CHARTING CYBERSPACE:
SELF-IDENTITY, COMMUNITY, AND NATIONALISM IN THE VIRTUAL REALM

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Abstract

This thesis takes a broad look at recent social developments in cyberspace with a particular focus on the key concept areas of self-identity, community and nationalism. The field of cyber research is very much a nascent one, but already a seminal core of literature abounds that privileges cyberspace as a world that is somehow removed from the everyday one in which we reside. This study argues against this assertion, suggesting instead that cyberspace, for most users, is merely another commonly accessed part of daily life.

Online ethnographic techniques utilising participants from Stormfront.org (a prominent white nationalist website), supplement general and theoretical literature in order to sustain the main argument that cyberspace *is* real world space. This primary contention is supported across the key concept spheres by three major subsidiary arguments. Firstly, with regard to self-identity, it is suggested that online identity development relies heavily on the existence of stable and continuous personal identifiers, just as is the case for 'real world' identity formation. Secondly, in relation to community, the contemporary aversion to virtual communities by many social commentators is contested, and counter claims are produced in order to support the legitimacy and viability of online communities as worthwhile social spaces. Thirdly, on the subject of nationalism, online patriotism is put forward as an understandable human actor response to ingrained nation-state approaches to national identity. These state approaches can be seen to privilege macro-level economic factors over the needs and ambitions of individuals at the micro-level of society, ensuring that the relatively free domain of the Internet makes a viable empowerment vehicle for those who feel isolated and disenfranchised.

Statement of Authorship

Except where explicit reference is made in the text of the thesis, this thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis by which I have qualified for or been awarded another degree or diploma. No other person's work has been relied upon or used without due acknowledgement in the main text and reference list of the thesis.

Signed: Date: 21/02/2003

　　　　Kevin C. Thompson (Applicant)

Acknowledgments

After four years of toil, trial and tribulation to ensure the completion of this research project, it seems somehow unfitting to acknowledge the support and assistance of others in such a small amount of space. Unfortunately, a small amount of space is all that I have at my disposal here for this task, and I apologise in advance for not being able to fully do justice to those on whose backs I have necessarily ridden during these arduous PhD years.

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Introduction

The place of cyberspace in the Western world[1]

It is easy for those of us residing in affluent Western societies to overestimate the true reach of information technologies on a global scale. The perils of such misjudgment are even more applicable to cyberspace researchers themselves; given that many researchers work in education institutions where Internet access is either provided free of charge or heavily subsidised. When one is constantly in touch with the online world and regularly involved in interactions with similarly oft-connected persons, it is not difficult to fall into the trap of envisioning cyberspace users as being the global norm, instead of the privileged exceptions. Jerry Everard (2000) places cyberspatial participation in a more realistic context when he argues:

> If 80 per cent of the world's population have never made a telephone call, and more than half of the world's population live more than 100 miles from the nearest telephone line, then clearly the world is not yet living with a global information super-highway (42).

In effect, cyberspace is very much a Westernised terrain and is largely dominated by *settlers* from Northern America, Western Europe and Australia (Holderness, 1998:41).

The "state of the cybernation" (Barrett, 1996) in Europe is of particular interest to this discussion. It was estimated that Europe would accumulate 50 million Internet users by late 2000, a figure that would account for 22.7% of the global total of 220 million (Elliott, 1999,

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[1] I will use Western society as the setting for the vast majority of discussion that takes place in this thesis.

November 6-7).[2] As a geographical territory Europe is large, but the sheer extent of its expanse is mitigated by the proximate nature of its many national borders. The cultural and ideological differences inherent within these politically delineated boundaries have served to curtail the expansion of computer-mediated communication (CMC) technology across the greater European continent. Cyberspace may be a predominantly virtual entity, but the situation in Europe reminds us that CMC remains heavily indebted to physical constructs for its current existence and future development as a medium.

The uneven spread of information technology (IT) development across the European continent contrasts conspicuously with the advancements occurring in the USA and Australia. The relatively stable and cohesive political environments maintained by these countries within their individual nation-states, along with their long-term adherence to the ideologies of capitalism and technological development, is reflected in the high 'multimedia access' rankings that are held by both countries.[3] North America and Australia maintain remarkable per capita multimedia access indicators in all four categories of phone lines, cellular phones, Internet connections and personal computers per 100/10,000 head of population [refer Table 1] and, as a consequence, promote serious statistical misrepresentation of the broader geographical regions (Americas & Oceania) of which they are the dominant members [refer Table 2].

On the surface, misrepresentation is also clearly apparent in the broader European figures that compare very favourably with the global averages. The solidity of the European figures, much like those of the Americas and Oceania, are unevenly bolstered by the inordinately strong technological showing put forward by the Scandinavian nations (Sweden and Denmark in particular). This scenario may surprise the uninitiated, but

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[2] Regional forecasts go on to predict that Internet usage in Europe will quadruple to 200 million users by the year 2005. This is in keeping with estimated increases of 400% in Latin America and Africa/Middle East during the same period. Projections for the Asia-Pacific region are only slightly behind these at 378%, whilst North America (given its present state of relative computer-mediated communication saturation) is only expected to surge by 209%. On a worldwide scale, it is suggested that the number of Internet users will triple to a total of 660 million come 2005.

as Hakken (1999) points out, the technological potency of the Scandinavians is not indicative of an "overnight success":

> The Nordic experience of [Advanced Information Technology] AIT is special for several reasons. These nations have long pursued policies of openness to and participation in world scientific and technological discourses, policies that recognize the centrality of appropriation of these innovations into national culture. This openness includes a trans-Nordic network of scientific, technological, and policy workers who interact frequently among themselves and with colleagues from around the world (142).

In Sweden, the decision to pursue IT policies can be traced back to the 1950s, when computerised technology became one of many planks in the nation's broad spectrum social welfare and development program (Hakken, 1999:148). By way of contrast, IT in neighbouring Norway developed largely in concert with NorskData, a once powerful Norwegian company that dominated the country's IT landscape by virtue of its ability to market itself upon popular elements of national pride (Hakken, 1999: 144).

The success of the Scandinavians overshadows the efforts of their higher profile European counterparts. This is not to suggest that Western European nations like Germany, France and Britain are IT paupers, although they do have a way to go before they can match the Nordic regions on a per capita basis. At least these nations are in a position from which they could make up the leeway, however, unlike the IT-poor countries that reside on the eastern flanks of the European continent. This reality is painfully evidenced by the Russian state, which boasts only 1 computer for every 25, and 1 telephone line for every 5, citizens [refer Table 1]. For Russia, the anaemic condition of its national IT infrastructure is yet another legacy of its "defeat" in the Cold War. In stark contrast to the inclusive approach to socialism employed by the post-World War 2 Scandinavians, the Russians—as primary members of the then Soviet Union—practised an exclusive form of socialism; ensuring that IT

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[3] Multimedia Access Rankings = the density of telephone lines, mobile phones, Internet

innovations were directed away from the public at large and accessible only to the military and space researchers.

The availability of phone lines is not the only factor retarding the growth of cyberspatial media in Europe. European countries, with few exceptions, lag well behind the United States with regard to computer penetration at the public level and entertain high communications costs that inhibit consumers from regular participation in web sessions (Drozdiak, 2000, January 15). Historical factors have also been at play here, with European countries showing a preference for participation in the mobile phone market over the personal computer industry during the past decade (Drozdiak, 2000, January 15). Finland exemplifies this preference having reinvented itself as the most mobile phone intensive nation on the globe during the 1990s.[4] The Finland scenario serves as a contemporary mirror for previous developments in Norway with Norksdata. After some early setbacks, the Nokia company has succeeded in building a corporate telephone empire and the Finnish public has embraced its product in the name of national pride (Silberman, 1999).[5] Similarly, the United States has clearly dominated the computer market in recent decades, so it is no surprise that the nation's personal computer penetration (45.86 per 100 inhabitants) should be higher than that of other countries (ITU, 2000).

www.american_hegemony.com

With the recent demise of the Soviet Union, the United States now stands alone as a genuine military superpower on the world stage. A not insignificant factor in the maintenance of this superpower status has been

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connections and personal computers per 100 inhabitants within individual countries.

[4] Finland had 57.18 mobile phones per 100 head of population in 1998, a figure that incredibly (albeit narrowly) exceeded the 55.39 main telephone lines that it had available per 100 head of population. It is the only country in the world where such a situation exists. Refer to the following for a broader outline of these figures — ITU (2000), *Basic indicators* [Online], Available: http://www.itu.int/ti/industryoverview/at_glance/basic98.pdf [2000, February 28] & ITU (2000), *Cellular subscribers* [Online], Available: http://www.itu.int/ti/industryoverview/at_glance/cellular98.pdf [2000, February 28].

[5] The scope of Nokia is quite extraordinary. It is easily Finland's largest company and accounts for more than half of all activity that takes place on the Helsinki stock exchange. It is also recognised as the world's best performed mobile phone company and 75% of all mobile phones in Finland are made by the corporation.

Table 1. Multimedia Access by country (comparative) 1998[6]

COUNTRY	POPULATION {in Millions}	PHONE LINES {per 100p}	CELLULAR PHONES {per 100p}	INTERNET CONNECTION {per 10,000p}	PERSONAL COMPUTERS {per 100p}
USA	270	66	25.6	2219	46
CANADA	30	63	17.6	2475	33
SWEDEN	9	67	46.5	3953	36
DENMARK	5.5	66	36.5	1887	38
GERMANY	82	57	17	731.5	31
RUSSIA	148	20	0.5	68	4
UK	59	56	25	1357	26
FRANCE	60	57	19	335	21
AUST	19	51	28.5	1603.5	41
NZ	4	48	20	1539	28
JAPAN	126.5	50	37	1323.5	24
CHINA	1256	7	2	17	1
VIETNAM	77.5	2.5	0.24	1.5	0.7
INDIA	982	2.5	0.12	5	0.3
STH AFR	44.5	11.5	5.5	286	5
EGYPT	66	6	0.14	15	1

SOURCE: ITU World Telecommunication Indicators Database (2000).

Table 2. Multimedia Access indicators by region 1998

GLOBAL REGION	POPULATION {Millions}	PHONE LINES {per 100p}	CELLULAR PHONES {per 100p}	INTERNET CONNECTION {PER 10,000p}	PERSONAL COMPUTERS {per 100p}
AFRICA	760	2	0.5	22	1
AMERICAS	800	32	12	921.5	20
ASIA	3538	7.5	3	88	2
EUROPE	798	37	13	491	14
OCEANIA	29.5	40	25	1236.5	38.5
WORLD	5925	14	5.5	256	6.5

SOURCE: ITU World Telecommunication Indicators Database (2000).

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[6] For this table USA = United States of America, UK = United Kingdom, AUST = Australia, NZ = New Zealand and STH AFR = South Africa. Also, the p (eg. per 100p) = persons.

flow of job losses that have accompanied the inevitable failure of such industries (Drozdiak, 2000). The Americans have also underscored their technological innovation processes with supportive political legislation such as the 'US Information Infrastructure Act' (1993), a policy approach that envisioned cyberspace as an 'Information Superhighway' (Everard, 2000: 19) with American citizens occupying the express lanes. This is not the case for the Europeans, with the obvious exception of the Scandinavians, whose inability to firmly rationalise and articulate their place in the burgeoning 'Information Age' has relegated its people and businesses to the slow lanes of the virtual thoroughfare.

Having firmly established itself as the pacesetter of the Information Age, the United States is now looking to improve the technological capabilities of the world's under-developed regions. The U.S. government frames this initiative in heroic social philanthropic terms. But O'Connor (1996) hints at unabashed self-interest when he writes that:

> The prospect that Africa may not figure into the telecommunications equation alarms the Clinton administration, which has made the development of the so-called Global Information Infrastructure a priority in its foreign policy. The United States sees Africa as a potential market for U.S.-made telecommunications gear — and as a future market for other U.S. goods and services once the continent's economy is bootstrapped by the technology (271).

For writers such as O'Connor, cyberspace represents yet another sphere in which the United States can impress their considerable will on the rest of the world. Just as IT builds upon earlier forms of media, American hegemony of the Internet works from a platform of established American rule, echoing prior U.S. dominance of global finance *via* the International Monetary Fund and similar authority over global military matters (through the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation & the United Nations).

While the Global Information Infrastructure (GII) may succeed in bringing otherwise removed regions into the cyberspace realm, it will only allow them to enter as dependent consumers and not independent

shapers of technology. Linda Main fears that the relentless American 'trade-not-aid' approach to information technology is threatening to polarise the planet along "north versus south" lines. In line with this thinking, which is Marxist in its overtones, the majority of global citizens will become forcibly excluded from the information age, with many of those included reduced to importing technology rather than producing it (2001:96).[7]

The Marxist perspective may appear somewhat alarmist in tone, but it nevertheless plays an important role in counter-balancing the over-enthusiastic treatises on technological innovation that are commonly espoused by economically fixated governments and corporations. Assorted visual media productions led the conflict approach to global IT developments throughout the 1990s; portraying small cross-sections of 'winners' moulded in the high-tech American pioneering image transposed against large pockets of 'losers' confined to downtrodden suburbs, public transport systems, rapidly dissolving industrial centers, and—in some cases—dilapidated shanty-towns and garbage dumps (Dowd, 1995; Harrison & Klein, 1994a, 1994b). Of the many statements aired in these productions, perhaps the most telling is attributable to Microsoft mogul Bill Gates, who speaks calmly and dispassionately about the lifestyle improvements inherent in the ever surging technological age, and of how many people would simply "decline to participate" in it (Harrison & Klein, 1994b). Comments like this are indicative of computopian[8] endeavours to

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[7] It was almost three decades ago that Schiller was writing of global communication developments in Marxist terms, envisioning a (Western) culturally-imperialised world bifurcated by two distinct social groupings — the winners and the losers (1973:1). In this scenario the winners are the contemporary equivalent of the bourgeoisie, although this ownership class not only owns the means of production, but also the primary knowledge bases required to shape, develop and control the vehicles used for this production. In essence, this leads to a proletariat that—for the most part—is not only bereft of an adequate power base within the dramatically evolving economy, but is removed from it entirely.

