

“I’m touching myself”
An Investigation of Ann Hirsch’s *Twelve*

by

Alex McLaren

A Major Research Paper presented to OCAD University in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Contemporary Art, Design
and New Media Art Histories

Toronto, Ontario, Canada, June, 2014

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Abstract

“I’m touching myself:” An Investigation of Ann Hirsch’s *Twelve*
Alex McLaren. M.A. 2014,
Contemporary Art, Design and New Media Art Histories,
OCAD University

Ann Hirsch is an emerging video and performance artist based in Brooklyn, New York whose work focuses on women’s sexuality on the Internet. Hirsch’s digital work is constantly in flux, appearing, disappearing and reappearing online. Her work, like her identity, reflects the possibilities of self-representation at the turn of the millennium. The paper that follows examines Hirsch’s artwork *Twelve* (2013) and its evolution from a pseudo-biographical eBook to an art object, a shift which transpired during the course of my own research and engagement. A complex piece addressing the nexus of youth culture, online intimacies and social regulation; the transformation of *Twelve*’s construction and preservation indicates the possibility for a teleological shift in new media scholarship that recognizes the ephemeral nature of technology-dependent art and the slower pace of traditional forms of academic scholarship. The speed of production, destruction, and reconstruction of *Twelve* is distinct to new media art fields and digital cultures.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deep gratitude to Professor Jessica Wyman and Professor Maria-Belen Ordonez, my research supervisors, for their patience, guidance, encouragement and useful critiques of this research work. I would also like to thank Jennifer Robinson, for her advice and assistance in keeping my progress on schedule. My grateful thanks are also extended to Mr. Patrick Phillips for his help with some of the citations unique to this investigation. I would also like to extend my thanks to the Centre for Students with Disabilities at OCAD University for their support throughout my graduate academic experience. Finally, I wish to thank my close friends and family for their support and encouragement throughout my study.

To Alvy.

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Introduction

In 1998, “social networking” was not a term embedded in the cultural imagination. In order to connect to the “World Wide Web,” a blocky desktop computer was attached to a long phone cable that was plugged into the telephone jack. These were the Wild West days of the internet before the dot com boom that would usher in the new millennium. Unlike the digital online landscape of 2014, the internet in 1998 was largely defined by anonymity. It would seem that part of the thrill of logging into the internet was logging into chat rooms to talk with strangers across the world. These “rooms” were spaces where strangers would gather around a similar interest or theme to meet likeminded people in an attempt to ease the ennui of contemporary life through instant messaging.

In order to access these spaces, it was necessary to choose a screen name to login to the interface. These screen names were often creative extensions or nicknames of the individual user. Unlike the “real world” offline, online names were not preassigned. Screen names were self-prescribed, could be changed at any time, and be spelled in virtually any way. This element of free choice and self-representation indicates how internet culture at this time was fantasy-driven and recognized the power of imagination over the material and unchangeable elements of the offline world. Online, one could be anyone. Gender, age, and locations were flexible constructs that were often exaggerated or manipulated as measures to create an ideal or convenient construction of the self.

Collections of these partial – never whole – constructions of the self would

comprise entire online communities that functioned remarkably similarly to social structures offline. Individuals would meet online and perhaps share a degree of sexual compatibility which would often lead to a subsequent romantic relationship. Strangers would meet and either omit or fabricate elements of their identity to seduce potential partners. Online, identity was flexible and it was generally understood that people one met could be lying about the truth of their offline lives.

Young people were quick to incorporate instant messaging into youth culture and were attracted to the freedom of expression and level of community engagement that they could not access offline. As parents feared abduction and molestation, more young people were dissuaded from congregating in public spaces. These young people stayed at home and used computers as the primary tool of socialization which led to the development of federally-funded youth online protection initiatives. Youth's safety online became a primary concern for the United States Federal Government. In 1998, Children's Privacy Act was passed as a federal law, forbidding websites to collect information "from children under the age of thirteen" and requiring that they include a privacy policy that requires verifiable consent from parent or guardian to access the website.¹ In the same year, the CyberTipline was launched in partnership with the FBI, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, U.S. Postal Inspection Service, U.S. Secret Service, military criminal investigative organizations, U.S. Department of

¹ The Children's Privacy Act was enacted on October 21, 1998. "Children's Online Privacy Protection Act," <http://www.coppa.org/>. Accessed 1 June, 2014.

Justice, Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force program, as well as other state and local law enforcement agencies.² The CyberTipline was put in place with the Missing Kids program to organize efforts around suspected crimes of sexual exploitation. Between 1998 and 2013, the CyberTipline collected more than 2.2 million reports of suspected child exploitation online.³

In 2000, The United States Department of Justice, in conjunction with the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children and a grant from the U.S. Congress, released “Online Victimization: A Report on the Nation’s Youth.” Chairman of the U.S. Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, State, and Judicial and Related Agencies, Judd Gregg, authored the chilling introduction which gives a brief summary of the “misuse of the internet” and the failures of “legislators, families, communities, and law enforcement” to prevent the victimization of the nation’s youth.⁴ Gregg calls for a “more aggressive prevention plan...extra attention and guidance” for the “most vulnerable” group of the population: youths.⁵ A nationwide survey revealed that “exposure to unwanted sexual material, solicitation, and harassment” were frequently reported by interviewees. From 1998 to now, numerous private and public organizations have been invested in Internet safety campaigns and announcements to educate parents and youths about safe Internet use and criminal

² “CyberTipline,” <http://www.missingkids.com/cybertipline/>. Accessed 1 June, 2014.

³ Ibid.

⁴ National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, “Online Victimization: A Report on the Nation’s Youth,” 2000. <http://www.unh.edu/ccrc/pdf/jvq/CV38.pdf>. Accessed 30 March, 2014. Published on The United States Department of Justice website, <http://www.justice.gov/psc/publications.html>.

⁵ Ibid.

misuse of cyberspace. Specifically, the fear and panic surrounding predators targeting and physically victimizing children permeated the cultural imagination, giving youth chat rooms a dangerous reputation.

Ann Hirsch, an emerging American artist, was one of these early digital natives and found a chat room on AOL Instant Messenger (AIM) that she later in 2013 recreated as an artwork to chronicle her early experiences as a preadolescent girl instant-messaging strangers in the late 1990s.⁶ A recipient of a Rhizome commissions project, Hirsch developed a theatrical piece, *Playground* (2013), and an eBook, *Twelve* (2013), that tells her story through different media. The narrative centers on Anni, a seventh-grade student, who finds a chat room for twelve-year olds in 1998, which was appropriately named “Twelve.” By immersing herself in chat room culture, Anni in both *Playground* and *Twelve* participates in cybersex, heteronormative coupling, possessive partnership, and her self-formation. *Twelve* and its simulations of instant messaging and chat room community structure embodies the time-based quality of new media artwork and indicates how instant messaging has integrated itself in everyday experiences like dating and self-presentation. Most notably, the central theme of a romantic relationship between an adult and pubescent person suggests that imagination and

⁶ Marc Prensky first coined the term *digital native* and *digital immigrant* in his essay “Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants” published in 2001. Due to the exponential increase in technological advancements and acquisitions, Prensky argues that students of the new millennia “think and process information fundamentally differently from their predecessors.” Youths online who process this information unique to the previous generation are “digital natives” whereas “digital immigrants” typically have very little appreciation for these new skills that the natives have acquired and perfected through years of interaction and practice.” Prensky, Marc. “Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants.” *On the Horizon*. (MCB University Press, Vol. 9 No. 5, October 2001).

fantasy were essential freedoms in the earlier days of online instant messaging and they continue to persist today.

In chapter one, the primary focus is on describing *Twelve* and its context of production, the characters within the story, the emergence of internet friendships and the eBook's convergence of old and new forms of media. In chapter two, three primary characters in *Twelve*, Anni, Heather, and Jobe, are considered inhabiting the virtual world in *Twelve*, pointing to social shifts in public intimacies. Chapter three's focus is on cybersex and sexuality with emphasis on Anni and Jobe's age difference. In chapter four, their relationship is examined with respect to the sincerity of romantic love online. Three texts are woven together in chapter four to explore overlapping issues of privacy, intimacy, and heteronormativity in online communities. Chapter five is a return to the artwork in question and the difficulties surrounding the reception, conservation and access to *Twelve* post-Apple.

1. You have entered the chatroom: Twelve.

Ann Hirsch is a video and performance artist based in Brooklyn, New York whose work focuses on women, sexuality, and the platform of the internet. Self-described as “an amateur social scientist,” Hirsch typically situates her personae in pop culture contexts to expose audiences on television and online to

performance artworks.⁷ Hirsch's characters and artworks are crucial to her investigations into "social science" as they allow her to investigate the relationships between technology, gender, and popular culture.⁸ This paper examines Hirsch's artwork *Twelve* (2013) and its evolution from a quasi-biographical eBook to an art object during the course of my own research and engagement. *Twelve*'s construction and preservation indicate the possibility for a teleological shift in new media scholarship that recognizes the ephemeral nature of technology-dependent art and the slower pace of academic scholarship.

Hirsch first developed a following⁹ in 2009 with her *Scandalishious Project* where she adopted a performance character, Caroline, to explore voyeurism and female agency online. Her project on YouTube, called *Caroline's fun fun channel*, centers around the character Caroline, an extroverted and artistic college freshman who shares intimate webcam videos from her bedroom at Syracuse University [see Figure 1]. Caroline's videos include sexual comments, provocative gestures, a shrill voice and an offbeat sense of humour. In addition to the YouTube videos, Caroline has her own complete online identity to reinforce her credibility as an artist: her "personal" website includes contact information, art and videos, as a remix of her YouTube released single "MY BUTT" plays in

⁷ Hirsch has recently redesigned her website (since initially consulted for research.) The term, "amateur social scientist" is a self-description which was recently removed from her website. Due to the redesign, some information can be found, some cannot. Screenshots will be provided alongside for the convenience of the reader. Hirsch, Ann. "The Real Ann Hirsch," <http://therealannhirsch.com/>. Accessed 13 January, 2014.

⁸ Hirsch, Ann. "The Real Ann Hirsch," <http://therealannhirsch.com/>. Accessed 11 March, 2014.

⁹ The term "following" here is used as a double entendre to imply Hirsch's internet fan base as well as her "followers" on numerous social media channels who are invested in her success as an artist, internet personality, and writer.

the background. From the videos and the website, it is evident that Hirsch carefully constructed Caroline to appear at once ridiculous and sincere, as each melodramatic action looks as if it's coming from a real person with real dreams and aspirations. In many respects, Caroline was well-received by a niche audience online with over 1.8 million YouTube hits and 2,043 dedicated subscribers.¹⁰

After Caroline, Hirsch continued to create characters that permitted her to play with mediated representations of identity and femininity through popular culture, reality, and mass media. In 2009, Hirsch auditioned to be one of the contestants on VH1's *Frank the Entertainer...In a Basement Affair*, a spin-off dating series centered on Frank the Entertainer, one of the stars from *Jersey Shore*.¹¹ Similar to the character Caroline, Hirsch developed and sustained a character distinct from herself for the show. Hirsch's reality dating show persona, "Anne," mirrors her own story as an offbeat performance artist. This pseudo-seriousness allows Hirsch to play with self-representations through the tropes of reality television to explore how gender and sexist stereotypes are connected to performance. Further, her participation illustrates the entanglement between virtual and actual spheres of cultural representation that audiences usually take for granted. Hirsch has described in an interview with Dr. Lisa Levy how her characters allow her to explore female representation:

¹⁰ Hirsch, Ann. "Caroline's fun fun channel," <http://www.youtube.com/user/scandalishious>. Accessed 11 March, 2014.

¹¹ *Jersey Shore* is an American reality TV series produced by MTV that focused on the lives of eight housemates in New Jersey. The show ran from 2009 to 2012 and gained a cult audience who were interested in the lives and debauchery of these sexually-charged North Shore caricatures. http://www.mtv.com/shows/jersey_shore/season_6/series.jhtml Accessed 7 April, 2014.

I have been on the show *Oddities* on the Science Channel a few times, so people who know me from that think I am a huge nerd. People who have only seen my Scandalishious work think I'm an attention whore and people who have seen me on *Frank the Entertainer* think I'm some nice, pathetic lovelorn puppy. I guess I'm all those things but, because of the nature of the media, I could only show one side at a time. My goal is that by constantly showing all these different sides, some kind of holistic version of myself will appear.¹²

Hirsch's exploration of Internet communities, popular culture and gender identity reinforces that mass media are increasingly significant to the collective imagination and shape community understandings of femininity, identity, fame, and virtually all cultural scripts.

Hirsch's "holistic" version of herself is impossible to encapsulate in any single representation, but her oeuvre reflects a prismatic artist. Her experiences as "camwhore" Caroline and Anne "the reality television star" informed Hirsch's writing "Reality Bites" (2011) and "Shaming Famewhores Part I, II, III" (2010) for *Bust* magazine and gave her "research material" to pursue new endeavors.¹³ She has exhibited her work in the US and internationally, completed residencies, and has been covered by Rhizome, Artinfo.com, *Artforum*, and *The New York Times*. Her recent work on Vimeo has begun to explore masculine representations and the performativity of gender vis-à-vis her male alter ego Jason Biddies [See

¹² Levy, Lisa. "Dr Lisa: Are Women Who Use Sexuality in Art Often Misjudged?" *Bushwick Daily*. Published 6 February, 2014. <http://bushwickdaily.com/2013/02/dr-lisa-are-women-who-use-sexuality-in-their-art-often-misjudged/> Accessed 11 March, 2014.

¹³ Hirsch commonly refers to the term "camwhore" in her artistic practice. As of 2014, a camwhore is commonly associated with webcam culture, selfies, and aggressive female sexuality. The term "cam" refers primarily to the camera as an included feature on most new millenia technological devices. Whereas the term "whore" denotes the literal webcam sex workers who are often solicited on pornographic and streaming sites. Often, the term is used pejoratively to infer that the individual is highly sexual with exhibitionist tendencies or behaviours.

Figure 2]. *I Decay I Part* is a four-part video series centered on Jason that “combines intimate performance moments, pop music, rickety video effects, feminist diatribes, forays into reality television and the story.”¹⁴ Always active on a spectrum of social media sites and channels, Hirsch’s digital work is constantly in flux, appearing, disappearing and reappearing online. Her work, like her identity, reflects the multiplicity of self-representations at the turn of the millennium in a technologically-saturated milieu.

