old male Navigator)

It's one of the many things I use on the Internet. I met my girlfriend on the Internet, I play cards on the Internet, I applied for grad school through the net, I do many things on the net. eBay hasn't really changed the way I used the Internet, since I knew about purchasing before, but it has given me an outlet for selling things I have laying around the house. (31-year-old male Navigator)

I learned Multitasking, Cut and Paste, e-mailing and find computers to be a useful money making tool; not a toy. (37-year-old female Problem Solver)

I would have to say that eBay has increased my use of the computer but decreased my exploration of the Internet. I spend so much time on eBay that I don't feel like surfing just for the fun of it or just because I have nothing else to do. So in a way it has been a negative factor rather than a positive one. But even thinking that, I don't have negative feelings about eBay and what it does to my computer usage. (58-year-old male Engager)

A small group of people (10) revealed that using eBay had influenced the way they used computers and the Internet by giving them more control or giving them more options. The three people who said eBay influenced the way they used computers and the Internet by increasing their control were exemplified by this comment from a 35-year-old female Navigator:

I have control over what I want filtering into my brain unlike to horrible torture of commercials on television.

Examples of comments from the seven people who said eBay's influence gave them an additional tool to use included:

It's a tool that should be taken advantage of and used to its potential. (18-year-old male Navigator)

It has given me a tool that I use on a regular basis in finding and the acquisition of products I have trouble finding elsewhere or at the price I am willing to pay. (40-year-old male Problem Solver)

Conducting research was another result of eBay's influence on computer and Internet use of the participants. It was important to these people to have computers and Internet access in order to do research, and they listed eBay as having an influence on their research abilities. Of the total participants, 15 people (4.2%) were affected by eBay in this way.

eBay has taught me to expand my research capabilities using the Internet. (49-year-old female Navigator)

The world is my oyster now. No question too hard to answer, no concept too bizarre to research. (45-year-old male Problem Solver)

It's helped. Looking for things really tunes you in to a lot of other things. (27-year-old female Engager)

Many participants felt that eBay had influenced the way they used computers and the Internet by changing them in some important way. The people in this group reported that

eBay had made them either more confident, cautious, appreciative, active, or more skillful, but they all experienced some kind of change as a result of eBay's influence on their computer and Internet use. Mezirow (1990) introduced the term perspective transformation which he defined as:

The process of becoming critically aware of how and why our presuppositions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand and feel about our world; of reformulating these assumptions to permit a more inclusive, discriminating, permeable and integrative perspective; and of making decisions or other wise acting upon these new understandings. (p. 14).

The people in this group have critically analyzed their previous positions and have recognized that eBay has influenced and changed their computer and Internet usage. There were 50 people (13.2%) who described an influence of this kind. Their comments included:

I'm much more comfortable with the process... transfer of learning. (56-year-old female Navigator)

A great deal, I find myself more active on the computer. (51-year-old female Problem Solver)

I actually want to take night classes at the local college to learn more about the computer. There are things I don't know and want to know but have to go through trial and error myself before getting it right. (35-year-old female; no ATLAS group)

Better typing skills and speed. (49-year-old female Navigator)



The most frequent influence listed by participating associates was the effect that eBay had on the time they spent on computers and the Internet. One-fifth (20.1%) of the people said that they spent more time on computers, the Internet, or both as a result of participating in eBay activities. These 76 people volunteered their comments about increased computer and Internet time when they wrote:

I seem to be on the Internet all the time! (54-year-old female Navigator)

Yes, I spend too much time on the Internet looking for bargains on e-bay--at least according to my wife. (52-year-old male Problem Solver)

I never used a computer until 3 months ago. Now I am on it every day. (49-year-old male Engager)

The participants were also asked to judge how much using eBay had changed the amount of time that they spent on the Internet. Using a 5-point Likert scale, well over one-half (55.8%) of the respondents reported their use increased either Very Much (30.6%) or Much (25.2%) with nearly one-third (30.8%) saying that their Internet use had increased Some. Only a small group of the participants reported that eBay had changed their amount of Internet time Little (6.2%) and Very Little (7.2%).

### Learning Strategies

Navigators, Problem Solvers, and Engagers differed in how using eBay has influenced how they use computers and the Internet. Those that eBay had influenced their use of

computers and the Internet by giving them more control or more available options were more apt to be Navigators. Navigators were more than three times more likely than Problem Solvers and seven times more likely than Engagers to reveal they achieved more control or received more options as a result of eBay. These learners who use the learning strategies of Planning and of Testing Assumptions are comfortable when they have control of their learning processes and have an array of options with which to work. Navigators "try to be judicious in the way I use computers and Internet" (45-year-old female) because eBay "is now a tool for finding and buying items" (51-year-old male).

Navigators were also more prone than the other groups to listing research as a by-product of their computer and Internet use. Of the 15 people who reported that being able to conduct research on computers and the Internet was eBay's influence, nine (60.0%) were Navigators as compared with four (26.7%) Problem Solvers and two (13.3%) Engagers. Since Navigators typically utilize the learning strategies of Identification of Resources and Critical Use of Resources (Conti & Kolody, 1999, pp. 8-9), it is not surprising to find Navigators here.

I can gain more information about the items that I am interested in. (25-year-old male)

Well, I am now doing more research about Peanuts and Snoopy--the history of them, etc. I also am

learning more about home furnishings and kitchenware of the 20s, 30s, and 40s which is very interesting. (38-year-old female)

It has helped me want to learn more about certain items and to search in them more. (29-year-old female)

Problem Solvers' computer and Internet usage was influenced more than that of the Navigators and Engagers by a bigger variety of things. Problem Solvers were more likely to narrate a story of the affect of eBay or to provide a detailed list of influences than their Navigator or Engager colleagues. Of the 15 total people who gave elaborate examples, 11 were Problem Solvers as compared with only 2 each from the Navigator and Engager groups. These Problem Solver participants were very detailed and descriptive in their responses.

Of course its made me think of using computers as tools for purchases, but I already knew that, and I buy little on the net that I can find in a store I prefer to buy in stores. Except for things like online newspaper and magazine subscriptions I purchase very little on the net. I use eBay because it has things I can't buy in stores--old stuff that is better quality than what is new. (47-year-old female)

I had an old "486" CPU, it was too slow and I would lose auctions while I waited for the old girl to load a page. As soon as I could, I bought a 600 mhz Pentium III. Now I learned how to build my own web page, how to download files from the Internet, how to send images, etc. (45-year-old male)

I find myself now thinking in very different terms recently and coming up with creative ideas utilizing the Internet which may be fruitful

someday. The computer is suddenly for me a tool that is useful on a daily basis (not just for playing games or making greeting cards), and going on the "Net" has become a daily event I look forward to and include as part of my routine. (47-year-old female)

Other influences of eBay that were reported by Problem Solvers were delivered in the form of a detailed list. The Problem Solvers were more than twice as apt as Navigators and three times more likely than Engagers to provide a list of the different ways eBay had influenced their computer and Internet usage. These learners who frequently use the learning strategy of Use of External Aids (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 12) were once again relying on lists to get their point across. Responses indicative of this strategy preference encompassed:

I think I'm better at e-mail. I'm more willing to communicate with strangers on the Internet. I probably spend more time on computers because of it. (40-year-old male)

I used to just use it as a word processor or a way to get information (such as encyclopedia) or to help my kids understand Shakespeare and such. (49-year-old female)

I plan to use it not only for information and research but also for buying and selling. I really don't like shopping from store to store trying to find a particular item. I can do this in my office. (62-year-old male)

In addition, Problem Solvers were much more than the other groups likely to recognize the influence of increased trade, commerce, and business as a result of their computer

and eBay usage. Generating Alternatives and Conditional Acceptance are strategies used often by Problem Solvers (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 12) as they imagine possibilities and speculate outcomes. This use of strategies is exemplified in these learners as they examine the possibilities and "keep an open mind" (p. 12) to the power of computers and the Internet.

eBay has changed the way I use computers and the Internet because now I can sell items right from my own home and make a little extra cash! (31-year-old female)

My success at eBay has encouraged me to examine other sites of commerce for a natural progression (expansion) of my market. (53-year-old male)

I have expanded my activities in my chosen area of commerce--much more active worldwide. (70-year-old male)

Apparently, the participating Engagers felt as though their time was spent better elsewhere than answering this question because 23 of them chose to give no answer to this question. In fact, giving no answer was the most frequently-furnished answer that Engagers gave. Of the 95 responding Engagers, 23 (24.2%) chose to give no answer or to simply say "no". When unenthusiastic about a subject, Engagers will rarely put forth the effort to finish the charge (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 14). Perhaps the Engagers would have preferred having a good time to answering this question. Of the respondents who said that eBay had

influenced how they used computers and the Internet solely by providing them more fun and excitement, 75.0% were Engagers as compared with 25.0% Problem Solvers and no Navigators. "It is so exciting", exclaimed on 64-year-old female while another wrote, "now I'm not bored and I am loving every minute of it!" (41-year-old female).

People from all three ATLAS groups reported that eBay influenced the way they used computers and the Internet by changing them in some way. Of the people proclaiming this influence, 37.2% were Navigators, 37.2% were Problem Solvers, and 31.5% were Engagers. In spite of the fact that people in the three groups arrived at the same answer, they differed in the way that they phrased their answers or in what they actually said. The Navigators described themselves as coming out of a suspicious or apprehensive state to a more confident state. Examples of this type of Navigator comment were:

I have not had any bad experiences with transactions. I am more trusting of the use of purchases through the net. (55-year-old male)

I'm much more careful and aware of others trailing you....Is that what you did? (43-year-old female)

I have more confidence on the computer now. Not afraid to try and teach myself other areas on the net. (47-year-old female)

On the other hand, the Problem Solvers in this group named specific changes or skills that had happened to them

as a result of eBay's influence on the way they used computers and the Internet. Problem Solver remarks that demonstrated their view of how eBay had changed them were:

I am a smarter and more efficient computer operator now. This is a result of using eBay on a very regular basis and the need to be competitive and present visually appealing auction pages.  
(35-year-old female)

I guess for the reason that it forced us to learn to scan pictures and also to use FTP programs and such. (37-year-old female)

I have become more efficient in the time I spend surfing. (44-year-old female)

The Engagers tended to list self-improvement as their force for change. These people described how eBay was the sole reason that they learned about eBay and the Internet.

I would never have learned anything about either without eBay being there as the catalyst. (55-year-old male)

I would not have a home computer if I didn't get "HOOKED" on eBay. (51-year-old male)

I bought the computer a year ago to use for eBay auctions. Someday I will learn how to use the computer better so I can do more selling on eBay.  
(67-year-old male)

I use computers with more love than I used to.  
(26-year-old male)

Time was another area that was listed by Navigators, Problem Solvers, and Engagers as being a way that eBay had affected the way they used computers and the Internet. Of the participants who listed spending more time on computers and the Internet as an effect of eBay, 25.3% were

Navigators, 46.7% were Problem Solvers, and 28.0% were Engagers. This compared closely to the percentages of entire study participants of 28.5% Navigators, 45.2% Problem Solvers, and 26.3% Engagers. Although people from all three ATLAS groups disclosed that they spent more time operating computers and/or using Internet functions as a result of eBay, they differed in how they described them or the reasons why they spent more time using these tools. Navigators compared their current time use to the time they spent on the Internet or using computers before eBay was a part of their lives.

I use the computer much more now than before when I didn't have the Internet. (22-year-old female)

I use the computer more often now. (22-year-old male)

Spend a lot more time on the computer! (40-year-old male)

Problem Solvers were inclined to describe their increased time with computers and the Internet in a different way. They not only said that they spent more time on computers or the Internet, but they also described how they spent the time or they gave specific time increments.

I still go to my news sites and message boards, but I always check eBay now--about 50% of my web time is spent there. (38-year-old female)

I now utilize the computer 4-5 times per week rather than less than weekly. (42-year-old female)



Probably added a 1/2 hour a day to my on-line time. (53-year-old male)

The Engagers in the group told a divergent tale when describing how using eBay has influenced their time using computers and the Internet. They tended to describe how the increased use had robbed them of their available and valuable time. Typical responses concerning the disappearance of Engagers' time were:

It's taken a lot of my time. (13-year-old male)

It takes much of my time on the computer. (28-year-old male)

There is a bookmark list of items in the auction which sometimes grows quite long and of course it takes a lot of time to follow many items in the auction. (34-year-old male)

#### Summary

In order to describe how using eBay influenced the way they used computers and the Internet, the respondents used several methods. It was obvious that the main influence that eBay had on the participants' computer and Internet usage was that it added to the amount of time they spent using both. Many people (76) told how they spent more time using computers and the Internet as a result of their eBay involvement. A quantitative question which used a 5-point Likert scale and dealt with the same subject revealed well over one-half (55.8%) of the respondents reported their use increased either Very Much (30.6%) or Much (25.2%) while an

additional 30.8% said that their Internet use had increased Some. Only a few reported that eBay had changed their amount of Internet time Little (6.2%) and Very Little (7.2%).

Other ways the study participants described the eBay affect on their computer and Internet use were how eBay helped them either make more money (5.8%) or spend more money (9.4%), increased their enjoyment or their communication with others (5.0%), gave them more control or increased their options (2.7%), assisted with their research (4.2%), or helped them make an important change (13.2%). Another group chose to describe the eBay influence in terms of giving detailed examples (4.2%) or creating lists of multiple results (9.2%). However, eBay had no great influence on the computer and Internet usage of 23.8% of the respondents.

Navigators were more likely than Problem Solvers or Engagers to report that eBay gave them more control or increased their options with computers or the Internet. These learners were also more likely to list research as an outcome of eBay use than their Problem Solver or Engager colleagues. Problem Solvers viewed this question as an opportunity to tell a story or divulge a list which described how eBay had influenced their computer and Internet use. Problem Solvers were also much more likely

than Navigators or Problem Solvers to acknowledge the business and commerce prospects that eBay afforded. Engagers evidently had other questions that interested them more than this question because 24.2% of the Engagers gave no answer. However, of the participants who responded that eBay was responsible for them enjoying computers and the Internet more, 75.0% were Engagers.

Although participants from all three ATLAS groups reported that eBay use had changed them in some way, the answers differed in their phrasing or content. Navigators appeared to move from a more suspicious or apprehensive state to a more confident state, Problem Solvers stipulated specific changes or resulting skills, and Engagers indicated that eBay was the sole reason they used computers or the Internet.

Navigators, Problem Solvers, and Engagers all declared that using eBay had influenced the amount of time they spent on computers and the Internet but their descriptions differed. Navigators compared their current time usage with their usage before using eBay. Problem Solvers not only said they spent more time with computers or the Internet as a result of using eBay, but they also described how their time was spent or they provided specific time increment portraits. Engagers told how using eBay had stripped them

of their valuable time when they described the influence of computers and the Internet on their time.

#### Learning from eBay Participation

Participants have learned much as a result of taking part in eBay activities. When asked to list as many things as they could that they had learned as a consequence of using eBay, the respondents provided lists that fell into seven basic categories. These categories were (a) bidding through eBay, (b) selling through eBay, (c) clerical skills, (d) mailing skills, (e) learning about people, and (f) learning about the eBay website. Two other categories identified were provided from participants who either said they learned nothing or from those who said they already knew all they needed to in order to engage in eBay activities.

Some participants revealed that their learning from eBay came about as a result of either the bidding or the selling processes. Adult learners desire immediate application of what they have learned in order to meet an immediate need (Knowles, 1980, p. 53). The learners in this study reported that learning how to bid and sell fulfilled their need to buy or sell items through eBay's auctions. Of the total study participants, 32 (8.4%) learned while participating in the process of bidding on auction items and 78 (20.4%) learned through the act of selling through the

eBay site. The following comments are representative of those who learned through eBay's bidding process:

How to bid items in a more efficient and cost-based manner. (52-year-old Navigator)

Looking up values of items being bid on, it has forced me to do more research on possible items I would have bid on and their values. (22-year-old female Problem Solver)

I learned how to bid on an item. (24-year-old female Engager)

Examples of those people who reported learning through the different activities in eBay's selling process included:

I've learned how to send email, and how to list items for sale and am now in the process of learning how to upload pictures. (26-year-old female Navigator)

How to photograph an item, and store the photograph on-line. How to list an item for sale. How to pack and ship an item. How to fit a description into 45 spaces. How to determine what items can be expected to do well on eBay. (60-year-old male Problem Solver)

Uploading pictures to my web site. By reading other descriptions, I have learned what parts of the description of an item are important to me and try to incorporate those into my descriptions, like shipping and handling costs, any defects in the item. I also try to do a little salesmanship in my descriptions. (59-year-old male Engager)

Clerical skills and mailing skills were two additional learning categories that were defined by the study respondents. Of the total number responding, 52 people (13.6%) reported an expansion of their clerical skills such as record keeping and organizational skills, purchasing

money orders, and e-mailing correspondence skills while 45 people (11.8%) said they learned more about mailing processes. Comments from the participants who reported that they learned clerical skills as a result of eBay use included the following:

I copy each item I bid on. I also copy letter confirming bid. At end of bid I copy all correspondence if I win the bid. Make out envelope and check immediately as well as email seller. Keep file of all bids I win. Check pictures off against product when it arrives. (67-year-old female Navigator)

I learned that you need an international money order for Canada....I also learned that you have to go to the post office to purchase an international money order. (44-year-old female Problem Solver)

Where to find a money order...how much one costs. (26-year-old male Engager)

Those who learned more about mailing processes as a result of eBay usage offered such typical comments as:

I have learned which mail delivery service are more reliable, such as FedEx rather than UPS, although UPS is 2<sup>nd</sup>. (35-year-old female Navigator)

United States Postal Services (USPS) isn't as bad as we sometimes think it is. Packaging counts!! (53-year-old male Problem Solver)

The USPS web site to get postal rates. That you can get free priority mailing supplies through the post office. (41-year-old female Engager)

Learning more about other people was another category identified by the study respondents. Out of the total group, 39 (10.2%) said that eBay taught them more about

others. Real-life problems are often solved by involving other people as opposed to the individual problem-solving techniques preferred by formal academia (Sternberg, 1990, p. 40). The learners in this group identified that they learned more about other people while proceeding through the eBay process. Their comments included:

Some sellers are frauds. One Florida seller refuses to answer e-mails, telephone calls or registered letters after cashing a cashiers check and not sending the item. I have no recourse except to sue in small claims court, which is not practical since I live in Utah. (67-year-old male Navigator)

There are some very bright support people at your disposal if you light the candle and stop cursing the darkness. (53-year-old male Problem Solver)

I have learned about the trustfulness of other individuals. (30-year-old female Engager)

The eBay website itself provided an arena for learning according to some of the participating people. Of the total group, 46 people (12.0%) said that they learned more about the website or more about the Internet as a corollary to their eBay involvement. The people in this category reported learning about such eBay site features as the Feedback Forum and help pages along with learning more about the Internet in general. Responses concerning the issue of learning about the eBay website or the Internet entailed:

Use the search engine, follow menus, researching sellers. (25-year-old male Navigator)

The rating system, the reserved prices, the feedback between the seller and buyer. (36-year-old female Problem Solver)

Moving around their site is basically my major new thing to learn. (58-year-old female Engager)

Two additional categories emerged as a result of the participants' responses to listing what they had learned as a result of using eBay. One was a category created by respondents who gave no answer at all or simply said "no" to this request. From the total number of participants, 37 (9.7%) were identified in this way. Those participants who revealed that they already knew everything or had all the skills necessary to operate in all aspects of eBay's procedures formed another category. In this group, 50 people (13.1%) said that they previously were equipped to use eBay's features so they had learned nothing new. These people frequently told about their backgrounds and experiences that qualified for membership in this category.

As a longtime magazine classified ad buyer and seller, I knew about most of the mechanics and pitfalls before starting on eBay. (48-year-old male Navigator)

As a buyer on eBay, all the skills it demands I had already. I had email, was used to doing searches, and have no problem with money orders or arranging package deliveries. (47-year-old female Problem Solver)

Quite familiar with the basics of money orders, shipping items and e-mail. With what seems to be a natural aptitude with computers, with or without basic instructions. (44-year-old female Engager)



## Learning Strategies

Navigators, Problem Solvers, and Engagers once again displayed their differences while answering this question. When asked to provide a list of everything they had learned as a result of using eBay, distinct trends from each ATLAS group emerged. While the actual numbers of Navigators, Problem Solvers, and Engagers found in each of the above listed categories were generally equal to their distribution in the overall sample, the findings revealed intelligible, general characteristics that emerged from the people in each ATLAS group.