[8] 'Computropian' is cyberspeak for those who oppose cyberspatial/computer developments on the grounds that they are serving to increase the socio-economic divide that separates the haves from the have nots on a global scale. Such critics should not automatically be mistaken for 'technophobes', as many of them are not opposed to the technology *per se*, merely the social inequality that it contributes to. 'Computopian', by way of contrast, refers to those who are exceedingly optimistic about the virtual realm's potential for improving life chances.

depict the 'technological revolution' as a bloodless coup; effectively absolving the winners from their moral and ethical obligations by addressing the losers as if they were elective abstainers from the information age, rather than uninvited guests.

Any apprehension over the socially divisive qualities of the Internet has not, however, prevented mainstream Northern America from embracing cyberspace media. The quixotic appeal of computerised technology is all too evident in this regard, with the Internet commonly referred to as the new "frontier". Jason Abbott alludes to this in writing of how "For many, cyberspace resembles the 19th century American West: vast, unmapped and legally ambiguous" (2001:99). This is in keeping with romanticised interpretations of the American pioneering spirit, which lionise the notion of everyday Americans boldly conquering uncharted territories and seizing control of their own destinies in the process.

Such idyllic romanticism aside, the frontier also had significant practical and legal meaning too. The legal definition of frontier during the mid to late 1800s pertained to "land occupied by two or more but less than six persons, on average, per square mile"; although by the 1890s such land arrangements no longer existed outside of the idealised confines of the newly emerging movie industry (Johnson, 1998:533). On the one hand, the notion of frontier (in its romanticised sense) is more in keeping with myth than historical reality, although it is interesting to note the way in which cyberspatial media has adopted the idealised frontier guise that was created by its cinematic predecessor. On the other hand, for all of the frontier's imaginary appeal it is obvious that in many ways it was a legal and logistical headache for American lawmakers. The same can most certainly be said for cyberspace, with contemporary political bodies struggling to reconcile archaic, but culturally reified, constitutional acts and amendments to a virtual world that stretches their interpreted meanings to the limit.[9]

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[9] Amendment 1 of the 'Constitution of the United States of America', with its emphasis on the preservation of free speech is proving particularly problematic for contemporary White House administrations insofar as the Internet is concerned.

It is ironic though, that an entity such as cyberspace should come to prominence at a time when American nationalist sentiment is on a high. History informs us that the United States of America itself effectively came into being (post-Declaration of Independence) at a time when the general feeling throughout the country was decidedly anti-nation in tone. The North Americans had become accustomed to, if not enamoured of, a domestic political structure that encompassed governance by separate states "bound together by negotiated agreements and compacts, charters and covenants" (Johnson, 1998:431). The war with Britain had drawn widespread support as a reaction to that country's perceived injustices against everyday Americans, but the ideological differences that had previously kept Americans aloof from fellow Americans (particularly those in the south from those in the north) remained sufficiently resolute as to deter broad acceptance of federalisation. A similar scenario exists today as U.S. led computopians try to formalise a single, integrated cyberspace in defiance of the long-engrained and radically diverse cultural differences that are common to the realm's many participating real world nation-states.

For the United States of America to successfully negotiate a unified cyberspace, it will first have to convince other nations that it is not driven predominantly by ulterior motives. The GII sounds admirable in theory, but it is clearly indebted to U.S. commerce for its funding and the time will inevitably arrive when these investors want some form of return on their investments (Main, 2001:83). Equally as disconcerting for potential beneficiaries of American technological philanthropy is the country's prior record of using poorer regions as a recycling depot for outdated equipment (Abbott, 2001:109). It is quite possible that sub-Saharan Africa could become a prime dumping ground for obsolete American technology, given that much of the $15 million 'USAID Leland Project'[10] funding will be necessarily needed for shoring-up telecommunication infrastructure in Africa. This will leave little (if anything) over for equipment purchases, but given that the Internet is easily accessible from old and slow computers, it

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[10] The 'USAID Leland Project' is a five-year plan aimed at "opening up markets for the developed world through the internet" (Main, 2001:86).

would appear most opportune for enterprising American businesses to "donate" their superseded systems to such countries.

All of this would meet the objective of widening the reach of cyberspace, whilst simultaneously reaffirming American control over its confines. In spite of this, there are writers such as Jon Stratton who do not believe that American dominance of the Internet is certain to be maintained in future years. Unlike previous modes of media, film and television in particular, the Internet provides ample scope for audience response and interactivity, which may bring challenges to American online hegemony as the non-American presence in cyberspace inevitably increases (1997:730). Even more worrying still for the United States government is the realisation that cyberspace presents as the communication vehicle of choice for American citizens aggrieved at the manner in which the country is being administrated. This is a point that will come under closer scrutiny when discussion turns to online patriotism in Chapter Seven of this thesis.

Britain follows the American lead

For several centuries during the past millennia the Western world looked to Great Britain for economic inspiration. From the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries (inclusive) the British were a prominent global power, as their expansionist ambitions led to vast expanses of geographical territory being colonised under the English flag. Following on from this, the growing need to restructure industry in order to best service burgeoning capital markets, both domestically and abroad, put the British at the forefront of an industrial revolution that would dramatically reshape the world of production and consumption on a global scale (Smith, 1995:114-115).

Throughout the twentieth century, however, Great Britain's privileged place in the overall world order underwent rapid decline. Revolts against British colonialism, coupled with a succession of wars ensured that the British Empire was gradually dismantled to the point of insignificance by the late 1940s. The trauma of war also had a pronounced effect on the British psyche, prompting the country to adopt a somewhat safe and

insular approach to industry during the prosperous years of the fifties and sixties. While the Americans and Scandinavians were focusing upon computer technology and gearing themselves for the forthcoming information age, Britain preferred to maintain emphasis on the manufacturing sectors on which it had long relied for economic security. As microchip technology began to monopolise Western attention in the 1980s, it quickly became apparent that the United Kingdom was in danger of falling considerably behind its key Western counterparts as a political and economic force on the world stage (Mariou, Raymond & Gerouard, 2001). In response to these concerns, successive British governments have put IT development and investment at the forefront of the country's social and economic planning for the 1990s and beyond (Slevin, 2000:47).

Of course, with the benefit of foresight and a slice of good fortune the British may have initially found a place for themselves at the helm of information communications development:

> In the same year [1965], Donald Davies, in the UK's National Physical Laboratories (NPL), conducted research into how best to break down data into packets for a storage and forwarding transmission system. Clearly, Britain was considering its options with an approach similar to that of the US, and under similar political conditions. Indeed, perhaps for the UK the situation seemed more critical, given Britain's lack of strategic depth in the face of the nuclear threat (Everard, 2000:13).

The early efforts of British researchers like Davies would eventually count for little, however, with American developers making the all-important breakthrough with ARPAnet in 1969[11] (Moschovitis et al. 1999:61-62). Further exacerbating Britain's problems has been its tendency to adopt economic policies that have placed "competition before cooperation", an approach that has helped to stifle domestic IT development, particularly in regard to mobile phones (Hirst & Thompson, 1996:148). The United Kingdom, along with several larger European nations, would again miss a

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[11] ARPAnet was the first multiple-site computer network in the world, linking research centres together electronically across the USA. ARPAnet would provide the impetus for increasing links across the globe and it was from this beginning that the Internet would eventually arise.

prime opportunity to become a leading IT nation in the latter stages of the 1980s when it declined the chance to devote energy and resources to a combined European cellular phone research and development project. The potential economic benefits of this technology (in 1990) were speculative, at best, but the courage of the Scandinavian nations and—to a lesser extent—France (both of whom embraced cellular innovation) are being rewarded at the beginning of the twenty-first century, while the UK desperately seeks a way to make up lost ground (Mariou et al. 2000).

Perhaps inspired by previous Swedish initiatives, the British government inaugurated the 'Realising our Potential' white paper in 1993, which linked the government, corporations and academics in a "think tank" aimed at best rationalising the UK's place in the information age (Tang, 1998:186). A subsequent (1995) report titled 'Competitiveness: Forging Ahead' placed government at the centre of IT development in Britain, stressing the importance of government reinvention and streamlining of services, *via* technological means, as a way of encouraging and setting an example for British corporate industry (Tang, 1998:18). Great Britain appears to be casting the net wide for fresh ideas on information communications although, wherever possible, it still chooses to take its lead from the Americans. This was clearly evidenced by a 1996 report that suggested, among other things, that the British parliament endorse a similar interactive approach to the broader electorate as exists in the United States. The American government has been at the vanguard of experimentation with two-way communication (*via* cyberspace) with its constituents and, as a consequence, "all US members of Congress can [now easily] be reached by electronic mail" (Tang, 1998:187).

A desire to emulate the interactivity and user-friendliness of the American system has been paramount in recent British government (conservative and labour) initiatives that have sought to bring the citizenry into its broader Internet development plans (Slevin, 2000:47). This would seem to have positive implications for the British people, but the current state of British society ensures that it will take more than oblique offerings of "people empowerment" to aid the United Kingdom in its attempts to achieve a top three presence in the world of information communications.

The Blair Labour government won the 2001 election by a landslide, but the comfortable winning margin failed to accurately reflect the enormous task it is faced with in trying to put the 'united' back into United Kingdom. For many English persons the new millennium is plagued with frustration over high unemployment rates and an exorbitant cost of living. Such uncertainty is even more acutely felt by the large number of people disenfranchised from job and society with the dramatic erosion of mining and manufacturing industries across the 1970s and 1980s. In other corners of Britain the situation seems equally tense, as Irish and Scottish nationalists continue to display a deeply ingrained disaffection with their English neighbours. The impending growth of the European Union (EU) is only likely to intensify the tenuous nature of Great Britain, as the non-English members of the British realm face the prospect of their sensitive national identities being further marginalised by the English-led push for EU inclusion.

Even with regard to the Internet itself, there are signs appearing that the smaller British nations are failing to keep pace with England in the global race to colonise cyberspace. For example, the geographical structure of Wales neatly links the country's transport routes to major English locales, and conventional media forms (newspaper & magazine) are necessarily concentrated along these pre-established routes. Conversely, the transport routes within Wales itself are less effectively integrated, which is helping to fragment the culture of the nation as English media deeply penetrates the Welsh society. On top of this, conventional Welsh media vehicles have attracted recent criticism for promoting "English views, mass culture, or a version of Welsh culture that is of little relevance to most people in [present day] Wales" (Mackay & Powell, 1998: 203-204). Such conditions would appear to be ideal for the rise of a uniquely Welsh Internet presence aimed at restoring the traditional aspects and values of community that have long been a central tenet of Welsh culture. This possibility is complicated, however, by the dominant state of non-traditional Welsh culture as expressed in the conventional British mass media. This means that such endeavours would need to necessarily compete with the conventional media, along with rival Internet

groups enamoured of the views expressed by such media, in attempting to promote the cause of Welsh nationalism.

Asia online

The Welsh situation shows the problems facing some Western nations as cyberspace begins to take shape around the interests of a few IT-rich countries. For all of its past neglect and hesitancy over IT innovation, the United Kingdom still enjoys a more advanced position in the information age hierarchy than any of its Asian rivals (Japan excluded). In spite of this it is the Asian countries that pose the biggest threat to the many ambitious nations trying to bridge the broad technological divide that separates the Americans (and Scandinavians) from the rest of the developed world.

The Asian countries, with the possible exception of Japan, have been late arrivals to the high-tech world of cyberspace. In the present day, most of them are caught in the catch-22 situation of wanting to control information flow to protect against possible cultural imperialism, whilst simultaneously needing to foster the free information flow that is integral to the region's burgeoning business interests (Haywood, 1998:25; Slevin, 2000:210). Up until the mid-1990s the former need was clearly being given preference over the latter, but in the aftermath of the East Asian financial crisis many Asian states are finding themselves compelled to ease harsh Internet restrictions as a means of encouraging domestic economic growth.

As was the case with Great Britain some years earlier, the East Asian nations have been found wanting as global emphasis has sharply shifted from an industrial to an information focus. From the 19th century onwards, these nations (at varying stages) have pursued four phases of economic growth that have mirrored developments previously occurring in American and European regions. In linear order, these phases have encompassed a shift from textiles, to steel through automobiles, and on to microchips, with Japan currently the only major Asian nation to have

adequately completed all four phases (Ozawa et al. 2001:2).[12] Proponents of the information age contend that the developed Western nations have entered into a new fifth phase of economic growth — "the McLuhan stage". This stage differs from the previous phases principally on account of its capacity to impact upon all other types of industry "in the areas of management, production, procurement, distribution, and customer services" (Main, 2001:1; Ozawa et al. 2001:3). The East Asian nations— by and large—have been slower to negotiate these shifts in phase, partly on account of their allegiance to communist ideology, but mainly as a result of their tendency for shielding domestic industries from global market developments.