In an interview with *Artforum*, Hirsch gives some background information about her seventh-grade self and her experiences with cybersex and strangers on the internet. She reveals that she grew up “very sheltered” without much by way of sexual education and that “AOL opened up a whole world” for her.¹⁵ This world and her secret life as a sexually curious adolescent made her feel ashamed.¹⁶ Hirsch kept her chat room experiences private until years later when she was developing “[her] camwhore character” Caroline for Scandalishious.¹⁷ These early experiences were investigations that later informed her internet personages, writings, and art practice. What emerges from Anni’s story in *Twelve* are feminist approaches into interpersonal relationships with peers, the power of words, the striking intensity of youth sexuality, and predators.

In order to recreate the original chat room, Hirsch uses the eBook as a method to simulate the interface of instant messaging from her adolescence. The

¹⁴ Hirsch, Ann. “I Decay Part I: I C U”. <http://vimeo.com/66752027> Accessed March 11, 2014.

¹⁵ Fateman, Johanna. “Ann Hirsch.” *Artforum* (2013). Accessed November 8, 2013. doi:43319.

¹⁶ “I was very ashamed of my secret life online, and I didn’t tell a soul about what I was doing.” Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

story reimagines her encounter with a twenty-seven year-old man named Jobe¹⁸ who she met in the chat room “Twelve” in 1998 and their ensuing relationship. Although the content of the story comes from Hirsch’s personal experience, online relationships between strangers were common experiences to a generation who grew up with the privilege of personal computers. A close examination of *Twelve* reveals sexual encounters like these as multifaceted, everyday experiences that demand a reconsideration of the interweavings of technology and intimacy. These reconsiderations are especially important in a technologically advanced age where instant messaging has become increasingly pervasive and frequently supplements offline communication and relationships.

Hirsch utilizes the immersive narrative potential of the iPad to emulate the interface of AOL from the late 90s. In order for Hirsch to accurately recreate the original chat room “Twelve” and preserve the earlier quality of instant messaging, she recreated the experience as an eBook. To expose a wide international audience to *Twelve*, Hirsch put the eBook on the Apple Store for \$2.99.¹⁹ Purchasers were welcomed to the eBook with an AOL sign-in screen. Dial-up modem noises played as the user “logged in” to AIM with Anni’s username, Lilac098 [See Figure 3]. As the user entered the chat room Twelve, a large AOL screen was in the background as the story began.

For the eBook, Hirsch had to shape the world of 1998 through a recreation

¹⁸ *Twelve* is a work of fiction and it is unclear whether Hirsch’s original online boyfriend in 1998 was named Jobe or if the name has been changed to protect his identity.

¹⁹ Apple Store. “Twelve”. Updated 1 October, 2013. Software developer James La Marre. Published by Klaus_eBooks. eBook Store Listing.

of chat room culture in 2013. Unlike instant messaging during the days of dial-up, where the sender and receiver worked in real time, typing, reading, and waiting for a response, this eBook cuts out the delays in time such that all developments happen quickly. Hirsch accomplished this in *Twelve* with the help of software developer James La Marre. In the eBook, the reader assumes the identity of Anni and enters the chat room, meets all the characters, and the narrative unfolds as the reader receives instant messages from various people. These recreations operate at a greater speed than in an actual chat room and thus require Hirsch to carefully frame the plot to function linearly. Each time the story picks up, it is unclear how much time has passed since Anni's last login. Therefore, the reader must read between the lines for these details. As a new media artwork, time in *Twelve* is accelerated and flexible. This fluidity of time distinguishes the work from a real chat room and reinforces that *Twelve* is a work of fiction.

All the text that appears onscreen is a recreation of the "Twelve" chat room or private direct messages with chat room members that pop up alongside the group conversation at appropriate points in the story. There are a few instances of photos being shared in offside personal conversations, but the primary mode of exchange is text [See Figure 4]. As seen in the image provided, windows layer on top of one another with the user able to minimize, maximize, and exit their discretion. Despite the illusion of interacting with the artwork, the user/observer does not have control over the narrative, nor can they change the dialogue between characters.

For this essay, analysis focuses on the evolution of *Twelve* and offers speculation about why, in December of 2013, the Apple Store (iTunes) decided to remove it from circulation, thus making the eBook inaccessible for many, myself included. Originally, I intended to focus my research on both *Twelve* and *Playground* as investigations into sexuality and technology. It was the eBook's erasure from the Apple Store that sparked my interest as a scholar in new media art histories. How could a fiction eBook be deemed inappropriate for sale by Apple?²⁰ Since its disappearance, there has been speculation from Hirsch about whether *Twelve* was subjected to censorship due to its focus on a romantic relationship between an adolescent and an adult, its user rating designating the eBook "appropriate for ages twelve and up", or its explicit language.²¹ Hirsch claims on her social media sites that this was an intentional act of censorship on Apple's part [See Figure 5 and 6]. This essay's scope does not extend to the judicial concerns or business agreement between Apple and Hirsch. Instead, it considers the content of *Twelve* as well as Hirsch's engagement with its erasure and her decision to keep *Twelve* in circulation by other means.

Since *Twelve* was removed from the Apple Store during this investigation, steps were taken to ensure a close reading of the eBook that does the original

²⁰ I ask this specifically in the wake of the success surrounding *Fifty Shades of Grey* (2011) and the *Twilight* saga (2005-2008) as two pieces of erotically charged fiction that focus on unhealthy romantic attachments and borderline-inappropriate power dynamics between partners. Both eBooks are still available for purchase on iTunes.

²¹ On Facebook, Hirsch made the assertion that the original eBook had a rating of 12+. She called the removal "censorship" both on Twitter and Facebook, although no evidence has been presented to verify what Apple's position is besides the statement published on Klaus eBook's website that will be discussed in Chapter 4.

version justice. Even before its disappearance, the only way to experience *Twelve* was to download it from iTunes onto an iPad. On 2 December 2013, I attempted to purchase *Twelve* from the Apple Store, but it had mysteriously vanished.²² Alongside the original eBook preview, Apple included a rating for “twelve and up” for “infrequent/mild sexual content, infrequent/mild mature/suggestive themes, and infrequent/mild profanity or crude humour” [See Figure 7].²³ Later that day, I contacted Hirsch via email to alert her to the app’s disappearance, and she subsequently released public statements on Facebook and Twitter about the erasure of her work (these traces have been introduced as Figures 5 and 6). To accommodate me, Hirsch sent me a full transcript of *Twelve* and personal screenshots to convey the interface. Those screenshots, and some of my own from different sites, will illustrate the app where I cannot.

When *Twelve* was still available in the Apple Store, it included a brief summary by writer and critic Brian Droitcour. As a project organizer for *Twelve*, Droitcour wrote the original description of the app and described it as an immersive experience “where the reader gains access to the private world of a thirteen year old girl but within limits.”²⁴ The reader gains access to the story and its environment without having control over the outcome because the only perspective is peering over Anni’s shoulder as other characters message her [See Figure 8]. The immersive quality of *Twelve* creates the illusion of an interactive

²² I had previously searched for *Twelve* on 13 November 2013 and was fortunate enough to take personal screenshots which are provided as supplementary documentation in the figure list.

²³ Apple Store. “Twelve”. Updated 1 October, 2013. Software developer James La Marre. Published by Klaus_eBooks. eBook Store Listing. See Figure 7.

²⁴ This particular quote was featured in the original eBook description on the Apple Store. Ibid.

experience, like that of instant messaging, yet the actual artwork is contained, a completed work of fiction.

The release of *Twelve* as an eBook gave Hirsch the freedom to write her story in the informal language unique to chat room culture as a way of exploring intimate relationships in personal messages and accelerating the “instantaneous” quality of instant messaging. The vernacular language of instant messaging is a recombinant formation of acronyms, abbreviations, numbers as words, creative spelling, and symbols that vaguely resemble contorted human faces. This shifting communication strategy saves time for the typist and adds personality to each keystroke. Each character in *Twelve* has a communication style and screen name that reinforces their identity and individuality within the community. Hirsch wrote each character’s contribution to the conversation, but each character remains distinct due to the nuances in their language. This particular aspect reinforces the intimate quality of the private messages and the public conversations unique to the group chat room “Twelve.”

In addition to the simulated and accelerated instant messaging, the eBook is designed to play over and over with no final resolution for the characters. It is unclear why Hirsch wrote *Twelve* with an open ending, favouring a narrative that repeats indefinitely. As taken from *Twelve*’s transcript:²⁵

XoaNNioX: i thought u said ud love me forever
XoaNNioX: well fine since u wont talk ill talk
XoaNNioX: i just needed some freedom or something

²⁵ This excerpt was taken from the transcript of *Twelve*’s was received from artist on 3 December, 2013.

XoaNNioX: i dunno i just felt pathetic
XoaNNioX: but it was a really stupid way of going about it!
XoaNNioX: i only ended up hurting you
XoaNNioX: i hate myself. i dont even like chris! its so much better with you
XoaNNioX: everything is better with you. i feel so alone
lieshadow: Fuck you, Anni. I'm unblocking you only for a minute.
XoaNNioX: please dont block me forever! i made a mistake
lieshadow: Yes you did.
XoaNNioX: please forgive me
lieshadow: Why should I?
XoaNNioX: because....
lieshadow: BECAUSE WHY ANNI?
XoaNNioX: because i...
XoaNNioX: i love u
lieshadow:
XoaNNioX: i do. i love you. i mean it. i realize what a horrible mistake ive made because i love u! and i was just scared of my love so i freaked out and made a big big mistake.
lieshadow: Do you really though, Anni? Or are you using me just like Heathery
XoaNNioX: im not like her
lieshadow: I thought you weren't either. But maybe I was wrong.
XoaNNioX: im not! i love u. do u hear me? I LOVE YOU. I LOVE YOU SO MUCH. please dont leave me
lieshadow: You love me really?
XoaNNioX: yes.
lieshadow: I love you so much Anni.
XoaNNioX: u still do?
lieshadow: Yes.
XoaNNioX: i thought u hated me
lieshadow: I'm mad Anni. And I don't know if I can trust you. But I could never hate you. I love you.
XoaNNioX: i made a mistake. a really stupid mistake. i learned my lesson. it will never happen again. i promise. i love u
lieshadow: I love you too, Anni. Let's work on making this right.
XoaNNioX: ill never hurt you again!
XoaNNioX: :)

After last line, we hear the AOL sound "Goodbye" and the AOL screens disappear and we are left with the original sign on screen, where someone can choose to go through it again.

Whatever Hirsch's personal feelings about the story, the app's non-ending demands that the reader question her position as the voyeur of a culturally taboo relationship between an adult and a young person. The ability to read *Twelve* as a circular story challenges the exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution structure typical of traditional narratives. The endless dramatic cycles in *Twelve* mirror the reality of human conflicts offline. *Twelve* is divided into scenes that begin when Anni enters the chat room and each episode contains its own exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution. Each login is connected in the eBook to resemble a linear narrative, but the infinite loop is a symbolic device that resembles purgatory.

2. HEAThery: the difference here is that i fuck wit people. u get fucked

As suggested earlier, Hirsch's experiences and inspiration for *Twelve* are hardly isolated. Many young people use instant messaging as a primary form of communication and exploration. The sheer number of young people online led to the development of many chat rooms like "Twelve," which functioned much like mall food courts: minors would loiter to kill time, make new friends, build romantic relationships, and have explosive, dramatic encounters with best friends and rivals. These online public spaces became as real and affective as their real world equivalents. These particular spaces are regarded by parents, schools, and religious institutions as potentially dangerous, with sexual predators taking

advantage of the emotional and sexual immaturity of young people.

Whether or not these spaces carry any more risk than those in a non-interfaced era, it is clear that encounters online have consequences, as they do offline. Online relationships regularly become real unions, verbal sparring hurts feelings, and cybersex creates real orgasms. Such encounters are now naturalized into our everyday experiences and have become a routine facet of contemporary life.

For many users, the chat room is a playground where communication is synonymous with play. These spaces become testing grounds for intimacy, conflict and resolution. Hirsch's simulation of AIM from the late 1990s and early 2000s allowed for her story to remain true to its moment of reference. Characteristic of AIM is the ability to have several conversations at once with multiple people in multiple chats. This is to say that along with a chat room that allows many users to login and carry on disjointed and multilayered conversations, one can also privately message users and carry on personal and private conversations. Like a playground, AOL chat rooms are spaces that are animated by users, who write the rules and define the terms of use.

Also like a playground, chat rooms are susceptible to unlikely visitors. One of the most common associations with online chatting is the "lecherous" child predator who lurks in the shadows of childhood spaces, preying on the innocent lambs we commonly assume young people to be. Hirsch's story presents an emerging relationship between an adult online who lies in the shadows and

invests himself in sexual relationships with young women under the age of consent.²⁶ Jobe, whose screen name is appropriately *lieshadow*, is a twenty-seven year-old hacker with muscular dystrophy. Although Jobe possesses a handicap car that allows him to go to the casino with friends once in a while, a facet of his private life revealed to Anni in a private message, within the narrative Jobe spends the majority of his time at the computer working, hanging out in the chat room, and caring for his adolescent girlfriends. Before Anni meets Jobe, she is aware of his reputation as the twenty-seven year-old hacker boyfriend of another middle-school girl named Heather. Unlike the majority of youths in *Twelve*, Jobe holds considerable power in the chat room with his hacking skills and malware.²⁷ His computer experience allows him to “ToS” users out of the server, which eventually blocks the user from logging in with that screen name again and essentially ostracizes that user from the community, ruining their reputation.²⁸

Jobe’s influence and considerable power are first introduced in *Twelve* through his relationship with his girlfriend before Anni: the fourteen year-old Heather. The relationship between Heather and Jobe is best described as unhealthy. This unhealthiness is not located in the age difference between the two, but rather in the abusive remarks, emotional distancing, and psychological warfare launched by both parties. The two characters have been hot and cold,

²⁶ As of 2014 in the USA, each state determines the age of consent. Across 50 states, the age of consent varies between 16 and 18.

²⁷ Malware is software that is intended to damage or disable computers and computer systems.

²⁸ “ToS” is an acronym for Terms of Service and refers to AOL’s legal rules which users must agree to in order to use the platform. In *Twelve*, the users use the term as slang which imply that a user could be “ToS”-ed when a hacker repeatedly reports the user to AOL hundreds of times in a couple of minutes with the assistance of malware.

together and apart, in love and in anguish for two years prior to Anni coming into the picture. Anni is known for her kindness, empathy, and inexperience. Heather, on the other hand, is immune to harsh words, prone to extreme mood swings, and unable to empathize with others, especially Anni. Paradoxically, the two girls appeal to Jobe for their distinctive qualities.