When asked to list as many things as they could think of that they learned as a result of using eBay, the Navigators were inclined to list things that demonstrated common characteristics in their lists. The lists provided by Navigators included how they placed value on evaluation and feedback, made cautious progress toward their goals, employed organizational systems, used common sense, and described a cautious view of other people. Examples of lists that included these characteristic Navigator trends were:

Evaluating feedback. Evaluating the value vs. price of an item for bid. (29-year-old female)

E-mailing strangers, negotiation, competition with other bidders, how to avoid scams & being ripped off. (19-year-old male)

You should have a system of some sort to know who you've paid, who owes you merchandise, and who you have posted feedback on. Some people expect you to email them back even though they don't mention it in their email. Some things are not listed in a way that you might logically expect them to be. (38-year-old female)

Stay away from sellers with negative or no feedback. There are some people out there who have no qualms about bilking others. (39-year-old female)

Do you not believe in common sense??!! (40-year-old male)

It is just common sense. If someone bids on your item they are entered into a binding contract. (28-year-old female)

I have learned to keep up with names and addresses to follow up with an order. (35-year-old female)

People with low rating most of the time do not honor their bids. (27-year-old male)

I have learned that everyone's not as honest as I am, having been burned a few times. But, as a result, I'm a much more educated buyer and have made several good connections through eBay. (56-year-old male)

I did investigate the process that most sellers were using should a person choose to place an item at auction. Interesting. (45-year-old female)

Selling items on eBay was a learning experience. I utilized the eBay selling options and tips prior to listing my own items for sale. Initiating contact with the high bidder, providing shipping information, follow-up information to the bidder once their payment was received, packaging/shipping, and postal options available for tracking the items shipping progress were all learning experiences. (49-year-old female)

Common trends were also revealed by the data generated by participating Problem Solvers. They too shared common

qualities as they listed the things they had learned as a result of eBay participation. The Problem Solvers' lists demonstrated how they provided more detail than Navigators and Engagers, were confident and bold during the eBay process, knew what their next learning steps would be, and made observations or judgements of other people. Problem Solver lists that illustrated these common themes included:

People use all kinds of boxes and shipping supplies--anything that enables them to get their object "safe"! Money orders are easy--any grocery store has them available--I guess after buying your first item--you don't even think about it much. Since I have not sold on eBay-I'm not sure about sending. I have sent many packages in the mail before so I don't think that would be a big deal. I would offer to ship items as the customer wants it to be shipped (either book rate or priority--whichever way they are willing to pay--it should be up to them). I usually don't bid on items where shipping costs either are not offered or are ridiculously priced. (as if they were wrapped in gold or silver paper?) Loaded my photos is my next step, I'm still learning how to use my new scanner to do that. So far-I've sent pictures to friends through email--I must be procrastinating. I've had to start making a homepage--which is free I guess but so far I only have the title for the homepage, a "welcome" sign.  
(44-year-old female)

I think it is fair to say I've learned nothing except how to bid intelligently. I'm a researcher and I've used computers for twenty years and I was likely one of the first people on the Internet.  
(47-year-old female)

I have yet to learn how to sell on the eBay. This is my next challenge. Otherwise it is pretty basic. I am a purchaser at my work so shipping and receiving and payment arrangements are second nature. (38-year-old male)

I haven't sold anything yet but am planning to so will learn how to do that, printed the eBay instructions. (43-year-old female)

I've gotten a wonderful education on bidding strategies, and who's interested in what. I've also learned how to read "seller-ese", i.e., interpreting descriptions. I've had to learn communication patterns for communicating with the sellers; I have a fairly standard note I email as soon as I've won something, introducing myself and asking for payment information. I've honed my research skills trying to think of synonyms for items I'm interested in. Also developed critical thinking skills learning to evaluate the likely worth of items. Also, have learned a lot about how Netscape works, in maneuvering back and forth between web pages to check information and run comparisons. I had to learn to take advantage of the information-services available on eBay's website, such as their bulletin board and user information. (47-year-old female)

I learned that there are many more collectors with an interest in the specialized items I collect than I had formerly believed. I found many more sources for the items that interest me. I have learned that there is quite a bit of misinformation on the Internet about the items I collect. I learned to keep track of foreign exchange rates as prices are all in US dollars. I learned that for the most part people involved in my hobby are basically honest. (55-year-old male)

That people will pay way too much for something just to "win". (34-year-old female)

Image compression, creating eBay templates, becoming an expert with FrontPage 2000, shipping costs to all 4 corners of the globe in my sleep, Customs and Duty procedures (we are in Canada), UPS practices, packing carefully and expertly. (35-year-old female)

Engagers also divulged common themes throughout the lists they provided of things they learned as a result of using eBay. The themes revealed by the Engagers' data

showed how they provided brief, less detailed answers than some Navigators and most Problem Solvers; enjoyed the tools that made life easier or less time-consuming for them; used more emotional descriptions than people in the other two groups; and tended to be optimistic about other people. Example lists that were indicative of these Engager characteristics involved:

Waiting for a check to clear and getting your item can be excruciating! (54-year-old male)

I am still learning. I have also learned to be a little more patient before bidding to see what similar items may appear. (57-year-old female)

People list things as antiques or French but these items are really recent copies. I've ended up with some stinkers! (47-year-old female)

I only get a money order when it is something I want "right away". (64-year-old female)

International orders can be a pain in the butt. (27-year-old male)

Both USPS and UPS have websites that allow me to calculate charges. (36-year-old female)

People are for the most part trustworthy. (53-year-old male)

I learned that some people have a passion for collecting. (37-year-old male)

Reinforcement of the belief in the basic ethics and honesty of individuals--rely totally on peoples basic honesty. No problems encountered to date. (55-year-old male)

How many great people there still are in the world. (38-year-old male)

How to have my Excel files, word files, and eBay all up and running at the same time. How to have one main Excel file for my total sales and other's for items that I sell for others. How to be efficient in using a word file to cut and paste responses. (46-year-old female)

### Summary

Study participants were asked to list as many things as they could think of that they had learned as a result of using eBay. The data generated by them revealed lists that fell into seven basic categories. These categories were bidding through eBay, selling through eBay, clerical skills, mailing skills, learning about people, learning about the eBay website, learning nothing new, and giving no answer.

Responses from people in the ATLAS groups of Navigators, Problem Solvers, and Engagers revealed different trends. Lists provided by Navigators demonstrated how they placed value on evaluation and feedback, made cautious progress toward their goals, employed organizational systems, used common sense, and described a cautious view of other people. Problem Solver lists included how they provided more detail than Navigators and Engagers, were confident and bold through the eBay processes, knew what their next learning steps would be, and made observations or judgements of other people. Lists that were created by Engager participants revealed how they provided brief, less-detailed answers than some Navigators and most Problem

Solvers, enjoyed the tools that made their lives easier or less time-consuming for them, used more emotional descriptions, and tended to be optimistic about other people.

#### Influences on Attitudes

The remarkable growth and awesome nature of the Internet was reflected in the participants' responses as they described how their participation in eBay had influenced their attitudes about the Internet. The majority of the people's remarks echoed the enormous scope, power, mystery, and magnitude of this relatively new medium as they defined the Internet's effect on their attitudes. Their responses told how the participants were in awe of the Internet's inspiration on (a) global issues, (b) business and commerce, (c) human relationships, (d) personal growth and change, and (e) personal enjoyment. The answers also revealed how a very few participants had developed a negative or anxious position during their Internet experiences.

Although almost four-fifths of the participants revealed that eBay had influenced their attitudes about the Internet in some way, close to one-fifth said they distinguished no influence. Perhaps because they already had extensive experience with the Internet, 21.3% of the

respondents said that eBay had not influenced their perspectives about the Internet.

It really hasn't....I've been a part of the Internet long before eBay. (29-year female Navigator)

It hasn't, any more than going to the grocery store influences how I feel about the mall. (49-year-old female Problem Solver)

Really, I don't feel that it has influenced my attitude towards the Net at all. (51-year-old female Engager)

Some participants' attitudes about the Internet were influenced by their amazement at the Internet's affect on global (12.6%) or business (9.7%) issues. After participating on eBay, some people became aware of the power of the Internet to connect people around the world. They saw the potential for change and economic development that participation in Internet activities provides. Other participants (15.2%) simply said that they felt positive about the Internet.

It has opened up my mind to the access that I have from a small community in Colorado. I am just as connected as anyone in a large municipal area. The world is simply at my fingertips. (45-year-old female Navigator)

I think it has become, for me, more democratic. I used to see the Internet as two groups: corporations, and twelve year olds on bulletin boards. Now I see everyone out there. (38-year-old female Problem Solver)

The Internet is great and everyone should be entitled/enabled to use it at a minimal cost. (24-year-old male Engager)



I can see how a small business can use it to their advantage. For example, a small antique or collectibles shop can post interesting items on eBay. They have a much greater potential of more people seeing their items, and for selling them for more. I also see potential for people to make money just by trading on eBay. (44-year-old male Navigator)

It's added a whole new dimension to my perception of the Internet. By the time I tried eBay, I'd just begun trying online shopping through Internet booksellers. This was quite a step up from that, and I couldn't be happier. It's one more way the Internet has facilitated commerce around the world. (47-year-old female Problem Solver)

Because of eBay and the Internet, the entire world is becoming an accessible market place. In time I can find virtually anything I'm looking for on eBay. As a result, I view the Internet as a necessary part of my life--it has changed the way I shop for everything. (41-year-old female Engager)

eBay is a subset of the Internet--they are both great in their own right. (48-year-old female Navigator)

eBay has had a positive influence on my attitudes about the Internet. It has taught me that I can use the Internet for pleasure and profit. (60-year-old male Problem Solver)

I have always had a very positive attitude about the Internet and my interactions on eBay have reinforced those attitudes. (38-year-old female Engager)

Other study participants revealed how eBay had influenced their attitudes about the Internet by provoking some kind of personal change (14.2%), helping them learn more about other people (16.6%), or making the Internet more enjoyable for them (3.6%). Typical responses from the

people who experienced personal change of some type included:

It has made me much more willing to do all sorts of Internet shopping and communication. My wife has seen my positive experiences on eBay, and this has encouraged her to participate in a variety of sites. (48-year-old male Navigator)

I'm certainly not afraid of it any more. I'm impressed at how much info there is on the Internet, and it seems that EVERYTHING is for sale on eBay at one time or another. I e-mail more quickly, more often and in briefer sentences. (40-year-old male Problem Solver)

I hadn't really gotten into the Internet until eBay. I am now using it for other things as I have become more comfortable with it such as other online shopping and looking up health related articles. (42-year-old male Engager)

The participants who learned more about other people as a result of eBay's influence on their attitudes about the Internet were revealed in these examples:

I feel that its like a happy community for the most part except for the few bad apples. It's like you get to know these people as if they lived in your own town. (26-year-old female Navigator)

It's really exciting where before I thought it was frightening. It seemed like relative strangers were entering my home but now I realize that it's the same as me entering their home too. Kind of like standing next to someone in a shopping mall. (49-year-old female Problem Solver)

Despite all the publicity about the dangers of commerce over the Internet-I must say that my experience has been without exception a positive one. The people I have sent money orders to have always sent the items, and their email is always friendly. (45-year-old female Engager)

Enjoyment was another by-product of eBay's influence on the attitudes of these participants:

Availability of sites astounding and fun to investigate. (67-year-old male Navigator)

This is just fun. (24-year-old female Problem Solver)

Since I started using E-Bay I find myself drifting around other sites just for the fun of it. (52-year-old male Engager)

A small group of participants disclosed that their participation in eBay had influenced them in a negative way. Only 6 people in the entire study group (1.7%) described their views or experiences on the Internet as negative and another 13 people (3.6%) described their attitudes about the Internet from a cautious or anxious perspective. The respondents with negative opinions were represented by this remark:

I have learned that like society in general, there is not customer service on the Internet. They don't care about the customer. I believe the reason is that if you don't want to do business with us, that's okay the next person will and we still won't have to provide customer service. (54-year-old male Problem Solver)

Some participants who reported feeling more anxious or uncertain as a result of participating in Internet activities:

It brought an enhanced meaning to the term caveat emptor. (35-year-old male Navigator)

I am concerned about giving personal information such as social security and credit card numbers to

anyone. I have opened a special account into which I put just enough money to pay for items using a credit card. You hope that security is tight as the company say it is. Keeping a limited of money in that account should protect me somewhat. It seems that this is the way things are going. I would like to see more control as to what is available. However not the government but some other watchdog group...one with teeth! (62-year-old male Problem Solver)

My attitude is better but I am very leery of the Net and the garbage it contains. (55-year-old male Engager)

### Learning Strategies

Differences in the responses about how eBay had influenced their attitudes about the Internet were evident in the remarks from Navigators, Problem Solvers, and Engagers. The most marked differences between those in each ATLAS group were found in their descriptions of business and global issues, human relationships, and enjoyment. Navigators and Problem Solvers were much more likely to view global awareness or business and commerce interests as influential than were Engagers. The Navigators were twice more likely and the Problem Solvers were three times more likely than Engagers to note that their attitudes about the Internet had been influenced by making them more aware of the large-scale impact of the Internet. Several Navigators and Problem Solvers shared their perceptions of the Internet phenomenon when they wrote:

I had no idea what it was really like to be on the Internet until I started selling on eBay. It has

really opened my eyes and made me realize how much smaller our world is now. (60-year-old female Navigator)

E-bay is the sharp edge of massive changes that will take place in society, globally, in the next few years. It certainly has given a great deal of additional power to a very powerful technology. (52-year-old male Problem Solver)

I have had wonderful, positive experiences on eBay. I resent how the media singles out a few cases of fraud on eBay and reports it on national news. I would like them to also report on people like me who have been able to quit their full time job, spend time with their husband and grandchild, and make more money selling on eBay than they ever did at work. (47-year-old female Navigator)

It has made it a very positive and profitable experience. I have since left my full time job, and stay at home with my children. So I would say I feel grateful for the new technology. (35-year-old female Problem Solver)

The Problem Solvers were more influenced by human relationships in their Internet experiences more than the Navigators or Engagers. These learners who "rely heavily on human resources and prefer expert advice rather than referring to manuals" (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 12) were almost three times more likely to mention other people in their comments than Navigators were and almost twice as likely as Engagers to do so. The Problem Solvers constituted over half (53.2%) of the people who referred to other people as compared with 19.4% Navigators and 27.4% Engagers who did likewise. Typical Problem Solver comments

about the influence of the Internet on human relationships included:

I have found that there are a lot of great people out there, you do find a few butts, but then the good out weigh the bad. (51-year-old female)

Interaction with real people is positive. Sounds corny, but it really is a community with shared goals and values. (53-year-old male)

Proves to me that regulatory efforts are best left to the people involved in the process, not governments or agencies. eBay shows that millions can effectively police themselves with minimal accepted guidelines. (53-year-old male)

In the area of gleaning enjoyment from the Internet, the Engagers were the most frequent commentators. Engagers were more than five times more likely than Navigators and ten times more likely than Problem Solvers to report that fun and enjoyment was their perceived result of Internet participation. Of the respondents in this category, over three-fourths (76.9%) were Engagers as compared with 15.4% for Navigators and 7.7% for Problem Solvers. Engagers tend to concentrate on issues of reward and enjoyment when deciding to begin a learning activity (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 14). Engager comments concerning the importance of enjoyment are depicted in these examples:

I enjoy it more. (20-year-old female)

It's made the Internet much more exciting for me. (42-year-old female)

I enjoy using the Internet even more because of eBay. (26-year-old male)

I have a lot of fun with it. (33-year-old female)

Have FUN and take some chances. (37-year-old male)

eBay has made the Internet all the more fun. (47-year-old female)

The remarks that displayed the positive attitudes about the Internet as a result of using eBay came from an almost equal number of Navigators (17), Problem Solvers (20), and Engagers (18). Although people from all three ATLAS groups in basically equal numbers gave this answer, their answers differed as to why they received positive attitudes from the Internet. Navigators tended to report that they were positive because eBay and the Internet were important tools for their use. Identification of Resources and Critical Use of Resources are two learning strategies that are consequential to Navigators as they learn (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 10). Typical Navigator comments were:

Great communication tool. (48-year-old female)

I think it is the greatest tool since the bread knife. (50-year-old male)

Problem Solvers were inclined to give affirmative answers when describing how their participation in eBay had influenced their attitudes about the Internet by saying it reinforced their already positive attitudes. These learners displayed their use of the Testing Assumptions learning strategy (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 12) when they wrote:

Just reinforces the fact that I think the Internet is great. (44-year-old female)

Supported my positive view. (34-year-old male)

Emotional involvement is typically a critical part of the learning process with Engagers (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 15). Engagers tended to use more emotionally-laden words in their descriptions of positive attitudes than the people in the other two ATLAS groups. For example,

I love eBay therefore I love the Internet. (39-year-old female)

I have always loved the Internet and this is just one more facet of it. (57-year-old female)

I like it. (45-year-old male)

The distribution of participants who reported that personal change was the influence that eBay had on their attitudes about the Internet was similar to the overall study sample: Navigators--28.8%, Problem Solvers--44.2%, and Engagers--26.9%. Although the people from all three ATLAS groups reported that some aspect of personal change influenced their attitude, they differed in the way that they said it. Navigators' answers tended to reveal their hesitancy prior to eBay involvement as displayed in these examples:

It has eased my suspicions about the Internet. (51-year-old male)

I've become more at ease with the Internet since participating in eBay. (52-year-old male)



I am not intimidated by the Internet any longer.  
(49-year-old female)

This trend was echoed in the number of people who reported that being more cautious or apprehensive was a result of their eBay participation. Twice as many Navigators as Problem Solvers or Engagers reported that they had become fearful, anxious, or more cautious during the eBay process.

It is somewhat scary interacting with complete strangers. (24-year-old male)

It may be too easy to spend money on items you want by just sitting down and looking at screen and bidding. It could get to be like gambling or drinking, it could become a problem. (67-year-old male)

I am concerned about using a credit card. (54-year-old female)

When reporting that eBay participation had changed their attitudes about the Internet, Problem Solvers once again gave illustrations during their answers.

I have a much more positive attitude about the net. I used to think it was a toy for kids and computer "nerds" but I see that many people use it for commerce and communication on a daily basis. (47-year-old male)

I am less wary of utilizing the Internet and now constantly try going to a variety of sites that will benefit me professionally, in business and recreationally. (42-year-old female)

It has made it from something I really could give or take to something I have to have. (45-year-old male)

On the other hand, Engagers tended to list increased self-confidence and comfort when describing their personal

changes. Issues of confidence are important to Engagers as they enter into a learning activity (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 14). Typical Engager comments that described their increased confidence or comfort included:

I am much more confident and secure about using the Internet. (54-year-old female)

I am more comfortable using the Internet now after using eBay. (24-year-old male)

eBay has given me more confidence in shopping for items on the Internet. (45-year-old female)

### Summary

The participants were in awe and amazement of the enormous power and magnitude of the Internet as they described how their participation in eBay had influenced their attitudes about the Internet. They told how they were positively impressed by the global issues (12.6%), business and commerce issues (9.7%), human relationships (16.6%), personal growth and change (14.2%), and personal enjoyment (3.4%) afforded them by the Internet. In addition, a small group of participants revealed a negative influence (1.6%) or made them more wary (3.6%) of the Internet as a result of eBay participation. Due to their apparent extensive prior experiences with the Internet, approximately one-fifth of the respondents identified no new influence.

Among the ATLAS groups, differences in the responses from participants were once again evident. Navigators and

Problem Solvers were twice more likely and the Problem Solvers were three times more likely than Engagers to view global awareness or business and commerce interests as influential. Problem Solvers described how the influences of other people were important to them. They were three times more likely than Navigators and almost twice as likely as Engagers to divulge their reliance on other people. Engagers were more than five times more likely than Navigators and ten times more likely than Problem Solvers to say that fun or enjoyment was an eBay influence.

Although an approximately equal number of Navigators, Problem Solvers, and Engagers said they had generally positive attitudes about the Internet as a result of eBay, they differed in the reasons they gave. Navigators tended to view the Internet as a useful tool. Problem Solvers were apt to report how eBay use reinforced their already-positive attitudes, and Engagers were more inclined to use emotionally-laden words such as "love" and "like" in their descriptions.

#### Attitudes About Skills

The participants were asked to characterize how their participation in eBay had influenced their attitudes about their own skills. The findings revealed that responses could be grouped in four main categories. One category of responses came from the group of people who said their eBay

participation had influenced them in (a) a positive or favorable way. Another category was the group of responses from those who found eBay had (b) not influenced their attitudes about their skills in any way. The third response category was (c) reinforcement of the participants' previously-held beliefs while a fourth was the group that revealed eBay participation had a (d) negative effect on the people in that group of answers.

Many participants had a favorable view of eBay's influence on their attitudes about their skills. Over one-half (55.3%) of the respondents reported that their eBay participation had influenced them in positive way. Although these 210 people all had favorable perceptions, there was variety in the reasons why their responses were positive. Some said they were more confident while others said eBay participation had made them better shoppers, bidders, or sellers. Other respondents's descriptions of how eBay participation had influenced their attitudes about their own skills included those who felt more literate with the English language or with computer language. Characteristic comments from the people who reflected a positive attitude toward their own skills included the following:

The more you use you computer skills, the better they continue to be and possibly get better. This is happening in my case. I am retired and spend half my day online. (52-year-old male Navigator)

Makes you feel more confident and more computer savvy. Helps seniors get in with the youngsters-- it's a generation mixer. (61-year-old male Navigator)

I have gained quite a bit of business acumen and for a recently divorced at-home person, this is saying a lot. This is my new lease on life. I have confidence about myself and my abilities. (52-year-old female Problem Solver)

I learned a lot of communication in English (since I'm a German). I learned a lot of the market price situation about the items I'm interested in. (40-year-old male Problem Solver)

Well, I am just a real good shopper!!!! I'm not too sure my husband likes this part of me!! Now I don't even have to leave the house to shop. Sometimes not good. (54-year-old female Engager)

I have found that in the beginning everyone else knew more about this stuff than I did. Now, I find myself a little more experienced than the average person and I am able to offer these people advice. (23-year-old male Engager)

Some people recognized that eBay participation had no influence on their attitudes about their skills. The people in this group comprised 37.9% of the total participants in the study. Most of this group said that their prior experiences with the Internet caused eBay participation to have no affect on their attitudes about their skills. Some of this group said simply "it hasn't", "no change", or "none". The following comments illustrate the responses from people who said eBay had no affect on their attitudes about their skills due to their previous experiences or knowledge.