The East Asian nations, prior to the late-1990s financial crisis, were largely insulated from global economic concerns via domestic regulation and protection of industry. The first clear signs of a shift from protectionist policies occurred in 1994, when Japan bowed to US pressure and deregulated its cellular phone industry. In the years to follow, Japan surged to the top of global mobile phone subscription figures, and the country now sees widespread deregulation of domestic industry as a necessary step in its bid to become a primary player in the IT market (Ozawa et al. 2001:5). The political necessity of deregulation is nonetheless counterbalanced by the substantial social angst that such processes entail. The American approach to capitalism has always privileged individualism above all else, but the modern Japanese experience—at the large corporation level—has been more inclined towards notions of paternalism and long-term job security (Ikegami, 1999:7). The recent Japanese switch to more aggressive economic policies and initiatives has necessitated a corresponding move away from employer paternalism, characterised by a rapid eradication of middle management positions across the country's corporate sphere. For a country that has placed such significant stock in the projection of national pride as underscored by employee loyalty to high profile domestic

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[12] Each of these industries still exist in today's world, of course, but it argued that none of them encompass the social and economic significance that is currently accorded to information communications technology.

corporations, it remains to be seen how warmly the everyday people embrace this new approach to economics and industry.

For the larger Asian nations, cyberspace looms as both a reinvigorating vehicle for national economy, as well as a debilitating agent for national pride. We have already seen the difficulties that the Internet poses to Asian language users, but this is only half of the dilemma being faced by eastern governments seeking to colonise cyberspace en masse. National pride in both China and Japan has long been openly espoused through explicit linguistic and cultural symbols; as evidenced by the Chinese word for China (Zhongguo) meaning "middle nation" and the Japanese flag depicting the country as the place on which the sun chooses to rise and set. Both of these symbols unambiguously position the Asian nations at the *centre* of the known universe, which is a primary tenet of sinocentric perspectives on Asian primacy in the broader global scheme of things. Such national pride has been under threat in recent times with the "defeat" of communism in the Cold War and the Japanese struggle to negotiate fresh industrial avenues following several decades of economic prominence on the world stage. Cyberspace is a Western construct dominated by Western countries with Western concerns, but it is still a sphere in which the Asian nations must participate if they are to become powers in the burgeoning global marketplace. Such participation is predicated on the promise of future glory, but also with the humbling knowledge that their present place is on the periphery of cyberspace, and not at its hub.

The Cold War may have ended, but for communist China (as for other communist Asian nations) the political paranoia associated with the period has left a lasting legacy. From the 1950s to the late 1970s, the Chinese Ruling Party (CCP) maintained a fixation with political ideology that stimulated similar levels of political awareness and interest in the general population at large. As the nation's focus switched to economic matters during the 1980s, the concerns of the people appear to have undergone a like transition (Hachigian, 2001:3). Signs of growing public indifference for political issues has not served to dim CCP unease over its capacity to maintain control over the country, however, and cyberspace is

causing the party particular anxiety in this regard. Throughout the twentieth century China entertained the view that information was "a part of state policy", which limited the flow of information within the country to the state's ruling party (Berring, 1998:1). Even today the state still controls most media outlets in China, but much of the CCP's nervousness surrounding the Internet pertains to fears that conventional media sources may lose their appeal and relevance to new, seemingly boundless online media, robbing the state of considerable potency in the process (Yang, 2001:4).

The CCP's misgivings over Internet technology can be traced back to 1989, when dissidents exploited the medium in order to quickly and widely disseminate news of the country's violent attempts to quell localised democratic uprisings In Tiananmenn Square (Abbott, 2001:100; Castells, 1996:354; Everard, 2000:19; Moschovitis et al. 1999:141). With this in mind, China has made attempts to tighten Internet security by erecting an (ultimately useless) firewall, and by legislating to make ISP's responsible for policing and censoring the Chinese virtual realm. These initiatives are viewed in some quarters as a cynical government ploy to convince technologically illiterate "old guard" officials that the CCP is in control of China's Internet media (Abbott, 2001:102). Of greater concern to civil libertarians and freedom of speech advocates is China's propensity for taking a hard line stance on Internet 'indiscretions' whenever the opportunity arises. In the past three years the government has jailed one man for providing e-mail addresses to a dissident group; jailed another for four years for committing online 'subversion'; and sentenced two hackers to death for infiltrating the computer system of a major domestic bank (Abbott, 2001:103; Hachigian, 2001:5).

Such cases are still isolated ones, however, given that the Internet is not classified as a major immediate threat to the CCP because the party is managing the new technology effectively, only a small section of the population is online and the country's current economic and political stability dissuade firm opposition to the CCP (Hachigian, 2001:8). At any rate, the government is well aware that for all the organisational strength and capability cyberspace offers, most political demonstrations still need

to occur in real world locales, which means that physical force can still discourage dissension in many cases (Hachigian, 2001:5). Violent displays are very much the least preferred option though, particularly as China strives to convince the world that its promises to improve on its dismal human rights record are genuine. In line with this 'ambassadorial' attitude to cyberspace administration, the CCP recently called for the creation of an 'International Internet pact' aimed at global regulation of the WWW as a means of minimising dissidence and enhancing economic productivity (Yang, 2001:2). The proposal was not met with great approval, but at the very least it would appear to indicate that China will not be prepared to leave the formidable task of Internet legislation and regulation entirely to their Western counterparts.

China can ill afford to lie silently as cyberspatial development continues at a phenomenal rate. The country's economy is enjoying unprecedented growth and the pace of this accretion will only increase by virtue of China's newly obtained membership within the World Trade Organization (WTO). Chinese businesses will need to embrace the WWW in order to ensure competitiveness and survival in the global marketplace, but 99% of these businesses do not even have a basic computer (Hachigian, 2001:2). The lack of widespread equipment and access to technology has been the biggest challenge facing the CCP in its bid to usher China into the information age. Undeterred by the monumental scope of the task, the CCP has worked hard over the past five years and succeeded in making several noteworthy steps toward a viable Chinese presence on the WWW. Firstly, it has restructured the domestic telecommunications industry, which has in turn resulted in competitive services, expanded networks, and cheaper across the board Internet participation costs. Secondly, it has eagerly encouraged and facilitated consumer demand for telecommunications capability, leading to 120+ million fixed-line and 60+ million cellular phone subscribers at the end of the year 2000. Thirdly, it has rigorously worked to put most government agencies online (the Government Online Project) so as to inspire domestic corporations to do likewise. Finally, it has closely followed the American example by offering these agencies interactively to the public, markedly

improving political transparency measures in the process (Yang, 2001:2-3). The reward for these efforts are all too apparent, with the number of Chinese Internet users ballooning to 22+ million in early 2001; a massive rise from the paltry 1997 figure of fewer than one million (Hachigian, 2001:1).

Internet participation is nowhere near as pronounced in nearby Vietnam where the local Politburo only licensed the country's first four ISP's in early 1998. In line with communist approaches to the medium, the Vietnamese Politburo has chosen to closely monitor *all* domestic web sites and has ensured that all local web vehicles are subject to content 'filtering software' (Richtel, 1998:72). The success of this strategy has been limited, however, given that restrictions of such a broad and ill-defined nature are commonly disregarded:

> Vietnam's Internet regulations conform to a great tradition of the Marxist/Leninist order, whereby laws are so strict that they are widely violated. This makes most people into outlaws and places them at the mercy of police and security officials, who get rich turning a blind eye. In practice, those who keep to themselves or are well connected can expect to live in peace (Case, 1997:5).

At least the Vietnamese government has loosened its tight grip on domestic e-mail, after previously (prior to 1998) imposing strict censorship on the content of all messages sent from within the country (Case, 1997:1). Not that this more laid back manner is indicative of a newfound trust in the local netizen population. To this point, Asian nations (or any nations, for that matter) are incapable of adequately scanning e-mail traffic due to its vast volume, but this may change in future as 'Carnivore' monitoring technology becomes improved and widely available[13] (Hachigian, 2001:5).

As is the case with other Asian Nations, Internet access in Vietnam is limited and not nearly as easy to arrange as it is in the West. In order to

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[13] 'Carnivore' software has been developed by the FBI primarily in response to online acts of dissidence and terrorism against the American state. Simply explained, the program hones-in on key words, phrases, names and addresses contained within high volume e-mail traffic. At the moment the FBI is the only body using the software, but this is likely to change once its reliability and effectiveness are firmly clarified.

participate online, Vietnamese netizens must first register for a licence, and sign an agreement making them responsible for all material that appears on their WWW vehicle (Everard, 2000:37). If these impediments are not sufficient enough disincentive for potential users then exorbitant Internet access costs may be, given that they amount to roughly a third of the average annual Vietnamese salary (Slevin, 2000:41). Interestingly, the Vietnamese Politburo has responded to the anemic condition of its country's cyberspatial presence in a similar fashion to the CCP. For the most part, this has encompassed the privatisation of the domestic telecommunications infrastructure although, even allowing for the government stipulations built into these privatisation agreements, it is difficult to foresee the Internet becoming widespread in Vietnam in the immediate future (Abbott, 2001:109; Everard, 2000:31; Moore, 1998:155). In essence, the country is wracked by too many competing domestic problems and is too fragile economically to make a significant impact on the global IT scene. The vulnerability of Vietnam in IT circles was all too clearly articulated in the mid-1990s when the Vietnamese National Assembly passed plans for a $500 million (US) 'world-class information technology industry' project. This initiative remains unfulfilled and although the country has long had exciting underground IT development talent, it nevertheless lacks the financial muscle and unwavering political commitment to bridge the expansive gap that separates Vietnam from the affluent Western IT power players (Case, 1997:4).

In the fellow Asian nations of Cambodia and Malaysia, opposition political parties endeavouring to overcome the disadvantages apparent in fighting against governments that control conventional information sources have experimented with cyberspatial media. The main opposition party in Cambodia relies heavily on the Internet in its ongoing quest to bring democracy to a nation worn down by corruption and tyranny. The party uses e-mail to inform sympathisers of current developments and to solicit support from others, with approximately three quarters of its entire financial support being derived from online sources (Leslie, 1999:234).

In spite of this, the opposition party in Cambodia has failed to gain a significant online advantage over the sitting government, which has proven

equally adept at placing its propaganda on the Internet. This failure to make a viable impact is somewhat surprising given that the Cambodian government is less dictatorial than other Asian nations when it comes to cyberspace. The situation contrasts with the happenings in Malaysia, with the government there openly refrained from censoring Internet use in 1996. The Malaysians had hoped that this would enable the country to outperform neighbouring Singapore, which had issued tight controls on citizen use of the virtual realm. For a short while this tactic proved successful, with Internet use in the country failing to capture the non-corporate imagination until the 'Anwar scandal' of 1998, when users saturated the Internet in protest over his sacking and arrest (Abbott, 2001:104). This would seem to support suggestions that cyberspace is a fertile environment for the nurturing of political ideas and uprisings, but it could also be argued that it is still largely dependent on real world events to stimulate such uprisings.

The Internet is thus a prized tool for nations desiring a stronger global presence and a sound economy with which to accompany that presence. The Cold War served to largely abridge global tensions to the point of polar divisions between east and west, but as these divisions fade to the background, fresh schisms arise in their place. It has been assumed that the globalisation of communications networks and economic markets would lead to an inevitable process of cultural homogenisation, but present signs indicate that the opposite is true. The world is no longer delineated along simplistic capitalist versus communist lines, meaning that individual nations are more aware of their strengths and vulnerabilities (and the strengths and vulnerabilities of others) than they would have been some decades ago. Rather than removing the differences between nations, global developments (with particular regard to media vehicles) have helped to afford them a greater transparency.

Cyberspace, as these last few pages illustrate, is a realm that impacts upon, and is influenced by, world developments that occur in the East, as well as the West. While this thesis chooses to focus almost expressly on cyberspatial machinations from a Western perspective, I am loathe to provide readers with the mistaken impression that the virtual

realm is little more than a Western enclave. Indeed there is much to be gleaned from investigations that serve to increase the anaemic profile of non-Western nations in the presently unbalanced field of cyberspace research. This thesis will not be among such studies, however, partly because space limitations necessitate a targeted approach to the topic and partly because the dearth of resource material pertaining to non-Western regions unduly restricted my capacity to support any detailed analysis into such regions. It should also be noted that a targeted Western approach to the research is thought to best align with the empirical observations presented throughout the body of work.

The aims of this thesis

> It is time to take a realistic look at the extent of the promises, and at the extent of the realistic dangers [cyberspace entails] — not in order to take a Luddite's revenge, but rather to be able to plan ahead with knowledge and understanding of the real benefits and the real limitations of this awfully big adventure (Everard, 2000:xvii).

It would indeed seem that, for many people, cyberspace looms large in the consciousness as an awfully big adventure with an ending that is anything but clearly predefined. For some, cyberspace is imbued with almost mythical qualities. It is a foreign place, of profoundly arcane dimensions, for which they lack the time and/or inclination to explore and uncloak. These are the people who the computropians contend are being left behind by cybertechnology and, while this may well be the case, there is little solid evidence (at this point in time) that non-participation in the virtual realm is markedly restricting the capacity of human actors to function effectively in everyday life. For others, cyberspace brings with it previously unimaginable benefits; bridging the once onerous time and space divide with an ease and efficiency that is a world removed from the archaic telegraph technology that originally preceded it.