Within *Twelve*, both Anni and Heather are in control of their sexual expressions and have agency. When Jobe encourages Anni to masturbate, Anni consents and expresses pleasure in the experience; when Jobe begs Anni to send him the pen she has presumably inserted into her vagina, she refuses his requests (this will be addressed later in regards to cybersex). Additionally, Heather maintains her power over Jobe by extreme emotional manipulation, avoidance, and public humiliation. Although these relationships are not indicative of mutual trust, respect, or interdependence, it is clear that neither are they indicative of power dynamics that automatically favour the older man. In both instances, the female characters maintain and assert their agency by determining the boundaries of their emotional and sexual expressions.

Hirsch introduces Heather into the narrative to illustrate tensions and dynamics between strong women. Although the girls have Jobe in common, he was never at the centre of their conflicting personalities, drama, or disdain. The relationship between Heather and Anni is indicative of youth community structures where females are encultured to compete for status.

You have entered the chatroom: Twelve
Lilac098 has entered the chat.²⁹

Lilac098: hey every1
JoshyWoshy: i wanna push u around
bUrKe13: WeLL i WiLL WeLL i WiLL
JoshyWoshy: na i change my mind
JoshyWoshy: that song is for faggotz ;x
bUrKe13: well i still like it ;p
CyrusGage: does that make burke a faggot?
JoshyWoshy: guess so ;>]
bUrKe13: iF iM a LeSbIaN then... i shouldn't be sending my pics
to boys nemo! @#\$##
CyrusGage: damn
JoshyWoshy: burke! i take it back. ur cool
bUrKe13: I sMeLL sEx aNd CaNdY
CyrusGage: heh
Lilac098: sometimes im goody goody right now im naughty
naughty
XxbETHiExX: ooo i love that song! with the baby voice in it
bUrKe13: haha yeh i wuv dat baby part bethie ;x
JoshyWoshy: heat where r u
HEAThery: wat
JoshyWoshy: why don't u talk
HEAThery: hate all these newbs
Lilac098: hehe
HEAThery: stfu anni
HEAThery: fuckin newb
JoshyWoshy: wats wrong with newbs? ;)
HEAThery: mainly they dont know when to stfu³⁰

The moment Anni enters Twelve, Heather asserts her dominance and power by claiming she hates “newbs” because they do not know when to “shut the fuck up.”³¹ A newb, noob, or n00b means a newcomer to an online community.

These users are often hazed, ignored, and bullied by insider members to

²⁹ In *Twelve*, Anni’s original screen name is Lilac098 and she transitions to XoaNNioX later in the artwork.

³⁰ This text was extracted from the transcript of *Twelve* that was received from the artist on 3 December, 2013. All text from *Twelve* that follows came from the same transcript and will be presented without further annotation.

³¹ “stfu” is a common acronym for “shut the fuck up” and is still commonly employed in 2013.

communicate the importance of superiority in these groups. Throughout the story, Anni exacerbates Heather's hatred by asking what a newb is, continuing to come to the chat room, developing a more appropriate screen name, and creating intimate relationships with the other members. As Anni becomes more popular with the chat room members, Heather becomes more irate.

The characters Anni and Heather complement one another's qualities and weaknesses. Although Jobe and Anni develop an emotional relationship, it begins by Jobe opening up about his devotion to Heather. It is through the retelling of their partnership that Anni learns about the positive elements of his character like his patience, devotion, and affectionate expressions; this is also how Jobe becomes emotionally attached to Anni. Her ability to listen without judgment, her patience, as well as her advice to leave the unhealthy relationship reinforces the assertion that Anni is mature enough, according to Jobe, to embark on a relationship complete with sexual expression and emotional support.

This is not to suggest that within *Twelve* there is a shared understanding of privacy or intimacy as many characters in the community have different interest, desires, and motives. While with Jobe, Anni begins to have doubts about their relationship after Jobe indicates that he loves her and forever will. Although he does not pressure Anni to say it back, Anni shares in a personal conversation with her confidant Bethie that she has doubts and feels that she might be happier in a relationship with a boy her age. She begins messaging Chris (CyrusGage), with whom she previously had cybersexual conversations, and expresses her desire by

saying, “i take your cock and put it in my mouth.”³² Chris does not respond and leaves the chat room without responding to Anni. Immediately thereafter, Jobe messages Anni and accuses her of cheating on him [See Figure 9]. It is revealed that Chris copied and pasted the conversation both in *Twelve* and privately to Jobe in exchange for some malware:

lieshadow: I know you cheated on me Anni. Chris just IMed me and pasted your WHOLE conversation. So yes, I have the whole thing and I've seen it all. Chris and I are friends, Anni. I give him punters and trust me, he wants to stay on my good side.

XoaNNioX: im sorry

lieshadow: You're nothing to me.

XoaNNioX: it was a mistake! u dont understand

lieshadow: I understand perfectly well. You think you can jerk me around. But you can't. I'm not your dog.

XoaNNioX: i kno

lieshadow: WHAT THE FUCK ANNI.

XoaNNioX: im sorry. i didnt mean to hurt you.

lieshadow: YOU ARE A WHORE.

lieshadow: YOU'RE JUST LIKE HEATHERY.

lieshadow: YOU'RE ALL THE SAME.

lieshadow: WE ARE DONE.

lieshadow has signed off.

[close IM]

[new IM]

XoaNNioX: i cant believe u

CyrusGage: heh

XoaNNioX: y did u do that???

CyrusGage: he gave me something to ToS peeps wit

XoaNNioX: i thought we were friends

CyrusGage: we r heh

XoaNNioX: then y did u do that

CyrusGage: that felt like more than just friends ;x

XoaNNioX: ur such a dick

CyrusGage: heh whatever

³² Ibid.

[close IM]

[New IM]

XxbETHiExX: what is going on??

XoaNNioX: what do u mean...?

XxbETHiExX: everyone in 12 is saying u a whore

XoaNNioX: wat?? why??

XxbETHiExX: burke is saying u cheated on jobe with chris and she has the cyber

XoaNNioX: what??? how did she get that??

XxbETHiExX: so its true?

XoaNNioX: yea...

XxbETHiExX: wow. did jobe flip?

XoaNNioX: yes. i think we r broken up

XxbETHiExX: i dont understand, how did he get the cyber chat?

XoaNNioX: chris sent it to him. but i dont understand how burke got it??

XxbETHiExX: i dont think jobe would send it to her...theyre not friends

XoaNNioX: maybe chris sent it to burke?

XxbETHiExX: maybe? but he just uses her. theyre not really friends

XoaNNioX: unless...fuck

XxbETHiExX: what

XoaNNioX: jobe sent it to heat and heat sent it to burke

XxbETHiExX: shit...

XoaNNioX: hes probably begging to get back with her

XxbETHiExX: probz

XoaNNioX: and now everyone thinks im a slut???

XxbETHiExX: yea...its pretty bad in 12...i wouldnt go there if i was u

Anni's emotional attachment to Jobe is indicative of the complexities surrounding virtual relationships and cyberlove. A close examination of their relationship considering the intensity of attraction, sexual fulfillment, and Anni's relationship doubts reveal the permeable boundaries between online and offline worlds. These dissolving boundaries present new understandings of privacy as illustrated in the above excerpt. Unlike offline relationships where memory

befuddles the content of most confrontations, everything on AIM is subject to copy and paste. After Anni messages Chris, the chat room erupts with chatter about her, calling her a slut, and degrading her character. Although the attraction and romantic quality persists between people online, dramatic confrontations like these prove that online partnerships and cyberlove are distinct from offline relationships because the online only ever supplements the offline world.

3. lieshadow: I'm touching myself

XoaNNioX: so u never think itz weird that im 13 and ur 28?³³

lieshadow: Not at all. You're very mature for your age. And I am a little bit immature ;)

XoaNNioX: someone told me once that the rule for older guys dating younger girls is to divide their age and then add 7 and haha i think we r way below that

lieshadow: Numbers aren't so important for me. It's how we feel about one another. I can relate to you so well.

XoaNNioX: yea i guess ur right. i can talk to u more than ne1 else

lieshadow: Is that why you are being weird? Because of our age difference?

XoaNNioX: i dunno...maybe

lieshadow: Don't. We're not doing anything illegal. And we have such a great connection. And I love you. What does age matter in that?

Twelve is a sexually charged artwork that emphasizes arousal and romantic feelings between characters representing Hirsch herself and a man fifteen years her senior. The age difference between Anni and Jobe adds a sensational element to this work. This chapter is concerned with understanding cybersex as a sexual activity and why the text-based interplay between Anni and Jobe may be seen by some as inappropriate.

³³ In *Twelve*, Anni turns thirteen over the summer.

Twelve is a modern-day love story set online. The messy entanglements between the characters, more indicative of middle school than a fairytale romance, are closer to real world relationships than the mythologies perpetrated by youth literature, the Disney channel, or sexual education. *Twelve*, a work of fiction, is perhaps a more honest depiction of youth sexuality than either mainstream media or the pornographic depictions abounding on the internet – even if these depictions are disconcerting.

Herein lies the most unsettling tension in the eBook: the moral question of whether it is appropriate for an adult and a legal minor to engage in sexual activities. In America and Canada, the consensus is that a sexual relationship like Anni and Jobe’s would be unacceptable online and criminal offline;³⁴ yet stories like these are common in literature, as in the eventual success of Vladimir Nabokov’s *Lolita*, which centers on the perspective of an adult man and his sexual relationship with a young girl. Hirsch’s explicit writing is honest to the form of instant messaging, which allows the sexual encounters described to become firmly embedded itself in the reader’s imagination without ever having been actualized offline.

Within *Twelve*, all the characters are aware that Jobe is an adult and that there are legal consequences to adult/minor relationships in the actual world. As a work of art, however, *Twelve* portrays the complacency of the virtual and

³⁴ Sex between an adult and a sexually mature minor is generally called “statutory rape” and is dependent on the age of consent in that geographical region. Sexual relations with a prepubescent child, generically called *child sexual abuse* or *molestation*, is typically treated by the courts as a more serious crime.

imaginative world where moralism is in direct competition with fantasy. In numerous instances other characters remark on how Jobe's behaviour disgusts or unsettles them:

XoaNNioX: i just want a boy to like me who is my age
XxbETHiExX: whats wrong with jobe? thought u were so into him
XoaNNioX: sometimes i just feel like its kinda gross i dunno
XxbETHiExX: well it is weird that he likes someone so young and hes like an adult..
XoaNNioX: yea and it just makes me feel like ill never do better t han him. hes kind of pathetic u kno?
XxbETHiExX: yea i see what ur saying. i mean he does creep me out. i still think he is bad news
XoaNNioX: i mean hes a good guy and all. he treats me well and we can talk about anything and he says he loves me
XxbETHiExX: he says he loves u??
XoaNNioX: yea
XxbETHiExX: whoa thats crazy! youre like the new heat
XoaNNioX: yea but i dont know if i love him. we've never even met
XxbETHiExX: well u dont have to say it back!
XoaNNioX: and sometimes he annoys me
XxbETHiExX: ya hes so annoyingggg
XoaNNioX: like he just bugs me about stupid shit and wont let it go
XxbETHiExX: ugh yea heat said the same thing. thaz why she would ignore him for so long and hed get mad and call her house and everything would blow up
XoaNNioX: he better not call my house. my parents will freak!!
XxbETHiExX: i bet he wont
XoaNNioX: i wish my real life was as exciting as my online life

Anni's friend, Bethie, remarks that she does not know why but he just "creeps her out."³⁵ This uneasy, creeped-out feeling is present and proclaimed by the characters in *Twelve*. Although they have been informed by society that these

³⁵ Ibid.

feelings and actions are inappropriate, there seems to be a disconnect as to why. Anni, as stated above, wants a boy her age and she finds the relationship with Jobe just “kinda gross” as well as “exciting.” The minors in the chat room teeter between the playful imaginative quality of childhood and the seriousness of adulthood depending on the intensity of their feelings and desires. Although Anni recognizes there is something wrong about the relationship, she understands that it is more enmeshed with fantasy and pleasure than her actual life. In the excerpt above, it is clear that Anni recognizes that her online fantasy life is distinct from her “real life” offline.

Considering instant messaging as a form of playful letter writing allows for a historicization of cyber chat room culture. Chat rooms and instant messaging stem from a larger epistolary tradition. For centuries, letters were the primary mechanism for delivering messages across short and great distances. Lovers have long used letters as an effective way to send personal and private communications to their beloved. Although the practice of the hand written letter has been lost in the switch to email and instant messages, these forms have surpassed the letter’s capacity to communicate immediate and emotional messages. Emotions are temporal by nature, and instant messaging is a highly affective text-based communication since chatters can bond in real time across great distances. Although they share a remarkably similar desire to communicate, the letter favours passivity, whereas cyberspace demands participation and engagement with imaginary systems. In fact, according to Aaron Ben Ze’ev in *Love Online:*

Emotions on the Internet, unlike experiential media that indulge fantasy, people online often fail to recognize the make-believe quality of the medium due to the high-level immersive participation the medium demands.³⁶ In these respects, the lines between imagination and reality found online are increasingly permeable.

Twelve is an artifact of these new relationships. Since the romantic relationship between Anni and Jobe never translates to the actual world, their entire relationship is built and sustained by instant messages. Their connection emerges and grows as the two put time and effort into their conversations. From love to contempt and back to love, *Twelve* articulates extreme emotions that arise from online instant messages. Evident in *Twelve* is the presence of young people in these spaces and their desire to engage in both romantic and platonic relationships. As these individuals emotionally mature into young adults, their primary method of communicating with peers remains instant messaging. This is particularly relevant to digital natives and their emergent sexualities. Since schools and parents had little understanding of media literacy and the realities of chat rooms, many youths online were at the forefront of experimenting with cybersex through interactivity and titillating dialogue with (adult) strangers. Through frequent communication, it is very easy to develop intimate feelings for a stranger through an online friendship. No matter the age, cyberlove is a possible consequence of intimate chatting.