I am a professional analyst. The skills I learned using eBay are a normal part of my business life. I have to learn new skills and debug problems daily. So, eBay in itself has no impact in my feelings towards my skills. (48-year-old female Navigator)

My own skills did not change for that. I am self employed and I have to take care of all new situations all the time. (42-year-old male Navigator)

I've been on the 'Net for several years and I've used it frequently in my research and have exchanged this information with many others. eBay has not had much influence. (49-year-old male Problem Solver)

I came to eBay already conversant with computer skills if that is what you are referring to. It's a tool. As far as my other skills, they may or may not have anything to do with computers or the Internet, but eBay had nothing to do with either, I don't think. (49-year-old female Problem Solver)

I don't feel that eBay has significantly affected my own skills. (41-year-old male Engager)

I don't believe my skills have changed. (54-year-old female Engager)

A fairly small group of responses came from people in the study who reported that eBay participation had influenced their attitudes about their own skills by reinforcing their previous beliefs. This group of 16 people (4.2%) divulged that eBay had either developed the skills they already had or supported philosophical convictions the participants had prior to their eBay involvement. Samples of remarks from this group of people whose previous beliefs

and skills had been reinforced by participating in eBay included:

It reinforced my confidence in my ability to deal with any on line requirements, specifically in setting up a web site. (51-year-old male Navigator)

I have been involved in computers since my first Commodore 64--eBay has only served to help develop the skills I already had. (44-year-old male Navigator)

I think I was confident in my computer skills prior to eBay. That hasn't changed any. (22-year-old female Problem Solver)

Being nice and reasonable counts for something. I think I always knew that, but it gets heavily reinforced on eBay. Your reputation is important, but so is theirs. You don't have to hesitate to speak up when it is warranted. (53-year-old male Problem Solver)

Reinforced my perception of my own competency. (47-year-old female Engager)

I knew I could do most anything, and this says I might be right--LOL [Laughing Out Loud]. (53-year-old male Engager)

A smaller group still insisted that participating in eBay had a negative influence on their attitudes about their skills. Evidently, eBay participation had revealed a short-coming or opportunity for improvement that these participants did not welcome. The eight people in this group (2.1%) had these things to say about their attitudes about their own skills as a result of eBay participation:

Showed me just how foolish I have become in thinking I was an intelligent life form. (56-year-old male Navigator)

Reminds me that I have terrible typing skills!  
(40-year-old male Navigator)

Shows me how computer illiterate I am. (60-year-old male Engager)

### Learning Strategies

In responses to a request to describe how their participation in eBay had affected their attitudes about their own skills, distinctions between the participants in the three ATLAS groups were recognized. Although representatives of the Navigators, Problem Solvers, and Engagers were found in each of the response category types, their descriptions when giving the same answer were different. Aside from the category of no influence responses, differences were found in the favorable response category along with the categories of reinforced beliefs and negative attitudes.

Among those participants who said eBay participation had affected them in a positive fashion, there were 50 Navigators (24.9%), 95 Problem Solvers (47.3%), and 56 Engagers (27.9%). Although these representations closely matched the distribution in the total study, the themes throughout the answers from people in each ATLAS group differed. The Navigators viewed themselves as more successful researchers, shoppers, or bidders than their Problem Solver and Engager counterparts which all pointed to their ability to research topics using external tools such



as the eBay website. Two important learning strategies of Navigators are Identification of Resources and Critical Use of Resources these provide the ability to "know how to locate and use the best information for them" (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 10). Several Navigators divulged their perceptions of being successful researchers, shoppers, or bidders on eBay. For example,

I am VERY confident on my skills to research and make informed decisions. (35-year-old female)

It has helped me develop more skill in using search words to find what I am looking for. (35-year-old male)

It has been fun to test my decision-making skills and also my ability to locate an item using words; I've had to work on my organizational skills. (38-year-old female)

The people in this Navigator group were more self-conscious and placed a greater burden on themselves to succeed than the people in the other two ATLAS groups. According to their comments, these participants appeared to be more vigilant and critical of themselves even when mentioning positive influences about their own skills. "Navigators are so preoccupied with achievement and success that in some cases they can tend to be overcritical of themselves" (Willyard, 2000, p. 120). The Navigators who responded seemed to be measuring themselves against a yardstick of their own creation.

I do my best to make sure all my correspondence is void of spelling errors. Spell check and a dictionary keep me from looking foolish. (35-year-old female)

I feel that I was more knowledgeable about things than I thought I was, and that I could learn to do things easier than expected. (26-year-old female)

I feel more confident in bidding now. At first I was afraid I would goof up. (58-year-old female)

In addition, the Navigators were more likely than Problem Solvers or Engagers to give a negative response for their description of how eBay participation had influenced their attitudes about their own skills. Of the eight people who gave this type of response, three-fourths (six) were Navigators. These learners are strivers who desire to learn the best that they are able to and whose concentration on success may lead them to feel like failures as their comments reflected:

I am not as knowledgeable as I thought and have asked for assistance many times from various sources. (67-year-old male)

I am in need of tutoring. Want to list items to sell, not sure I can figure it out on my own. (48-year-old female)

I know I suck on the computer but as an intelligent human being I find things all the time that could be changed for a better way of going through a process. (40-year-old male)

Sometimes have felt defeated...especially when you play by the book and a seller screws you. (43-year-old female)

When describing how their participation in eBay has influenced their attitudes about their own skills, the comments from the Problem Solvers revealed an entirely different set of trends. According to their remarks, these people tended to be more confident of themselves and their selling skills than Navigators and Engagers. Problem Solvers are "vivacious and thrive on spontaneity and creativity" (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 13) and the fast-paced online auction site appeared to be just the place for these confident learners.

I carefully assessed what I knew and what I needed to learn, and made it a priority to learn them well. I am extremely talented at writing auction pages, and taking excellent photos. It keeps the clients coming back, again and again. (35-year-old female)

I'm pretty good at getting what I want at an auction. I would say that I win about 75% of the auctions that I really go after now. (40-year-old male)

WOW!! Can I make money!! I have a good eye for detail and a bargain. Selling is fun!! (37-year-old female)

I receive a lot of positive feedback on how I communicate and deal with others so it makes me feel good about my communication skills. I also win a lot of my bids that I really want at good prices. It's all been positive on all my attitudes. (40-year-old female)

Problem Solvers are storytellers. As with all of the previous questions, they were once again inclined to provide more detail than the people in the two other ATLAS groups.

They frequently described in great specificity their positive attitudes about their own skills. Typical detailed remarks from the Problem Solvers included:

I am over 50. My first experience with a computer involved data cards, and a computer larger than a house. While I have tried to be open to change, the information curve in this area has become overwhelming. I feel good about myself that I can enjoy my hobby. (53-year-old male)

I have always been skilled in computer use, but eBay has made me realize that I have commercial skills as well. I've always hated selling things person to person. The ability to sell over the computer has made me start a business locally as well as on eBay. (42-year-old female)

eBay participation has been so much fun and I've learned a tremendous amount. My computer skills as well as my communication skills have blossomed, I'm more organized, very immediate with payments, and I follow through to the end. It feels good! (47-year-old female)

I am learning all the time and the net, eBay is another tool for me. It had been a good thing and maybe I know more than I thought I did--but tomorrow is another day. (44-year-old male)

The Engagers described how their participation in eBay had affected their attitudes about their own skills in different ways than the Navigators and Problem Solvers. The Engager remarks found in the category of positive comments had a decidedly greater flavor of the importance of interaction with others and satisfaction through the eBay process than those of the other two ATLAS groups. In that "interaction and collaboration are major motivators for entering into the learning task" (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p.

14) for Engagers, the value that they placed on participation was no surprise. Engager notes which pertained to interaction and collaboration are found in these examples:

Others I know are amazed at what I can do and all the things I tell them I do on eBay and the marvelous buys. (53-year-old female)

I am much more confident. Just like now, I'm all by myself and had not qualms about getting on the net without anyone here to help. (52-year-old female)

I feel much wiser in the ways of people and I feel good about my ability to participate on eBay as a veteran. (Male; no age provided)

All in all it is a great learning session with not only others, but with SELF. I am a positive person and I certainly am not over with learning. (64-year-old female)

It's something my husband and I can work on together. (31-year-old female)

"If Engagers have begun a learning activity that they find rewarding or enjoyable, they will completely immerse themselves in the activity to be able to fully experience the joy or satisfaction of a job well done" (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 14). Several Engagers who participated in this study listed their satisfaction or pride as important attitudes about their own skills through participating in eBay activities. Sample comments from the Engagers who displayed their pride and satisfaction included:

I've never done anything like this so I'm proud of myself. (18-year-old female)

I knew I was capable of increasing my computer skills--I just didn't want to take the time to learn. It made learning fun for me. (42-year-old male)

I take great satisfaction in seeing many of my items sell for more than others because I take the time to learn about the items I am selling, and I believe it shows in my writeup. I also intend to major in English, which also helps. (28-year-old male)

It did make me a little proud that I taught my husband to use eBay, instead of the other way around (like it normally is). (54-year-old female)

### Summary

Four main categories of responses were revealed by the findings when the participants were asked to describe how their participation in eBay had influenced their attitudes about their own skills. The four categories were positive influence (55.3%), no additional influence (37.9%), reinforcement of previous beliefs (4.2%), and negative influence (2.1%).

Differences between the themes throughout the answers from those in the positive influence group existed between Navigators, Problem Solvers, and Engagers. The Navigators showed their perceptions of being successful researchers although they also appeared to be more self-conscious and critical of themselves. Problem Solvers demonstrated confidence in their answers and again proved to be storytellers who provided more detailed answers than the

Navigators and Engagers. Engagers' remarks divulged the value they place on interaction with others and on satisfaction and pride in their learning processes.

#### Attitudes About Self

When asked to describe how their participation in eBay had influenced their attitudes about themselves as a person, the study participants provided a host of answers. Although their answers had individual uniqueness, they could be grouped into four main classifications. The first classification was the respondents who had (a) become more aware of something about themselves as a result of eBay participation. The second classification came from the people who (b) felt favorably influenced about themselves as a person while the third group (c) felt no influence. The fourth classification came from a small group of participants who (d) felt personally validated in their previous beliefs by the eBay auction process.

Although many people described how they had been influenced by participating in eBay activities, the largest group reported that eBay had not influenced them as a person in any way. Almost one-half (46.3) of the total participants described feeling this way. However, these people had multiple ways of communicating that eBay had no influence on their attitudes about themselves as a person. Many people simply said, "no", "not applicable", or "it

hasn't". However, several people felt that this was a ridiculous question to ask and responded as follows:

It hasn't, I don't mean to be rude but are you nuts!!! What kind of a question is that??!! (40-year-old male Navigator)

I don't believe it has influenced my attitudes at all. (43-year-old male Navigator)

I shop, therefore I am? I don't think so! As above, shopping doesn't impact how I feel about myself--my self-esteem is not wrapped in consumer attitudes! (49-year-old female Problem Solver)

Oh come on! now you are sounding like those reporters who stand outside of disasters and ask people how do they feel about the death of their whole family. it just a computer not the answer to the meaning of life! (53-year-old female Problem Solver)

eBay is a tool, self is self. (44-year-old female Engager)

As a person? Are you people serious? We are talking about the same eBay here, right? The online auction? Personally, I'd have to say eBay has salvaged my existence from the depths of near-suicidal depression, and strongly influenced my decision to stop smoking crack, but other than that...not much effect....Please note the sarcasm here. (20-year-old male Engager)

The next most populated classification of responses to this request came from the group of people who described how participation in eBay had influenced their attitudes about themselves personally in a favorable or positive way. The 146 (38.4%) people in this category described being affected favorably by the eBay process. Although they all replied in a positive fashion, the personal modifications credited to



eBay were very diverse. Some felt more confident about themselves as people while others described themselves as having better skills. Other people felt better, happier, proud, more independent, or more in control. While their answers were unique to each individual, all answers were positive, and many were conversational in tone. Typical descriptions from the people who said eBay participation had influenced them favorably toward their attitudes about themselves as a person included:

Bidding can be emotional. It is satisfying that I can be disciplined and rarely want an item so much that I am willing to pay more than I think it is worth just because someone outbid me. (42-year-old female Navigator)

I feel real good about the collection I've accumulated, which I could not have accomplished without eBay. (56-year-old male Navigator)

I can go out and enjoy what I'm doing and not be concerned about it. Obtain things that I normally wouldn't or didn't have the interest or knowledge to obtain. As I said previously, the computer opens up a wide variety of opportunities in one small package. Convenience is the key especially without having to travel from your home. (57-year-old male Problem Solver)

I share some of my experiences on eBay with coworkers or friends or relatives. I try to avoid the image of being a geek or computer nerd or someone obsessed with eBay. Since a large percentage of the world still doesn't use the Internet or computers I want to be able to feel at ease with those people. (36-year-old male Problem Solver)

It has made me realize that I've got a wide range of interests and really do enjoy finding unique

and fun items that I otherwise would not have found. (26-year-old male Engager)

It gives me a sense of accomplishment to be able to be home with our child but still be able to bring funds into our home. I went from teaching to being a stay at home mom and the transition of not having a check was a hard issue. It is nice that I can make a fair amount of money and still be able to stay home. (24-year-old female Engager)

Of all the people who participated in the study, one group revealed that their eBay involvement had made them aware of something about themselves that was previously unknown. These 45 (11.8%) people reportedly gleaned information about themselves they either found surprising, curious, or distressing which is a reflective process known as transformative learning (Mezirow, 1990). "Transformative learning involves a particular function of reflection: reassessing the presuppositions on which our beliefs are based and acting on insights derived from the transformed meaning perspective that results from such reassessments" (p. 18). Contrary to those who feel that it is ridiculous to assume that engaging in a process such as eBay can have an influence on a person's self-concept, others pointed out that the eBay experience can have a great impact on a person. For example, "just the fact that I have found out I can do the Internet and do eBay has been a boost for me about myself. I have been a person with dyslexia so this is an accomplishment for me" (53-year-old female Engager).

Other comments also demonstrate that reflecting on this process can lead to a new personal awareness:

Well, honestly, it has made me see that I can lose control in competitive situations but also that I can handle this type of pressure and deal with it. (26-year-old male Navigator)

I continue to be cautious in terms of spending money within my budget and cautious about the type of people that communicate online. (45-year-old female Navigator)

I find that I have a lot to offer people... something that 27 years of a marriage that emotionally starved me, could never do!! (52-year-old female Problem Solver)

In some ways, I learned that there is a downside to me--that I have the capability of doing this compulsively and to the detriment of other things in my life. I found myself somewhat addicted to it in an unhealthy way--and part of the solution was making it my full time business. On the other hand, it was what was needed to get me to see that the job I was in was not really making me happy, that I needed a more flexible and independent setup, at least for now. It's also been an interesting lesson in discovering a whole new side of myself I didn't know I had--a salesman side. (39-year-old female Problem Solver)

I do like winning, and successfully sniping an auction can be an adrenalin rush. (35-year-old male Problem Solver)

I have learned that I have to be very careful because I can become overwhelmed. It's so simple and uncomplicated that I can get carried away with the "wants". (54-year-old female Engager)

I learned how gullible I can be about some things. I also learned that I don't have as much control over my impulse buying as I thought I did. (42-year-old male Engager)

A final classification of responses came from the participants who felt validated about their feelings of themselves by participating in eBay activities. Although a very small group, these 12 (3.2%) people were resolute about eBay's reinforcement of their prior personal beliefs. Adult learners' self-concepts are very valuable to their learning processes, and "adults have a self-concept of being responsible for their own decisions, for their own lives" (Knowles, et al., 1998, p. 65). It was important for those in this group to have their self-concepts validated by participation in eBay activities.

I've reaffirmed that I'm an astute business person and supreme "bargainer". (52-year-old male Navigator)

When it come to participation in eBay, it gives me positive reinforcement to my attitude. (40-year-old female Problem Solver)

I have always been an eager person to learn new ideas and challenges and this confirms it. I am an old retired Army Officer that flew helicopters in the military, so you know how I am. (63-year-old male Engager)

### Learning Strategies

The Navigators, Problem Solvers, and Engagers varied in their responses pertaining to how the participants described eBay's influence on their attitudes about themselves as a person. Even though the people in each ATLAS group provided the same basic answers, differences between the groups were found in the classified group of favorable responses along

with the responses that signaled new awareness. These differences in the word selection, phrase composition, or response tone of these two categories were detected among the responses from the three ATLAS groups.

In the response classification that included favorable influences as a result of eBay involvement, the ratio of Navigators, Problem Solvers, and Engagers was extremely close to the ratio of the entire study representation. Of the people who had a positive view of eBay's influence of themselves as a person, 28.0% were Navigators, 45.5% were Problem Solvers, and 25.9% were Engagers. Although they responded in like form, the themes behind the answers were different across the learning strategy groups.

The Navigators reported their attitudes about their own skills had more influence on their research capabilities and their abilities to act as a resource for other people. Navigators have the ability to pinpoint and expose the best information for their learning needs (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 10). Some of the people in this group also revealed that accumulating external items was more important than the internal feelings they had. In addition, many of the Navigator comments had an undertone of self-consciousness.

I feel good about it because I can search around and find things efficiently. (45-year-old female)

My self confidence has been bolstered tremendously. I also find it very satisfying to

be able to get an item at a very good price. (40-year-old male)

I feel kind of "freakish" because no one else I know eBays and they all kind of looked down on me for doing it. They make comments about how much money I spend and how I must like to gamble and that's why I like to eBay. They characterize eBayers as losers and I feel like one too when they do. I feel like an expert on eBay though and I am proud that if someone should ever ask me to, I can show them the "ins and outs". (39-year-old female)

It has made me feel more capable of getting connected with items I am interested in. (25-year-old male)

I feel better when I can answer questions and help other with unique knowledge I may have amassed. I was helping out on the Ritz Camera talk site answering questions about photographic equipment and leading people to other sources of information. (45-year-old male)

Satisfied when I outbid another person; I can feel stupid when I buy a piece of junk. (19-year-old male)

The Problem Solvers used different words and phrases and their comments had a different tone when describing their favorable attitudes about themselves as a result of eBay participation. "Problem Solvers thrive in a learning environment that promotes experimentation through practical experience and hands-on activities" (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 13), which is an ideal match with eBay's online auction format. Their answers appeared to be much more confident than the other groups, and they are evidently delighted with their business acumen and entrepreneurial spirit. They

continue to be the storytellers of the ATLAS groups and often told a story instead of providing a short answer.

I don't drive....never have (strange-right?). This gives me a way to get outside my home without truly leaving it. I feel I get adult stimulation from a different source for about an hour every day. I love talking with people and it just plain and simple makes me happy. (48-year-old female)

Well I'll put it like this. My husband and I have had our computer for about 2 years now and when we got it I knew nothing about them and now as my friends and family are getting computers and getting on the Internet, they are all coming to me for help. I keep telling them the best thing to do is hook up and go to town. You always have the back button to push and you can always disconnect if you get somewhere you don't want to be. So I think the computer and the Internet has broaden my horizons as a person! (25-year-old female)

I am confident I can make money on the Internet. I can run a business on here if I so desire. (47-year-old male)

Oh, it's made me feel much, much better about myself. I always thought it would be wonderful to have a used book store or an antiques business, and I've always loved collecting. I'm very proud of how my skills have developed in those areas. I also get a real boost from reading the "feedback" comments I get from sellers I've dealt with. That's one of the best parts of eBay, discovering that the sellers feel as happy dealing with me as I do with them. I really feel my efforts to work with them are appreciated. (47-year-old female)

I have learned to be a more agreeable person when dealing with people near and far, and to consider the thought processes and feelings of others even on the net more than ever before. (70-year-old male)

I am the greatest. (38-year-old male)



On the other hand, Engagers had still other ways of saying that their eBay participation had a positive effect on their attitudes about themselves as people. Interaction with other people continued to be a dominant theme in the Engager comments. Since these learners "seek out activities that provide the greatest opportunity for engagement" (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 14), it was of no surprise to find the responses from participating Engagers full of references to other people. In addition, fulfilling a need appeared to be a strong personal by-product of eBay participation for the Engagers. Their attitudes about themselves seemed to frequently revolve around some type of immediate need that some of them had. In learning situations, "the Engager's focus is on meeting their internal needs rather than meeting external standards" (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 15) which holds constant in the eBay auction setting. Some Engager comments that described how participating in eBay had influenced their attitudes about themselves were:

I have always been a confident person in terms of success. Now that I am successful at eBay, people are very interested and it makes me feel good that people are impressed with what I am doing. (27-year-old female)

I now enjoy e-mailing several friends and professional contacts in which I met while conducting business on eBay. (23-year-old male)

I am on a member list which involves scouting collectors and they bring up eBay from time to time. I would usually ignore the line of



commentary that flows from these "discussions" but I find I now express myself on certain subjects, especially when people complain about how eBay bidders who bid at the last second are costing them things they thought they were going to win. (58-year-old male)

I'm feeling more productive and like I have some purpose now. I was losing that feeling from being home with 2 small children all day. (31-year-old female)

I try to be very honest in my dealings and go out of my way to do so. I always try to be friendly and polite no matter what the situation may be. I find from this that I have grown much more tolerant of others and have achieved a greater patience level and understanding of others. (Male; no age provided)

In addition to differences between the ATLAS groups in the category of positive responses, differences were also distinguished in the category of descriptions that revealed a new awareness on the part of the participants. Of all the people who were made aware of something about themselves as a result of eBay participation, 14 (31.8%) were Navigators, 17 (38.6%) were Problem Solvers, and 12 (27.3%) were Engagers. However, dissimilar trends and themes were woven throughout the answers given by the people in the three ATLAS groups.