The white nationalist movement[14] is a prime example of a substratum of society that is taking full advantage of cyberspatial technology in order to pursue political platforms that are devoid of general acceptance in mainstream society. White nationalism is an unashamedly racist ideology and, as is the case with racism itself, has played a role in Western politics and social structures from medieval times onwards. In physical terms, racism arose as an obvious by product of the colonial slave trade as begun (in the "New World") by Portugal in the fifteenth-century (Blackburn, 1997:102). Over the ensuing four centuries Spain, France and the USA would follow the lead of the Portuguese; the economic aspirations of all four nations helped enormously by the dehumanising commodification of African-born slave labour.

The political origins of white nationalism are more difficult to clarify, but have been tentatively traced back to the Puritan ascendancy period of the mid-1600s (Barkun, 1997:5). It would take a further two centuries before these early thought patterns would evolve into what came to be known as the British-Israelism movement[15] (Barkun, 1997:7-9). British-Israelism would eventually make an appearance in the USA during the 1870s at approximately the same time that the fledgling Ku Klux Klan organisation was beginning to grow in popularity (Bushart, Craig & Barnes, 1998:174). The Ku Klux Klan would gradually fade from favour and has not been a significant presence in American politics since the 1920s, but the concept of British-Israelism has proven more hardy and continues on as a prominent white pride doctrine in the present day.[16]

The white power movement in general has also shown considerable resilience in the face of legal and political developments that have threatened its very existence. The movement's public standing was

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[14] The terms 'white nationalism/nationalist(s)', 'white pride/prider(s)', and 'white power' will be employed interchangeably throughout this piece of work.
[15] British-Israelism worked predominantly from the viewpoint that British-born whites were the descendants of the 'lost tribes of Israel' and thus held a privileged place in the eyes of God.
[16] British-Israelism evolved into what is now known as the Christian Identity Movement in the USA. American white pride advocates adopted most of the tenets outlined in British-Israelism, but altered the focus so that North America was viewed as the site of the future 'White Israel', not England.

severely diminished during the 1960s as civil rights initiatives dominated Western social landscapes and the accompanying prosperity of the times pushed right-wing racist ideologies to the back recesses of the broader public imagination (Walters,1987:11-12). The organisation endured something of a momentum swing from the mid-1970s to the late-1980s as the global financial meltdown produced a backlash against affirmative action policies (Walters, 1987:13-14). This backlash was further exacerbated as a result of the social stresses applied by the Reagan Administration's championing of communitarian ideals, but by the early-1990s white nationalism was still residing on the far outposts of Western political process.

It is my belief that the white nationalist movement was struggling for want of two crucial elements — a unified, cohesive intra-movement communications structure, and a public standing that was divested of the violent baggage that had long been intrinsically associated with racist activities and initiatives. The latter problem was also crippling the movement financially with several high profile legal judgements awarding millions of dollars against white pride affiliated organisations (on account of their alleged guilt in planning and committing violent acts) during the 1980s and 1990s (Roberts, 1999, September 11). What the movement desperately needed then was an outlet through which white priders could freely exchange ideas, and minimise the violent symbolism that hindered positive acceptance of their political platforms by wider communities.

The burgeoning realm of cyberspace sufficed on both of these counts and white pride groups began to colonise the virtual world in considerable numbers from 1995 onwards.[17] The first major portal for white nationalist content online, Stormfront.org, appeared during that year and it remains the first cyberspatial port of call for many white pride devotees at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Stormfront.org is more than just a right-wing gateway site, however, as it also exists as an Internet community in its own right, drawing together a wide variety of white power

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[17] White nationalism had a presence in cyberspace during the late eighties, but it was small and primitive and the Internet (at that stage) lacked the broader public access capacity to make the medium a worthwhile political tool.

followers and their opponents from a disparate array of countries for interaction, debate, and event planning. This thesis gathers much of its empirical data and direction from the Stormfront.org site; underscoring information relating to broader cyberspatial developments with targeted support documentation from message post content analyses and online interviews with participants on the site's discussion fora.

White nationalists have not been well represented in academic studies of online environments with McPherson's treatise on Dixie-Net (2000); Whine's writings on the far right's Internet presence (1997, 1999); and Zickmund's piece on the vagaries of cyberhate (1997) standing as the only investigations into the topic that I am aware of at the time of writing. This is surprising given that right wing groups are precisely the type of group that is most likely to accrue clear benefits from online participation, given the many hurdles that affected their fleshspace[18] development throughout the twentieth century. This was part of the reason why I chose the white pride movement as a case study subject for the empirical requirements of this thesis. This factor aside, the movement also offered the prospect of access to individuals who, to varying degrees, retained an appropriateness to the three key concepts of investigation (self-identity, community and nationalism) encompassed by the overall body of work.

I would like to emphasise here that the empirical material relating to white nationalists is employed only to support and provide practical examples of general cyberspatial phenomena. A detailed study of white nationalists online would certainly make for an engrossing research project in its own right, but it was never my intention to prepare a predominantly

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[18] Fleshspace = the physical sights, structures and everyday machinations that we have come to commonly associate with the 'real world'. Throughout this thesis I will be arguing that cyberspace is ostensibly just another part of this 'real world' space and, as such, should not be treated as a kind of magical, mystical other world. This argument could become confused were I to continually conflate cyberspace with 'real world' space, however, making it necessary for me to find another term to use here as a point of differentiation. Expressed another way, I will be using the terms fleshspace and cyberspace throughout this body of work; with the former term refering to physical representations of the real world and the latter alluding to disembodied aspects of the real world. It is important that the reader grasps the notion that both fleshspace and cyberspace are considered to be (often overlapping and interrelating) parts of 'real world' space. Where the term 'real world' is used, it should be understood that both fleshspace and cyberspace elements are considered to be at work.

ethnographic body of work in order to pursue my research agenda. As it stands, the relatively small number of interview/questionnaire respondents accessed in the methodology would have rendered a total ethnography unworkable in this instance anyway. In spite of this, it is worth noting that an ethnography of substantial dimension is yet to be realised, in either cyberspace or fleshspace terms. *Soldiers of God: White supremacists and their holy war for America* (Bushart et al. 1998) is the closest thing to an ethnography on white nationalists in existence, and the authors of this work make much of the difficulties apparent in persuading white pride devotees to speak with outside researchers.[19] I encountered similar hesitancy in recruiting subjects for this study, and while twenty-one respondents may seem a little on the slender side, it is nevertheless enough to meet the qualitative demands of the project and it is a reasonable figure for political activists traditionally opposed to participating in mainstream research processes.

The central argument driving this study is the contention that cybersociety *is* real society or, at least, an extension of real society. At times, too much effort is expended in trying to present cyberspace as an entity that is separate from the everyday world, but this argument is misguided and only succeeds in diminishing the legitimacy and importance of the realm as a sphere of academic study. With this in mind, I will repeatedly emphasise the tendency for virtual interactions to work from (and in concert with) the everyday machinations that underscore normal human life in Western societies.[20]

This central argument will be underpinned by three subsidiary contentions that relate directly to the main concept areas of the thesis.

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[19] The text by Bushart et al. (1998) was, to the best of my knowledge, one of only five published works covering interviews with white pride movement members in existence at the time of writing. The other four being *Inside organized racism: Women in the hate movement* (Blee, 2002); *"White power, white pride!" The white separatist movement in the United States* (Dobratz & Shanks-Meile, 2000); *The Racist Mind: Portraits of American Neo-Nazis and Klansmen* (Ezekiel, 1995) and *The new white nationalism in America: Its challenge to integration* (Swain, 2002).

[20] I would like to stress that the decision to differentiate between the 'virtual realm' and the 'real world' when discussing matters in this body of work is predicated only by the need to clarify the similarities between the two, and not to contribute (even unconsciously) to suggestions that the two are significantly removed from one another.

The first of these contentions will take umbrage with popular multiple identity interpretations of online participation, putting forward the contrary view that online identities are more often than not stable and singular in form. This will be followed by a second contention that works in opposition to computropian efforts to decry the value and viability of virtual communities in comparison with fleshspace alternatives. Finally, in switching emphasis to the concept of nationalism, I will assert that online patriotism provides individuals with a sense of national identity and ideology that has long been denied them by conventional macro-level (state-orientated) nationalist models.

The methodological dimensions of this study are presented in Chapter One, 'Methodology: Outlining the approach to the research', along with an accompanying discussion that reveals the place of cyberspace within the broader social sciences disciplinary sphere. Both anthropology and sociology have a prime role to play in future explorations of cyberspace, with the former discipline ideally suited to demystifying the virtual realm's complex interactive processes, and the latter well placed to explicate the various influences driving these processes.

Chapter Two, 'Analysing Identity: Unravelling the idiosyncrasies of the individual' focuses implicitly on the construction of self-identity and the multifarious aspects that aid in the shaping of an individual's unique sense of self. This chapter will address a wide range of predominantly social science based literature relating to the notion of self-identity, with particular emphasis being placed on the works and ideas of Erving Goffman, Anthony Giddens and Erik Erikson. These writers share an approach to the topic that relates in some fashion to human agency perspectives on the issue. This is less obvious for Erikson as it is for Goffman, but the former's ideas on role construction are similar to Goffman's on closer inspection. Further to this, Erikson adopts a line of thinking on individual 'ontological awareness' that corresponds neatly to Giddens' employment of the notion in his theory of structuration.

There were obviously alternative theoretical approaches that were considered for implementation in this body of work. In terms of scope, the thesis would undoubtedly benefit from being able to draw from a wide

range of multi-disciplinary theorists and lines of philosophical thought. The possibilities apparent in theoretical expansion, by way of example, are seldom more evident than in the sub-sphere of self-identity, where the discipline of psychology would provide supporting material of considerable depth and substance. The broad use of multi-disciplinary texts has been decided against in this instance, however, as the large amount of topical terrain encompassed by the thesis, combined with the restrictions on overall word limit, render an extensive theoretical treatise largely unworkable.

The reader need also understand that this thesis will not unduly concern itself with providing in-depth critiques of the major theorists presented here. The works of Erikson, Goffman, Mead, Giddens, Simmel, Durkheim and the like have already been extensively debated over the years and it is not my intention to add unnecessary weight to this particular body of work. This should not be misinterpreted as a sign that I believe such thinkers to be beyond reproach, as all forms of social theory can be seen to contain inherent flaws and weaknesses. The theorists focused on in these chapters are not exempt from this way of thinking, and my comprehension of their respective imperfections can be inferred from the lines of thought that *have not been included* in discussions relating to their particular works. Essentially, I have sought only to highlight the views of theorists in this thesis when their ideas have entailed significant contribution to the realm of cyberspace (generally) or the topical sub-spheres (specifically).

Matters of theory aside, Chapter Two will also be representative of the first of three thesis chapters to unmistakably incorporate literature review conventions into its framework. This may have something of a disorientating effect on readers who are schooled in the more common convention of locating entire literature review elements within a single chapter of a thesis. This approach is definitely preferable for theses that encompass tight, singular topical foci, but would not work as well here, given the multiple interest spheres being addressed.

The literature review type format employed in Chapter Two acts as the setting for Chapter Three, 'Internet Identities: Investigating the online

self'. The content of this section expands and elaborates upon the central ideas expressed in the preceding chapter, transposing them onto the virtual landscape as a means of illustrating the ways in which online interactions tend to reflect those that take place in fleshspace. The central argument expounded here is that whilst cyberspace creates an environment for people to experiment with multiple identity forms and expression styles, the social structures and expectations inherent in virtual environments almost invariably ensure that netizens maintain identity integrity and stability.

For Chapter Four, 'Appraising Community: Clarifying a contested concept', the line of thought on identity is expanded so as to include representations of the concept at the meso-level.[21] This chapter mirrors the structural approach used in Chapter Two, providing a brief, but succinct outline of established sociological thought surrounding the community theme. The main ideas presented here are drawn upon in the formation of a range of thematic variables that, in turn, direct the empirical observations that take place in the following chapter devoted to online communities.

This chapter, entitled — 'Cyberspace Communities: Virtual or *virtual?*' pushes the viewpoint that cyberspatial communities are, by and large, equally credible as the conventional ones commonly created in fleshspace. The section starts out by establishing the various online media *via* which communities can be built and maintained, before moving on to focus on the social stimuli encouraging their construction and the conventions that arbitrate participation in them. All too often discussion on virtual communities is unconsciously derailed by an overt emphasis on the technological capabilities of cyberspatial media, but not all cyberspace media are appropriate for community development and the social aspects

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[21] *Meso*, as the term is used here, refers to 'middle' and is needed to differentiate from the type of group that exists in the nationalist sense. Other writers have referred to community as entailing a 'macro-level' phenomenon, and this is fair when assessing community in relation to the self, but the inclusion of nationalism in the argument highlights the marked difference in scope that exists between community at the localised level and community (particularly in the imagined sense) at the national level.

of group interaction are always more significant than the technological tools that underlie them.

At this point, attention turns from meso-level expressions of identity to those that occur at the macro-level. Chapter Six, 'Addressing Nationalism: Contemplating the notion of nation', introduces nationalism to the discussion *via* a review of literature that traces sociological thought on the subject back to the eighteenth century. The chapter touches upon a range of co-requisite issues that impact on the shaping of individual identities including ethnicity, religion, language and structural symbolism.