Cyberlove and cybersex are not synonymous with love and sex. Cyberlove

³⁶ Aaron Ben Ze'ev, *Love Online: Emotions on the Internet*, (Cambridge: Cambridge Press, 2004), pg. 4.

and cybersex are always mediated by technology and imagination, whereas love and sex can be experienced without technological mediation. In order to understand virtual spaces and cyberculture, it is critical to distinguish their properties from the offline world. In *Love Online: Emotions on the Internet*, philosopher Ben Ze'ev argues that the opposite of the virtual is not the real but the *actual*. This term is more accurate than 'real' since virtual experiences are enmeshed in the real while intrinsically incorporating imagination.³⁷ This means that although virtual experiences are only possible with a computer, the brain experiences the emotions and memories with the same intensity of the actual. Although cyberspace is intangible, it is psychological and social like that of the actual.³⁸ Online places and communities have entirely different understandings of space, time, and boundaries than those of the actual world; unlike the offline world, distance and location are not measured by physical parameters but by psychological content. This is to suggest that despite a great distance between two individuals, an affective connection seems to transcend the distance between them. Because online communities privilege emotional responses, virtual spaces are not fictional or fantastic escapes from the actual, offline world. The virtual is a ludic exploration of reality, not a denial of it.

Ben Ze'ev defines cybersex as more than just a sexual conversation: the activity is a kind of cybernetic exchange between two participants who mutually

³⁷ Aaron Ben Ze'ev, *Love Online: Emotions on the Internet*, (Cambridge: Cambridge Press, 2004), pg. 2.

³⁸ Aaron Ben Ze'ev, *Love Online: Emotions on the Internet*, (Cambridge: Cambridge Press, 2004), pg. 1.

shape and make the experience exciting and fulfilling.³⁹ The cooperation between these two or more people carries a high degree of reality since cybersex usually involves “experiences typical of sexual encounters, such as masturbation, sexual arousal, satisfaction, and orgasm.”⁴⁰ Like phone sex, where couples masturbate with telecommunications stimuli,⁴¹ cybersex always includes another real person.⁴² In these respects, cybersex is a broad term for the spectrum of sexually-related activities offered in cyberspace.

Because instant messaging yields real experiences, young people gain considerable social skill and emotional experience through virtual relationships. Since cyberlove is defined by Ben Ze’ev as a romantic relationship “consisting mainly of computer-mediated communication,” the emotions of love are experienced as intensely and fully as offline relationships but without the physical risks that may be associated with offline relations.⁴³ *Twelve* reveals the complexities and challenges of cyberlove. All the characters in *Twelve* experience a range of emotions, illustrating the reality of virtual connections.

Self-disclosure is the most crucial distinguishing feature of cyber-communication in the formation of intimacy. Since it typically happens more

³⁹ Aaron Ben Ze'ev, *Love Online: Emotions on the Internet*, (Cambridge: Cambridge Press, 2004), pg. 5.

⁴⁰ Aaron Ben Ze'ev, *Love Online: Emotions on the Internet*, (Cambridge: Cambridge Press, 2004), pg. 208.

⁴¹ In phone sex, it is the voice contact that is instrumental to the sexual experience and not the telephone device itself that's the stimulus.

⁴² The two person human element is changing. The 2013 film *Her* directed by Spike Jonze, concerns love between a human and an intelligent computing operating system. Aaron Ben Ze'ev, *Love Online: Emotions on the Internet*, (Cambridge: Cambridge Press, 2004), pg. 203.

⁴³ These risks include unwanted pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, social stigma, monetary expenses, loss of privacy, and parental interferences. Aaron Ben Ze'ev, *Love Online: Emotions on the Internet*, (Cambridge: Cambridge Press, 2004), pg. 4.

quickly online than in-person, Ben Ze'ev is concerned with the immediacy of romantic feelings that can arise after a conversation in cyberspace.⁴⁴ Generally, falling in love online is a result of knowing someone well and having a compatible communication style that creates a bond despite the possible distance between the lovers. Often, partners feel the distance when their lovers message less frequently and are unavailable to chat. In *Twelve*, Jobe confronts Anni about her online availability, suggesting that he is very aware of the mental distance between them and is curious about the state of the relationship. Mental proximity has more influence than geographical closeness and is measured by the frequency, length, and depth of the partners' conversations. It is repeated contact that becomes instrumental in the development of love online.

In these respects, instant messaging is a medium that extends the mind beyond the body's physical limits. It permits a rethinking of our social relationships because it instantaneously, sometimes without our awareness, conveys information through perceived availability, enthusiasm, and tone. The more available one is in messaging, the more valuable the partner appears.⁴⁵ Emotions that arise from online communications are as real and powerful as corresponding emotional responses from actual telephone or in-person conversations.⁴⁶

In *Twelve*, cybersex is entirely text-based communication that combines

⁴⁴ Aaron Ben Ze'ev, *Love Online: Emotions on the Internet*, (Cambridge: Cambridge Press, 2004), pg. 167.

⁴⁵ Aaron Ben Ze'ev, *Love Online: Emotions on the Internet*, (Cambridge: Cambridge Press, 2004), pg. 179.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

fictional conversations with implied masturbation. Cybering, the vernacular for engaging in cybersex, includes describing the body, verbalizations of sexual actions, descriptions of reactions, and actively making-believe that the virtual happenings are being actualized.⁴⁷ Often, the articulation of sexual desires online allow for more adventurous thinking than in face-to-face contact. For example: the conversation between Jobe in a wheelchair and the able-bodied twelve year-old Anni would not be likely offline. Since cybersex contains provocative and erotic messages exchanged with the intention of creating pleasure, the two participants are engaging in an actual sexual encounter.⁴⁸ In this way, cybersex is a hybridization of virtual and actual sexual acts.

This erotic hybrid of imaginative desires and stimulation carries the same emotional intensity as actual sexual intercourse. This is because cybersex has all the “basic characteristics of actual sex” except for physical contact.⁴⁹ In fact, it could be argued that cybersex is currently the safest form of sex available since there is no risk of disease, pregnancy, or stigmatization. Although cyber partners lose the sensual quality of the body, they still receive the same level of excitement, anticipation, satisfaction, and orgasm of actual sex.⁵⁰ These are the precise reasons why adults are so uncomfortable with the prospect of their children using instant messaging as a platform for building, developing, and

⁴⁷ Aaron Ben Ze'ev, *Love Online: Emotions on the Internet*, (Cambridge: Cambridge Press, 2004), pg. 5.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Aaron Ben Ze'ev, *Love Online: Emotions on the Internet*, (Cambridge: Cambridge Press, 2004), pg. 204.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

sustaining sexual encounters with strangers and perhaps one of the reasons Apple pulled the plug on *Twelve*.

Unlike casual sex with strangers or webcam masturbation, no physical attraction or stimulation is necessary in an online cybersexual encounter. Instant messaging forces participants to be active communicators and shape the imaginative fantasy world of their encounter. Text-based relationships are dependent on verbal skills, written language, and extensive communication. By the time Anni finds the chat room, Jobe has had plenty of online and offline sexual experiences. He brings this knowledge to their conversations and teaches Anni how to articulate desire and arousal as he cherishes her naivety and inexperience. Before experiencing cybersex with Jobe, Anni's sexual conversations were literal translations of sex into demonstrative text:

CyrusGage: im taking off ur shirt ;x
XoaNNioX: hehe
CyrusGage: * kiss *
XoaNNioX: * french kiss *
CyrusGage: *french kiss * on ur boobs
CyrusGage: ;x
CyrusGage: im taking off my pants
CyrusGage: dont u want to touch me?

Anni harnesses the subtleties of language and the nuances of desire during her affair with Jobe. As the conversations remain virtual, Anni claims to enjoy herself as Jobe teaches her how to masturbate, and she claims to experience a pleasurable orgasm:

lieshadow: I am kissing you hard, holding your head in my hands.
XoaNNioX: im circling my tongue with yours
lieshadow: I love feeling your tits under your little shirt. They are the

perfect size. They fit right into my hands.

XoaNNioX: well, hehe they might actually be a bit smaller than that ;\

lieshadow: All I need is a mouthful :)

XoaNNioX: really?

lieshadow: Yes, they're perfect.

XoaNNioX: i am unzipping your pants, taking your cock into my mouth

lieshadow: Oh it feels so good when you suck me.

lieshadow: I'm touching myself.

XoaNNioX: me too

lieshadow: What are you doing?

XoaNNioX: im putting a finger in my vagina

lieshadow: Are you rubbing your clit?

XoaNNioX: yes im rubbing it

lieshadow: I want to lick your clit and make you cum

XoaNNioX: ooo yea i like that and i want to suck your dick and swallow your cum

lieshadow: Oh Anni. You're so special to me.

XoaNNioX: ur special to me too.

lieshadow: Are you wet?

XoaNNioX: yea

lieshadow: Are you parents still awake?

XoaNNioX: no theyre asleep. my sister is watching tv

lieshadow: Do you think she will come down?

XoaNNioX: no

lieshadow: Good. Then pull down your pants. And then your panties.

XoaNNioX: ok theyre off

lieshadow: Good Anni. Can you stick a finger inside for me?

XoaNNioX: ok

lieshadow: Does that feel good?

XoaNNioX: yea

lieshadow: Good, now move it in and out.

lieshadow: How does that feel?

XoaNNioX: it feels ok

lieshadow: Just OK?

XoaNNioX: maybe im not doing it right i dunno

lieshadow: Try spreading your legs far apart, as far as they will go.

XoaNNioX: i dun think iz workin

lieshadow: Try putting in two fingers

XoaNNioX: it hurts

lieshadow: Ok Anni, don't worry, you don't have to do it. Just use one finger. One is plenty.

XoaNNioX: is this masturbation?

lieshadow: Yes Anni, this is how girls masturbate. It is supposed to feel good.

XoaNNioX: i guess it feels ok
lieshadow: Do you think you're going to cum?
XoaNNioX: maybe yea
lieshadow: Me too. Keep going.
lieshadow: Oh Anni, are you close?
XoaNNioX: yes very close
lieshadow: Did you cum, Anni?
XoaNNioX: yes did u?
lieshadow: Yes, I came for you.

It is not until Jobe encourages Anni to penetrate herself with a pen and send it in the mail that she finds her lover to be perverse. According to Anni's messages to Jobe, she had no trouble with the insertion of the pen into her vagina and its verbal articulation online, but the thought of sending it through the mail makes her uneasy. In these respects, it is clear that Anni is uncomfortable with Jobe as soon as the conversation refers to offline parameters:

lieshadow: Is there a pen nearby?
XoaNNioX: a pen?
lieshadow: Yes
XoaNNioX: ok i found one
lieshadow: I want you to take the pen and put it inside of you.
XoaNNioX: inside of me?
lieshadow: Yes, stick it inside of your vagina. And then slide it in an out. Make sure it gets real wet.
lieshadow: How does it feel, Anni?
XoaNNioX: it feels fine
lieshadow: Now take it out and smell it.
XoaNNioX: smell it?
lieshadow: I want you to tell me what you smell like.
XoaNNioX: i dont want to smell it
lieshadow: Please Anni, I want to know so badly.
XoaNNioX: no thaz gross I dont want to do that
lieshadow: That's fine. But I do have one more really special request that I hope you will do.
XoaNNioX: wat
lieshadow: I want you to send me that pen in the mail.
XoaNNioX: no thaz weird

lieshadow: I would love it so much.

XoaNNioX: ur gross

As a work of fiction, *Twelve* presents how virtual and actual sexualities have been naturalized for young people. Through researching cybersex, Ben Ze'ev found that those who had cybersex said they had “more sex, better sex, and different sex” both on and offline than those who hadn't.⁵¹ It would appear that online communities, like the “Twelve” chat room, could produce novel intimacies and sexualities. Jobe, who used online communications for his profession as a website developer and as an amateur hacker, used sexually charged instant messaging as a way to keep the kind of company he could not have in his offline actuality. In a private message to Anni, Jobe confides that he lives in his mother's house in Kentucky, where he would login to AOL and frequent the chat room for companionship, entertainment, and erotic fantasy. The online space ensured a level of anonymity that is often necessary for adult males to form sexual relationships with underage females.

Anni, on the other hand, offers a very different way to look at generations online. Since Anni was using the internet during her early years of development with members of her peer group, there is likelihood that she was quicker to naturalize virtual identity-formation and sexual expression than Jobe's generation. This is especially true because Anni admits that she has never kissed a boy when she first starts messaging Jobe, and she quickly develops enough self-confidence

⁵¹ Aaron Ben Ze'ev, *Love Online: Emotions on the Internet*, (Cambridge: Cambridge Press, 2004), pg. 20.

to engage in imaginative cybersex. Despite her lack of experience offline, her conversations with Jobe contribute to a sexual maturity and development that is akin to actual experience. Immersive and interactive media, like instant messaging, alter the way a generation communicates and understands the world. Since online conversations allow for the easy confabulation of fantasy with personality, communication is no longer to be understood as either offline/actual or online/virtual, because for many who grew up with instant messaging this distinction is not entirely clear. In this respect, *Twelve* reveals a generational shift in communications and intimacy. This shift indicates that sex and love demand a different kind of privacy online.

4. XoaNNioX: like real love?

Twelve is an important new media artwork because it depicts technology's impact on relationships by presenting the entanglement between actual and virtual worlds. The artwork is reminiscent of what it feels like to come of age and the desperation surrounding adolescent relationships: how romantic love and sexual encounters can come to define us during a period of extreme emotional distress that occurs as young people learn more about forbidden adult worlds. On the verge of desire and self-discovery, age twelve is a confusing state of becoming that is often inaccurately understood by parents. Anni, on the verge of "becoming a woman," never fully understands what that means.

Twelve touches on critical elements of romantic love. Online relationships often

emerge slowly as people disclose personal and private details as they feel comfortable. Ben Ze'ev claims that there are four critical elements to romantic love: self-preservation, similarity, reciprocity, and expectations.⁵² The first, self-preservation, focuses on autonomy and subjectivity of the self. The internet is an ideal space to demonstrate autonomy and self-creation. In *Twelve*, Anni stands out in the community chat room precisely because of her focus on self-preservation. Jobe is attracted to how kind Anni is, her dedication to school, and her autonomy in the chat room. Despite Anni's transition from Lilac098 to XoaNNioX, Anni maintains her integrity which attracts Jobe as a partner.