In the group that reported they became aware of a new personal trait while reflecting on their eBay participation, the Navigators had different responses than their Problem Solver and Engager counterparts. Navigators tended to place value on rule-setting and self-control in their answers.

Navigators desire a "structured learning environment by providing schedules and deadlines" (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 11). Thus, rules and enforced regulations are important to Navigators. They also tended to be cautious and tentative when participating in a learning activity new or unfamiliar to them and feedback appeared to be vital to the Navigators. "These learners also value prompt feedback" (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 11), and formal assessments are important to them. These Navigator qualities were illustrated in these comments:

I realize that I am very cautious with my purchases. (24-year-old female)

I have established limits on a item. If the bid is going over then I drop out of the action and if I have time I check to see what the item finally went for. (67-year-old male)

It's made me more aware of being nice, positive and honest. You never want negative feedback so you're always trying to do your best. (37-year-old female)

I realize that this could become addictive and that I have had to put some serious restraint on my purchasing. It has generated a more understanding attitude of how activities can become addictive to some people. (44-year-old female)

Participating Problem Solvers became cognizant of a different set of characteristics which were revealed as they described how participating in eBay had influenced their attitudes about themselves as people. The Problem Solvers revealed how they formed a propensity to go overboard in

their zeal and enthusiasm of the eBay experience. Since they flourish in an atmosphere of experimentation, spontaneity, and exploration (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 13), it is not surprising that these learners recognized a need to proceed with more caution. As always, the Problem Solvers appear to never resist the opportunity to tell a story. The following remarks were indicative of Problem Solver summations regarding personal awareness:

I didn't realize I would get so persistent when I really wanted a particular item. (44-year-old female)

It's exciting to win. I get involved in the excitement too much some times. (47-year-old male)

The only way it has influenced me is to bring to my attention my obsessive nature. I tend to run and check my auctions at least twice a day and sit at the computer when I'm bidding on an item I really want. (52-year-old female)

Engagers "learn best when they are actively engaged in a meaningful manner" (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 13). For this reason, they learn best when they perceive a need to learn about something. The Engagers in the study who described how their participation in eBay had affected their personal attitudes told a different tale than the Navigators and Problem Solvers. The Engagers in this category revealed how they became aware of the importance that fulfilling an immediate need was during their eBay processes. Frequently,

these people mentioned the satisfaction of winning an auction item and their determination to win at all cost.

I have learned that if I want something then I need to go after it. (24-year-old female)

I've noticed just how competitive I can be. (45-year-old female)

Good in some areas but not good in the area of addiction--eBay and all the bidding and buying and selling can be very addicting. I have an addicting personality so doing eBay can be stressful. (55-year-old male)

I am convinced I must like to pay the most! (45-year-old female)

### Summary

In response to a request to describe how their participation in eBay had influenced their attitudes about themselves as people, an array of responses was discovered. A large portion (46.3%) of the participants indicated that eBay had no influence on their attitudes about themselves. Some indicated that this was a ridiculous avenue to pursue while others gave responses that demonstrated reflection that resulted in a new personal awareness. The responses were grouped into four main categories: responses pertaining to new awareness on the part of the respondents (11.8%), responses dealing with positive eBay influences (38.4%), and, responses that confirmed a prior belief of the participants (3.2%).

Variation in the two categories concerning new awareness and positive influence were distinguished within the three ATLAS groups of Navigators, Problem Solvers, and Engagers. Although responses were found from all three ATLAS groups across the various categories, distinct differences between the words, phrases, and themes arose to separate the people in the learning strategy groups.

In the category of responses pertaining to positive eBay influences, the Navigators gave answers that reflected the importance on research and being a resource to other people. They also revealed their propensity to value the accumulation of external items. The Problem Solvers' answers appeared to be more confident, especially in the area of commerce. They continued to be the most accomplished storytellers of all the ATLAS groups. The Engagers tended to proclaim their penchant for interacting with other people and of their desire to fulfill a personal need.

The respondents' descriptions regarding personal attitudes also illuminated differences between the ATLAS groups in the area categorized by new awareness of some kind. The Navigators' responses revealed a tendency for them to set rules and to exert self-control, and their desire for feedback was evident. The Problem Solvers became aware that they tended to go overboard in their enthusiasm

of the eBay process. They continued their pattern of telling a story instead of merely answering the question. The Engagers were inclined to divulge how they became aware of the importance of fulfilling an internal need of winning the auctions at all cost.

## CHAPTER 8

### EXPERIENCING eBay

#### Positive Experiences

In order to discover the participants' descriptions of experiencing eBay, they were asked to describe their learning processes related to both positive and negative eBay experiences. The participants described their positive experiences on eBay and what they had learned from those experiences with generosity and enthusiasm. Experiences are a vital component of adult learners' learning process and are one of the main elements that separate adult learners from child learners; the experiences act as a resource from which adult learners may draw (Knowles, 1970). In previous questions of this study, a notable number of people elected to give no answer or minimal comment. However, when asked about their positive experiences on eBay, only 10.2% of the participants gave no answer. Another 21.8% gave general answers about their positive experiences on eBay with "I have had positive experiences" or simply "positive" as the typical answer. However, most participants reached deeply into their reservoir of experiences and gave sincerely of their time to answer the question thoroughly and thoughtfully.

Doubtlessly, the single most important ingredient in the eBay recipe is the people involved. Whether they told

tales of people in general, particular people, special memories of people, people in hardship, or services provided by people, the participants clearly communicated the importance of other people in their positive eBay experiences. Other participants told satisfied stories of something they received as a result of participating in eBay that resulted in a positive experience. In addition, some participants felt as though they got good bargains while others liked the feedback they received or were happy with the item they purchased.

Of those who reported that other people were important to their positive eBay experience, five groups emerged from the data. One group spoke of (a) people in general while another highlighted (b) specific persons. A third group mentioned (c) memories that they or a correspondent had of certain people while a fourth group reported on (d) their own hardships or the hardships of other people. A fifth group appeared to be delighted with (e) people who had offered exceptional service to them.

Some experienced eBay in a positive way due to the actions of people in general. Of the total group of participants, 82 (21.5%) said that other people had been responsible for their positive experiences and their favorable attitudes toward eBay. Although they did not mention specific incidences, the people in this group



clearly felt as though positive contacts with other people were their best eBay experiences. The appreciation for other people that these respondents felt comes through clearly in their comments.

Almost all of my experiences have been positive. One of the most common is some of the great people I have met as a result. While we may not stay in contact, the interaction is neat in the respect that I would have never even known these people otherwise. (40-year-old male Navigator)

That there are a lot more honest people out there than there are dishonest. The "self-policing" aspect of the e-bay community is one of its biggest strengths. (52-year-old male Problem Solver)

It's hard to say what I learned from it, but I have enjoyed making acquaintance with people from Texas to Alaska to Florida. I've been selling women's magazines from the 1920's and 1930's. The people who buy them often have a reason for purchasing a particular issue and they share their stories. It's really fun. (42-year-old female Engager)

Another group was so taken with another person or persons that they mentioned them specifically. This group of 57 (14.9%) people recognized their positive eBay experience was due to one specific person or one particular couple. The participants in this group also frequently told stories of the relationship that had blossomed from mutual participation in eBay activities. Typical comments from the people who thanked specific persons included:

I sold a 3-wood to a person and he e-mailed me a week after he received it to let me know he used it to score an Eagle on a hole, that won his club

championship. It made me feel great to help another person, that I have never met. I learned that by selling things I do not use I can help others that may need the item. (31-year-old male Navigator)

I recently bought an item from a lady in a town nearby where I grew up. When I commented on it we had an exchange of email and we discovered we are cousins by marriage--a new cousin I never knew I had. (48-year-old female Navigator)

I "met" a young woman in California by helping her with a description of a doll she was selling, so she could be factual. I "met" another woman who makes flower arrangements for a hobby, and she shared her life story with me. It's just fun to learn about people--and there are so many good people in this world. (55-year-old female Problem Solver)

I bid on a bear and lost. Another buyer who had that bear offered to sell me one without having to go through the hassle of bidding and risk getting outbid. Through our e-mails, we found we had a few things in common and are keeping in touch, even though we live several hundred miles away. (24-year-old female Problem Solver)

I sold a car to a couple in Michigan. I got to know them very well and have stayed in touch. They drove down here, picked up the car, and then drove to my museum to see it. Also, since it was a 11 hour trip for them they spent the weekend. (45-year-old male Engager)

I bid on a 1 caret cluster ring for my husband. I was also sort of looking for a solitaire for myself. In talking with the seller of the cluster, I found out about a diamond enhancing process that allows a person to own a much larger diamond that looks good for a better price. After reading on the process, I bought one from him, and I love it! I've also made a friend. My husband is a Country/Wester singer, and recently had a new CD released, and the seller bought two of the CD's from me. I've recommended him to some of my friends, and one of them has bought an engagement ring from him, so we've got a good thing going

here, all because of eBay. (40-year-old female Engager)

Through special memories and hard times, eBay participants have come to rely on each other. One group of 10 people (2.6%) described their most positive eBay experiences as those where they sold or purchased an item of sentimental value while another group of eight (2.1%) described how adversity connected them to other people in a positive way. Remarks typical of the group whose positive eBay experiences took a sentimental journey included:

It is very rewarding to find something so individual for the person you are purchasing the gift for. For example...my 29-year-old sister adored Snoopy when she was a child. She was transferred 1500 miles from home and her husband had to stay behind (for almost a year!!) and finish up things at his current job before he could join her at their new home....Well, I was able to find her an adorable, like new, large plush Snoopy to have something to hold on to during those long nights. Very rewarding!! (31-year-old female Navigator)

I was 10 when my grandmother bought me my first comic book. Last month, I found a mint condition (truly mint, no B.S.) copy of that very same book about a week before my grandmother passed away, and paid more than market value to get it. When I received the comic in the mail right after her funeral, it brought back lots of happy memories I had of her. Winning that auction brought me a lot of joy. (40-year-old male Problem Solver)

Through correspondence, I've made some great friends. One of the nicest things was when I was able to locate and buy comics on the character Boots. My mom's nickname was Boots (after that character). The day she died, I won those comics. It means a lot to me. (47-year-old female Engager)

Remarks from those who connected in a positive fashion with other eBayers during difficult times included:

Last year I ordered a set of golf clubs from a seller on ebay, this was my second order from him. The first order had gone really well, so I had e-mailed him and ask him to hurry the order for me as I had a couple of important tournaments coming up. He e-mailed me back, thanking me for my kind words, and said of course he would do his best. Well several weeks past and my clubs did not arrive, my tournaments came and went and I got angry. I e-mailed this fellow back and let him know how disappointed I was in him and that I felt he had really let me down. He e-mailed me back and apologized saying his daughter was sick and he had been spending time in the hospital with her. He let me know that the clubs had been shipped but I could return them for a full refund if I desired. I learned that at the other end of my eBay transactions are real live Mom and Dads trying to do the best that they can living, loving and taking care of their families. Certainly no different than me! (44-year-old male Navigator)

I am a cancer patient, very ill 1 year ago when I started and unable to work. This is the reason eBay was so important to me, I had to earn a living without leaving my home. I borrowed the money for the computer and needed programs and I have been able to support myself and pay my medical bills. (59-year-old female Problem Solver)

I wanted a piece of mourning jewelry and after calling a collector friend I decided to bid like crazy til I got it....It was worth it, it was meaningful to help me with my loss of my mom and I have bought several other pieces to give to friends to have suffered losses. I learned to share both feelings, money and my interest in eBay. (58-year-old Engager)

Several participants had a positive experience on eBay through people from whom they had received excellent

service. These 23 people (6.0%) described their most favorable eBay experience through stories about their benefactors as being very accomplished at customer service. Some responses from those who described a positive experience as one where they received good service from another person included:

I accused a seller of fraud because he refused to answer my e-mail, his computer was down. He sent me the item free as compensation for my frustration with him. This has greatly increased my tolerance of others and has solved many apparent log jams. (67-year-old male Navigator)

A seller forgot to send me an item after being paid for it. He then couldn't find the item. He returned my money, and sent me a gift worth approx. \$50 as an apology (unnecessary, but unbelievably sweet of him). (38-year-old female Problem Solver)

A seller sent me the wrong doll (a brunette, instead of the blonde that I had bid on and won). He obviously shipped the blonde to the high bidder of the brunette auction, because he no longer had it. (That winner must have wanted to keep it). The seller had to go to the eBay auctions again to find me a blonde (only available thru secondary market as it's a closed edition, several years old). He paid almost 3 times what I paid him for the same doll. All this for a \$5 sale! I learned that honest people don't have to see you face-to-face to do the right thing. (54-year-old female Engager)

Although many participants described their positive eBay experiences as those that involved other people, several posted stories in regard to something tangible they received as a result of eBay participation. These people described how they acquired a good bargain, a quality

auction item, or positive feedback as a result of eBay involvement.

Some developed their positive attitude about eBay as a result of purchasing an item at a value price or bargain price. These 29 people (7.6%) were proud of their sales transaction or their purchases and described them in their comments.

I got a tremendous bargain on a vintage baseball from a collector with dubious credentials (feedback). He agreed to use eBay's escrow system for the sale and, as a result, I bought a great ball for a fraction of it's value. (56-year-old male Navigator)

I love making buyers happy. I feel good about myself and them. It is empowering to find a pair of boots for \$1.00 and sell them for \$40.00 and the winner is so happy they thank me over and over for their good deal. I am happy, I made money. They are happy--they got a "dream come true item" at what they considered a "steal" it is a win-win situation. (37-year-old female Problem Solver)

I like to check out high cost items and think how much of a bargain I'm getting by obtaining the item thru eBay. (41-year-old female Engager)

As a result of participating in eBay activities, two other groups of respondents emerged. One was the group of people who described a positive eBay experience as a successful transaction where they bought or sold a specific item. Another group was delineated by their fondness for favorable evaluations on eBay's Feedback Forum. The group whose positive experience occurred due to satisfaction in regards to a particular item numbered 33 people (8.6%). The

other group's included responses from 15 people (3.9%).  
Examples of the descriptions from respondents were as follows:

I bid on, won and received a pair of boots within one week. I needed them for Halloween, and the seller got them to me in time to wear. They were hard to find in shops and once I had them, they turned a lot of heads. It would have taken me hours to find these boots if I had to search at the mall. Instead, I found them at 2 in the morning from a seller in Ohio. I learned that just about anything is a click away. (25-year-old female Navigator)

Got my wife a birthday present that she wanted. An old Masterpiece Theatre series that was no longer available. Found 3 or 4 auctions for the item and successfully bid in one of them. Felt really good about getting her an item that is really hard to find. Learned to check eBay before making a purchase elsewhere. (55-year-old male Problem Solver)

My first "win" on eBay was a movie "Thumbelina" for my 3 year old granddaughter. It arrived today and it came from Canada. That was neat. The person had packaged it well. When I got inside, he had also wrapped it in pretty blue tissue paper and tied some pretty ribbon on it. My little granddaughter squealed with delight and had a great time unwrapping it. I thought that was really thoughtful. As for learning experience, my opinion that there are many nice people in this world if you just keep your eyes and heart open, was reinforced. (52-year-old female Engager)

Examples of the descriptions from respondents who had a positive experience with feedback from other eBay users included:

People have taken the time to email back after you have left feedback that was positive...just to



thank you for doing that....says a lot about someone. (43-year-old female Navigator)

I recently sold an Indian basket. The purchaser left feedback indicating I was knowledgeable, honest and trustworthy. (60-year-old male Navigator)

I like getting positive feedback for being a good customer. (32-year-old female Problem Solver)

### Learning Strategies

The people representing the three ATLAS groups wrote of different perceptions as they described a positive experience that they had on eBay and what they learned from the experience. Differences between the Navigators, Problem Solvers and Engagers in the responses that pertained to (a) other people on eBay, (b) specific auction items bought or sold, (c) the Feedback Forum, (d) good customer service, and (e) eBay bargains or good financial deals.

The Navigators were much more likely to list a positive eBay experience that concerned a successful monetary transaction, positive feedback, or good customer service than their Problem Solver and Engager companions. Among the people who reported a positive experience on eBay as one that involved a successful financial deal, over one-half (57.1%) were Navigators as compared with 39.3% for Problem Solvers and only 3.6% for Engagers. The bargain-hunters of the eBay population described their successes in these ways:

I got a ring and pinion set for 1/2 price new. I got the part, and it is brand new. I saved over



\$100 on this part, and that made me happy. I learned that you do not have to be at the mercy of junkyards and new part dealers all the time. People on the net might just have the thing you want sitting in their garage and are willing to get rid of it at a reasonable price. (31-year-old male)

It's just a matter of acquiring quite a few really good deals. I've bought 4 computers over eBay (and one over Yahoo! auctions), and all at amazingly good prices. I've probably bid on 70 or 80 in the process of acquiring the 5, but I let 'em go when they go too high. (53-year-old male)

Won something for cheap. I learned that sometimes, you can get a bargain, so it doesn't hurt to bid low. (39-year-old female)

Those Navigators who reported a positive incidence on eBay as having to do with affirmative feedback they had received or given as a result of an auction made up almost three-fourths (71.4%) of the people who listed feedback as important. The other 28.6% were Problem Solvers, and no Engagers mentioned feedback as being an issued associated with a positive eBay experience. Since Navigators are learners who "value prompt feedback" (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 11), the eBay Feedback Forum is very satisfying to them.