Nationalism is all too often thought of as a social element that is extraneous to human actors at the micro-level. For many such actors, however, the factors explicit in nationalist ideologies are at the forefront of their chosen models of ontological awareness and are integral to their pursuit of idealised group dynamics at the meso-level. For this reason, I have chosen to assemble this thesis in a manner that accentuates the interweaving linkages that underscore human identity development across self, community, and nationalist lines.

The final chapter, 'Net Nationalism: CMC and the pursuit of nationalist agendas online', completes the explication of nationalism that began in Chapter Six. This chapter is essentially written in two parts, with the first part focusing on the conventional economic-centered mode of nationalism that is endemic to modern nation-states and the pride of place that cyberspace (and assorted computerised technologies) are assuming in the endeavours of such nation-states to shore-up their international strength and standing for the twenty-first century. The second part, by way of contrast, delves into the alternative expressions of nationalist ideology that are preoccupying contemporary activist groups within Western society and the role that the Internet fills in enabling and furthering these nationalist agendas.

1

Methodology: Outlining the approach to the research

Basic outline of the chapter

When cyberspace research was in its infancy, many studies relating to computer-mediated communication (CMC) had their focus on multi-user virtual environments (MUVES) and the arcane nature of the interactions that occurred within them. Because of this, early research ventures into cyberspace became somewhat repetitive and limited, as Jones suggests in writing that:

> For instance, it is possible that we lose sight of the fact that few people are generally, in fact, pioneers when it comes to the Internet and Internet research. How many have "discovered" e-mail and written studies about it? How many analyses have been published or are underway that examine on-line discourse in MUDs (multi-user domains), MOOs (multi-user domains object oriented), and IRC (Internet relay chat)? (1999:11).

The proliferation of writing around these vehicles has forced some cyber researchers to seek out alternative online domains for explanation and exploration. This subtle change of focus has encouraged researchers to delve outside of the confines of online participation, in the strict communications sense, in order to contemplate the broader social, political and, in some instances, practical aspects of CMC participation.

This chapter takes a close look at the case study employed in this thesis, utilising a framework that considers the appropriateness and

uniqueness of online research methods to contemporary cyberspace-based research projects. As a starting point discussion will centre on an exploration of the contemporary state of cyberspatial research within academia. From there the chapter will provide details of the three differing modes by which researchers can undertake cyberspace-related research. Following on from this attention will turn to the four specific research techniques used in this study, explaining each method in sufficient detail and accompanying this explanation with a rounded rationale as to why they have been chosen for implementation here. Finally, some closing thoughts will be provided as to the state of cyberspatial research methodologies in general, with a view to positioning this study in the wider context of what is clearly a neophyte and, as such, underdeveloped research sphere.

The precarious state of socially driven cyberspatial research

As cyberspace continues its gradual, yet important, climb into wider consciousness, in the social sciences contention abounds as to whether established study disciplines are adequately situated to meet the investigative demands that the burgeoning social sphere asks of them. Is it sufficient for cyberspace research to reside in vibrant, but ostensibly unobtrusive, corners of the sociological, anthropological and psychological landscapes? Or would it be preferable for it to flourish as the centrifugal focus of a new and all-encompassing discipline of 'cyberology'?

Within the social science sphere itself, the general state of cyberspatial research remains decidedly understated at best. Helen Morton, in her introduction to a special cyberspace-related issue of the journal *Social Analysis*, laments the minimalist presence of social science based contributors in cyberspace writings when she says that:

> To give just two examples, Steven Jones' *Virtual Culture* (1997) has thirteen contributors, none of whom are from these [anthropology and sociology] disciplines, while David Porter's *Internet Culture* (1997) is a collection of fifteen essays, only one of which is written by an anthropologist. The remaining contributors are from diverse fields including English, history and cultural studies; other publications include work from philosophy,

computer science, economics, media and communications, law politics, and, in one case, architecture (Morton, 2001a:2)

Morton's findings mirror my own after a preliminary investigation into the impact of cyberspace on sociological understandings of contemporary society.

In methodological terms, this inquiry was conducted at a very basic level, and involved the scanning of seventeen key sociological journals spanning a five-year period between 1994 and 1998 inclusive.[22] The choice of this method was underscored by a presumption that cyberspace would be stimulating considerable discussion and research among academics working in key societal spheres, were it really as chimerical as its protagonists were suggesting. These 'key societal spheres' were identified as health, family and sexuality, mass media, education, religion, and work and industry. The journals chosen were considered to be the most prominent in their particular focus field, and were drawn from Australia, the USA and Great Britain, with one journal in each field coming from each of these countries.

This examination of journals resulted in some interesting and not entirely expected findings. Not one article published in the work and industry, religion, family and sexuality journals throughout the entire five-year period pertained to CMC matters in any shape or form. Cyberspace fared little better in the mass media sphere where a mere two articles related implicitly to the virtual realm. Discussion on cyberspace was more proficient in the education sphere, although it still fell well short of constituting a quarter of all topical material presented during this time.

This survey was limited in scope, but it illuminated a cross-section

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[22] The journals used in this preliminary investigation are as follows — *Labour and Industry; New Technology, Work and Employment; Work and Occupations; American Journal of Education; British Journal of Sociology of Education; Computers and Education; The Journal of Religion; Religion; Religious Traditions; Media International Australia; Media, Culture & Society; Intermedia; Sociology of Health and Illness; Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health; British Medical Journal; Journal of Family Studies; Journal of Marriage and the Family.*

of current research directions within academic sociology. While results stemming from the investigation appeared to indicate that cyberspace was overrated as a research sphere, subsequent probes (such as Morton's) suggest that the problem lies more with the research practitioners than the research site. This view is reinforced by the findings of two other small-scale inquiries (conducted by this researcher) into sociological writings on

Figure 1. Discipline areas of papers presented at The Australian Sociological Association (TASA) Conferences [1996-2000, inclusive] (Total papers presented = 1069)
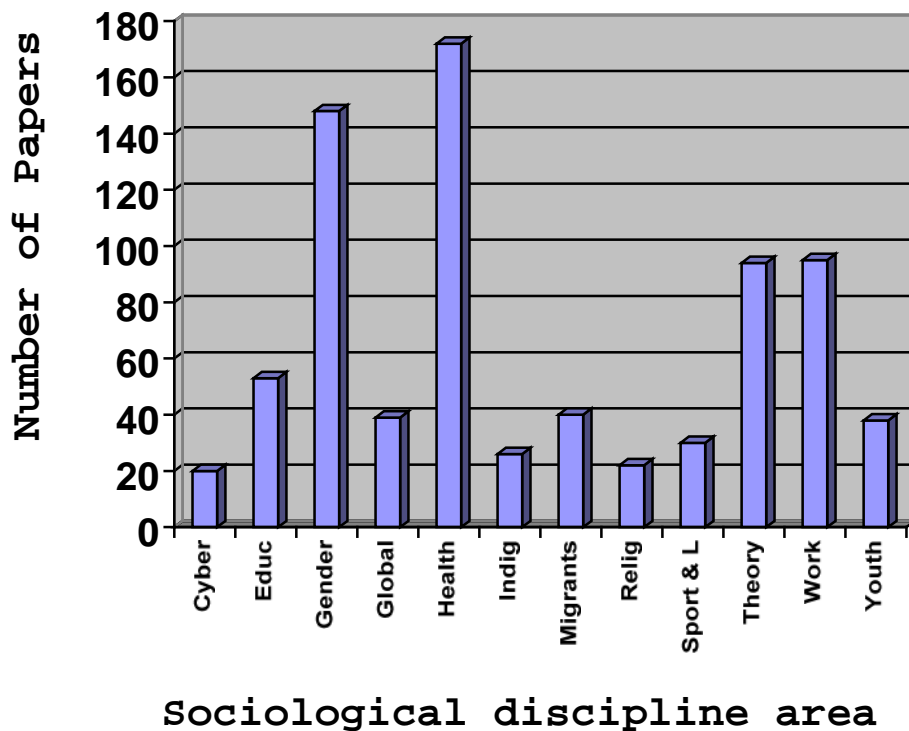
cyberspace issues. The first inquiry [refer Figure 1] dealt with the topical foci of papers presented at annual conferences held by The Australian Sociological Association (TASA) over a five-year period. One thousand and sixty-nine papers in all were given during this time; a figure that is clearly dominated by health-related papers that accounted for 172 (or

16.09%) of the overall total.[23] Other sociological spheres such as gender, work and theory also fared well during this time, but cyberspace lagged well behind, accounting for a mere 20 (or 1.87%) of the total papers. These figures tend to make something of a mockery of John Dvorak's (1996) confident assertion that "sociologists will love the next 100 years", given the seemingly boundless research avenues that cyberspace opens-up before them.

Figure 2. The discipline areas of chapter contributors to recent texts focusing upon the relationship between cyberspace and society. (Total chapter authors = 177)

Discipline area
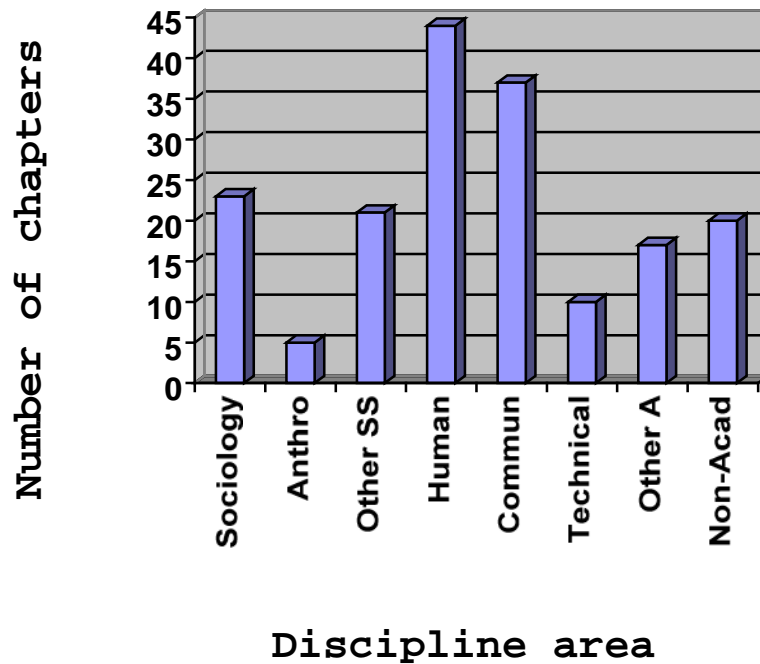
The level of sociological input into cyberspatial writings looks equally as deficient on a global level. The second inquiry [refer Figure 2] attempted to gain a sense of global developments by examining twelve text books that pertained implicitly to the impact and influence that

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[23] There were overlaps between some of these categories. The category headings in full read as follows — Cyberspace, Education, Gender, Globalisation, Health, Indigenous matters, Migrants, Religion, Sport & Leisure, Theory, Work & Industry, and Youth Studies.

cyberspace is having on the greater society.[24] All of these books reside in the social sciences section of the University of Ballarat library, yet social science researchers account for a just over a quarter of the chapters that appear in the texts. The input of sociologists to the writing of these chapters is somewhat embarrassing, with only 13% of them belonging to writers from the discipline (almost half of these being postgraduate students).

The reasons for this anaemic cyberspatial output from social scientists vary, although the most likely cause would appear to be a lack of technical confidence and competence on the part of the researchers. Hakken alludes to the heavy presence of technophobia within the anthropological ranks when writing of the discipline's difficulty in recognising cyberspace as a fertile research terrain:

> Among the manifestations of the difficulty is anthropologists' personal technophobia. Our difficulty may have something to do with our individual psychic histories, having perhaps picked this field because it wasn't science or math, perhaps reinforced by personal self-perceptions of ourselves as "people people," not "geeks." Skitishness about technology makes anthropologists peculiarly subject to the technicism which permeates modern culture, itself arguably connected to the tendency of humans to distance themselves psychically from technological dependence; schizoid on technology, humans tend strongly to treat it as external (1999: 65).

Hakken is referring to American anthropologists here, although it is probable that the same could be said for social scientists (in general) on a worldwide scale.

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[24] The discipline areas used are — Sociology, Anthropology, Other Social Sciences (Politics, social policy, womens studies), Humanities (English, Literature, American Studies, Medieval Studies, History, Film & Media), Communication Studies, Technical (Computer Studies, and the like), Other Academic fields, and Non-Academic writers. The books concerned, in no particular order, are — Jones (1995, 1997, 1998, 1999); Loader (1997, 1998); Shields (1995); Porter (1997); Hawthorne & Klein (1999); Holmes (1997); Smith & Kollock (1999); (Kolko et al. 2000). Some authors appear more than once.

The three principal modes of doing research online

Social science departments are clearly having difficulty in forming and maintaining concrete cyberspatial research links with outside academic bodies, but it is heartening to see that academic imperialism does not appear to be further constricting developments within the social science sphere itself. Sociology has gained immeasurably from this breaking down of inter-disciplinary barriers by gaining access to traditional anthropological ideas and approaches that adapt perfectly to the fresh sphere of cyberspatial research. Primary among these anthropological approaches is the ethnographic research technique, which is now commonly employed in social scientific incursions into the virtual realm. Cyberspace ethnographies (otherwise known as cyber-ethnographies) are popular with social scientists (Bechar-Israeli, 1995; Cherny, 1999; Correll, 1995; Miller & Slater, 2000; Morton, 1999) given that, by and large, researchers are as limited in their understanding of virtual worlds (at least when initially embarking on their study) as the uninitiated.