The second element to romantic love is similarity, which refers to what two people have in common. Anni and Jobe do not share any hobbies, nor are they in the same peer group, but they possess similar expressive communication styles. Despite Jobe's rather explosive temper tantrums, the two characters are often calm and open to sharing details without passing judgment. When Anni "cheats" on Jobe, expressing how different she feels they are from one another, she reinforces how important similarity is in a relationship.⁵³

Reciprocity in this context is the ability to love and be loved. In *Twelve*, Jobe tells Anni that he loves her but does not pressure her to say it back. After Anni solicits cybersex from an old flame and panics in the face of possible rejection, she expresses to Jobe in a private conversation that she loves him. Her

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ "Cheating" online will be discussed further in the next chapter in respect to Intimacy and Heteronormativity. Cheating often assumes ownership and possession of some sort.

words rekindle the flame of their online romantic partnership.

Lastly, expectations refer to the mental picture the lover paints of their beloved. Often, these expectations are not grounded in evidence but are idealizations of the partner. In *Twelve*, since Anni is the protagonist, it is difficult to decipher her expectations entering the relationship with Jobe. She often expresses doubt in herself, as well as qualms about Jobe's age, with other characters outside the romantic attachment. In this regard, it may be assumed that Anni did not idealize Jobe.

Exclusivity appears to be one of the most pressing concerns in an online relationship. Due to the abundance of available and possible partners online, there is a profound impact to committing to one person.⁵⁴ In *Twelve*, Anni has relationships with two different men at different times. Both Chris and Jobe are invested in a committed online relationship and understand cybersex to be an activity that is dedicated to one exclusive romantic partner. Romantic love uses exclusivity as a means to distribute resources like free time, attention, and sexual energy,⁵⁵ so it is no surprise that cybersex would fall into some of the same rules that offline heteronormative romantic love determines to be appropriate. When Anni cheats on Jobe by sending suggestive and explicit instant messages to her ex-boyfriend Chris, Jobe describes the betrayal as on the same level of emotional intensity that would have been experienced in an actual (non-virtual) relationship.

⁵⁴ Aaron Ben Ze'ev, *Love Online: Emotions on the Internet*, (Cambridge: Cambridge Press, 2004), pg. 181.

⁵⁵ Aaron Ben Ze'ev, *Love Online: Emotions on the Internet*, (Cambridge: Cambridge Press, 2004), pg. 182.

Self-preservation, similarity, reciprocity, and expectations contribute to sustaining a romantic relationship that incorporates the rewarding features that make these partnerships valuable: intimacy, passion, and commitment.⁵⁶ Intimacy, understood as the level of connection and bond between partners, is often stronger online than offline due to self-disclosure.⁵⁷ Because pleasurable conversations are often comprised of sharing a sense of humor and similar interests, two people having a great conversation online feel close despite their apparent physical distance. The level of communication required in an online relationship leads to a feeling of intimacy; Jobe and Anni develop an intimate connection through their instant messages because they openly express and share their emotions. Chat rooms and intimacy will be addressed further in the following chapter.

Passion and commitment are different concerns that can only be partly experienced in an online environment. Passion, or the expression of desires and arousal, can only ever be accomplished partially through cybersex. Jobe and Anni express their passion by the frequency and length of their sexual conversations. Commitment, or the extent to which the other will stick around, is an ambitious – although not impossible – endeavour in cyberspace due to the availability of cybersex partners. In these respects, cyberlove requires extra time and attention to the partner in order to adequately express passion and develop/sustain commitment.

⁵⁶ Robert Sternberg argues that romantic relationships are characterized by intimacy, passion, and commitment. Aaron Ben Ze'ev, *Love Online: Emotions on the Internet*, (Cambridge: Cambridge Press, 2004), pg. 188.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

The adoption and success of instant messaging in widely diverse populations reinforces the importance of social connectivity in the digital age. Ben Ze'ev argues that the psychological reality of cyberspace can yield profound interactions because someone online instinctively attaches a huge degree of reality to their cyber-conversations, therefore experiencing closer feelings of intimacy than in-person encounters.⁵⁸ Instant messaging yields close companionship because there is vested interest from both parties. Both people feel validated for their time and emotional investment in the relationship. For dating and flirting, instant messaging is an ideal social medium that allows psychological interactivity and autonomy due to the level of control available to the medium. Unlike an in-person conversation, online messaging allows one to exert power over the speed and frequency of responses making a conversation feel either more immediate/important or slow/unimportant. Additionally, observing the other person chat allows for a reading of their interest and attitudes towards us.⁵⁹ Due to the high degree of emotional impact and interactivity, instant messaging is an ideal environment for sharing sexual desires and flirting. The persistence of cybersex has inspired more innovations:

"I think the Internet is and has always been almost a safe haven for women to be sexual and feel allowed to be sexual in ways they can't offline, because it's dangerous, or they'd be slut-shamed," says Hirsch. "[Young girls today] are doing very similar things--reaching out to strange men in sexual ways; they're just using Tinder instead of AOL."⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Aaron Ben Ze'ev, *Love Online: Emotions on the Internet*, (Cambridge: Cambridge Press, 2004), pg. 3.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Alcorn, Stan. "An E-Book That Tells The Story of Adolescent Sexuality On The Web, Banned From The iTunes Store." *Co.EXIST*, December 10, 2010. (accessed February 21, 2014).

Generations who grew up instant messaging have a unique understanding of chatting online as a special intimate communication. Many people prefer instant messaging for its capacity to circumvent some of the expectations around courtship, identity expression, and sexual desires that are assumed to be unavoidable in a face-to-face exchange. This kind of freedom often attracts people at the margins. Unlike traditional courtship, the players online write and enforce the rules of sex. Expressions of desire, love, and contempt are commonplace in pseudo-public places on the Net. These particular spaces online also subvert the cultural norms and scripts that are enforced in school and the home. There are still rules, as illustrated when Bethie and Jobe teach Anni how to navigate and integrate into “Twelve”; from this, it is evident that chat rooms like these are still coded and defined by cultural scripts, sexist double standards, and peer pressure.

5. XxbETHiExX: everyone in 12 is saying ur a whore

danah boyd’s book *It’s Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens* was released in February 2014 as I was searching for contemporary scholarship on youth and social media that could illuminate Hirsch’s *Twelve*.⁶¹ An accumulation of ethnographic research on networked societies, social media and millennial culture, boyd’s writing shaped my perspective in new media historicism. boyd’s scholarship on networked societies refers to social media’s

⁶¹ The book *It’s Complicated* was published with danah boyd’s name all in lower case and thus her name is reproduced here in that manner. Additionally, articles that featuring interviews with Dr. boyd or book reviews refer to her name without capitalization.

ability to empower young people to create networked publics, see themselves as part of a collectively-imagined community, and regularly participate to make these communities meaningful.⁶² In order to construct these publics, youth rely on “networked technologies” like the home computer as tools to “network people” into new meaningful imagined systems that resemble adult public life.⁶³ The internet is an ideal platform for young persons to gain online access in the privacy of their homes to facets of public life they are barred from offline.

Over ten years of researching and interviewing teens about their technological lives, boyd collected a range of data from early social media sites that now seem passé to contemporary and cool mobile apps, which themselves will likely become passé soon after the completion of this paper. She discovered that social media attracted young people for their ability to create “meaningful access to public spaces” as well as to connect to peers.⁶⁴ Instead of fighting to reclaim public places that earlier cohorts occupied, boyd argues, many young people choose a different approach and create independent publics that are shaped and defined in their own terms.⁶⁵ The chat room “Twelve” was a meaningful, imagined community that was regulated by its users. Increasingly, it appears that in the digital age there is a need for conversations about youth agency because it is highly possible that young people are more aware of the digital landscape than

⁶² danah boyd, *It's Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens*, (New Haven, Yale, 2014), Kindle eBook, “the creation of networked publics,” paragraph 1.

⁶³ danah boyd, *It's Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens*, (New Haven, Yale, 2014), Kindle eBook, “the creation of networked publics,” paragraph 2.

⁶⁴ danah boyd, *It's Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens*, (New Haven, Yale, 2014), Kindle eBook, “the why behind social media,” paragraph 1.

⁶⁵ Ibid

adults.

Twelve is a document that captures these earlier days of young person-networked societies that were subject to parental moral panic surrounding “stranger danger” and online predators. As teens were discouraged from going into public spheres, like the mall or the streets, they found a world online where they could safely congregate from the prying eyes of worried caregivers. These cyberspaces soon also became the subject of moral panic and continue to be understood in the cultural imagination as dangerous spaces populated by sexual predators victimizing children. Worse yet, social media bring the uncertainty and risks of public life into the safety of the home – a parent’s worst nightmare. The extent of this myth, perpetuated by parents, teachers, religious figures, and politicians outside the parameters of these semi-private spaces, has greatly influenced *Twelve*’s reception. For these reasons, it is important to understand the volatile and emotionally charged cultural landscape of youths online both today and ten years ago.

boyd’s research indicates that the early days of email and instant messaging contained different cultural scripts than the social media landscape of 2014. Take, for example, talking to strangers never-met and never-to-be-met as typical for early online messaging systems: networked teens would log into their accounts to meet others and make new friendships that remained virtual since not everyone at school would have access to the internet. The site of the home, traditionally understood as private, became increasingly public with access to the

internet and imagined communities on social media interfaces. Access to friends and the broader public was “situated physically in [young people’s] bedrooms” and brought the virtual public into the actual private sphere.⁶⁶

Twelve presents how young people crave and create public spaces of their own through social media. In her research, young people confided that they never have enough “time, freedom, or ability to meet up with friends when and where they wanted” so they turn to social media as a supplement to their personal lives.⁶⁷ Adults justify the “exclusion of youth [from public spaces] as being for their own good or as a necessary response to their limited experience and cognitive capacity.”⁶⁸ Understandably, many young people refuse to accept their position as cognitively less developed and inexperienced and turn to social media as a form of expression and power acquisition. Due to their highly regulated lives, boyd argues that young people value peer socialization and congregation as a type of freedom worth protecting.⁶⁹ Online public life, like the “Twelve” chat room, reflects that in order to create a community, it is first necessary for the group to “develop a sense for what is normative by collectively adjusting their behavior based on what they see in the publics they inhabit and understand.”⁷⁰ Most often, young people learn normativity and understand publics through mainstream

⁶⁶ danah boyd, *It’s Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens*, (New Haven, Yale, 2014), Kindle eBook, “the home,” paragraph 1.

⁶⁷ danah boyd, *It’s Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens*, (New Haven, Yale, 2014), Kindle eBook, “searching for a public of their own,” paragraph 7.

⁶⁸ danah boyd, *It’s Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens*, (New Haven, Yale, 2014), Kindle eBook, “normativity,” paragraph 4.

⁶⁹ danah boyd, *It’s Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens*, (New Haven, Yale, 2014), Kindle eBook, “searching for a public of their own,” paragraph 2.

⁷⁰ danah boyd, *It’s Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens*, (New Haven, Yale, 2014), Kindle eBook, “normativity,” paragraph 3.

media, peer socialization, and education.

The world in *Twelve* is a paradoxical accumulation of youth creativity and cultural normativity. Through researching *Twelve*, it became evident that it was almost impossible to uphold a non-moralizing conversation about the relationship between Anni and Jobe. Often in discussing *Twelve* with colleagues and scholars, judgments and accusations would quickly emerge and disperse into more narrowly focused conversations about victimization, pedophilia, and rape culture. In my experience, these judgments are based on knee-jerk reactions since often people who judge in a moralizing way have not looked at or read the work. It was obvious that a close reading of *Twelve* needed to address the positive elements of online relationships that encourage and permit sexualities that would elsewhere be considered perverse, especially when an entire generation could relate to the larger speculations about online dating, cybering as safe sexual expression, and online identity formation.⁷¹ Reducing *Twelve* to a story only about intergenerational love would be an inadequate understanding of the work and its cultural moment and the significant communities being redefined by social media and young people.

In Donna Haraway's influential 1990 essay, "A Cyborg Manifesto - Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," published at least eight years before Hirsch first went online as an amateur social scientist, Haraway points to the "new industrial revolution" as a consequence of

⁷¹ *Twelve* does not represent queer communities that are still considered perverse in regions of America.

telecommunication technologies. This revolution was producing new worldwide working classes alongside new sexualities and ethnicities. However ambitious the revolution sounded in 1990, it is clear that telecommunications, personal computers, and internet communities continually revolutionize contemporary experiences and have created a population of cyborgs, with young people among the first to embrace cyborg fictions as part of their identities. As avatars, all the characters in *Twelve* are cyborg constructions since they are simultaneously animal and machine.⁷² Hirsch's *Twelve* demonstrates that sexual expression and identity evolved alongside technological innovations.

To boyd, the household is a site for new public life for young people, whereas for Haraway it is also home to cyborg creation myths. In her manifesto, Haraway argues that the integrated circuit reflects a postmodern collapse of binary forces ushered in by technological advancements unique to the late 20th century. Among these collapses, the cyborg is “no longer structured by the polarity of public and private” due to a “revolution of social relations” in the household.⁷³ Furthermore, the integrated circuit of cyberlove and cybersex reinforces how virtual spaces penetrate private life (the home) with cyborg formations and identities. The home, as a place, is forever augmented by technology.

Twelve reflects the social reality of youths online and is a work of fiction, which in effect renders it a cyborg creation myth, akin to Haraway's image of the

⁷² Donna Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto - Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century,” (New York and London, Routledge, 1990), 191.

⁷³ Donna Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto - Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century,” (New York and London, Routledge, 1990), 192.

cyborg. Simultaneously animal and machine, the cyborg is a “condensed image of both imagination and material reality, the two joined centers structuring any possibility of historical transformation.”⁷⁴ Since chat rooms allow for a high degree of participation and engagement, users are constantly writing their lived experiences into conversations, instilling power and authority over their memories and identities. Like authors of their own memories, instant messaging permits mastering one’s own autobiographical information and allows each cyborg to combine fiction with lived experiences as a type of freedom unique to imagined communities.⁷⁵

Within *Twelve*, all the characters embody this kind of cyborgian fiction. Except for a couple of photos exchanged, the conversations and participants are always presented through text-based instant messages shared publicly in the chat room or in private instant messages. In order to read *Twelve*, the reader too assumes the position of cyborg, with the iPad as an extension of her own material body and imagination. In 2014, intimate moments that arise between person and technology are commonplace, but in the earlier days of instant messaging captured by *Twelve*, moments like these were revolutionizing the way we connected.

In a sense, connectivity and imagined community are more central to

⁷⁴ Donna Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto - Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century,” (New York and London, Routledge, 1990), 191.

⁷⁵ “Imagined communities” is a concept coined by Benedict Anderson. An imagined community is different from an actual community because it is not, and cannot be, based on everyday face-to-face interaction between its members. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, (London, Verso, 2010).