Probably my first transaction. I responded promptly to e-mails, send my payment, the item arrived, I liked it and left positive feedback. When I received positive feedback, I knew I had this thing down pat. (34-year-old female)

Getting the positive feedback from people who do not even know me confirms how important responsibility in business transactions are for others to form opinions of an individual. (44-year-old female)

The Navigators also differed from Problem Solvers and Engagers when they described their experiences with quality customer service as favorable. Among those who reported their positive eBay experience to be connected with good assistance, almost one-half (47.8%) were Navigators. The remaining people in the group were divided evenly between 26.1% for Problem Solvers and 26.1% for Engagers. A sense of fairness and abiding within pre-set rules is important to these types of learners who "like to be in control of their surroundings" (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 10). These Navigators viewed good customer service as a responsibility and as an important part of the eBay regulations. Typical Navigator references to good customer service involved these quotations:

I bid on 5 Stockhausen records, after winning one, the seller sent me an email suggesting that we wait until all 5 auctions were finished so that I could save postage. I thought that this was a nice gesture, I ended up winning all 5 and was very pleased with the entire transaction. It generated positive feelings towards eBay and other users etc. It made feel that the users of eBay aren't necessarily in it just for the profit making potential but almost as a kind of service. (26-year-old male)

I purchased a \$40,000 Dodge Viper from a person in California I'd never met or heard of and the money and car exchanged hands in a professional and courteous manner where both the seller and I were satisfied and would do business with one another again with no reservations. (52-year-old male)

I had received my item that I had won and it was broken so I e-mailed the seller back described

what was wrong and he sent me back some of my payment. (22-year-old female)

The participating Problem Solvers differed from the Navigators and Engagers in two important ways. First, they were more apt to described their positive eBay experience as it pertained to a specific item. Over one-half (54.8%) of the people who mentioned a positive experience that involved a specific item were Problem Solvers which contrasted with 16.1% for Navigators and 29.0% for Engagers. Problem Solvers "test assumptions to evaluate the specifics and generalizability within a learning situation" (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 12). Thus, they are uncomfortable with sweeping generalizations and "blanket statements" (p. 12). The attention to detail as these Problem Solvers told a story was evident in their responses of positive eBay experiences that involved specific auction items:

Winning an item that had meaning to me and my husband. It was a Bob Timberlake print titled, Jerry's Place, and it shows a log cabin in the mountains. Our dream is to own a log cabin in the mountains and my husbands name is Jerry. Every time I look at that item, it helps me stay focused on our dream. I think I found that item as fate and now I think about \$ before spending it. I am now putting more in savings. (34-year-old female)

I bid and won an item that ended up being covered by the New York Times. That was pretty cool....My 15 minutes of fame. <http://www.nytimes.com/library/tech/99/09/biztech/technology/22guer.html> (35-year-old male)

I bought a Harley and learned how to ride. (56-year-old male)

The second important difference between the Problem Solvers and the people in the other two ATLAS groups was that the Problem Solvers were much more likely to mention a specific person or specific people when they listed their positive eBay experience. Of the people who listed certain others, almost two-thirds (65.5%) were Problem Solvers as compared with 7.3% for Navigators and 25.5% for Engagers. Although a few Problem Solvers mentioned people in general as having a positive influence on their positive eBay experience, most preferred to provide more exact references to others. Responses indicative of these Problem Solvers endorsements involved:

I had been outbid in the last few seconds of an auction for an item that had great sentimental meaning for myself and a friend. The buyer ended up rejecting the item because they didn't like the frame and the seller contacted me to see if I still wanted it. I did, and the seller settled on price that was my high bid (not that of the other buyer). It gave me sense of optimism that some things really do work out and I was grateful that even weeks after the item sold the seller had kept track of my interest and contacted me. That may have been simply sound business (since they didn't have to re-list) but it also seemed thoughtful.  
(41-year-old female)

I have made some friends with eBay and will be vacationing on New Year's (the Millennium) with a couple whom we purchased a trip from in New Orleans. (47-year-old male)

Hmmm...I'm having trouble narrowing it down! There are SO MANY! Maybe one thing that really makes me happy is that a dear friend of mine inherited this mishmash of jewelry and he knew nothing about it. He wouldn't have had a clue

what to do with it, what any of it even was. He might have gone the garage sale route just to get rid of it. Instead, he consigned it to me. I was able to identify some VERY valuable pieces in there and I listed those individually. I also put up several lots of lower end items or things I wasn't sure how they'd fare on eBay. So far we have made several THOUSAND dollars in sales--I get 40% of that--one piece alone went for over \$900. (There was a lot of junk there too--so that was sold as a lot and did fine. Even the broken jewelry was sold as a "craft lot." There is a buyer for everything it seems.) My friend ended up with more money from that jewelry than he would EVER have gotten selling it on his own or to a local dealer. (39-year-old female)

The Engagers in the group challenged their Navigator and Problem Solver comrades in one main area. The Engagers were more likely to list other people in general as the subjects of their positive experiences on eBay. Although the Navigators and Problems Solvers also occasionally mentioned other people in general, the Engagers were almost three times more likely than the Navigators and almost twice as likely as the Problem Solvers to do so. Of all the respondents who reported favorable eBay experiences with universal appreciation of humanity, 45.2% were Engagers, 20.9% were Problem Solvers, and 16.5% were Navigators. Apparently, many of these Engagers found people in general to be responsible for their pleasant eBay experiences as affiliating with other people is very important to Engagers as they learn. Typical Engager comments about human-kind in general included:

I have only had positive experiences on eBay and I've come to expect it. I've learned that the old fashioned hand shake still is alive and well on eBay with feedback forum. (53-year-old female)

I went to the charity page and saw a great many people selflessly helping one another. I was impressed by what I saw and was happy to contribute what I could in a particular instance. I learned that eBay is not ALL business. (28-year-old male)

eBay is a positive as I enjoy communicating with others around the world. I am amazed when I can send questions to Australia and get an answer in a minute. (61-year-old male)

### Summary

As a result of undergoing a positive experience on eBay, the participants listed their experiences and what they had learned from them. Some acknowledged the importance of other people to their favorable experiences through references to specific persons (14.9%), people in general (21.5%), people with memories to share (2.6%), people in times of adversity (2.1%), and people who gave good service (6.0%). Other participants perceived their positive eBay experiences as stemming from specific items they sold or acquired (8.6%), bargains that they made (7.6%), or feedback they received (3.9%). Although 19.6% of the respondents provided only general statements about positive experiences in vague terms, most of the participants took the time to describe their positive eBay events.

Navigators, Problem Solvers, and Engagers revealed different perceptions of their positive experiences on eBay and what they learned from them. Navigators tended to regard obtaining bargains, receiving good customer service, and obtaining positive evaluations as important to their positive experiences. Problem Solvers were commonly more detailed in their descriptions of favorable eBay happenings as they depicted specific items and specific people that made their experiences positive. Engagers were more likely than the people in the other two ATLAS groups to speak in ecumenical, sweeping terms of positive interactions with people in general when describing their affirmative experiences on eBay.

#### Negative Experiences

The study participants were asked to describe a negative experience that they incurred while participating in eBay activities. They also remarked on what they learned as a result of this experience. The term "transformational learning" was introduced by Mezirow (1990) and is used to describe

The process of becoming critically aware of how and why our presuppositions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand, and feel about our world and of making decisions or otherwise acting upon these new understandings. (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 14).

These participants had the capacity to take a negative eBay experience and transform it into a meaningful learning event. They recognized the experience for what it was and guided themselves through an entire learning process as they questioned the experience, reflected on it, and made decisions and judgements about it. They attached real meaning and learning to these everyday real-life learning experiences. In addition, they recalled these experiences and attached their new meaning in a report for this study questionnaire.

The respondents answered a request to think about a negative experience they had using eBay and to briefly describe that experience and what they learned as a result. Some described their negative experiences to be non-existent while others had many experiences and learning results to share. Over one-fourth (27.9%) of the participants professed that they had no negative experiences while engaging in eBay's auction processes. Other study participants described their negative experiences as (a) encounters that related to either the auctions themselves, (b) technical problems, (c) specific items, or (d) other people.

It was clear by the respondents' remarks that other people are still the most single influential component of the eBay auction process. Almost one-half (46.1%) of the



participants mentioned a negative experience where other people were the focus. Although problems with items, auctions, and technology were notable, the problems with other people were apparently the most irritating. Whether other people backed out of bids, sent the wrong item, were rude or inconsiderate, kept their money, or left negative feedback, these participants were thorough in their descriptions of other people's faults, mistakes, and habits. The following comments are characteristic of the responses from participants who had a negative eBay experience that involved other people:

In one case I wrote a seller asking about a system I was interested in because a couple of his claims were out of line for the rest of the description. The machine he described, for instance, was a machine I know to be 133 MHz (and which I was therefore interested in), but he claimed 266 MHz. I got back a really nasty reply attacking me for questioning what he wrote in his ad. As you might guess, I didn't bid. (53-year-old male Navigator)

When I first started using it, I went on a bidding frenzy and didn't keep good records. I thought I had everyone paid. I got a "nastygram" from the seller about not paying in a timely fashion, but the seller did not include the item number, amount or his address in his follow-up correspondence which made it impossible to determine what I owed to whom. I had to actually spend several hours one evening going back through ancient e-mails to find the original correspondence. I now keep better records. (42-year-old female Problem Solver)

I bought an item which was described in big bold letters as a "Glossy Photo". When it arrived, it was a relatively poor copy of a photo albeit on glossy paper. The seller indicated he had had

this item for years but my instincts tell me different. Anyway, down in the bowels of his description in small letters, I could have (and should have) noticed "hints" that this was not an original photo. When I got and wrote to the seller expressing my disappointment, he was unmoved. I ended up sending it back, he resold it, but I got back \$36 of an \$80 payout. What did I learn. Read the small print dummy, and ask questions if you aren't sure. Actually, I know this and have for 50+ years, but I got a little careless and forgot. Won't happen again though. (58-year-old male; no ATLAS group recorded)

Other people were not the only subjects of the participants' negative experiences. Several participants were annoyed or exasperated by an event that occurred during the auctions themselves. These 38 people (10.0%) described their adverse eBay experiences that occurred as a result of last minutes bidders, bidding wars with other eBay users, and bidding too high in an auction. The participants in this group also expressed their dismay at bidding in auctions that have a set base price placed on the item by the seller which is a type of auction called a "reserved price" auction. Comments that were typical of the group who had a negative eBay experience as a result of an auction process were:

There is a thing called Sniping on eBay. That's when someone makes a bid in the last seconds of an auction and beats you out by a small margin. In many cases this is the only bid they make. This has happened many times to me. At first I got angry then I just learned to accept this practice by some as a matter of course. I make my first bid my maximum bid so that sniping doesn't matter to me anymore. (44-year-old male Navigator)

I've bid on things merely because they're cheap, and I've gotten into bidding wars over some insignificant thing just out of competitiveness. I've learned that eBay can be addictive and expensive. (35-year-old female Problem Solver)

I didn't really know what a reserve auction was so I bid on some stuff that was a reserve auction and thought I won but because it was at a reserve price the seller didn't want to sell it for lower. (23-year-old female Engager)

Other people and eBay's auction processes were not the only things that triggered the participants' memories of negative experiences. Another group reported that situations involving specific items brought a negative experience to mind. Of the total participants, 45 people (11.8%) said that their negative eBay experiences were attributable to a particular item. Some of their disappointments about the items was due to poor descriptions while others were because of the items' conditions. For example, one participant reported on the purchase of an autographed ball that did not match up to the auction picture:

I bought an autographed team ball which looked pretty good on the scan [picture on the computer monitor], turned out that the signatures were pretty worn, smudged and I paid more than I would have had I been able to handle look at the ball in person.

Another participant had difficulty with the condition of the coin he had purchased:

One coin was damaged, according to the seller, in the mail. The old coin was sent in a regular

envelope with virtually no padding. (42-year-old male Problem Solver)

Another respondent described his disappointment with an item that evidently left much to be desired when he wrote:

Someone advertised a helicopter pencil sharpener and I envisioned it to be a very nice item. When it arrived it was a piece of junk that could be purchased in a five and dime store for probably \$1.00. (63-year-old male Engager)

Although new technological advances in the Information Age frequently make life much easier, faster, and more convenient, these advances can apparently be troublesome when they work incorrectly or inconsistently. In this study, 14 people (3.7%) reported that troubles with eBay's website or their own computer equipment. Descriptions from the participants who attributed their negative experience on eBay to a technological glitch included:

When eBay was doing their changing over from one program to another some how I never had contact with a person that I had the winning bid with for some mohair wigs therefore I never got them. I was unhappy and I am sure that the seller was most unhappy also. (51-year-old female Navigator)

The negative experience is not so much with the people that we interact with as it is with the frustration with the computer when it is not working right. (48-year-old female Problem Solver)

I posted a bear rug and after three days of bidding on my auction, eBay removed it. This was a legal sale and all paperwork had been processed. It apparently did not meet eBay's criteria. From this, I surmised that eBay still has some growing to do and policy revision. (Male Engager; no age given)

## Learning Strategies

Variations in the responses pertaining to a negative experience on eBay and the learning effects of that experience were described by those in all three ATLAS groups. Once again, response differences were reported among the Navigators, Problem Solvers, and Engagers. The people representing all three ATLAS groups reported that their negative experiences could be related to the auctions themselves, auction items, technological glitches, or other eBay users. However, the words, phrases, or emphases used by those in various groups differed.

"Navigators are focused learners who chart a course for learning and follow it" (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 9). When asked to relate a negative eBay experience and to describe what they learned as a result, the Navigators generally took a different path than the Problem Solvers and Engagers. The participating Navigators appeared to be bothered by other people disobeying the rules of the eBay auction site or their own rules of basic human conduct. Many Navigators referred to the practice of last-minute sniping as a rule-breaking irritation. A number of Navigators mentioned rule-breaking and being "fair" as an important part of their negative eBay experience.

I bid on item early on and changed to meet one additional increase. However in the last fifteen seconds someone upped the bid by \$1 and won the

item that I had been high on for 6 days. (67-year-old male)

I learned that some people think it is a game when it is a place to buy items under a binding contract. If you don't pay for a item you will be given negative feedback which will effect you future transactions. (28-year-old female)

An auction that I was high bidder on gave false information in a description and of the item and would not refund money even after I had offered to return the item. (40-year-old male)

I won the bid on an article from a seller who was committing a fraudulent act. The FBI took care of the problem for me, and it didn't cost me anything. (51-year-old male)

Receiving responses in the form of feedback was apparently important to the Navigators participating in this study as several mentioned eBay's evaluation method in their negative experience descriptions. Many of the Navigators told of their unfavorable eBay experiences that included feedback.

I received a negative feedback from a seller when I was out of town taking care of my stepfather. The seller was so irate he would not listen to anything I said. He used flawed logic to support his argument and I admitted I had missed his deadline. He would not accept the money after I missed his deadline by a week. He told eBay I was a bad buyer but after I appealed to them the rating was lifted. I am much more persuasive in a letter than most people. (52-year-old female)

I got a follow-up email for non-payment for an item for which I had not only paid but which I had received. I had paper records supporting my payment and was able to point the vendor to the positive feedback which he had given in connection with that transaction. I learned that my record

keeping practices were worthwhile and that others are not so methodical. (45-year-old male)

I listed what I called a small 6" baby plate/dish with adorable transfers of fairy tale children all over it from middle to edge, and supplied beautiful, clear picture. It sold for \$41. and I was pleased, I expected about \$35. After the buyer in N.Y. received it she e-mailed me to complain that it is a saucer and should have been listed as such. She also left me neutral feedback before contacting me. I apologized and offered a full refund which she accepted. It was unfair of her to give neutral feedback before talking with me and allowing me to make it right. Another lesson: a small dish with indented circle in bottom is not a small dish--it's a saucer. (47-year-old female)

I have learned that the racism is present also on eBay. (30-year-old female)

The Problem Solvers continued to be the storytellers of the group. When asked to depict a negative experience on eBay and to describe what was learned as a result, the Problem Solvers often offered informative accounts of their experiences and were much more likely to do so than the Navigators and Engagers. Problem Solvers are vivacious learners who "rely on spontaneity and creativity" (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 13), and they are able to critically analyze difference situations in order to learn from them. In order to adequately communicate their descriptions of negative eBay experiences, many Problem Solvers relied on their supreme storytelling skills. Regardless of the reason for the negative experience, these Problem Solvers all gave a detailed report:



After bidding on hundreds of auctions I have had positive or neutral experiences on most cases. I did win one auction where the bidder has failed to deliver the product. As I investigated other items he has won or put up for sale I saw a pattern that made it fairly obvious that I had been had. I am still in communication with the person but still don't have the item after 60 days. I don't expect I will get either the item or my money back. Another auction I won sent the money and exchanged several emails with the seller who claimed he had never received the money. I sent another payment and the seller eventually learned that he had cashed the original payment and never realized it. Everything has been resolved. (36-year-old male)

In the beginning, I received many broken pieces, and almost gave up on eBay--about half of the items were broken. I had even started wondering if items were broken before they were shipped because the occurrence was so high. I noticed that everything broken was packaged in bubble wrap and popcorn, while things packaged with rigid Styrofoam around them were not broken. I started waiting until the sellers gave me the total price, including shipping and insurance. I then e-mailed them and said I'd pay an extra \$5 beyond what they asked for in total, and that I wanted them to pack the item in rigid Styrofoam. I pointed out that I'd had high breakage before asking for this, but since asking for rigid Styrofoam I have no breakage. I pointed out that manufacturers use rigid Styrofoam not bubble wrap and that I figure they know bubble wrap and popcorn doesn't stop breakage. I tell them they can just use old Styrofoam they have lying around in their garage. I apologize for my pickyness so they will not be offended. (47-year-old female)

A number of bidders were unable to bid on one of my items during the last few minutes of bidding. This taught me that eBay must change their way of conducting bidding. An auction should be extended to 5 minutes when a last minute bid is made and should continue to be extended until five minutes has passed without a bid. eBay should post the reserve during the last 24 hours of any auction



that has not reached the reserve price. (60-year-old male)

I am currently dealing with a company that sold me 16 comics in 16 different auctions. They forgot to send one of the comics, and 4 of them were in significantly worse condition than described. I've called and e-mailed the guy who owns the store, but haven't heard back from him as yet, because he's been out of town. Hopefully, he'll be back soon, and I'll get a refund. Stuff like this just annoys me, because I would never sell such low quality stuff without a better description. (40-year-old male)

The Engagers who participated in the study described their negative eBay experiences in two different ways from the Navigators and Problem Solvers. The Engagers were more inclined to label their feelings or the feelings of others from the people in the other two ATLAS groups. Emotions are a strong part of Engagers' learning processes, and they tend to learn best when passionately absorbed in the emotions of their learning. These learners who "love to learn, learn with feeling, and learn best when they are actively engaged in a meaningful manner" (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 13) often used feelings as descriptors in their responses. Several Engagers included descriptions in which they labeled their own feelings or the anticipated the feelings of others.

I lost the auction at the last second. I was very frustrated. (24-year-old male)

A seller told eBay that I did not pay them. I did pay them, it was confirmed by my bank. eBay made me feel like a criminal, I'm sure this was not their intent, but....Also, eBay never contacted me regarding the results. I just want

to know what the seller had to say. I would still like to know what the seller had to say!!!!!!!  
(54-year-old female)

I bought a doll and the doll had a chip in her eye. I wanted to return the doll or get a partial refund. I sent the doll back in the same packing that he had sent. The eyes broke. He was mad that I sent the doll back without permission.  
(46-year-old female)

Another apparent trend that Engagers exhibited was in their reported ability to disassociate themselves from negative eBay experiences by dismissing the experience as a learning opportunity. These people learned from the experiences and were ready to move to the next activity rather than dwelling on any negative aspects. Engagers are stimulating learners who learn as long as they perceive an activity is worthwhile and as long as that activity does not become superficial and tedious (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 14). Examples of comments from Engagers who adopted a serendipitous attitude about their negative eBay experiences were:

I have had some clunkers too (by far in the minority). These give me that "try, try again" mentality: I consider myself to have made a mistake and I re-evaluate the process by which I decided to bid on that item in an attempt not to repeat the mistake. (33-year-old female)

I posted negative feedback for a seller once and he returned the favor. There is no way for eBay to really do anything about this. The feedback system has to be pretty much self-sustaining. I guess I learned that some people are irresponsible and such things will occasionally happen. (29-year-old male)

One of the sellers claimed she never got my check so I sent her cash money thru the mail. I later noticed on my statement that she did get & cash the check. Since the expense involved was very low, I just chalked it up to experience. (49-year-old female)

Early on, I purchased an item that was "iffy" because I believed the sellers description....When it arrived the seller was unpleasant that I noticed she had grossly lied. I decided to throw away the piece of trash, write it off as an expensive lesson and never do that again. (48-year-old female)

### Summary

The study participants were asked to briefly describe a negative experience that they had on eBay and identify what they learned as a result of the negative experience. Although some (27.9%) affirmed that they had experienced no negatives while participating in eBay events, most participants had unfavorable situations to share. The participants' negative experiences pertained to four basic topics. Some (10.0%) had negative experiences that they described as relating to the auctions themselves while others (11.8%) related to particular auction items or to technological difficulties (3.7%). By far the most prevalent influence on the status of eBay experiences was other eBay users. Almost one-half (46.1%) of the participants remarked that other eBayers were the source of their dissatisfaction.

Although Navigators, Problem Solvers, and Engagers reported negative experiences with auctions, items, technology, or other people, the words, phrases, and emphases used by the learners in each group differed. Navigators reported being irritated by people who disobeyed eBay's rules of fair conduct. Navigators also included remarks about negative feedback in their descriptions. The Problem Solvers continued to offer illuminating and insightful accounts of their negative eBay experiences through detailed narratives. Engagers were more inclined to label their feelings or the feelings of others within their negative experience accounts. They also frequently adopted a serendipitous attitude about their experiences.

## CHAPTER 9

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND COMMENCEMENT

#### Summary of the Study

The current revolution of the Information Age is rapidly changing the complexion of many personal and corporate societies. This revolution is changing the methods people use to communicate with each other, research new information, solve problems, and transact business. Computer and Internet usage has become available in many types of communities with many types of people around the world. For those with computer and Internet access, the revolution has dramatically changed their personal and professional lives on a daily basis.

In addition to its societal transformation, the Information Age has created a new form of literacy. Called computer literacy, this form of literacy has become necessary for people to be able to utilize and access new technological advances. However, in spite of all the interest in computer literacy, a component of the Information Age has been virtually ignored. A large amount of people have engaged in self-directed learning in an informal learning environment with practically no recognition of the intricate learning processes taking place.

Although much has been written and discussed about the Internet auction website called eBay, little is known of the learning processes that adult learners have used in order to participate in the online auction activities. These people have demonstrated their self-initiated and self-directed learning abilities in a real-life learning situation through engaging in the eBay auction process. Although crucial to those who plan to learn or teach others using this pervasive new technology, the field of Adult Education has not yet investigated the chosen learning strategies that adult learners are using in record numbers in computer-related activities such as eBay.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to describe the learning strategies that adults use in learning to engage in the eBay auction process. The study used the following research questions: (a) what are the identified learning strategy preferences of adult learners using eBay, (b) how do the learning strategy preferences of eBay users compare to the norms for ATLAS, and (c) how do eBay users describe their learning processes related to getting started on eBay, participating in eBay activities, communicating on eBay, learning through eBay, and experiencing eBay?

This study used a descriptive design along with the information and data gathering advantages of the Internet to collect data about how adults learning using the Internet.