Considered cyber-ethnographies, particularly those that incorporate extended periods of active participant observation, allow researchers to develop a rounded understanding of the virtual environment itself, as well as an affinity for, and sometimes with, the participants within the environment. Cyber-ethnographies are crucial then to studies of cyberspace and CMC as cultural entities, although it is important to remember that cyberspace and CMC can also be utilised as means of accessing research subjects and resources for the study of cultural issues of any particular type (Hakken, 1999:44; Mann & Stewart, 2000:5; Walther, 1999:1).

With this in mind, it is important to be able to distinguish between the differing aims and approaches that exist in the broader cyberspatial research sphere. Morton outlines two principal modes of online research that help to clarify the real extent of these differences. The first of these modes is known as the 'distanced' form of research, wherein the researcher does not necessarily make him or herself known to the individual(s) or group(s) being studied (2001a:7). This mode of research is commonly realised through 'lurking' (explained in greater detail shortly),

content analyses of discussion forum message postings and deep analyses of nicknames, signatures and the like that are gleaned from online sites.

The second mode of online research is the 'involved' form, wherein the researcher makes him or herself known and interacts, to varying degrees, with others via CMC (2001a:8). This type of research bears unmistakable similarity to the active participation process that has characterised many real-life anthropological ethnographies in years gone by. In its online guise it is commonly realised through participatory news group observations, interactive MUD (Multi-User Dimension) studies, and in the implementation of realtime interviews and e-mail questionnaires, both of which will be detailed further below.

Morton's research modes are noteworthy for the manner in which they group a dispersed and disparate array of study techniques together under explanatory terms that are both apt and manageable. It is all too obvious, however, that these terms are only applicable to online research as it pertains to cyberspace in general and cyberculture in particular. For this reason, I have decided to coin a third term for the discussion in order to account for online research that does not automatically correspond to matters of cyberculture. This type of online research is known as the 'facilitative' form, wherein the researcher utilises CMC tools to support and shape studies that may or may not specifically pertain to cyberspatial issues. Such research is evidenced in the use of e-mail and online databases to locate sources and contacts; in the employment of search engines of both a basic or advanced nature for the uncovering of data; by the use of online translators to access foreign messages and web sites and, more recently, through the utilisation of online hard drives and storage spaces for the convenient relocation of sizeable data.

It should be noted that these modes of online research are by no means mutually exclusive. While all three modes are capable of underscoring a study individually, it is not rare to see overlaps occur between two, or sometimes all, of the different modes. The rise and rise of e-mail networks and electronic databases in contemporary times has led to a scenario whereby precious few studies abstain from employing the

'facilitative' mode of research within their overall investigative framework, regardless of the phenomenon under review. This makes 'facilitative' online research the most common of the three research types, but the other two are growing in prominence as the cyberspatial realm finds ever increasing significance within academia. This particular study utilises all three modes of online research in its development, with much of the remainder of this chapter devoted to outlining the specific research techniques that were chosen for the study, along with the explicit rationale that influenced each selection.

The rationale for 'lurking'[25]

The first stage of the methodological process in this study entailed a period of lurking within the Stormfront.org web site. 'Lurking' as the term is employed here, pertains to the unobtrusive and unannounced observation of discussions and interactions within a cyberspace setting. Some researchers prefer to explain lurking by reducing it to the act, on the part of Internet users, of reading online messages without responding to them (Denzin, 1999; Hine, 2000; Parks & Floyd, 1996; Sharf, 1999). This definition is adequate in most circumstances, but it does tend to unduly minimise the depth and importance of the process for many computer users.

Lurking is a significant enterprise for newbie (new Internet user), discerning participant and interested researcher alike; a fact that is picked-up on by Holeton when he states that:

> Good netiquette requires new participants in electronic
> discussion groups to lurk for a while in order to get a feel

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[25] I would like to stress to the reader, so as to avoid any confusion at a later stage, that I would in no way consider myself to be an 'insider' among the Stormfront.org 'community'. On only one occasion did I post a message to the site, and this action was predicated by the need to give a brief rundown on myself and the research project to several members who had expressed concern at my e-mailed requests for interviews. I do not hold beliefs that are in keeping with those of the white nationalist movement and this reality was made clear to every Stormfront.org member who made himself or herself available for questioning.

for the conventions of the group they're joining (1998:439-440).

Netiquette, by way of explanation, refers to the established behavioural protocols of online groups that must be adhered to by participants, transgressions of which can be met with stern censure or, in worst case scenarios, expulsion from the group. By and large, netiquette protocols tend to correspond closely from Internet group to Internet group, but differences ranging from the subtle to the extreme do occasionally occur, and group members are not always predisposed toward guiding inexperienced newbies through the site's unwritten rules.

In this 'lurking' stage I essentially acted in a 'complete observer' capacity, and the subjects of study were unaware that I was documenting their ideas and conversations (Babbie, 1989:266). Such an approach, being relatively new to the field of social research, brings both benefits and limitations to the study. The major benefit of the procedure is that it allows the researcher to investigate "a social setting as preparation for more intensive study" (Singleton Jr, Straits & Straits 1993:323). Aside from this, the unannounced presence of the researcher allows them to gauge the data potential of the study group without having to make any commitments to the group beforehand. It also enables the researcher to view the participants acting in a natural and unaffected manner, insofar as this occurs in an Internet setting, which is not always possible when the participants are aware that they are being monitored.

At some stage, the researcher has to announce oneself and make the necessary commitment in order to progress one's data gathering beyond an elementary level. Then the researcher moves from the role of complete observer to that of the 'participant-as-observer'. The participant-as-observer role entails that "observers become participants in the activities of the group by revealing their identities and the goals of their research" (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 1996:285; see also Punch, 1998:188-189; Robson, 1993:197).

The rationale for 'lurking' was essentially two-fold. Firstly, it was anticipated that the subjects of study may have compromised and

censored their actions were they privy to my status as a researcher. Secondly, lurkers predominantly frequent Internet newsgroups, given that groups only welcome input if it is relevant and/or original in content. For this reason, most frequenters of discussion fora tend to observe the interactions rather than actively participate in them (initially, at least). It was also hoped that by unobtrusively monitoring such conversations and interactions over a period of three-months, I may have been able to obtain indicators of a community consciousness that exists independently of the carefully structured dimensions of the discussion fora itself.

The rationale for content analyses

> More than just a single technique, *content analysis* is really a set of Methods for analyzing the symbolic content of any communication. The basic idea is to reduce the total content of a communication (eg. all of the words or all of the visual imagery) to a set of categories that represent some characteristic of research interest. Thus, content analysis may involve the systematic description of either verbal or nonverbal materials (Singleton Jr et al. 1993:381, italics in original).

In the previous rationale, details were provided that outlined the initial 'observatory' stance to be encompassed by this study. Content analysis is seen as the most effective and efficient method for the attributing of structured meaning to otherwise incomprehensible data. A carefully constructed content analysis framework, derived explicitly from my working definitions of identity, community[26] and nationalism [refer Chapters 2, 4 & 6] would provide the background information that would be crucial to an effective implementation of structured interviews with notable figures from the focus group.

There are several reasons as to why content analysis provides the researcher with an advantageous form of research method. Firstly, the

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[26] This content analysis framework approach was initially trialed in relation to *community* for a conference presentation *cum* journal article. See (Thompson, 2001) for greater clarity on this.

content analysis approach enables the researcher to apply both qualitative and quantitative measures to the focus of study (Lewis-Beck, 1994:252). It is easy to miss valuable pieces of data during straight observation and, more often than not, key investigative directions do not become apparent to the researcher until after the observation process is over. Accordingly, content analysis allows the researcher constant access to hard copy material from which they can formalise fresh study directions and expand upon pre-established ones.

Secondly, as the method is decidedly unobtrusive to implement, it is likely to produce a richer quality of data given that those being studied would not temper their discussions in the knowledge that their conversations would be acutely scrutinised (Babbie, 1989:309; Lewis-Beck, 1994:252: Robson, 1993:280, Wilhelm, 2000:90-92). This is of crucial importance to a study, not only on account of the rich information it supplies, but also for the insights that it provides as to the identity traits and worldviews of potential research subjects.

Thirdly, content analysis is both cost and time effective, and does not present the logistical problems that can be associated with alternative methods; such as questionnaires and surveys (Babbie, 1989:309; Robson, 1993:280). For many researchers the cost of implementing questionnaires and surveys has to be built into the overall research framework and, depending on the number of participants desired, can result in hefty expenses for the purpose of mailing alone. Content analyses also put the researcher in control of temporal aspects of the study, as the project is not dependent on the researcher organising data collection around the time schedules of the research subjects.

Rationale for data-mining

The next step in the methodological process involved long-term 'data-mining' of the Stormfront.org site. Unlike the lurking process which was unabashedly qualitative in scope, 'data-mining' permitted the researcher to add quantitative measures, albeit in small scale, to the study. It should be stressed that the data mining techniques employed here were low-level manual ones, as distinct from the high-density

automatic techniques that are enabled through the use of expensive computer software. Interestingly the Stormfront.org site utilises such software for its own record purposes, even though programs such as *Webtrends* are more commonly used by commercial sites as a means of keeping track of consumer patterns.

Webtrends, as with all data mining software gleans information from 'cookies', a computerised innovation described here by Jones:

> Cookies are files stored on a computer's hard drive by web browser software that allow web sites to silently track the user's movements from site to site. They can hold information about the user (user name, passwords, pages accessed, computer type, etc.) (Jones, 1999:26).

Having assembled the necessary raw data from the cookies, *Webtrends* is then capable of reorganising the information into polished tables and graphs that provide detailed information on a range of categories, such as: global regions of users, most requested pages on the site, most active countries, daily user activity, user density by hour and day, and so on (Black, 1995).

'Data-mining' software like *Webtrends* can be good for gathering information from. In the case of Stormfront.org, however, it is somewhat limited in that it is only activated for 2-3 months of the year. This is obviously sufficient for meeting the purposes of the Stormfront.org site owner, but it certainly leaves the researcher wanting more. The research potential of software such as *Webtrends* is clearly evident and, for Internet researchers with funding dollars to spare, the possibilities for innovative studies are seemingly boundless. McLaughlin, Goldberg, Ellison & Lucas (1999) exemplified this point with their study on Internet audiences.   In their study, McLaughlin et al. combined high-tech cameras with *Webtrends*

software to monitor user access to a 'virtual museum' across a nine-month period.[27]

In most situations, however, manually implemented 'data-mining' can be perfectly acceptable, depending on the search capabilities inherent in the site(s) being studied. One of the strengths of the Stormfront.org site is its diverse array of search engines, which enable users to track such information as: past messages (by date, author or title) and registered users (by nickname, city, state, country or homepage) (Black, 1995). I found this second search capability to be exceedingly helpful in tracking down interview/questionnaire subjects, along with monitoring membership changes on the site by USA state and county.

Two other small forms of data-mining were also mobilised in the construction of this thesis. The first of these involved the monthly gathering of Stormfront.org web site figures as compiled by *WebSideStory* software contained on the Stormfront.org site. *WebSideStory* functions in a similar fashion to *Webtrends,* although it tends to present its information in a more condensed and user-friendly form than its counterpart. *WebSideStory* allowed me to closely monitor overall attendance and participation on the Stormfront.org site by tracking the daily and monthly 'impressions' and 'uniques' that the software was recording.[28]

The second subsidiary form of data-mining to be pursued here necessitated the printing-off of the Stormfront.org site's entire list of registered users. This list was required for the building of a table that categorises online nicknames into varying typologies [refer Chapter 3]. This table endeavours to highlight the depth and diversity of nicknames presented on the Stormfront.org site, drawing its methodological

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[27] The term 'virtual' as it is used in this instance differs somewhat from the virtual that is commonly used to refer to completely computerised environments. The 'virtual museum' constructed by these researchers was actually a fleshspace museum presented to online users via cameras. These cameras were sophisticated enough to allow viewers to manipulate the angles from which they were viewing specific museum pieces.

[28] Hits on a website pertain to the occasions on which the particular site is accessed by an Internet user. 'Impressions' and 'uniques' are both categories of hits, with the former relating to the number of times the site is accessed in total and the latter detailing the number of times the site was accessed by a new Internet user. It is not uncommon for Internet users to access the same site several times in the one day.

inspiration from similar works undertaken by Bechar-Israeli (1995) and Morton (2001b).

Rationale for e-mail questionnaires & online interviews

The final section of the methodological process involved the conducting of e-mail questionnaires or ICQ (online chat vehicle) interviews with selected Stormfront.org participants. This process was easily the most problematic of the three, for several reasons. Firstly, there was uncertainty over what constituted an acceptable number of research subjects to survey. Given the qualitative nature of the study, it was eventually decided that twenty subjects would provide a viable sample group. Secondly, there was uncertainty over which users would be chosen to participate, given the enormous number of registered users on the site. In the end, an arbitrary qualification figure of 20+ (log-ons to the site) was chosen so as to ensure that the subjects had sufficient knowledge of the fora to credibly negotiate the surveys. Thirdly, concerns existed as to how the desired candidates would be recruited for the study, given that I had remained a lurker on the fora prior to the recruitment drive. The final problem mentioned above was further exacerbated by indications (from Stormfront.org users to other inquiring researchers) that interviews would only be agreed to if conducted on the Stormfront.org chat server. I was not keen on this approach, as chat servers invariably involve multiple users making for a very complex and confusing interviewing environment.[29]   To circumvent this problem, I decided to recruit Stormfront.org members from outside of the site itself, and turned to ICQ to achieve this task.