Twelve than the relationship between Anni and Jobe. That much of the focus within this analysis has been around the couple notwithstanding, *Twelve*'s central focus is on "Twelve" the chat room for twelve year olds and the conversations that emerge from a twelve-year-old community. Besides the escalating drama and emotions that stem from the central romance, the eBook's circular ending redirects the story back to the beginning and moment of origin when *Twelve* welcomes the reader to the story with the words: "You have entered the chat room Twelve." Due to the contradictions inherent to *Twelve*, especially with regard to a feminist artist writing the central character as the epitome of sexist double standards, the eBook remains paradoxical. The irony of *Twelve* is that this feminist work engages with heteronormativity and gender bias without critiquing or disrupting it. According to Haraway, irony is crucial to the feminist work because as a device it can accurately portray the contradictions that "do not resolve into larger wholes... about the tension of holding incompatible things together because both or all are necessary and true."⁷⁶ Particularly, Haraway claims that "[irony] is about humour and serious play,"⁷⁷ which Hirsch accomplishes both with *Twelve*'s narrative and her response to the Apple store, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

The community in *Twelve*, and within that community the desire to be accepted, is more important than the conversations on the chat room walls. It is not necessarily the rejection or abandonment of her lover that induces suffering

⁷⁶ Ibid

⁷⁷ Ibid

but rather the group's ostracism and stigmatization of Anni as a "whore" that induces suffering. Judgments, coming from a group of strangers in a virtual world, induced enough anxiety to make Anni feel unwelcome returning to "Twelve." Due to the immediate nature of instant messaging, her private conversation with Chris is immediately shared with the entire community. Anni receives more hatred for betraying her partner than Jobe does for creating multiple relationships with adolescent girls. This is why Hirsch's Anni and Jobe indicate that life online is still subject to sexist double standards. The transgressive nature of their relationship is reluctantly accepted by their online peer group, which enforces monogamy as a norm. *Twelve* is testament to how communities build and sustain themselves by enforcing ideology and adhering to cultural scripts accepted by the group.

While *Twelve*'s virtual space as an "art product" speaks to a sexual coming of age, it does so within the constraints of heteronormative limitations such as sexism, slut shaming, and possession. These facets were crucial to depicting an honest imagined community since young people, when constructing publics through social media, mimic the values and scripts of the public sphere. Jobe being present in "Twelve" and monitoring the chat rooms, ToSing users he did not like, and defining the parameters of the relationship with Anni and Heather, reflects the kind of influence an adult has on understandings of acceptable behavior. Jobe is the icon for the forbidden adult world of sexual expression and affirmation as a young adult. His presence in "Twelve" reminds

the reader that these young people, although very much invested in their own imagined community, are simulating adulthood. In *Twelve*, there are multiple and fractured explanations for transgressions and emotions which reflect the prismatic digital world through the perspective of a young woman. Besides being playful and humorous, Haraway argues that irony is a rhetorical strategy and political method.⁷⁸ *Twelve*'s ironic twists and contradictions allow Hirsch to explore her own memories and online experiences.

In her essay, Haraway offers an apt explanation for the frequent generational misunderstandings about technology between adults and young people. Haraway claims that the political struggle is to “see from both perspectives at once because each reveals both dominations and possibilities unimaginable from the other vantage point.”⁷⁹ Often, especially through maturity, single vision develops as a way to understand the world from a subjective position informed by experience. Particularly, it is this kind of single vision that “produces worse illusions than double vision or many headed monsters.”⁸⁰

Another feature of Haraway's essay is a critique of innocence. This applies to *Twelve* because of the innocence often associated with youth. Haraway claims that nothing is innocent and no construction is whole. Her example is the non-innocence of the category “woman” and how it enacts a kind of domination akin to labeling race, gender, sexuality, and class. In this sense, Haraway points to

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Donna Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto - Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century,” (New York and London, Routledge, 1990), 196.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

language as a primary way to understand the world and each individual's ability to mediate that world through classification.

According to Haraway, "writing, power, and technology are old partners in Western stories of the origin of civilization."⁸¹ Instant messaging and chat rooms are a symptom of a new civilization of cyborgs. In this world, instant messaging is the writing tool and power is wielded with words. This is one of the possible reasons for which Jobe has such power in *Twelve*: his ability to communicate effectively with language to threaten and intimidate other community members. Additionally, this explains the community's ready acceptance and employment of alternative spellings, abbreviated messages, and emoticons. Since writing is "preeminently the technology of cyborgs," cyborg politics is "the struggle for language and the struggle against perfect communication, against the one code that translates all meaning perfectly, the central dogma of phallogocentrism."⁸² *Twelve* is a struggle for language between the old world, personified by Jobe, and the new cyborgian world order, embodied by the young people's imperfect spelling and grammar.

Youths are aware that their perspectives on love are dismissed and discredited by adults and often express resentment through rebellion. Language in *Twelve* is highly symbolic and by continuing to collectively resist grammatically perfect communication, young people yield power independently from adults.

⁸¹ Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto - Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," (New York and London, Routledge, 1990), 195.

⁸² Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto - Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," (New York and London, Routledge, 1990), 218.

Although intentionally abbreviating words and spelling things phonetically seem like small measures in the scheme of greater civilization, youth agency and their ability to influence society can be observed in instant messaging today. Language has evolved to recognize some of these early language-based youth-rebellions. Many adults and young people alike now employ communication styles that are informal and are meant to be imperfect. Many young people understand that mutual engagement, cooperation, and exploration are primary features of instant messaging. In looking at projects like *Twelve*, it may be possible to challenge the outdated assumption that youths are innocent and inexperienced in community building and sexual expressions.

Since Haraway sees the world as partially constructed with no essential unity, each person maintains a fractured identity. These partial and fractured identities are common in cyberspace and are a central theme of Hirsch's work. Cyborgs value reality and fiction to the same degree and integrate fractured identities into their stories. According to Haraway, cyborgs are "wary of holism, but needy for connection."⁸³ This particular resistance against a complete and total true identity is implicit in Hirsch's art practice. As an artist, Hirsch embodies the contradictory, partial, and strategic identity that Haraway professed was distinct to the postmodern self.⁸⁴ Hirsch is coding the world around her through a collection of disassembled and reassembled representations of her public and

⁸³ Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto - Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," (New York and London, Routledge, 1990), 193.

⁸⁴ Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto - Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," (New York and London, Routledge, 1990), 197.

personal identity.⁸⁵ Exposing herself as a cyborg, Hirsch exposes the “permeable boundary” between tool and myth that Haraway claims is critical to coding a postmodern feminist self.⁸⁶ Through AIM and later through the eBook, Hirsch codes a feminist world that crafts her biographical Anni as a feminist tool and myth.⁸⁷ Hirsch’s reconceptualization of body as an avatar and of female desire is a tool to unravel previous frameworks surrounding women and the Internet. In this way, Anni represents how online relationships might alter understandings of intimacy in public.

In Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner’s essay “Sex in Public” in the edited volume *Intimacy* (1998), the two scholars propose an alternative model to the heteronormativity of intimacy. Particularly, their goal was to promote “radical aspirations of queer culture building” and challenge heteronormative privilege.⁸⁸ Dominant heteronormative culture attempts to impose and regulate sexuality by instilling shame in behaviours that fall outside stereotypical male/female couplings.⁸⁹ Queer culture-building is an attempt to turn heteronormativity’s

⁸⁵ “The cyborg is a kind of disassembled and reassembled, postmodern collective and personal self. This is the self feminists must code...” Donna Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto - Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century,” (New York and London, Routledge, 1990), 205.

⁸⁶ Donna Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto - Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century,” (New York and London, Routledge, 1990), 206.

⁸⁷ Donna Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto - Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century,” (New York and London, Routledge, 1990), 205.

⁸⁸ Berlant, Lauren, and Michael Warner, “Sex in Public,” *Critical Inquiry*. no. 2, (1998): 548. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1344178> (accessed February 11, 2014).

⁸⁹ Berlant and Warner define heteronormativity as the dominant model enforced by institutions, structures of understanding, and practical orientations that privilege heterosexuality. Heterosexuality here exceeds the definition of reproductive sex between a male and female partner and is understood as the central organizing index of social membership in heteronormative societies. Heterosexuality is not a single monoculture “involving dispersed and contradictory strategies for self-maintenance and reproduction” but rather a symbolic ideology that can and does

desire to hide and misrepresent underground sexualities into an opportunity to create a public.⁹⁰ This means that in order to politically challenge heteronormative values, there needs to be a shifting of ideas with regard to queer sexual behavior and the expression of intimacy through extending definitions of what intimacy is. The shared understandings generated by queer people at the margins challenges the oppressive force of heteronormative culture.

Berlant and Warner claim these heterosexual family values affect our understanding of media. In 1998, American politics primarily focused on the purification of family life, protection of children, censorship of pornography, and sustained homophobia. More than fifteen years later, these are still divisive and important issues in the United States since these developments “organize a hegemonic national public around sex.”⁹¹ Sex is one of the most important topics that infiltrates the public sector. As more people choose the internet as their primary method of media, it is clear that cybersex will prevail and the virtual public will reproduce an environment that aligns with their ideological

include gays and lesbians. Berlant, Lauren, and Michael Warner, "Sex in Public," *Critical Inquiry*. no. 2, (1998): 547-566. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1344178> (accessed February 11, 2014).

⁹⁰ Berlant and Warner's essay on intimacy addresses notions of queer communities gaining equal rights, acceptance, and freedom has been historically difficult since heteronormativity protects the private rights of the majority. Governments take considerable efforts to assimilate queer sexualities into heteronormative culture to “protect” the public from being contaminated. For example, they describe the puritanical re-zoning laws in New York City that regulated adult entertainment and sex shops in the city to supposedly prevent urban moral degradation. According to these re-zoning principles, stores that were devoted to sexual goods and services could not be in the same vicinity so as not to create an adult entertainment neighborhood. Before these regulations, communities devoted to queer customers would emerge organically and become central cultural hubs for queers. These laws privilege the ownership of property but not the use of the public sphere for queer worlds. Although the zoning regulations were put in place to protect the neighborhoods from degradation, the motivation was to protect the status quo that favours heterosexual family life. Ibid.

⁹¹ Berlant, Lauren, and Michael Warner, "Sex in Public," *Critical Inquiry*. no. 2, (1998): 548. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1344178> (accessed February 11, 2014).

principles.⁹² Despite cybersex holding few physical consequences offline, it is for this reason that many adults find the idea of instant messaging with strangers to be risky.

Berlant and Warner argue that intimacy is publicly mediated and that often the differentiation between personal life and work is a false one. This is because the heteronormative public enforces and defines private worlds. Since intimacy is only linked to personal life, intimate relationships privilege the personal and people understand sex as personal experience that is irrelevant to public life. This kind of assumption, that sex is purely personal and not a matter of public life, is oppressive to queer communities or unlikely couplings. In effect, this enforces what is considered “normal” behavior and encourages members of the public to identify both themselves and their politics as private. This is the predominant model in offline encounters and is evident in the way both Anni and Jobe hide their relationship offline but revel in their love within the chat room. Anni and Jobe are public in the group messaging about their relationship status and their participation in cybersex. In this environment, online there are more public declarations of intimacy than offline, but heteronormativity persists despite the shift.

Online sexualities offer alternative models to rethink cybersex as a particular flavour of intimacy unique to the contemporary digital age. Berlant and Warner introduce the term “counterpublic” in their essay to validate the

⁹² Coleman, Vicki, “Social Media as Primary Source: A Coming of Age,” *Educause Review*, (2013). <http://www.educause.edu/ero/article/social-media-primary-source-coming-age> (accessed 3 June, 2014).

experiences of marginalized groups to make their own intimate sexual public spheres. Berlant and Warner extend counterpublic to include porn cinemas, phone sex, adult print markets, lap dancing, and strip clubs.⁹³ *Twelve* presents a group of youth online who use the chat room to express their desires, articulate exclusivity, and experiment with virtual sex.

If communities offline enforce heterosexual culture that favors kinship and coupling, communities online also stigmatize non-monogamous relationships. Anni's desire to have multiple cybersexual partners without being "possessed" is not uncommon and is a stereotype of masculinity. The community's stigmatization of Anni as a whore for this desire is, unfortunately, equally common. Specifically, this enforces the heteronormative and sexist model of an earlier generation instead of imagining new rules. When Hirsch was first invested in these communities, the dominant model of appropriate relationships was that of the previous generation (e.g. monogamy). As an omnipresence in the chat room, Jobe enforces heteronormativity and reprimands Anni when she acts outside this framework:

[new IM]

lieshadow: You're a fake.

XoaNNioX: ??

XoaNNioX: r u ghosting?

lieshadow: Yes, I blocked you.

XoaNNioX: why?

lieshadow: Because you're a slut. I'm done with you. I'm just IMing you to let you know that. All this fucking bullshit about you needing time to yourself.

⁹³ Berlant, Lauren, and Michael Warner, "Sex in Public," *Critical Inquiry*. no. 2, (1998): 547. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1344178> (accessed February 11, 2014).

XoaNNioX: wtf?
lieshadow: Does this look familiar?
“XoaNNioX: im kissing you
XoaNNioX: entwining my tongue with yours
XoaNNioX: im unbuttoning your shirt and i take off your belt and pull down your pants”
lieshadow: You didn’t want time to yourself. You wanted time with another guy!
lieshadow: I know you cheated on me Anni. Chris just IMed me and pasted your WHOLE conversation. So yes, I have the whole thing and I’ve seen it all. Chris and I are friends, Anni. I give him punters and trust me, he wants to stay on my good side.
XoaNNioX: im sorry
lieshadow: You’re nothing to me.
XoaNNioX: it was a mistake! u dont understand
lieshadow: I understand perfectly well. You think you can jerk me around. But you can’t. I’m not your dog.
XoaNNioX: i kno
lieshadow: WHAT THE FUCK ANNI.
XoaNNioX: im sorry. i didnt mean to hurt you.
lieshadow: YOU ARE A WHORE.
lieshadow: YOU’RE JUST LIKE HEATHERY.
lieshadow: YOU’RE ALL THE SAME.
lieshadow: WE ARE DONE.

lieshadow has signed off.
[close IM]

Twelve as a historical document is exactly this: a lesson about chat room culture presented in the vernacular. Since the protagonist is a young girl, the language and experiences reflect the world she occupies, making the story a sincere account of a young person because it complicates the issue without patronizing the audience. As Berlant and Warner suggest, a queer counterpublic is a world-making project that includes alternative intimacies outside the heteronormative framework. *Twelve* reads as an account of a young cyborg woman learning about coupling structures, sexist double standards, and her own

perspective as it develops online.