The study involved a representative sample of 380 eBay users which was identified by electronically downloading the e-mail addresses of participants in completed auctions. The sample was stratified by the 13 categories of items listed on eBay. Within each of these categories, high-volume completed auctions were selected in which the final sale price was under \$10, between \$11 and \$100, and over \$100.

Summary of Findings

The findings of this study were arranged into five areas: Getting Started on eBay, Participating in eBay Activities, Communicating on eBay, Learning Through eBay, and Experiencing eBay. In each area, a discussion of the responses were given to each question which detailed the frequencies of specific categories of answers along with the learning strategy differences.

Table 1 Summary of the Findings

Getting Started on eBay	Learned from other people
Participating in eBay Activities	Used eBay features Monitored current auctions Developed bidding strategies
Communicating on eBay	Relied heavily on e-mail; trust
Learning Through eBay	Strong influence on computer, Internet, and personal skills
Experiencing eBay	Many positive experiences involving other people

Navigators	The Strivers Plan the work and work the plan
Problem Solvers	The Storytellers Ask them what time it is and they will build you a clock
Engagers	The Stimulants It's fun!

Getting Started on eBay involved the participants described how they learned about the eBay website, how they learned about setting up their eBay account, and how they learned to traverse the site. The pervasive aspect of eBay was evident as other people were the most common method that the participants cited about how they learned of eBay. Navigators relied on external sources such as advertisements to learn about eBay while Problem Solvers counted the Internet as one of their major sources. Engagers tended to learn about eBay from their friends. Most participants learned about becoming eBay users by following the website's directions. Navigators were likely to utilize eBay's search engine while Problem Solvers chose to describe intricate combinations of methods and Engagers went straight to the bidding process to learn about getting their eBay accounts started. Once their accounts were established, the participants described how they searched the website, used trial-and-error, or a used combination of methods to learn



what was available on the eBay website. Navigators tended to use their own logic, Problem Solvers used trial-and-error and a combination of sources, and Engagers went directly to eBay's search feature to learn more about the site.

Participating in eBay Activities involved an examination of the participants' typical eBay sessions and how they went about learning more about the auction items, the people involved in the auctions, and any other things related to the auctions. The study participants also shared their eBay bidding strategies and the processes they used to develop their bidding strategy. Typical eBay sessions included such activities as checking on current eBay auctions, browsing the site, giving detailed examples of sessions, executing predetermined plans, searching with keywords, and using various situational combinations and techniques. Some participants briefly described how they either read the item description page or viewed the item picture to learn more about the auction items while others gave elaborate examples of their discovery methods. Others relied on outside sources such as the seller, the Internet, or reference books.

Participating in eBay Activities involved how the participants learned more about the other people in the auction and more about any additional things related to eBay. While describing the methods they used to learn more

about the other auction people, some participants used eBay's Feedback Forum and other eBay features while others used a combination of techniques, detailed remarks, and e-mailed communications in their description. When asked to characterize how they went about learning more about things other than the auction items or the auction people, the participants told of using the different eBay website features, trial-and-error, a combination of methods, and other people.

Participating in eBay activities included placing an early bid combined with a last minute bid, placing a last minute bid only, placing a maximum bid only, utilizing a predetermined bidding plan, or varying their bidding strategies by the situation. In describing how they went about developing their bidding strategies, the participants cited the process of bidding, the process of being outbid by others, financial considerations, live auction experiences, and watching other bidders' actions.

Throughout the section on Participating in eBay Activities, differences were identified between the Navigators, Problem Solvers, and Engagers. The Navigators tended to use predetermined plans and external resources such as reference books and trade journals and to give more credence to eBay's Feedback Forum and their own logical thinking than the Problem Solvers and Engagers did. The

Problem Solvers repeatedly provided detailed examples to tell the stories about their experiences while participating in eBay activities. In addition, Problem Solvers were more likely to use a variety of techniques according to their particular situations. Woven throughout the Engagers' comments was their tendency to waste little effort on activities that they deemed unworthy and their penchant for involving other people and using emotionally-laden words and phrases in their descriptions.

Communicating on eBay encompassed the participants' perceptions of communicating with other eBay users via e-mail, the advantages and disadvantages to e-mailed communications, and their overall feelings of e-mail with others. Communicating by e-mail is an important aspect of operating on eBay since over one-half of the participants used e-mail either Very Much or Much. Many participants provided detailed lists of the advantages to e-mailed communications along with others who applauded the speed of e-mail while others said they learned additional item information or got to know other eBay users better by using e-mail. Over one-half of the participants reported no disadvantages of communicating with others by e-mail while others cited perceived risks, time constraints, and lack of personal contact as detriments.

Differences between the participants in the ATLAS groups were discovered as they related their perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages to e-mail on eBay. Navigators listed speed and the perk of getting additional information about auction items as advantages to e-mail while Problem Solvers offered detailed lists and descriptions of advantages from their perceptions. Engagers tended to report their strong feelings about the importance of good communication. When describing the disadvantages to e-mail, Navigators pointed to the external problems that could arise such as legal problems and the inefficiencies of others. Problem Solvers were again more explicit with their answers and appeared to be concerned with possible unpleasant e-mail interactions with other eBay users. Engagers were concerned with competition with other bidders and with being bored with the details of e-mail. Engagers were also more apt to express their personal feelings on the disadvantages of e-mail than either the Navigators or Problem Solvers.

To determine Learning Through eBay, the participants were asked to respond to a series of questions concerning their feelings about eBay's influence on computers and the Internet along with their perceptions of what they have learned as a result of eBay participation. They were also

asked about eBay's influence on their attitudes about the Internet, their own skills, and themselves as people.

When asked to describe their feelings about computers and the Internet and to list what they had learned, some of the participants reported influence of eBay on their computer and Internet feelings and use while others said eBay had either changed them in some way or had confirmed some already-present beliefs. Lists from the respondents about what they had learned as a result of eBay participation included learning about other people, learning about the skills necessary for on-site operations, and learning about the skills necessary for offline activities such as purchasing money orders and shipping packages.

The participants reported on how eBay had influenced their attitudes about the Internet, their own skills, and themselves as people. They were amazed at the powerful and omnipresent nature of the Internet as it related to business and commerce, human relationships, and personal growth, change, and enjoyment. Their computer and Internet skills reportedly had been positively influenced by eBay participation while their feelings about themselves as people remained largely unchanged.

Discernable differences between the participants in the ATLAS groups exist when Learning Through eBay. The Navigators placed value on using external tools and

completing more research and they also valued rules, regulations, and any control they may have had. They also reported that evaluation and feedback was important to them, and they tended to be more cautious about their next steps and about other eBay users than the Problem Solvers and Engagers were. In addition, the Navigators were more self-critical and self-conscious while learning through the eBay process. The self-confidence of the Problem Solver group came clearly and repeatedly through their responses as did their affinity for providing detailed, descriptive stories about their learning processes. The Problem Solver answers also revealed how eBay participation reinforced their already positive attitudes about computer and Internet use along with their intrigue and curiosity with the many possibilities of the Internet. The Engagers were more likely than Problem Solvers or Navigators to express their answers using internal feelings or emotionally-laden words or phrases, and they tended to utilize methods that made their lives easier, more worthwhile, and more enjoyable. Engagers were also inclined to value personal interaction and relationships with other people and were generally optimistic in their opinions of others.

Experiencing eBay involved the participants' perceptions of their positive and negative eBay experiences along with their descriptions of what they had learned from

each type of experience. As they described their positive and negative experiences while engaging in eBay activities, the participants repeatedly acknowledged the importance of other people in their positive experiences while their negative experiences were also frequently attributed to others or to technological difficulties. Positive eBay experiences were described by Navigators in terms of obtaining good bargains, receiving good customer service, and receiving positive feedback while their negative experiences centered around others' disregard for rules and receiving negative feedback. Problem Solvers' positive and negative experiences were both communicated through detailed descriptions that included specific examples and stories of specific events or people. The positive experiences on eBay according to the Engagers were reported in sweeping, global terms while their negative experiences were laden with emotional terms and phrases.

The problem for this study was conceptualized around three areas of The Internet, Adult Learning, and Addressing Individual Differences. Conclusions and recommendations were drawn related to each of those three concept areas.

#### Adult Learning

##### Andragogical Concepts

Informal learning on eBay exemplifies the six assumptions upon which Knowles' andragogical model is based.

A tremendous amount of informal learning has taken place in order for the eBay users to engage in the various parts of the eBay auction process. As the findings from this study clearly disclose, participation in eBay activities personifies adult learning at its best and illustrates the andragogical assumptions written decades ago. Although Malcolm Knowles developed the four core assumptions of andragogy over 30 years ago (Knowles, 1970), his assumptions apply to the current Information Age with amazing relevance. His assumptions are so applicable, it is as if they were written to describe the very learning processes that adults use today when engaging in eBay auction activities. Likewise, the two additional assumptions that were added in 1984 and 1989 (Knowles, et al., 1998, p. 69) also readily apply and give foundation to the learning phenomenon characterized by eBay participation. The core principles of andragogy "go beyond basic respect for the learner and view the adult learner as a primary source of data for making sound decisions regarding the learning process" (p. 183).

Knowles' first assumption in the andragogical model have to do with adults learners' need to know (Knowles, et al., 1998, pp. 64-65). Adults need to know why they are learning before they participate in a learning activity (p. 133). Adult learners who participate on eBay may go about



learning for different reasons such as to explore the eBay website or to purchase a specific item. However, they all know why they have elected to participate in the online auction activities.

The second assumption in the andragogical model involves self-concept (Knowles, et al., 1998, p. 65). The self-concept of adult learners as they move from dependency to self-direction leads to the knowledge that they are "responsible for their own decisions, for their own lives" (p. 65). Adult participants in the eBay auction process are self-directed in nature. They have determined their interests, goals, and individual courses of inquiry. In addition, they determine their degree and level of participation each time they join the eBay activities.

The third assumption has to do with the role of the adult learners' experiences (Knowles, et al., 1998, pp. 65-67). As they take part in eBay operations, the adult learners bring a variety of experiences to their action. Each adult learner who chooses to participate in eBay activities brings a lifetime of experiences to the online auction. Some may have many experiences with live auctions, while others may have extensive knowledge of particular collectibles, and while still others may have prior computer skills or human relationship skills, they all have a foundation from which to draw that enhances their learning

on eBay. This eBay participant exhibits Knowles' third assumption of andragogy as she developed her bidding strategy:

I learned that bidding early in the auction is usually a waste of time. When people see bids on items, they are more inclined to check it out and bid themselves. Also, some people always like to be top dog, so it just drives the price up. I also learned to check out the bidding lists of people who liked the same things I did. I figured if I do it, they may too--so that's why I don't tend to bid on things until the end. I also learned that many people DON'T bid their maximum--they bid what they think is "enough" then race to place another bid if outbid near the end. That's why I snipe--to not give them a chance to place another bid and drive the price up. (39-year-old female Problem Solver)

The fourth andragogical assumption pertains to adult learners' readiness to learn. Readiness to learn is connected to each learners' particular developmental stage in life. Adult learners reject anything that is irrelevant to their current learning situations. Despite their various reasons for engaging in eBay, these adult learners find great relevance in eBay's ability to meet their needs and goals. The decisions they make while participating in all steps of eBay all have great relevance to the learners.

The final two assumptions of the andragogical model relate to adults' orientation to learning and motivation. Adults learn more effectively "when they are presented in the context of application to real-life situations" (Knowles, et al., 1998, p. 67). The orientation of adult

learners is life-centered, task-centered, or problem-centered (p. 67) rather than the typical subject-centered curriculum of children's learning. Learning on eBay is organized around the participants' particular life situations. For example, this eBay user was looking for a particular item and her quest lead her to eBay:

I punched into my favorite collectibles and started looking at the various dogs. Then I learned how to punch in Scotties under search and come up with only those specific items. (52-year-old female Problem Solver)

Finally, internal motivators such as satisfaction and self-confidence inspire adult learners to new levels of growth and development (p. 68). Thus, the intrinsic rewards of participating in the eBay auction process feeds the natural desires of adult learners as they gain new skills, acquire new items, make new friends, and confirm their beliefs all in a setting that is free of traditional educational barriers. Instances of adult learners who responded to internal motivators were repeatedly found during this study. For example:

I never really thought about it before, but the more I learn, the better I feel about myself. It's fun to share the knowledge with others. (42-year-old female Engager)

#### Recommendation for Andragogical Concepts

In light of the new frontier that has been created by the Information Age, practitioners and researchers in the

field of adult learning have a great opportunity to learn from the current times. In visualizing the future, "we can be certain only that the Internet will continue to evolve and that technological innovation will create new demands for adult learning" (Cahoon, 1998, p. 75). Therefore, practitioners and researchers in the field of Adult Education must recognize and be constantly aware that the core principles of andragogy are applicable in many current settings such as the Internet. Informal learning is learning that meets the learners where ever they are and this type of learning is taking place in every aspect of the eBay auction process. If unfamiliar with Knowles' assumptions of andragogy, practitioners and researchers should become familiar with the assumptions and acquire knowledge of their practical application. If unfamiliar with computers and the Internet or with the array of online opportunities for learning, these practitioners should become familiar with new technology in order to experience first hand the powerful application of the assumptions tools that are available via the Internet. Perhaps articles in Adult Education journals along with hands-on professional development courses at educational, research, and human resources conferences would address such needs and overcome such barriers.

#### Self-Directed Learning

Adult learners who engage in the eBay auction process are exhibiting self-directed learning.

The knowledge that adults engage in self-directed learning is now a "foregone conclusion in adult learning research" (Knowles, et al., 1998, p. 135). Along with others, Stephen Brookfield (1986) and Malcolm Knowles (1975) made important contributions to the better understanding of self-direction in adult learning. Brookfield identified two forms of self-direction, and Knowles brought forth five assumptions of self-directed learning. Adults who partake in the eBay auction exemplify the work on self-direction of both these men to light in a new era that perhaps even they never envisioned.

The first of Brookfield's (1986) two forms of self-direction is that there are "various techniques of self-directed learning" (p. 47). As adult learners participate in the many procedures entailed in an online auction, they are practicing many of Brookfield's identified techniques. The findings produced many examples of eBay users participating in such complex self-directed techniques such as "specifying goals" as they determine their auction objectives, "identifying resources" that will assist their auction decisions, "implementing strategies" that will best suit their bidding needs, and "evaluating progress" of their auction-related intentions.

Adult learners who participate in eBay's online auction process are also practicing Brookfield's second identified form of self-directed learning, which is internal consciousness change (Brookfield, 1986, p. 47). The adults who involved themselves in the eBay auction process had a variety of complex internal shifts on a variety of developmental levels. These changes in awareness not only were recognized by the study participants, they were also reviewed and reported by them.

I feel much better about computers and the Internet since I am able to communicate with people who have similar interests. At first I was nervous about bidding on Internet auctions, but after gaining experience over time I find it very exciting and convenient. (23-year-old male Engager)

Built my confidence in the Internet becoming user-friendly for me. I have become more computer-literate. I have learned, because of eBay use, how to use a scanner, how to video capture, how to resize pictures & reduce file size, upload pictures to a website for our auctions, how to use the Internet to find things that greatly enrich our home, personal studies & research, family needs, etc. as well as provide a supplemental income for our family. (35-year-old female Problem Solver)

Just as they parallel his andragogical assumptions, Knowles' (1975) five assumptions of self-directed learners also correspond nicely with the actions of the adult learners who participated in this study. As an "essential component of maturing" (p. 20), the study participants have grown naturally into the need to be self-directed as they

enter and proceed through the auction activities. These adult learners have also exhibited how important their pre- and post experiences (p. 20) related to eBay are to their learning and that their learning needs change in correlation to their developmental levels (p. 20) as they progress through the processes associated with eBay. In addition, the adult learners who have engaged in the eBay auction process have accomplished tasks and solved problems (p. 21) as they registered on eBay, learned about the site, researched items and other users, developed bidding strategies, undertook a host of other tasks. Lastly, the internal incentives of eBay users have inspired them to new levels of achievement, satisfaction, and accomplishment (p. 21) as they joined in the website's activities.

#### Recommendation for Self-Directed Learning

Additional knowledge about self-directed learning is important to the adult learning field. Although Malcolm Knowles (1975) viewed self-directed learning as a critical concept of andragogy, his views pertained primarily to the instructor-student relationship. Stephen Brookfield's (1986) work viewed self-direction more from a facilitator's perspective and Allen Tough (1979) focused on learning projects. In their published works, none of these leaders in Adult Education had an opportunity to deal with the powerful Internet phenomenon. Indeed, Spencer (2000) did

examine the methods in which a group of 75 learners pursued self-directed learning projects on the Internet. However, much investigation on self-directed adult learning has yet to be accomplished. In order to learn more about adult learners as they engage in self-directed learning on the Internet, Adult Education researchers should conduct individual case studies and ethnographic, or naturalistic inquiry (Gay, 1996, p. 207), studies in a variety of Internet adult learning settings.

#### Learning How to Learn

Adult learners have implemented the theory of learning how to learn through participation in the eBay auction process.

Not only do adult learners who have participated in eBay's auction activities exemplify the andragogical model and the concepts of self-direction, they also have implemented the theory introduced by Smith (1982) called learning how to learn. Along with Knowles (1970), Smith had prophetic words to offer related to learning how to learn that applies to the Information Age almost two decades later. "In an era of breathtaking change, it is truly impossible to acquire early in life the knowledge that adulthood will require" (p. 15). Therefore, since learning itself can be learned and taught through use of various processes, perceptions, and capacities, "one can learn how to learn more effectively and efficiently" (p. 15). "It is



a tragic fact that most of us only know how to be taught; we haven't learned how to learn" (Knowles, 1975, p. 14).

Overcoming that tragedy are the adult learners of eBay who have effectively learned how to learn.

The adult learners who have participated in eBay auctions clearly practiced the three learning how to learn subprocesses of planning, conducting, and evaluating (Smith, 1976, p. 6) in the informal setting of eBay. An example of planning occurred when adult eBay users identified their needs for a particular auction item or they identified their needs for a different bidding strategy.

It only took a couple of auctions to realize that if I bid early and high the other bids would drive up my price. I also found that small frequent bids developed a competition which is what the seller wants but not the buyer. (51-year-old male Navigator)

Conducting was demonstrated when the eBay participants reviewed their bidding procedures or utilized available resources. For example,

It was an evolution from simply bidding and waiting to sniping (if the item is particularly interesting). I learned this behavior from the numerous times when another bidder did it to me. (29-year-old male Engager)

I read through each auction available on the specific item. Some auctions offered links to other sites providing more info. I also did a search and found retailers selling the item to compare prices. (44-year-old female Problem Solver)

Examples of the adult learners on eBay who utilized the learning how to learn subprocess of Evaluating were found in the many responses from eBay users who met their auction goals in a variety of ways.

My most costly purchase was an old apple laptop. I was nervous because it was electronic. The seller was not the original owner. He was trying to "turn a buck". I was happy that the machine has worked thus far. It was cosmetically worse than I imagined, but I am pleased. I have purchased a motorcycle helmet, leather jacket, Gameboy case, and have been pleased with everything. (43-year-old male Engager)

In addition to the applying the subprocesses of learning how to learn, the study participants have also performed the less basic learning how to learn skills which are all characteristics of the learner who has successfully learned how to learn. These include deciding what and where to learn, enhancing necessary skills, being open to change, selecting the mode of learning, and applying flexibility which are all characteristics of the learner who has successfully learned how to learn. These higher-level skills are referred to as the characteristics of successful learners (Smith, 1982, pp. 84-93).

The adult learners who are eBay participants demonstrated these characteristics of successful learners. Adult learners who have engaged in the eBay auction process have certainly decided to learn during that process and they decided what to learn based on their skills, goals, and

needs. Many adult learners on eBay reported in the findings that they found it necessary to access additional skills in order to participate in the auction processes. For example, as this participant expressed:

My skills are much better since I started using eBay. I am more proficient in using a variety of screens and in my searching. (37-year-old female Navigator)

Just by participating in such an innovative technological venture as eBay, these learners demonstrated their ability to be receptive to change in their lives. Whether they have chosen to learn individually or cooperatively, these learners have also selected their mode of learning through eBay activities, and they clearly have practiced flexibility as they wove their ways through the intricacies of the online auction processes. The following participant illustrated the flexibility of many an eBay user:

I'll type in a search engine for a certain musician to find recordings(LP or CD) or I will look for specific types of musical equipment or toys for the kids. Then I'll make a bid if it's something desirable and the seller has good feedback. (34-year-old male Problem Solver)

#### Recommendations for Learning How to Learn

The learning how to learn process is applied by adult learners who have participated in the eBay auction process. However, eBay is only one of the vehicles available in which to exercise this concept. Therefore, it is recommended that additional research be conducted both in and outside of the

Internet to discover how the learning how to learn concept has been applied by adult learners in settings other than eBay and in settings other than originally examined.