ICQ is the world's largest and most popular Internet chat vehicle, encompassing millions of registered users worldwide. Its diversity of function   allows   for   one-to-one,   one-to-few,   or   one-to-many

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[29] It was also felt that by holding interviews on the Stormfront.org chat server, the possibility existed of the interviewees banding together to browbeat me with ideological dogma. Admittedly, this was only a possibility, but I was nevertheless keen to ensure that there was no chance of such a situation arising.

communications in either synchronous or asynchronous format. Outside of this diversity, the most appealing aspect of the ICQ program (from the researcher's perspective) is its broad internal search engine. Suitably impressed by the search capabilities of both Stormfront.org and ICQ, it occurred to me that the chance existed to revolve the recruitment process around each engine. The thinking here was that the huge dimensions of the ICQ server made it highly probable that some Stormfront.org users would also be ICQ participants. As well as this, it was also felt that white nationalists may be reluctant to talk to unknown researchers in the general scheme of things, but may be more prone to doing so in the relaxed and recreational setting of ICQ.[30] The whole premise of people joining ICQ is to allow them to chat with people on a global scale, so if I could locate Stormfront.org users on ICQ then the chances were good of getting them to agree to take part.

Semi-structured interviewing is a conventional form of social research, although in this instance it is rendered slightly uncommon by virtue of the fact that it is done entirely in cyberspace. While this can be viewed as an apt technique in that a thesis dealing with cyberspace matters is researched largely through the auspices of computer-mediated technology, it is also pertinent for logistical and economic reasons. As the participants of this study, with just one exception, reside outside of Australia, the difficulty associated with arranging and attending face-to-face interviews would be extremely difficult to overcome. Compounding this problem are the enormous costs (airfares, accommodation, meals) associated with executing the in-person style of interview (Schonlau, et al. 2002:10-13). Computer-mediated technology overcomes these concerns by providing an interview vehicle (e-mail or chatserver) that is accessible by anyone with a modem, anywhere in the world, at any time of day (Chen

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[30] ICQ is a 'relaxed' and 'recreational' environment in that (unlike other virtual domains) there are no set parameters for interaction on the medium. Topical chatrooms and thematic discussion fora, by way of contrast, will commonly censure interactions between participants that drift from the setline of discussion pursued by the group. On ICQ, however, participants are free to direct their interactions in any way they see fit.

& Hinton, 1999:8).   As a bonus, the only costs associated with online interviews are the small expenses that are incurred through the hiring of hours for Internet use. Aside from these advantages, realtime interviewing online also offers the prospect of full automatic transcription of data to computer hard drive and greater subject objectivity through anonymity (Chen & Hinton, 1999:9).

For all the obvious positives that are apparent in computer-mediated interviewing, there are also potential negatives that need to be considered.   Firstly, given that a defining characteristic of cyberspace pertains to its capacity to facilitate the cloaking and embellishing of individual identities, it is almost impossible to be certain that the person being interviewed is really who they profess to be. Secondly, in order for an interview to be successful "the respondents must feel that their interaction with the interviewer will be pleasant and satisfying" (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 1996:239).   Face-to-face interviews make it far easier for researchers to put the respondent(s) at ease, by way of appropriate use of body language and the deployment of smiles and laughter as a means of building rapport and confidence. Conversely, the lack of face-to-face contact prevents the researcher from reading the non-verbal signals that emanate from a respondent when they are annoyed by or uncomfortable with a particular line of questioning (Mann & Stewart, 2000:126).   Finally, computer-mediated interviewing, as with telephone interviewing, provides the respondent with the capability to 'break-off' the interview before it is completed, by simply switching off their modem (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 1996:244).   It is also possible for the interview to be inadvertently sabotaged by a technical malfunction (ie. the computer crashing, or the Internet service provider unexpectedly going off-line).

Initially, I had hoped to administer all of the questionnaires via ICQ in interview format. Unfortunately, interviews could not be organised in half of the cases, meaning that ten of the questionnaires had to be implemented via e-mail. E-mail questionnaires are also a promising and effective research tool, offering advantages such as: low cost; respondent anonymity; minimised interviewer bias; greater reach (than realtime

interviews, given the broad use of e-mail); and efficient time to volume ratios (Sheehan & Hoy, 1999:4-5). The drawbacks to e-mail questionnaires include: possibility of respondent neglecting to answer; difficulty with returning questionnaires due to technical glitches; and the prospect of e-mail addresses becoming inactive at unexpected moments (Sheehan & Hoy, 1999:5).

The last factor, 'Internet churn', is an exceedingly common one, reflecting the dense location of Internet users in workplaces and education facilities where online usage is mostly free of charge or heavily subsidised. As workers and students leave their jobs and complete their studies their Internet accounts are discarded along with their e-mail addresses (Mann & Stewart, 2000:30). Internet churn is also an inevitable by-product of the intense competition that occurs among Internet Service Providers (ISPs), with netizens regularly changing accounts and addresses in order to take advantage of cost-cutting offers.[31] Some would also suggest that the lack of interviewer ability to probe answers and the probability of respondent confusion over some questions would also count as significant weaknesses here. This is true, but such limitations are easily overcome by the sending of follow-up e-mails, which are generally well received by subjects, although this can extend the timeline of the research project.

All of the respondents to the e-mail questionnaire and follow-ups reacted favourably to the process. Ostensibly, they decided to choose the method over realtime interviewing because it fitted more neatly into their online schedules and it also allowed them greater scope to reflect on their answers. From my viewpoint the information gleaned from the questionnaires was of a comparable standard to that arising out of the interviews and the time delays were largely insignificant. It is worth noting that all respondents to the e-mail questionnaire also indicated a

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[31] More and more netizens are becoming aware of the pitfalls associated with 'Internet churn' and are combating it by signing-up for primary (or secondary) e-mail accounts with large online bodies such as Hotmail and Yahoo. These e-mail accounts can be accessed from any Internet enabled CPU in the world and are not dependent on user affiliation to a particular ISP.

willingness to participate in future questionnaires if the opportunity arose. Despite this, all research subjects indicated that face-to-face interviewing remains the most satisfactory data gathering technique, followed by realtime interviewing and e-mail questionnaires, in that order.

Organising and implementing the interview/questionnaires

Having decided on this approach, I then spent a weekend switching back and forth between The ICQ and Stormfront.org search engines, piecing together a list of users that frequented both communication vehicles. At the conclusion of this exercise, in excess of 70 Stormfront.org users that met the criteria had been located on the ICQ search engine. I had been hoping for a final tally of 60 here, so the initial count exceeded expectations. The feeling was that for a subject group of 20, at least 60 invitees would be required given the tendency for most people to decline or ignore requests for questionnaires and interviews. Unfortunately, the number fell back to 55 when subsequent investigations revealed that some of the ICQ accounts were no longer active.

From here, I paged invitations to participate in the study to 55 persons via their ICQ accounts. Of these invitations, 10 replied within a couple of days to accept the offer, 5 replied in the same period wanting further information, 2 sent e-mails declining the invitation, and the remaining 38 issued no response. Over the ensuing three weeks I continued negotiations with the wavering 5 (eventually convincing them all to take part) and entered into preliminary (ice-breaking) semi-regular ICQ interactions with the ten initial acceptances. Finally, after going a month since the initial round of invitations, I decided to reapproach the 38 that failed to respond, this time directing invitations directly to their e-mail accounts. From this second round of offers, 7 persons responded within a fortnight to provisionally accept, contingent on receiving further information as to the aims of the project, 1 replied after 6 weeks to accept with apologies for the time delay, and the remaining 30 again declined to respond.

A few things are worth mentioning about this recruitment drive. While the ICQ server is impressive in its communication capabilities, it is

clearly unwise to trust in it entirely. All 8 respondents from the second round of offers indicated that they had not received the initial ICQ page. The main reason for this is that people can have more than one ICQ account, which are generally linked to their e-mail addresses. E-mail addresses can change frequently and subsequent ICQ accounts can essentially become totally removed from previous ones, particularly if the user concerned opts for a different ICQ nickname to the one used previously. Each individual ICQ account has its own unique pager, which functions similarly to e-mail, delivering a message to the ICQ account when the user next decides to access it. These pagers carry no links to the individual e-mail addresses of the ICQ user, meaning that if a user has opted for a new ICQ account, the page sent to the old one is rendered useless. For this reason, any important approaches to ICQ users should be made *via* e-mail (where indicated), as this is clearly a more reliable mechanism than the ICQ pager.

This left me with 23 confirmed respondents and the focus then shifted to implementing the questionnaires and interviews. Initially, it was hoped that realtime interviewing could be employed for all 23 subjects, as it was felt that this was the most efficient and effective technique available. Ten of the preselected 23 respondents eventually carried-out realtime interviews, which—in a positive sense—was retrospectively preferable to all respondents doing so, as it presented the possibility of drawing interesting comparisons between the two research styles. All 10 appeared to enjoy the ICQ process, with each of them indicating that they would happily do another realtime interview in future (if asked to do so).

The main difficulty associated with the interviews (from my side) was actually getting the interviews started. Respondents would faithfully indicate firm starting times only to be no-shows when the time finally arrived. Others would provide overly flexible timeframes, ensuring that the researcher often spent long periods online for no result. Fragile technology also hindered the interview timetable, with the researcher's ISP failing to provide access to the Internet on two vital occasions; a problem that also affected 2 of the respondents at their end. Surprisingly, the one to one and a half-hour suggested time for completion of each interview

proved decidedly optimistic, with interviews ranging from two to four and a half-hours in duration. This exemplifies another potential pitfall of online interviewing. Some of the respondents refrained from devoting their entire attention to the researcher during the interviews, preferring instead to maintain several conversations with other users throughout the interview. This obviously served to elongate interview times, as lengthy delays accompanied the return of each question while interviewees took the opportunity to intermittently answer communications from others.

In spite of these difficulties, the information gleaned from the interviews was most encouraging. I did, however, receive interesting criticism from my supervisory team with regard to the delivery style employed for the interviews. It was suggested that I had fallen down slightly in four areas — providing too much, and possibly inappropriate, feedback to some answers, behaving in too 'familiar' a manner with the subjects, missing key opportunities to probe further on answers, and lapsing—on occasion—into self-deprecatory statements.

On one level, these criticisms are valid ones that probably bear witness to the relative inexperience of the interviewer, in what is really a very specialised research technique. On the other hand, the comments also reflect the supervisors' lack of familiarity with the ICQ environment and the laidback climate that characterises interactions that take place within it. It is also worth noting that considerable preparation went into these interviews, by way of sharing information and anecdotes (both ways) with the research subjects.

The employment of an extended informal 'lead-up' stage to online realtime interviews can be an important investment for researchers that are keen to probe their subjects deeply for answers, as Mann & Stewart suggest when writing:

> (t)hat mutual sharing online can increase trust and emotional connection and may even allow interviewers to tap into areas which might be difficult to address FTF [face to face]. It should be noted that researchers themselves may also find it easier to be relaxed and to open up online than FTF… Technical ease of contact in CMC gives the option of repeating interview interactions

over time. There is evidence that trust and warmth in CMC relationships increases over extended interactions (2000: 138).

The understandable perception (on the part of the supervisors) that I was acting somewhat flippantly and "giving too much of myself" to the interviewees was thus, in some way, precipitated by their lack of access to this 'lead-up' stage. Put simply, the researcher was aware that his actions could be viewed by some as being 'lowbrow' in tone, but was nevertheless keen to maintain established interaction conventions for the sake of respondent confidence and comfort.

Ethical matters

Ethical concerns, in relation to this study, only appeared problematic with regard to the processes of lurking and interviewing. In the end, however, it was decided that such concerns would not prove morally or legally insurmountable, a belief that was shared by the University of Ballarat's Ethics Committee. There were two mitigating reasons for arriving at this decision. In the first instance, most contributors to newsgroup discussions are identifiable only by nicknames or first names, ensuring that their true identities cannot be compromised; in the second instance, any recording of information related in these discussions is documented in a manner that ensures the anonymity of the participants concerned.

The University of Ballarat Ethics Committee adjudicates on the ethical elements at play in all major research projects conducted by University staff and students. This study was the first cyberspace related project to go before the Committee and the lack of clearly prescribed ethical guidelines for investigating the virtual realm made the methodology used in this thesis difficult to approve. The Committee was unfamiliar with 'lurking', but reluctantly allowed for its implementation upon ascertaining the frequency by which 'lurking' occurs in virtual environments. This aside, the Committee was also troubled by the implication that I would be able to ascertain participant stress levels via the Internet. The committee stressed that interviews and/or questionnaires be ceased upon the first

sign of respondent distress and, unlike in fleshspace scenarios, this can be hard to pick up on whilst online.

In most circumstances, copyright laws protect the written works of individuals, but this does not automatically apply to written material on the World Wide Web (WWW), as Mann & Stewart explain:

> absolute copyright is also mitigated by the concept of 'implied licence'. For example, each individual may own the messages they transmit in CMC, but if copyright were to be enforced literally no one could download or view the message. In sending the message there is an implied licence to read, or even archive, the information it contains (2000:46).