To be public and be in public is important for young people to develop autonomy and meaningful relationships. boyd presents a parallel between her research and the work of French poet Charles Baudelaire that encapsulates the primary desire of public life for teens: the interest in being seen and seeing others. “Digital flâneurs” refers to individuals’ desire to be at once an exhibitionist and a voyeur on the Internet.⁹⁴ They determine private life as they “choose to share in order to be part of the public, but how much they share is shaped by how public they want to be.”⁹⁵ More than ever, there is freedom to create identity through strategic and partial disclosure in public communities that are accessed. Ironically, there is no holism when it comes to producing the self, and instead everyone is encouraged to be at once a spectator and spectacle.

6. Special Edition iPad Mini

The economy of internet culture, as well as the artwork online, is indicative of a paradigm shift where community membership involves naturalizing fractured digital lives and online experiences into artworks and literature. *Twelve* reflects a particular moment in history where stories are informed by digital experiences which have a distinct temporality. This chapter is

⁹⁴ danah boyd, *It's Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens*, (New Haven, Yale, 2014), Kindle eBook, “to be public and be in public,” paragraph 1.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

concerned with issues of temporality in new media scholarship and also the work itself.

Internet culture today makes the fictional world in *Twelve* appear modest. Hirsch describes the 90s web as a very different world than today's internet because there was less surveillance, terms of service, commercialization, and protection acts. Before Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter, there were fewer social media sites and personal computers to connect with actual contacts, so it was common to make internet friends. In an interview with Stan Alcorn for *CoEXIST Magazine*, Hirsch claims the social circle she had online was at once "secret" and sacred.⁹⁶ Unlike contemporary social media tools, 90s chat rooms were detached from actual identity. Instead of using legal names, friends had screen names and there was little obligation to connect with actual acquaintances and more opportunity to connect with strangers. Even the informal and abbreviated language online was quite different in 1998 than it is today. In order for Hirsch to accurately portray the world in *Twelve* she had to avoid anachronisms in language. In the interview, Hirsch spoke about the significance of the computer as an object; once logged in, "there was greater freedom" than what today's web offers.⁹⁷ This is why Hirsch compares the 90s web to the Wild West: because it

⁹⁶ "I basically had a secret life that no one knew about," says Hirsch. Alcorn, Stan. "An E-Book That Tells The Story of Adolescent Sexuality On The Web, Banned From The iTunes Store." *Co.EXIST*, December 10, 2010. (accessed February 21, 2014).

⁹⁷ "Internet culture was just being created, and while access points were fewer and getting to them might have required using the family computer in the basement, once you were logged on there was a greater freedom." Alcorn, Stan. "An E-Book That Tells The Story of Adolescent Sexuality On The Web, Banned From The iTunes Store." *Co.EXIST*, December 10, 2010. (accessed February 21, 2014).

was not as highly monitored as it is now. Apple is one of the many companies invested in the monetization of internet culture and that means appeasing the values of a heteronormative public which is still the body that monitors and maintains major companies like Apple.

In the *CoEXIST Magazine* interview, Hirsch gave more insight into why she believes Apple removed the app and how she interprets this action. Hirsch believed that *Twelve* was deemed inappropriate for the rating for ages twelve and up that she originally proposed to the store.⁹⁸ Perhaps a concerned guardian or an Apple employee interpreted *Twelve*, complete with swearing and intergenerational cybersex, as a perverse instrument to teach children how to engage in mature behaviors, attract sexual predators, and encourage anarchy (these are only my speculations). According to Klaus_eBooks' website, accessed on February 21, 2014, Apple stood by their decision to remove *Twelve* from the Store. Apple stated that the declaration that the app was an artwork was "not a legitimate contention" and thus "the claim of censorship was invalid."⁹⁹ Since the piece did not offer explicit imagery, just the explicit written word, Apple took issue with the content.

At the time the article by *CoEXIST* was published, Hirsch spoke about finding a solution to continue the life of *Twelve* since conversations with iTunes

⁹⁸ Alcorn, Stan. "An E-Book That Tells The Story of Adolescent Sexuality On The Web, Banned From The iTunes Store." *Co.EXIST*, December 10, 2010. (accessed February 21, 2014).

⁹⁹ Klaus_eBooks, "Twelve." Last modified February 11, 2014. Accessed February 21, 2014.

⁹⁹<http://www.klausgallery.net/ebooks/hirsch.html>.

staff had proved unproductive and dismissive.¹⁰⁰ Her solution to this problem was to create a “hard copy” of *Twelve*. Klaus_eBooks and the artist were committed to keeping the piece in circulation. Hirsch worked alongside the publisher, Klaus_eBooks, to create a version of *Twelve* that could be permanently held by a collector: a Special Edition iPad Mini [See Figure 10].

On Klaus_eBooks’ website on 12 March, 2014, *Twelve* is for sale as a limited edition customized jailbroken iPad.¹⁰¹ Each device is preloaded with the app, laser engraved with Hirsch’s signature, includes the edition number, and “an iconic image of a pen.”¹⁰² In an email to Klaus_eBooks on February 21, 2014, Robert Hult revealed that Klaus_eBooks put twenty-five of the Special Edition iPad Mini on the market.¹⁰³ Each edition is priced at \$1500, and at the time of writing this essay the full edition is still available for purchase. As for the “iconic pen,” it was Hirsch’s choice to include it as a reference to the same writing instrument that Jobe begged Anni to masturbate with and send in an envelope within the story.¹⁰⁴ It appears that the Special Edition iPad was the only way to ensure the artwork would exist with a compromise.

The Special Edition iPad Mini is an ironic plot twist to the life and evolution of *Twelve*. The App store’s removal of *Twelve* and the Apple iPad are

¹⁰⁰ From subsequent conversations with iTunes staff, Hirsch doesn't believe *Twelve* will be allowed back in the iTunes store. "We're figuring out how to still give it a life in another, perhaps more exclusive way," Hirsch says.

¹⁰¹ Jailbreaking is the process of removing the limitations on Apple devices running the iOS operating system through the use of software and hardware exploits – such devices include the iPhone, iPod touch, iPad, etc.

¹⁰² Klaus_eBooks Website

¹⁰³ (Robert Hult, e-mail message to author, February 21, 2014.)

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.,

crucial elements to *Twelve*'s existence, disappearance, and rebirth. Since *Twelve* was designed to be exclusively compatible with the iPad, it is appropriate to assume that using the Apple interface was an integral element to the execution of this artwork. The medium, although invisible when experiencing the artwork, is as important as the story itself and if Hirsch had chosen another device for sale through Klaus_eBooks the artwork could be compromised. This is precisely why Hirsch and Klaus_eBooks' decision to jailbreak the iPad for *Twelve* is a confusing facet to the artwork. It is clear that for Hirsch the iPad's hardware is as important, or perhaps more so, than the imitation AOL chat room displayed on the iPad's screen. Unique to *Twelve* as a new media artwork is that the hardware and software are competing forces.

This is precisely why a close reading of the object became a significant factor in this investigation. Unlike the majority of writing on *Twelve*, few have offered criticism of Hirsch's choice and insistence to keep *Twelve* in its original form: software only suitable for an iPad. Already this particular feature adds an exclusive element to downloading the original 2013 piece from Apple's App Store. Since *Twelve* in its inception could only be viewed on an iPad, it would on the surface appear like a literal translation of the original *Twelve* to an objet d'art in the form of an iPad Mini. This is further enhanced once the signature of the artist is considered, emphasizing that the Special Edition iPad Mini is an object to be collected by art connoisseurs, galleries, and cultural institutions. More so, it is a direct response to Apple's claim that calling their act censorship was not a

“legitimate contention.” The art object indirectly fuses *Twelve* with Apple regardless of Apple’s negation. It would appear that the material quality of the piece legitimates it in today’s field of cultural production.

On a deeper level, the assessment claiming that *Twelve* was not a legitimate piece of art suggests there is a deep disconnect between traditional material forms of art and emerging new media works. In art history, there has been a long tradition of art being commodified and its cultural value fused with its market price. When *Twelve* was still available on the Apple store, the price of \$2.99 did not reflect the conventional value of a work of art. Furthermore, its listed status as an eBook contributed to the long-standing cultural fascination with categorization and classification: *Twelve* is a hybrid of eBook and artwork that reflects experimentation with 21st-century technological advancements and convergence media. Apple’s reception of the piece and Klaus_eBook’s response indicates that there is still a desire to legitimate art through material production and market value.

The Special Edition iPad Mini indicates a hardware fetish particular to digital natives who are constantly upgrading their hardware. Ironically, the desire to gather new technology in an age when old hardware is constantly becoming obsolete is a paradox of our consumer-driven digital age. When it comes to consumers in the Western World, technology that is new and special is valued more highly than other products on the market (this is generally true despite the technology’s capabilities.) Both Apple and Microsoft have been aware and on the

front lines of this generational divide in hardware and software preferences and work ceaselessly in their advertisements to convince less brand-committed consumer demographics to buy their products. Apple, despite its issues with *Twelve*, seems to still occupy a sanctified status to a particular kind of artist in very recent history. This element makes jailbreaking the iPads all the more ironic.

This is not to suggest that the Special Edition iPad is a dead end for *Twelve*. While researching and writing, the artwork continues to evolve and reconfigure. Since Klaus_eBooks released the objet d'art, Hirsch has transformed *Twelve* into a performance piece alongside artist Josef Kaplan at Macie Gransion Gallery in New York City [See Figure 11]. As featured in the public Facebook event description:¹⁰⁵

Ann Hirsch will be presenting a staged reading of the first half of her ebook "Twelve" which was censored by the iTunes store for "crude and objectionable content." Net art friends will come together to reenact AOL chat room scenes from the late nineties that will regale the artist's online pubescent exploits. Hirsch will play herself and will ask the audience to join her and her exceptional cast as she recalls IMing new friends, cybering kewt boyz, learning how to become the queen B of the chatroom and courting pedophiles.¹⁰⁶

From landline dialups, jailbroken iPad minis, to Facebook event invites, *Twelve* engages with numerous layers of media and media-specific distributions. A piece that was informed by online life experience has taken on a distinct life

¹⁰⁵ Hirsch, Ann; Durbin, Andrew; Gransion, Macie; and Josef Kaplan. Starring Kristin Smallwood, Joel Holmberg, Ally Marzella, Ryder Ripps, Deanna Havas, Kevin Champoux, Zachary German, and Ann Hirsch. "New Agendas: Josef Kaplan + Ann Hirsch". Screenshot from Facebook. March 12, 2013. Screenshot taken by the author.

¹⁰⁶ There have been considerable measures taken to avoid using the word "pedophile" in this major research paper due to the complexities surrounding the terminology in a psychological and legislative sense. Specifically, the characters in *Twelve* are post-pubescent which would contradict the basic definition of a pedophile with respect to Jobe.

online. *Twelve* indicates a teleological shift in new media scholarship as the project disperses and dissipates into fields of digital production.

Conclusion

Twelve is a feminist coming-of-age story delivered in a voice unique to the digital age. It could be argued that *Twelve*'s intended audience is identified as female since the piece primarily focuses on what it means to be a girl becoming a woman through online liaisons. Yet, *Twelve* appeals to a wider audience as it shifts and is extended into different formats. Remarkably, *Twelve* has already lived several lives as a story, piece of software, Special Edition iPad Mini, and performance piece. The speed of production, destruction, and reconstruction are reflections of new media art fields. Unlike artists working in analogue or static media, artwork that is entangled online and with technology has a more distinct temporality since the now Special Edition iPad Mini and original Apple software depreciate in digital relevance each day.

Writing about a work that disappeared from circulation only to then change its form was a challenge. The speed of activity in the digital sphere is unpredictable and has a tendency to accelerate at a pace distinct to internet culture. In order to undertake a close reading of *Twelve*, I had access to Hirsch's transcript via email with the original dialogue and screenshots. Working with the original Microsoft Word document and reading about others' experiences on the App, new significance to the value of a hard copy in the electronic art world was gleaned.

Apple's removal of *Twelve* from the App Store indicates that the fascination with protecting minors is often at the expense of their own safety and wellbeing. As more relationships stem from online dating sites and instant messaging, it is becoming increasingly important to focus efforts on media literacy to enable youth agency so they can understand the risks associated with internet use. Love is only one of the complex facets of *Twelve*; so too is young people's desire to understand the public sphere, autonomous from parents, teachers, and legislators. *Twelve* offers a realistic introduction to the world of online teenagers and their relationships, which are more about exploration than exploitation.

Hirsch's artwork is a story about online love and its erasure from the App Store reflects how society values artworks like *Twelve* and treats young people. Although "youth" is one of the most popular keywords in internet porn search queries, youth expressions of sexual desire and romantic feelings are not given the same level of consideration as those of adults. This is likely a result of the desire of adults to protect young persons through a disavowal and denial of their sexuality. Often these protective actions come from a nostalgic and idealized reconstruction of childhood. These paternalistic impulses set out to protect young people from the unsavory emotions that follow the failures of romantic relationships, but do more to hurt than help. Hirsch's feminist intervention and reconstruction of the "predator" and his "victim" stands as a powerful statement on female desire, sexual conquest, and the significance of fantasy.

Each generation believes it invented sex, and that all others before were rather prudish and simple despite the history of art proving humans have been sexually sophisticated for thousands of years. But what's incredible about *Twelve* is that when considered in different ways, it appears that a generation has reimagined how to communicate sex and intimacy. In many respects, text-based communication augments the value and significance of intimacy, sexuality, and community structures. To reduce *Twelve* to a document on pedophilia would be a true perversion of the artwork. The assumption that girls and boys would not read the work as a piece of fiction greatly undermines the intelligence of young people. Hirsch's work, although a fictitious retelling of her experiences, reinforces how powerful and memorable first sexual experiences can be.

The story that Hirsch chose for *Twelve*, replete with conversations of longing and loss, of the first meeting of future lovers and their intoxicating, passionate encounters, is exciting material that she could incorporate in her own art, making her an example of how an artist can make a public statement out of such private experience. Brought up in a "very sheltered home," Hirsch felt a responsibility to learn about the world and sharing her new knowledge with her art. Characteristically, she was determined that her approach would not be heavy-handed but suffused with humour and irony. *Twelve* only offers a partial truth. There is nothing to tell us who Anni really is. We do not know whether she or Jobe were ever really there or someone else pretending to be the characters. This insistently unspecific particular story reminds us that sexual behavior, although

private, is also universal. Society's responses to it, on the other hand, are most definitely not.