The original work completed on the concept of learning how to learn included reference to the possible shortened phrase of learning to learn (Smith, 1976) which "facilitates expression but deprives the term of impact and the utilitarian flavor useful in convincing adults of the importance of the concept" (p. 5). The use of the word *how* is vital to the concept for "the matters under consideration include also learning what, why, when, and where to learn" (p. 5). It is therefore a recommendation to those in the field of adult learning that the related concepts of learning what to learn, learning why to learn, learning when to learn, and learning where to learn be explored as to their application and relevance to adult learners.

#### Real-Life Learning

Real-life learning occurs when adult learners engage in the eBay auction process.

Any reflection of adult learning trends should include "learning that is relevant to the living tasks of the individual" (Fellenz & Conti, 1989, p. 3). Otherwise known as real-life learning or real-world learning, this type of learning generally results in practical or everyday knowledge (p. 3). Real-life learning is practiced daily by

millions of eBay users as they participate in the website's activities.

Two major concepts of real-life learning are particularly apropos to the operations of adult learners while on eBay. First, real-life learning focuses on trends in adult learning that "provide for potential empowerment of the individual" (Fellenz & Conti, 1989, p. 23). The eBay phenomenon exposes adult learners who are empowered either through personal freedoms uncharacteristic of academic-type education or through the additional aspect of increased awareness "both of the social-cultural context that affects one's life and the potential one has for transforming that society" (p. 24). The power of real-life learning and its individual and societal possibilities were expressed in this participant's description:

I have always felt it a pity that we could not be in direct interaction with the people of the world. The blessed Internet has widened our horizons and friendships and understanding of others!! (52-year-old female Problem Solver)

A second concept of real-life learning connects with the real-life experiences of adult learners on eBay. Learning in real life "suggests that learning needs stem from the learner's real-life situations" (Fellenz & Conti, 1989, p. 25) instead of the artificial program-planning models of traditional education. The real-life learning opportunities provided to adult learners as they engage in

the eBay auction process personifies this second concept of real-life learning, and it fits the requisite basis for a learner-centered curriculum that is "based on social realities" (p. 25). An example of this may be found in this participant's perception of how eBay participation had influenced his attitudes about himself and his social realities:

Through some e-mails, you also have a feel for some peoples' personalities. On some occasions you will exchange some other information about a common topic or geographic region. I think eBay is a great example of how the Internet will change the way we purchase items and view the world. It opens the world to an even playing ground. (36-year-old male Problem Solver)

#### Recommendation for Real-Life Learning

"The focus of the field has shifted from adult education to adult learning" (Fellenz & Conti, 1989, p. 23). Much of the previous important work in the area of real-life learning has compared real-life situations with the academic situations found in educational institutions. Yet, the current explosion of computer use and Internet access provides adult learning researchers with delightful opportunities to investigate the learners themselves as they participate in real-life situations that go beyond the eBay experience. "Adult Education is a fractured field of practice" (p. 26) a problem that has emerged as a result of the field's neglect of regarding the learner "as our basic

unit of organization" (p. 26). Therefore, further adult learning research that focuses solely on the learner in real-life settings is imperative if the field of adult learning is to keep pace during the Information Age explosion. Of particular interest would be longitudinal studies of older adult learners in real-life environments who are just beginning their journeys into the world of computers and cyberspace.

### Addressing Individual Differences

#### ATLAS

ATLAS is a useful tool for addressing the individual differences of adult learners.

The current study confirms the findings of previous studies (James, 2000; Spencer, 2000; Willyard, 2000) that utilized the ATLAS instrument to determine learning strategies among groups of learners. In all of these studies, the findings associated with the characteristics of the ATLAS learning strategy groups were consistent. The distinctive traits of Navigators, Problem Solvers, and Engagers remained true across the findings of all four studies that incorporated the ATLAS instrument in their design. The original ATLAS categories are stable.

Navigators have a tendency to desire complete control of their learning plans and rarely veer from those plans once established. In this study, they were inclined to

value external tools such as resource books, trade journals, and catalogs to gain additional information about auction items. These logic-conscious learners reported that eBay activities often followed logical progressions that were clear to them, however they were uncomfortable with the uncertainty and conundrum associated with the last minutes before online auction deadlines. They confessed that "I'm not comfortable with the last minute bidding" (43-year-old female Navigator).

On the other hand, Problem Solvers revel in the ambivalence and mystery of eBay's auctions. These critical thinkers are clearly "sustained by the ongoing modification and revision of their learning plans in relationship to their evaluation of their own learning process" (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 12). In addition, the Problem Solvers were partial to the exploration and adventure that eBay and the Internet afforded. They also enjoyed the collaborative and cooperative atmosphere that the online auction site offered. Problem Solvers were the largest represented ATLAS group in this study.

Engagers are enthusiastic learners who enjoy emotionally rewarding new tasks and challenges. They were thrilled with the eBay activities as long as the desired item or the time involved was worth the effort. These learners who will avoid any learning tasks that appear



"ominous and formidable" (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 15) often chose to provide short answers or no answers to questionnaire requests that did not meet their criteria for attention. Engagers will frequently take the paths of least resistance and use any tools that will alleviate tedious details or boredom. Engagers frequently reported using eBay's short-cut features that would get them the most amount of information in the shortest amount of time. They also reported using the prearranged features provided on the eBay site.

I like to keep up with items using "My eBay". I watch as the end of the auction nears by pressing the refresh button on the computer while on the "My eBay" page. If it is an item I am not particularly in love with but would like to have, I put in what I am willing to pay the day before it closes and look at it the day after it closes. (45-year-old female Engager)

In addition to providing consistent descriptions of the learning strategy groups, ATLAS has proven to translate successfully to an Internet format. The ATLAS instrument for this study was administered via electronic mail as opposed to the in-person administration of previous studies (James, 2000; Willyard, 2000). Although the mode of transmission differed, the basic ATLAS characteristics of Navigators, Problem Solvers, and Engagers were consistent with findings in these other studies. In a study of adult learners in self-directed learning projects using the

Internet (Spencer, 2000) ATLAS was administered through electronic mail and found complementary success.

#### Recommendation for ATLAS

This study was one of only two studies (Spencer, 2000) that have taken advantage of the electronic ATLAS instrument embedded within another online questionnaire. The ATLAS instrument translated successfully to this online format. Its proficient and easy design quickly enabled both the participants and the researchers to determine the learning strategy preferences of the study participants. The ATLAS instrument lends itself well to incorporation into online questionnaires. In addition, analysis of the data collected from the electronic format of ATLAS was found to be extremely efficient as the results required limited manual data entry time or energy. Due to its practical, convenient and uncomplicated operation, ATLAS is an excellent instrument that adapts well to any learning situation. Thus, adult learning researchers should consider the use of the ATLAS instrument when conducting any investigation into adult learning whether electronically or in person.

#### Learning Environment

The nature of the organization attracts a certain type of learner.

The different groups of learners identified by the ATLAS instrument are inclined to gravitate toward the types

of organizations or learning environments that best support their strengths. For example, in this study and a study by Spencer (2000), it was discovered that the Internet attracted more people from the ATLAS group called Problem Solvers. "The hyperlinked nature of the Web fit in well with Problem Solvers' natural tendency to immediately begin exploring solutions" (Spencer, 2000, pp. 137-138).

Spencer's study found over one-half of the participants were Problem Solvers while this study revealed 45.2% were Problem Solvers. Since Problem Solvers are comfortable considering various solutions and keep an open mind to learning possibilities (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 12), the Internet and eBay auction site were the ideal place for them to explore. Two other studies (James, 2000; Willyard, 2000) discovered that Engagers tended to be drawn to Adult Basic Education classes and community colleges since they "will likely choose not to participate in an environment where they are unsuccessful or do not feel good about themselves" (James, 2000, p. 143). Thus, different organizations or learning environments have a propensity to attract more learners from certain ATLAS groups based upon the image of the organization and elements in it.

#### Recommendations for Learning Environment

Recent studies involving the learning strategies of adults in different organizations or environments have

revealed settings that enticed both Problem Solvers and Engagers. To date, no research has revealed an organization that has specifically attracted the ATLAS learners known as Navigators although the expected distribution of Navigators in the general population was 36.5% (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 18). An "ongoing study at university language institutes may produce this result" (Willyard, 2000, p. 193) which may reveal more Navigators. Therefore, it is recommended that learning strategy research in higher education and similar settings be conducted in order to discover if organizations that display characteristics which are complementary to the learning strategy preferences of Navigators attract a disproportionately large number of Navigators. It is also recommended that ATLAS be employed in investigations of many different types of organizations and learning environments in order to learn more about what organizations draw which group of ATLAS learners.

#### ATLAS Descriptors

Additional descriptors for each ATLAS group of learners are possible for better understanding of the people in each group.

The current study not only confirms the stable characteristics of Navigators, Problem Solvers, and Engagers it also illuminates added detail. The detailed responses of the participants indicate that the groups of Navigators, Problem Solvers, and Engagers can be given an ancillary name

and an accompanying descriptive slogan to assist with further description.

The findings from this study revealed that Navigators were learners that attempted their learning activities with much sincerity and gave each activity their utmost effort. They appeared to be learners who expected and demanded more of themselves than others did and were self-conscious and hyper-critical when they made efforts they perceived to be mistakes (Willyard, 2000). Because of this characteristic behavior, Navigators may also be called Strivers. They continued to strive for improvement even though many were initially uncomfortable participating in the online auction activities. For example, this Navigator described the method he used to develop his bidding strategy:

I'm just starting. "Strategy" implies a predictable opponent; I think the other bidders are unknowable and unpredictable. So the best "strategy" is just to know what you want to spend and get it into the system as a bid. (67-year-old male)

The Navigators were also learners who valued a set plan they established before they participated in the auction activities. As they appeared to be determined to stick with a specific plan, they can be viewed as learners who "plan the work and work the plan". The Navigators tended to use their predetermined plans regardless of the plans' success. For example, this Navigator described his bidding strategy

and his determination to use this strategy in all circumstances:

I do the same thing every time I get on eBay. After I find something that "sings" to me I check out the price, time left in the auction, who the other people bidding on the item, and of course the description of the item. Not to often have I had to email questions about different items. I usually bid on antique pottery. With my knowledge of Roseville pottery, if the price is right, I will stay with the item. If the price is still right with 5 minutes left, I will stay. Now, I have already checked out the other bidders before this time and usually know by their past bids and history how they might bid. Knowing what the piece is worth and what it could retailed for I then place a bid with about 45 seconds left. If I get the bid I watch my price until time has run out and bidding is closed. If the item is something that I can't live without, then I put in my high bid price usually when I find the item. Doing this, I usually win the bid. (52-year-old male)

The Problem Solvers were clearly the leaders of the ATLAS groups on eBay. In addition to being the largest group represented in this study, these learners appeared to have found their niche in the Internet auction format. The Problem Solvers were extremely confident about not only themselves and their auction abilities, but they were also confident and bold in describing the next learning steps they would take in their eBay progress. They were comfortable in the online auction environment. "I've always had good skills and logical thinking. There's always been a high confidence in that area. This just reinforces it

daily" (57-year-old male). The confidence issue also was clear in this Problem Solver description:

I am tickled that I have learned what I did, but I also knew that I was capable of doing it I just needed a reason to do so and I got that with e-bay. It gave me access to items that I could probably not have located in my geographical area.  
(53-year-old female)

A similar confidence was displayed by a man just beginning to sell items on eBay as he prepared to take his next steps:

I am in the process of currently learning about uploading pictures for the Internet auctions. Have bought a scanner. Learned how to email pictures. Now have uploaded as of yesterday to my web site first pictures. (57-year-old male)

The Problem Solvers also distinguished themselves in another important way. They were clearly the most descriptive and detailed in their answers of the three ATLAS groups. Thus, the Problem Solvers can be viewed as Storytellers. While Navigators and Engagers were often inclined to answer in brief sentences or short phrases, the Problem Solvers would elaborate extensively and would add delightful detail to their stories about their experiences on eBay. The Problem Solvers were the manifestation of the adage "Ask them what time it is, and they will build you a clock". The clock-builders in this study added great new insight into the characteristics of Problem Solver learners. It was clear from the Problem Solvers' detailed descriptions that it was the actual *process* of telling the story that

intrigued and delighted them, rather than the completion of the story. Storytellers seemed to find little satisfaction at the conclusion of their stories. Instead, their contentment appeared to rest in the process of telling the story. Indeed, the punchline or story ending is the Storytellers' least favorite part of the process. It is clear from this Problem Solvers' story that he could go on and on with stories about what he had learned while participating on eBay:

I've learned what my price options are for paying for items that don't accept credit cards or personal checks. I've found an online site that will pay for my items. I've found a free site to host my images and counters for items I sell. I've streamlined my mailing process with envelopes and canned letters. I've kept a log of items that I have mailed money for and are waiting for delivery. I've learned about some of the behavior of others that are selling and others that are buying on eBay. It is a cross section of humanity. Not quite like standing in line to renew your driver's license but this is the computer literate world and not the real world you are dealing with. I've learned what my options are regarding fraudulent auctions. I've found websites for tracking down information about people. (36-year-old male)

This Problem Solver's story gives the perception of a story that could go on for quite some time as she described how she learned more about auction items:

There's a lot of artwork listed as "Outsider Art" and another type called "Tramp Art" which I didn't know much about. I clicked on and viewed item after item for weeks to see what they looked like, why they were given one of these titles, and what kind of price they brought in. I was also



interested in seeing how many people bid on these specific items, if any, and kept watch on how fast the bids came in and made a mental note of the names of those bidding and winning the item. I also went into the eBay galleries of certain artists (if offered) to get an overview of their styles. In addition, I did some research in my local library on these types of artwork. Tramp Art was especially interesting to me historically. As far as any questions I had about an item, e-mail made communication with an artist very quick and easy. This goes for all of the people auctioning items--each is very fast in answering any questions, in giving further descriptions, background details, measurements, and so on. (47-year-old female)

The Engagers in this study were inclined to frequently express excitement and joy in their learning processes. These "passionate learners who love to learn" (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 13) were excited about their learning on eBay and were eager to share what they learned with others. For this reason, they can be viewed as the Stimulants. When Engagers decide that a learning activity is worthwhile to them, they participate with full enthusiasm and utmost energy, and they encourage others to do likewise. Enjoyment is an important component in Engagers' learning processes. The phrase "It's fun!" seemed to describe their approach to learning the best. They appear to delight in new accomplishments and tend to share those accomplishments with others. For example:

It has increased my respect and pride in learning this new technology. I want to share with others this new learning tool. I enjoy the fun of looking at pictures of things I do not know about

or have never seen before. I want others to feel the thrill. (58-year-old female)

I have joked to my spouse is the best thing to come out of my eBaying is that I truly had to learn something new! I learned what other people are interested in--what demand is for and what it isn't for. (33-year-old female)

Likewise, the Engagers also had a tendency to use more words and phrases that were packed with internal emotions. They frequently used such words as "like" and "love" in their descriptions. For example:

I like the idea of eBay and Internet shopping. I like the idea of auctions but I think waiting up til 3:08 AM to see if you are going to win a bid or get sniped in the last minute and 46 seconds takes a lot of the fun out of it. (54-year-old male)

This has reaffirmed my love of learning, spent last year as a Smithsonian scholar and eBay has allowed my pursuit of areas I was further interested in. I feel pride to show and discuss acquiring collections thru eBay on Lincoln, quail, mourning jewelry. (58-year-old female)

#### Recommendation for Additional Descriptors

This study concerning the learning strategies of adults who have engaged in the eBay auction process has revealed additional descriptors of each of the ATLAS groups of Navigators, Problem Solvers, and Engagers. Thus, along with the recommendation for adult learning researchers to use ATLAS in any future studies, it is further recommended that the analysis of each additional study focus on developing even additional descriptors of each ATLAS group. Since

ATLAS is a relatively new instrument, any additional descriptors for adult learners in each ATLAS group can provide new meaning and understanding into the Navigators, Problem Solvers, and Engagers.

#### Similar Learning Tasks

Learners can be successful in accomplishing similar learning tasks even though they use different strategies in the process.

Navigators, Problem Solvers, and Engagers frequently reported that they accomplished similar tasks, but the strategies they used to arrive at their accomplishments were different. For example, when asked to describe how they developed their eBay bidding strategies, several Navigators, Problem Solvers, and Engagers said they used the actual act of bidding as a method of developing their strategy. However, there were differences in the strategies that those in each group used to get to this point. The Navigators tended to use external resources.

I learned to develop my strategy from the reading the book I mentioned. (45-year-old female Navigator)

However, the Problem Solvers were inclined to give detailed descriptions and examples of the processes used to develop their bidding strategies. For example:

When I find something I want to bid on by scrolling through a list of like items, I would examine the writeup thoroughly. If I need a photo, then I definitely check it out. If the photo is murky or unclear and out of focus and the

item is not visible, then I pass it up. I then look to see the price limits and try not to push the envelope unless I just have to have it. Often I would bid once at its low end and wait and see. If I am outbid along the process, I would file that information and come back to it near the end of the auction to see what its current valuation is; if I can still afford it, and still want it badly, then I would hike up the bid to my level, and wait and see. I would check on these items almost daily. (70-year-old male)

The Engagers displayed the propensity to use emotionally-laden words even in their descriptions of their bidding strategy development. For example:

I didn't like losing out, especially if it was something I really needed or wanted. (40-year-old female)

The realization that learners can be successful in accomplishing similar tasks by using different strategies while learning points out the importance of the process involved in using different learning strategies. This point supports the entire concept that learning strategies are not stable, unchangeable traits but are rather "the techniques or skills that an individual elects to use in order to accomplish a learning task" (Fellenz & Conti, 1993, p. 3). This also supports the concept that adult learners in certain situations have successfully learned how to learn (Smith, 1976; 1982). Learning strategies are available for adult learners to pick and choose from according to their learning needs.

#### Recommendation for Similar Learning Tasks

The findings of this current study revealed that the process of achieving similar learning tasks could be successfully accomplished by using different strategies. However, this is the first such study to do so. Therefore, a recommendation for researchers of adult learning is to further explore the different processes that adult learners use when accomplishing similar learning tasks. Each time ATLAS is employed in an adult learning investigation, it is suggested that the researcher look for these differences.

### The Internet

#### Data Collection

The Internet is a useful data collection tool for adult learning researchers.

The widespread growth of computer and Internet use within certain populations provides a unique opportunity to researchers of adult learning. Along with such traditional methods as mailed questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups, this medium offers yet another tool for researchers to add to their choices when designing a research plan. In addition to being less expensive than traditional methods, Internet data collection may be faster, more convenient, and may reach a broader audience than more traditional data gathering methods. However, more important to researchers could be the quality and quantity of data collected by using the Internet as a data gathering tool.

The findings of this study support the use of the Internet as a data collection medium and of e-mailed questionnaires. Although the 6% response rate was low, the quality and quantity of data made it clear that the collection method had important implications for future adult learning research. The 380 representative respondents submitted 340 pages of single-spaced, size 10-font data that were rich in detail and description. In fact, so much information was presented by the participants that decisions concerning the depth of analysis had to be made in regard to this one study. The analysis of the data revealed high quality responses, that was perhaps due to the freedom that online anonymity affords. "The electronic mail medium offers a greater degree of anonymity for most users than other types of media" (Persichitte, Young, & Tharp, 1997, p. 280).

In addition to the quality and quantity of data, the post-collection work of this study was assisted by the electronic collection format. Since the data were submitted electronically and were stored in a computer file, analysis and transcription responsibilities were greatly enhanced by the electronic format. Direct quotations from the participants' answers to the qualitative requests could be copied and pasted into the study findings which expedited the reporting speed. Also, the data were analyzed using a

powerful combination of software programs that permitted added ease and accuracy in the analysis phase of the process. In addition, the precision of transcription provided by electronically cutting and pasting blocks of data helped to ensure the integrity of the participants' responses.

The study findings also produced support for the practice of triangulation (Greene & McClintock, 1985) or of blending two types of data together. In this case, both qualitative and quantitative data were analyzed which resulted in a richer and more thorough examination of the volumes of data provided by the participants. Within the online questionnaire, 19 qualitative requests in an open-ended format were presented along with 5 quantitative requests which featured 5-point Likert scale choices. Since people who favor different learning strategies may prefer one response choice over the other, this mixed-method pattern appeared to appeal to both the Problem Solvers who are "better assessed with open-ended questions" (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 12) and Navigators and Engagers who may prefer the shorter Likert scale options, albeit for different reasons.

#### Recommendation for Data Collection

The explosion of computer and Internet use offers new and varied opportunities to researchers of adult learning.

Therefore, when in search of the most current information from a large group of people, researchers should consider the Internet as a data collection tool. This may mean that researchers will find it necessary to become personally more familiar with computer and Internet operations. This includes familiarizing themselves with computer and Internet functions perhaps through hands-on professional development opportunities at various educational and research conferences and seminars. Since the analysis of electronic data may be greatly facilitated by using a highly effective combination of software programs, sponsors of adult learning and adult research conferences should consider offering seminars that reveal the intricate analysis procedure and its accompanying corollary that were used in this study.

Researchers process and analyze data from their own personal and professional perspectives. The response to this Internet study resulted in large amounts of qualitative data which were examined from one researcher's perspective. Qualitative research in particular tends to be very multi-dimensional. Since research itself is a learning activity, research projects like this which have rich data should merit including data analysis by additional researchers for interpretations and implications which may have been lost due to researcher perspectives. Any researchers of future studies should clearly articulate their perspectives and be



constantly aware from which viewpoints they are analyzing the data.