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Appendix A: Characters

This appendix provides a character list and their screennames that are featured in *Twelve*. All the names listed here have been arranged in order of appearance. The list is by no means comprehensive but offers a sketch of the dynamic nature of multiple identities unique to social media and specifically in “Twelve,” the AIM interface.

Annie	Lilac098, XoaNNioX
Josh	JoshyWoshy
Burke	bUrKe13
Chris	CyrusGage, CyrusRage
Bethie	XxbETHiExX
Heather, Heat, Heathery	HEAThery
Jobe	lieshadow, dieshadow
Prescott	Flounder34 ¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ Although not featured in this analysis, Prescott makes a very brief appearance in *Twelve*.

Appendix B: Figures

Figure 1: Hirsch, Ann. "Caroline's fun fun channel," *Scandalishious Project*. <http://www.youtube.com/user/scandalishious>. Accessed 11 March, 2014. Screenshot taken by the author.

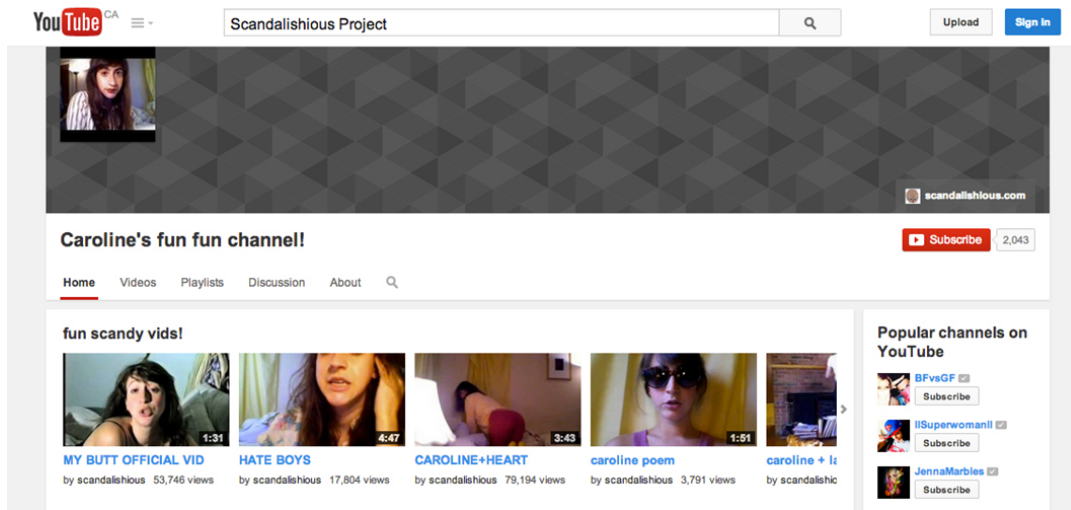


Figure 2: Hirsch, Ann. "Ann Hirsch Talks Jason Biddies with Ana Cecilia Alvarez," *Topical Cream*. <http://topicalcream.info/editorial/ann-hirsch/>. Accessed 24 March, 2014.



Figure 3: Hirsch, Ann. *Twelve*. Screenshot courtesy of the Hirsch via email. Accessed 3 December, 2014.

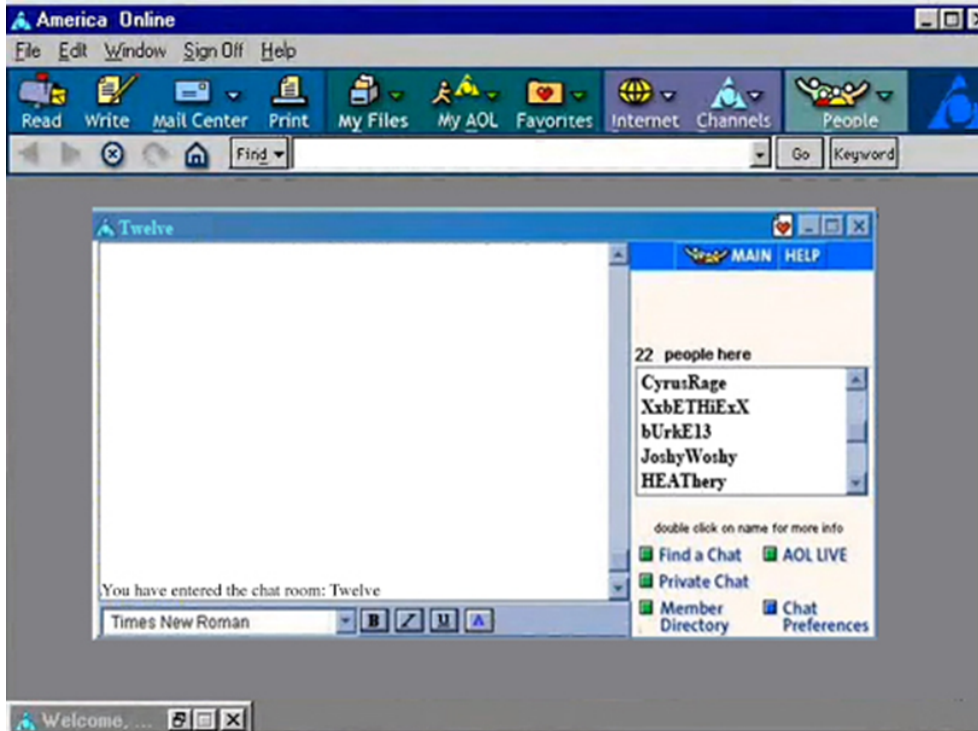


Figure 4: Hirsch, Ann. *Twelve*. Screenshot courtesy of Hirsch via email 3 December, 2014.



Figure 5: Hirsch, Ann. Screenshot from Facebook. December 12, 2013. Screenshot taken by the author.



Figure 6: Hirsch, Ann. Screenshot from Twitter. December 8, 2013. Screenshot taken by the author.

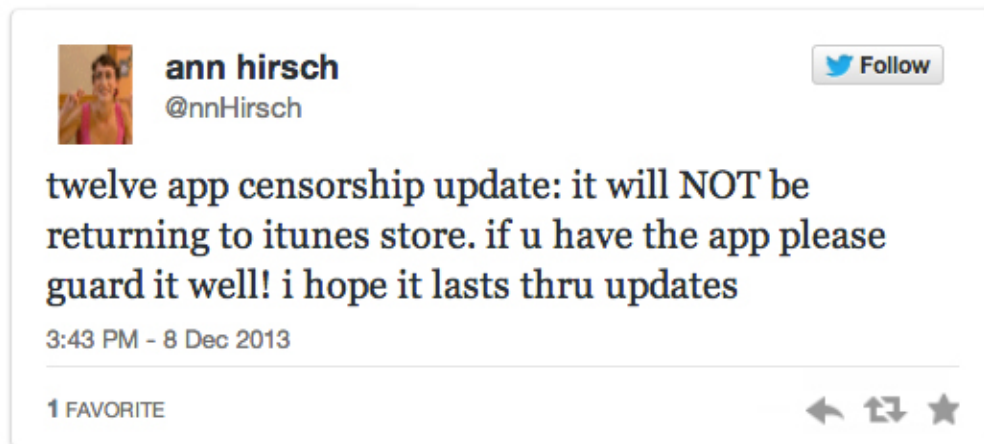


Figure 7: Apple Store. *Twelve*. Accessed 24 November, 2013. Screenshot taken by the author.

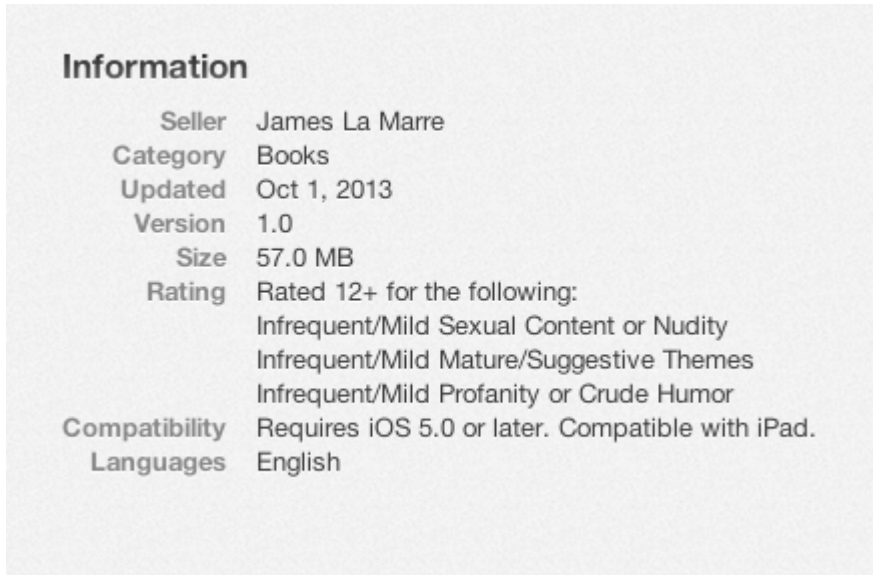


Figure 8: Apple Store. *Twelve*. Accessed 24 November, 2013. Screenshot taken by the author.

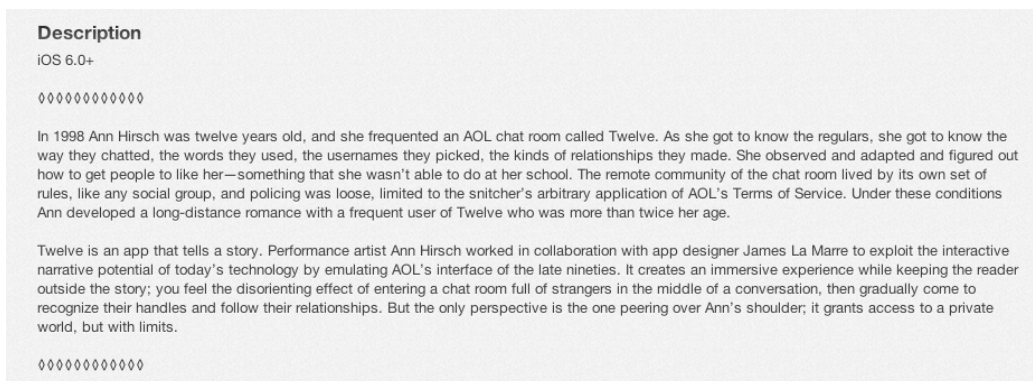


Figure 9: Hirsch, Ann. *Twelve*. Screenshot courtesy of Hirsch via email 3 December, 2014.

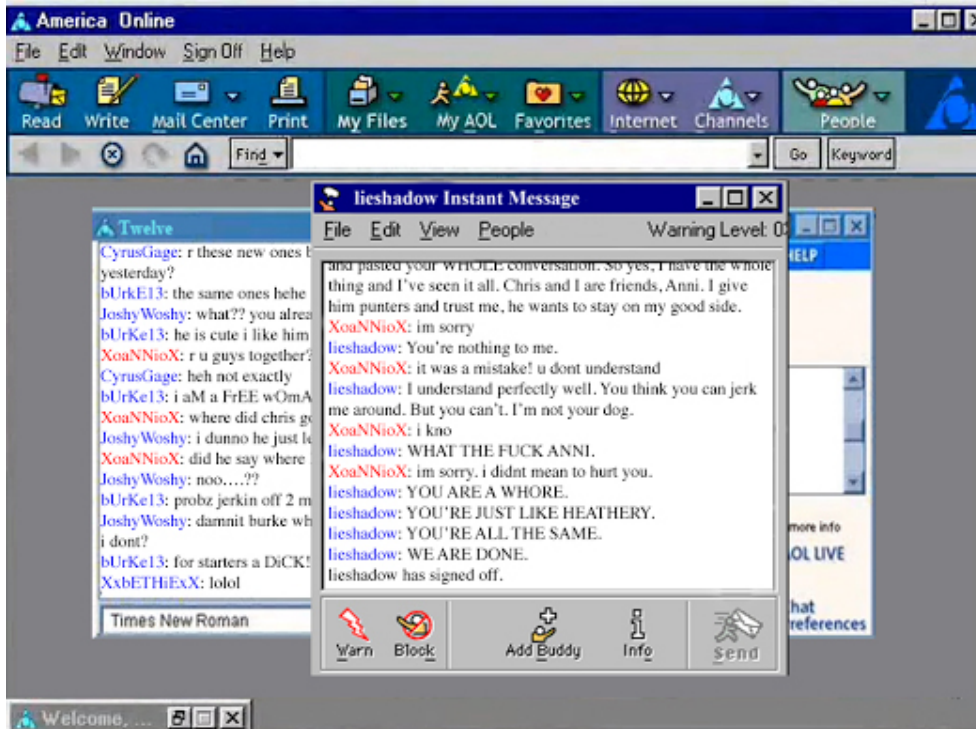


Figure 10: Hirsch, Ann. *Twelve*. Software Developer James LaMarre. Klaus_eBooks. 2014.



Figure 11: Hirsch, Ann; Durbin, Andrew; Gransion, Macie; and Josef Kaplan. “New Agendas: Josef Kaplan + Ann Hirsch”. Screenshot from Facebook. March 12, 2013. Screenshot taken by the author.

The screenshot shows a Facebook event page. At the top is the Facebook logo and a search bar. Below is a photograph of several potted plants, likely money trees, arranged on a table. The event title is "New Agendas: Josef Kaplan + Ann Hirsch". The location is "Macie Gransion" at "87 Rivington St, LES, NYC". The date and time are "Saturday 19:30". The event is categorized as "performing their work at". The description states: "Ann Hirsch will be presenting a staged reading of the first half of her ebook 'Twelve' which was censored by the iTunes store for 'crude and objectionable content'. Net art friends will come together to reenact AOL chat room scenes from the late nineties that will regale the artist's online pubescent exploits. Hirsch will play herself and will ask the audience to join her and her exceptional cast as she recalls IMing new friends, cybering kewt boyz, learning how to become the queen B of the chatroom and courting pedophiles." The cast list includes Kristin Smallwood, Joel Holmberg, Ally Marzella, Ryder Ripps, Deanna Havas, Kevin Champoux, Zachary German, and Ann Hirsch. The page also shows a list of invited guests, including Alex McLaren, Ann Hirsch, Jennifer Chan, and Ed Fornieles.