### Literacy Skills

Participation in Internet activities enhances the literacy skills of the participants.

Countless traditional courses in adult literacy occur all over the world in abundant settings, yet many adult learners are benefitting from the literacy-building component of the Internet with no formal instruction. Not only does the Internet enhance adult literacy skills, it affects assorted types of literacy skills in meaningful and practical ways. Both traditional and computer literacy skills are improved as a result of Internet participation.

The participants this study indicated that the skills traditionally associated with literacy such as reading, writing, spelling, and comprehension were enhanced by Internet participation. The eBay users participating in this Internet experience have recognized and reported that their skills have improved as a result of their Internet experiences. One man wrote, "now, I can almost spell" (29-year-old male Engager), and a woman described how Internet use "has validated my writing and spelling skills" (26-year-old female Navigator). Improved literacy skills such as communication techniques are also apparent bonuses of Internet use. "I now know I have an influence over people

by using my vocabulary to describe products using descriptive verbs and modifiers" (28-year-old female Navigator). Along with these skills, the English competency of this German-speaking participant was enhanced: "I realize that my English is not too bad and I can communicate with other and they understand me" (30-year-old female Navigator).

In addition, it was conclusively determined through several participants of this study that the Internet was also a source for improved computer literacy and Internet skills. The ample responses from this eBay study revealed with astonishing clarity that Internet participants' literacy skills were increased as a result of participation in Internet activities.

The computer literacy skills of adult learners may be improved in a variety of ways. For example, several of the study participants reported that their computer literacy skills improved because their typing or keyboarding skills were enhanced by Internet use while others found the Internet to be the source of improvement for their Internet research and navigational skills. One person recognized that "it has caused me to increase my typing skills for sure, as well as general computer usage" (52-year-old male Engager) while another noticed "I have more confidence in my skills in use of the Internet and finding information for

areas in which I may not be adept" (44-year-old female Navigator). The literacy skills of adult learners are also improved by the Internet as it is a method that encourages use of certain software applications and particular computer equipment. Internet use and participation has the capacity to lead adults to learning such advanced operations as scanning pictures, downloading photographs, uploading images, and writing text to fit particular computer protocols.

#### Recommendation for Literacy Skills

As demonstrated by the participants, the findings from this study showed how the traditional literacy and computer literacy skills of Internet users are enhanced by Internet use. Each day, over three million eBay users are potentially learning to improve their traditional and computer literacy skills in meaningful ways and have become the expression of practical literacy improvement outside of formal literacy classrooms and computer classrooms. Therefore, adult literacy programs should follow adult learning principles and encourage computer and Internet practice in their course formats. Programs such as English as a Second Language and those offered as Adult Basic Education classes would do well to take advantage of computers and the Internet to facilitate and enhance their programs. Not only would the adult learners benefit from

improved literacy skills, but they would also benefit from the technological skills that enhanced computer and Internet competencies would bring.

### Language and Culture

eBay participation is creating new forms of language and culture.

As more people gain access to computers and the Internet their language and culture are undergoing transformations. The findings of this study revealed that the Internet site called eBay was a definitive example of this change. People from all over the world travel to the online auction site to transact business and communicate with others in a developing language and culture all their own.

The language of eBay is one of the components that sets it apart from other websites. Accomplished eBay users and novice participants alike use such custom-made words as "sniping" in their descriptions of eBay actions:

I've lost items to others that sniped me so I figure if I really want something I have to keep a close eye on it and when needed, snipe it. (49-year-old male Problem Solver)

After being run up to my max bid in the last minute I learned to snipe. (38-year-old male; no ATLAS group)

Additionally, eBay members use such phrases as "I check feedback", "I view the scan", "watch the bid history", "proxy bidding", "I go to My eBay", or "I visit safeharbor".

These mean virtually nothing to a non-eBay user but are significant to eBay users who may or may not speak the same native languages. When adult learners worldwide find common ground through an exclusive communications, a new language is formed (Kipp, 2000).

eBay participants are involved in a variety of outside auction activities. Some are organized by eBay, and others are not. The eBay website provides its users with such avenues for communication as online "chat" rooms and the eBay Community pages which include eBay discussion groups and user help boards along with an online newsletter. The site encourages users to e-mail each other with auction questions or to e-mail the site with feedback information. eBay users also meet online and in person in ways not associated with the website. "I have made both professional and personal friends on eBay from all over the world, and haven't met one of them" (53-year-old male Problem Solver). Some eBay users have formed friendship and collectors' communities and clubs as a result of meeting through eBay auctions. Several groups worldwide gather in celebration of eBay's birthday every Labor Day weekend.

#### Recommendations for Language and Culture

The eBay website is in a unique position to study the new languages and communities that have formed as a result of the massive global participation in their online

auctions. Therefore, the eBay Foundation should offer several grants to researchers willing to study the eBay language and resulting subcultures and publish their results. Such research initiatives could be focused around the language alone or could focus on the friendships, business relationships, and even marriages that have occurred as a result of eBay use.

Another opportunity awaits eBay support. Since eBay has such an international flavor, eBay people of different countries than the United States should be interviewed and studied in order to learn how eBay can better serve these populations. One participant expressed his dismay at eBay's proclivity to favor users from the United States when he wrote:

When a transaction ends, there are only 3 day for communication. I live abroad, so I have time difference. In the weekends I can hardly use E-mail, so communication could easily take two weeks to define the right shipping price. After that money has to be transferred and this will take another 6 days. Some sellers have problems with this period and whenever a system "crash" appears things are delayed. Recently I experienced such a problem, and due to my buyings and the delay for administration of them, I was "promoted" to not-registered user. What did I learn from it. eBay is set up for The States only and cannot easily handle international delay. Of course eBay makes rules, and when you start it is easy on a few items. When you buy more the delay is forced by the geographical distance. I just keep on doing business, and the fact that they made me a "non-registered user" just causes me be more inventive to handle this problem. (42-year-old male Navigator)

## The Digital Divide

eBay is contributing to the Digital Divide.

Although computer use and Internet access is growing at a phenomenal rate, the rate of access and availability is clearly not matching that pace. The number of people in the United States who own computers has increased by over 50% in the past few years, and the number of households with e-mail capabilities has quadrupled (National Telecommunications and Information Administration, 1998). However, a huge gap which is commonly called the Digital Divide has developed effectively separating those with computer and Internet access and those without. The findings of this study expose the eBay process as an unknowing contributor to the Digital Divide worldwide. eBay strengthens the negative aspects of the Digital Divide in many ways. In order to be admitted to the eBay website, people must first live in areas supported by electricity and telephone capabilities. They must also have access to a computer with an Internet account and possess the requisite computer literacy and language skills necessary for eBay participation. The ethnic makeup of this representative sample of eBay supports the Digital Divide charge that the Internet is the domain of white, western nations. Likewise, the sample was well educated and had the disposable income and disposable time to engage the Internet auction process. However, the balance in male and

female participants is one positive indicator mitigating against the Digital Divide.

eBay is obviously a website of well-educated White people. Of the total participants in the representative sample, an astonishing 93.3% were Anglo American or White. This compared with .3% African American or Black, 1.0% Asian, 1.7% Hispanic, and 1.0% Native American. Although people from nine countries participated in this study and an attempt was made to target completed auctions that would attract people of various cultures, the sample still resulted in an over 90% participation rate of White people. The group was also well educated in that over one-half (55.6%) had earned Bachelor's or Graduate school degrees and an additional 12.2% had earned an Associate's degree. This finding is consistent with a major report on the Digital Divide that found "the greater one's education, the greater the likelihood that a person has a phone, a PC, or modem" (National Telecommunications and Information Administration, 1998, p. 4) and "those with a college education are almost ten times as likely to own a computer as those without any high school" (p. 4).

The study findings also exposed more subtle examples of the Digital Divide on eBay. Although eBay may be a source for bargain hunters and value shoppers, it is also a place for people who have disposable income and disposable time.



While many people in this country and beyond do not have enough money to cover their necessary living expenses, most eBay users have access to enough discretionary monies of varying amounts to participate in the auction.

In addition, eBay participation attracts people with fluctuating degrees of time at their disposal. One participant remarked, "I find myself spending more time on eBay than on other sites" (55-year-old male Problem Solver) while another participant volunteered that she was "pretty much on my computer 24/7 now" (26-year-old female Navigator). It is imagined that single parents with young children or adult learners caring for an older relative at home would rarely have the extra time required to effectively operate as a successful eBay user. However, some eBay users have left traditional employment in favor of selling full-time on eBay as the findings showed.

As one-half of the eBay study participants were male and one-half female, any gender gap of the Digital Divide on eBay appears to have closed. Another recent study (Spencer, 2000) also found an equal number of males and females in its sample of self-directed adult learners on the Internet. Although the Internet is apparently losing its divide between the genders, stereotypical assumptions about eBay participation still exist. Many people believe eBay is simply a source for shopping and therefore is prone to

visits by more women than men. The results of this study findings reported that not only are men utilizing the eBay site for shopping, but people from both genders are using it for collecting purposes as these participant descriptions illustrate:

eBay has been one of many positive experiences with on line shopping. I now do most of my shopping on the Internet, through auction sites but mostly through shopping sites. (51-year-old male Navigator)

I like being able to purchase collectibles that I do not have time to search for in stores. (38-year-old male Problem Solver)

I was able to find pieces via the Internet to add to my collection when I had just about given up on finding them. (60-year-old female Engager)

#### Recommendation for The Digital Divide

The work of the National Telecommunications and Information Administration has exposed many truths about the Digital Divide in its studies completed in 1994 and 1998. However, any publication about the Internet "risks obsolescence before it even reaches print" (Cahoon, 1998, p. 2). Therefore, it is suggested that additional research on the Digital Divide be conducted on a consistent basis in order to assess gaps in electricity, telephone, computer, and Internet access and gauge how these factors that influence the Digital Divide may be related to adult learning.

Through the work of its new foundation, eBay has an extraordinary opportunity to contribute to the control of the Digital Divide. Thus, the eBay Foundation could actively seek out and fund programs that supply computer and Internet access. For those with electricity and telephone access, eBay could provide recycled computers and Internet accounts. For those without electricity and telephone access, the eBay Foundation could provide assistance to programs that help clients obtain and maintain electrical and communications access.

This study collected demographic information of its participants based on gender, age, education, and race. However, no data were collected which concerned the income levels of eBay participants. Future studies of Internet participants should attempt to collect such information.

#### Commencement

To me it seems very appropriate that this volume should end with a beginning, a commencement.  
(Rogers, 1969, p. 341)

These 380 respondents in this study have done much more than participate in an Internet auction activity and answer an online questionnaire. Their words ring loudly and clearly. In this current era of rapid change, the participants have "engaged in a process, the outcome of which we cannot clearly predict" (Rogers, 1969, p. 341). This process reveals a shift to "more self-reliant and self-

directed participation" (p. 341). Learning is the main activity in that process in which they have participated. "An internal process that is not always visible to the eye, learning is a pervasive state of being, rather than merely a change in behavior" (Kittredge, 1998, p. 12). The communicants have repeatedly described the complex learning processes in which they have engaged as a result of an on-going informal activity. In addition, they have made clear that engaging in eBay activities is an endeavor of human relationships involving continuous learning rather than just an effort of electronic commerce.

Almost all of my experiences have been positive. One of the most common is some of the great people I have met as a result. While we may not stay in contact, the interaction is neat in the respect that I would have never even known these people otherwise. (40-year-old male Navigator)

I learned that almost all people are trustworthy. I have only a few bad experiences. Most people are just like me. (34-year-old female Navigator)

I helped the guy from Tasmania get some things that he was always outbid on. I lost money on it, but it made him so happy to finally get that item. I learned that you don't always have to make a profit to have a satisfying transaction. (45-year-old male Problem Solver)

One of the best--and there have been many, many positive contacts, all involving getting to know lovely sellers--has been the couple I bought a Queen Mary lifevest from. The wife posed for a photo wearing the lifevest, and the husband wrote me a wonderful note about how she didn't want to do it, but he convinced her. We've been writing back and forth ever since; they're a super couple, and I'm so glad to have met them. I learned just

how many interesting, lovely people are involved in eBay, and how many fascinating lives there are out there, that I'd know nothing about were it not for eBay. The fellow had any number of interesting careers before choosing eBay as a possible retirement activity. (47-year-old female Problem Solver)

I have just started using digital technology, and I have learned a great deal from sellers and buyers of eBay about digital technology. Most are willing to assist others. (63-year-old male Engager)

There are really too many positive eBay experiences to list. We've had countless positive experiences. Most people I've worked with have been honest, friendly, and wonderful!! I guess I would have to say that what I've learned from these experiences is what I already knew...people like to work with you when you're honest!! We are always honest about the condition of our products and any other information we can provide. I've also learned that it works best for me to treat people the way I want to be treated. (31-year-old female Engager)

"Whether viewed scientifically or artistically, learning is a process grounded in the individual's perceptions of place" (Kittredge, 1998, p. 12). This process is based with the learner and all action radiates from the learner for "it is the individual who draws the connections and sees the whole. It is the individual who makes the choices to act after reflective thought. It is the individual who holds the frame for viewing the future" (pp. 268-269). The learners hold the key to understanding learning. Like Alice in Wonderland, it is the researcher's

job to turn the key to understand what is on the learner's side of the looking glass:

But oh...now we come to the passage. You can just see a little PEEP of the passage in Looking-glass House, if you leave the door of our drawing-room wide open: and it's very like our passage as far as you can see, only you know it may be quite different on beyond. Oh...how nice it would be if we could only get through into Looking-glass House! I'm sure it's got, oh! such beautiful things in it! Let's pretend there's a way of getting through into it, somehow....And certainly the glass WAS beginning to melt away, just like a bright silvery mist. (Carroll, 1871, pp. 5-6)

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APPENDIX A  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD  
APPROVAL FORM



OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Date: November 2, 1999

IRB #: ED-00-172

Proposal Title: "LEARNING ON THE INTERNET"

Principal Investigator(s): Gary Conti  
Anne Ghostbear

Reviewed and Processed as: Exempt

Approval Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved



Signature:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Carol Olson, Director of University Research Compliance

\_\_\_\_\_  
November 2, 1999

Date

Approvals are valid for one calendar year, after which time a request for continuation must be submitted. Any modification to the research project approved by the IRB must be submitted for approval with the advisor's signature. The IRB office MUST be notified in writing when a project is complete. Approved projects are subject to monitoring by the IRB. Expedited and exempt projects may be reviewed by the full Institutional Review Board.

APPENDIX B  
QUESTIONNAIRE

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**OSU**  
College of Education  
Oklahoma State University

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Dear eBay User:

eBay is an exciting Internet site that enables us not only to use our computer skills but also to learn about many items for sale and to interact with other people. These activities involve various forms of learning. Much of what we know about learning is the result of studies conducted in formal learning settings. However, most adult learning takes place in informal situations such as learning about things related to eBay. Therefore, we are conducting a study to describe the learning strategies that adults like you use to engage in the eBay auction process.

In order to make our study meaningful, we need your help. You have been selected as a representative member of eBay because of your recent participation in an auction. Listed below is a website which contains a brief survey related to how you learn about things connected with eBay. It takes approximately 15 minutes to complete the survey. You may volunteer to participate in the study by clicking on this website. If you agree to help by telling us about how you learn connected with eBay, your answers will remain anonymous; no one but us will see your answers.

Your answers will help us greatly in understanding how adults learn in real-life situations. If you are willing to participate in the study, please click on:

<http://members.aol.com/GaryConti/ebay.htm>

After the responses are in, we will be holding a drawing to select two of the respondents for a "thank you" award of \$25 each. In the eBay fashion, the winners will be contacted by e-mail.

Sincerely yours,  
Gary J. Conti, Ed. D.  
Professor of Adult Education

Anne Ghost Bear  
Educational Consultant

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## Learning on eBay

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**Directions:** eBay is an exciting Internet site that enables us not only to use our computer skills but also to learn about many items for sale and to interact with other people. These activities involve various forms of learning. The purpose of the following questions is to gather information from you about how you learn about things using eBay. Your answers will help us better understand how adults learn in real-life learning situations. Please give as much detail for each answer as you can. **You may easily move from one item to the next by pressing the Tab key.**

This survey consists of two parts. Part 1 asks about how you learn related to using eBay. It will take approximately 10 to 15 minutes to complete. Part 2 provides you information about your learning strategy preferences. It can be completed in less than 3 minutes.

-----  
Part 1  
-----

1. How did you learn about eBay?

2. Describe the learning process you used to get started on eBay.

a. How did you learn about getting your account started?

b. Once you had your account started, how did you go about learning what was on eBay and about the different parts of the eBay web page?

3. Describe a typical session that you have on eBay.

4. Think about an auction on eBay in the past 6 months that interested you and that you took action to learn more about it.

a. Describe how you went about learning more about the **item**.

b. Describe how you went about learning more about the **people involved in the auction**.

c. Describe how you went about learning more about the **any other things related to the auction**.

5. If you are willing to share your strategy for bidding on items, please describe the strategy that you use for bidding on items in eBay. (**Note:** We are not interested in compiling a list of the strategies that people use for bidding. Rather, we are interested in knowing your strategy as an example of the way you apply your learning.)

6. Describe how you developed your strategy for bidding on items on eBay.

7. E-mail is a powerful communication tool for eBay users. How much do you communicate with other eBay users using e-mail.

- Very Much       Much       Some       Seldom       Never

8. What are the **advantages** of communicating with others about an eBay auction on e-mail?

9. What are the **disadvantages** of communicating with others about an eBay auction on e-mail?

10. How would you describe your overall feelings concerning your e-mail communications with others on eBay?

- Extremely Positive     Positive     Neutral     Negative     Extremely Negative

11. How has using eBay influenced the **way you feel** about computers and the Internet?

12. How has using eBay influenced the **way you use** computers and the Internet?

13. Using eBay may require you to learn about a variety of things. For example, if you buy items through eBay, you may have to learn about such things as getting money orders or using e-mail. If you offered items for sale, you may have to learn about such things as up-loading your ad or arranging shipment of the item. Please list as many things as you can think of that you have learned about as a result of using eBay.

14. Getting on and using eBay allows you to do a wide variety of things that includes being a part of the Internet, participating with strangers in the bidding process for an item, and communicating with others over an item or auction.

a. Describe how your participation in eBay has influenced your attitudes **about the Internet**.

b. Describe how your participation in eBay has influenced your attitudes **about your own skills**.

c. Describe how your participation in eBay has influenced your attitudes **about yourself as a person**.

15. Think about a **positive** experience that you had using eBay. Briefly describe it and tell what you learned from it?

16. Think about a **negative** experience that you had using eBay. Briefly describe it and tell what you learned from it?

17. How would you rate your **computer skills**?

- Very Good       Good       About Average       Poor       Very Poor

18. How much have your **computer skills increased** as a result of using eBay?

- Very Much       Much       Some       Little       Very Little

19. Approximately how many **hours per week** do you tend to:

a. Use the Internet?

b. Spend on eBay?

20. How much has using eBay changed the **amount of time** that you spend on the Internet?

- Very Much
- Much
- Some
- Little
- Very Little

21. How much have your **skills in finding out about things** increased as a result of using eBay?

- Very Much
- Much
- Some
- Little
- Very Little

22. How much has your **confidence in yourself** increased as a result of using eBay?

- Very Much
- Much
- Some
- Little
- Very Little

23. How much has your **confidence in your ability to use computers** increased as a result of using eBay?

- Very Much
- Much
- Some
- Little
- Very Little

24. How much has your **confidence in your ability to use the Internet** increased as a result of using eBay?

- Very Much
- Much
- Some
- Little
- Very Little

25. How much has your **confidence in your ability to deal with others** increased as a result of using eBay?

- Very Much
- Much
- Some
- Little
- Very Little



The following information will help use better understand the information that you have provided us.

**Gender:**  Male  Female

**Your Age:**

**Education:** Please select your highest level of formal education.

- Less than High School Diploma
- High School Diploma
- Vocational or Educational Certificate
- Associates Degree
- Bachelors Degree
- Graduate Degree



**Race:**

African American    Asian    Hispanic    Native American    White    Other



2  
VITA

Anne A. Ghostbear

Candidate for the Degree of  
Doctor of Education

Thesis: ADULT LEARNING ON THE INTERNET: ENGAGING THE eBay  
AUCTION PROCESS

Major Field: Occupational and Adult Education

Biographical:

Education: Graduated from Ada High School in Ada, Oklahoma in May 1974; received a Bachelor of Science degree in Business from East Central University, Ada, Oklahoma in August 1977; received Master of Science degree from Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma, in December 1998. Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Education degree with a major in Occupational and Adult Education at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in May 2001.

Experience: Early childhood and school-age program administrator; Educational Consultant; Adjunct instructor at Tulsa Community College and Oklahoma State University.

Professional Memberships: National Association for the Education of Young Children, Southern Early Childhood Association, Early Childhood Association of Oklahoma, and Friends of Early Education.