'Implied licence' is often formally encouraged on web sites wherein the webmaster concerned places a disclaimer on the site warning netizens that anything they choose to post on the site will automatically become public domain property. This is true of the Stormfront.org site and stands as the third reason why concerns over confidentiality or anonymity did not serve to hinder the methodological direction of this thesis.

In spite of this, it must be noted that ethical safeguards are not only designed to protect the interests of those being studied, as researchers can also find themselves compromised by elements of the research process. 'Lurking', for instance, does carry with it the slight risk that participants within a focus group could react with hostility towards the observing researcher. At a medium level such hostility could result in verbal attacks on the researcher (flaming), or–alternatively–group members could lobby the group manager in the hope of having the researcher blocked from accessing the group. In a worst case scenario such hostility could lead to group members sabotaging the computer equipment of the observing researcher.

It should be emphasised here that the probability of such negative reaction to the study was always negligible, with most newsgroup hostility

being directed towards 'Bashers'.[32]   The concerns outlined above are entirely contingent on group users being opposed to the prospect of having lurkers present in their domain.   With particular regard to 'Stormfront.org' it was not perceived that the group would display such hostility, given their propensity for allowing non-regulars to log-on to the group as (observe only) guests.

Studies of this type, as is the case with most cyberspace research, should require profound researcher sensitivity to ethical concerns.   Up until now, it has been considered acceptable for cyber researchers to proceed with lurking and message post gathering methods purely on the basis that online communications are public domain property, thus absolving the researcher from consultation with the individual(s) responsible for creating the data, prior to employing it in the study.   If cyberspace is to be fully accepted as real world space then research practices such as this need to be carefully reconsidered.   As a general rule, social science research projects employed in everyday circumstances almost invariably require the researcher(s) involved to make the subject(s) of their study aware that they are part of a study project.   At the very least, it is decorum to inform subjects that writings or comments attributable to them are likely to appear in the finished piece of work.

Sharf (1999:252-255) has constructed a five-step process aimed at bringing cyber researchers into synch with fleshspace ethical practices. Sharf's steps are a promising starting point for concerned scholars wanting to heighten the professional image of cyberspace investigators. In keeping with this objective, such scholars would be well advised to ignore Sharf's afterthought suggestion, which infers that some online subject groups (child pornographers and racists, by way of example) should be automatically exempted from ethical conventions.   I can understand the sentiment behind this view, but without wishing to defend either of the aforementioned groups, I would nonetheless express concern

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[32] 'Bashers' are people that log-on to newsgroups with the sole intent of harassing, abusing or insulting the regular group users. Correll coined this term in her study of the Lesbian Café, and it will also be employed where necessary in this thesis (1995:12-13).

at any ad hoc approaches to deciding who is worthy of ethical consideration and who is not. It is expected that, wherever possible, a conscientious researcher will adopt a pragmatic and objective approach to their study. Such an approach should also carry over to the research subjects focused upon for the study. If you are willing to ask an individual to take part in your study then that person must be accorded the same respect and rights that other participants receive. Research subjects can be difficult to recruit at the best of times and good researchers, aside from constructing quality research projects, are duty bound to ensure that the available subject pool is not further depleted by inconsistent and overtly subjective research practices.

Closing thoughts

As participation on the WWW continues to burgeon and the funding opportunities for universities (particularly in social science disciplines) continues to recede, the need for time efficient, cost effective, and wide reaching research techniques will only increase. While the methods presented in this thesis have their limitations, it is nevertheless felt that they offer sufficient advantages and deviations from conventional approaches, to at least ensure their consideration in appropriate future projects. Because of this it is hoped that greater energies will be devoted to online research methodologies during the coming years.

While matters of content are extremely important in cyberspatial studies, we must not lose sight of the fact that the Internet is first and foremost an information and *communications* network. Many academics tend to lose sight of this point, which hinders their ability to identify and utilise CMC vehicles to the fullest. This is a shame, given that the use of vehicles such as ICQ is actually quite easy with a little practice, but they remain largely hidden from academic view. It is the role of interested online researchers to bring such vehicles into the academic environment for inspection and considered debate.

Results emanating from the aforementioned research methodologies will be interspersed throughout chapters three, five and seven of this thesis. For now, however, attention will be shifted away from

methodological concerns and placed firmly on notions of identity as they have developed historically within the social sciences. The following chapter will focus implicitly on identity as it pertains to the individual, pushing a line of investigation that considers the intricate construction of self as influenced by a range of qualifying aspects, such as: familial upbringing, corporeal matters, and gender concerns.

CHAPTER

2

Analysing Identity: Unravelling the idiosyncrasies of the individual

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Introducing identity

This chapter will begin the three-part discussion of identity by proffering an explication of the key ideas and issues that are applicable to the concept of self-identity. It focuses primarily on aspects of 'embodied' identity, which will provide ample background material for the following chapter, where the impetus will move toward online identities. In terms of structure, the section will open with an outline of the social theorists who have been chosen to explore the self-identity problematic and, in some cases, the wider conceptual terrain inherent in this thesis. From here the commentary will centre upon the divergent ways in which identity is formed within individuals; giving careful consideration to a range of contributory elements, such as interaction with others, familial upbringing, bodily influences, occupational effects and gender concerns.

The discussion on self-identity that is presented here will pave the way for an exploration of the ways in which aspects of self both shape and influence the behaviour and actions of individuals online. In turn, these behaviours and actions contribute to the 'extensions of self' that are actualised by netizens in their pursuit of community and nationalist belonging. In this way, all three key concepts addressed in this thesis can be seen to share the same single common denominator — identity. Self-identity thus becomes the first point of contention in a line of thought that stretches from the individual at the micro-level, through the individual

among other individuals at the meso-level (community), on to the grouping of individuals among other groups of individuals at the macro-level (nationalism). Cyberspace provides a fascinating environment in which to investigate this multifarious construction of identity, but before discussion can turn to the way that this is achieved in the specialised sphere of CMC, it is essential that guidelines for the investigation be plotted from a preliminary analysis of the wider identity landscape.

The term self-identity will be expressed throughout this study by way of a varied range of substitutable terms.[33] These will include sense of self, individual identity, personal identity, personality, subjective identity and persona. It is understood that each of these terms implies a differing meaning when applied to a differing context, but—other than on occasions where their usage is alternatively specified—in this body of work they will all refer to the one same concept.

Outlining the theorists

There are restrictions apparent in pursuing an investigation of self-identity from a sociological/anthropological paradigm. Self-identity, not surprisingly, lends itself more explicitly to the realm of behavioural sciences and the discipline of psychology in particular. Sociology, by way of contrast, has been largely ambivalent about inquiring into self-identity, as McCrone makes clear in writing that:

> Until recently, sociology had little new to say about identity. The term had largely migrated into the reserve of micro-sociology, where it was inextricably bound up with social psychological notions of 'self'. In the rest of sociology, it became quite unproblematic (1998:31).

This is the reasoning behind the somewhat peculiar decision (on the surface, at least) to include a discussion on the ideas of Erik Erikson throughout this section. On the one hand, Erikson—having written extensively on the subject of individual identity—would be difficult to

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[33] It is also worth noting here that the research subjects encountered in the empirical framework of this study also had a tendency for referring to self-identity in a variety of forms.

overlook in a serious study of this topic, regardless of the discipline employed. On the other hand, Erikson's prominent reputation as a psychoanalyst adumbrates his subsidiary interests in the social sciences (more broadly) and social anthropology (in particular).

Some branches of psychoanalytic thought have, as a general rule, tended to approach the concept of self-identity from a constrictive framework that unambiguously aligns to a belief that 'the child is the parent of the adult.'[34] In this way, identity formation is viewed as a finite function that occurs only in the early formative years of the child (Frosh, 1989:63). The unspoken premise of this approach is that the child, in concert with its parents, or primary care givers, will absorb, *in toto*, the necessary moral and ethical information on which it will base all of its future decisions as an adult. It is presupposed, therefore, that a child can only evolve into a healthy, viably functioning adult if its primary care givers performed capably in fulfilling their nurturing role(s).

The criticisms of Frosh and Elliott suggest that this approach is deficient for four clearly definable reasons. Firstly, it falls victim to social determinism by suggesting that self-identity develops in children during a specific period of the life-cycle and that this process will be binding throughout the individual's entire existence. Secondly, it fails to adequately account for those individuals who achieve seemingly well-adjusted adult lives after having endured decidedly inadequate childhoods. Thirdly, it limply expresses self-identity as a static reactionary mechanism, which is incongruous when assessed against the predominantly dynamic proactive nature of the human being. Finally, it affords no scope (outside of the primary care givers) for external influences to play a part in the emotional shaping of the individual and their life experiences.

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[34] It should be stressed that, whilst this framework is common to psychoanalytic theory, it is by no means indicative of the entire terrain applicable to the discipline. There are at least eight different ways by which psychoanalytic theory can assess notions of self-identity. Elliott lists these as: the structural division of ego, id and superego; topological structure of consciousness, preconsciousness and the unconscious; defence-mechanisms motivated by ego-organization; organary drives which are 'object-seeking'; the conjecture of 'true' and 'false' selves; the process of splitting ranging from paranoid-schizoid positions to depressive positions; an imaginary structure of misrecognition and illusion; and a process of linguistic closure in which repression is constituted. See Elliott

Notwithstanding these criticisms, psychoanalysis still provides insights into the human condition that could prove very useful here. With this in mind, it is proposed that the ideas of Erikson will be utilised at appropriate junctures of this thesis. On a basic level Erikson approaches the broad concept of identity by expressing it in terms of four mutually exclusive, yet regularly intertwining, sub-categories of the term: 'sense of individual identity'; 'continuity of personal character'; 'ego synthesis'; and 'inner solidarity' (Erikson, 1959:109).

'Sense of individual identity', as the term suggests, refers to the capacity of a human individual to arrive at a conscious state of self-realisation. The 'continuity of personal character' qualifier flows-on from the state of self-realisation process, whereby the individual carefully maintains a personality that unambiguously portrays his/her sense of self to others. Elliott explains this neatly when he writes of how:

> Implicit in this is the belief that there is something stable
> and durable about the self. I believe myself to be the
> same 'self' as I was yesterday; and, for purposeful social
> life to be possible at all, I must also believe that others
> have a fairly coherent sense of their own identity (1994:5).

The third category, 'ego synthesis', basically amounts to the thoughts and actions around which the continuous personal character is constructed, organised and maintained.

Erikson's perspective on identity construction unambiguously presupposes the need for stable and solid points of reference from which individuals can assess and moderate their unique senses of self. This view runs contrary to contemporary cyberspatial interpretations of identity construction that present virtual selves as identities in crisis. As these writers see it, virtual identities are removed from stable referents, incoherent in shape and form, contradictory in function, and subject to multiplicity of representation (Cheung, 2000; Robins, 1996; Turkle, 1995). I will be arguing against such standpoints on virtual identity, contending instead that virtual selves commonly develop from like stimuli to

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(1994:8-9) for further discussion.

fleshspace identities, and will thus necessarily employ the same stable and solid points of reference that Erikson alludes to.

When Erikson's three elements are successfully realised by the individual, they will then reach the stage of 'inner solidarity'. At such time the individual has arrived at a point where they feel confident about the solidity and stability engendered in their sense of self, while also realising that this composed persona has become sufficiently developed to enable them to comfortably position themselves within a wider group (community) identity (Erikson, 1959:109). Fundamentally, the process of identity construction that Erikson espouses is one that seeks, as its overriding goal, a competent level of ontological awareness for the individual concerned. It is likely, however, that the robustness of such ontological awareness could not be fully assessed until the persona in question was trialed within a wider group dynamic; which presents an appropriate opportunity to bring Goffman into the argument.

Erving Goffman devoted much of his career to analysing and explaining the dramaturgical dimensions of everyday human interactions. The dramaturgical approach borrowed from William Shakespeare's assertion that "all the world is a stage", by aligning the concept of human interaction with the notion of role-playing as it exists in entertainment stage plays (Abercrombie et al. 1994:127; Branaman, 1997:xlviii; Burns, 1992:6 Waters, 1994: 27).

As such, Goffman's main intention was "to show that individuals are not simply passive receptors of social definitions of their identity. They actively manage the impressions that they wish others to receive from them" (Waters & Crook, 1993:105). This action-centred approach to social situations is synonymous with the theoretical discipline of 'symbolic interactionism'. Symbolic interactionism was inspired by noted American sociologist, George H. Mead (1863-1931) who argued that:

> The self is something which has a development; it is not initially there, at birth, but arises in the process of social experience and activity, that is, develops in the given individual as a result of his (sic) relations to that process as a whole and to other individuals within that process (1934:135).

According to Mead, a "self-conscious human individual" would absorb and reproduce the social norms and mores of the particular social group, which he/she was most favourably predisposed toward (1934:156). The choice of social group could alter at any time, however, as the individual concerned found his/her 'life goals' better suited to those being actively sought by alternative social bodies. In this way, the individual tailors their surroundings as best they can to meet their preferred circumstances (Willis, 1993:100).

Functionalist theory dominated much sociological thought during various stages of the twentieth-century, but at the turn of the century symbolic interactionism (in general) and Erving Goffman (in particular) are enjoying a new period of academic favour and intellectual respectability. Structure is no longer a source of comfort for many individuals. The prosperity that symbolised capitalism in the post-World War 2 decades has been replaced by a seemingly endless cycle of recession that has resulted in disturbingly high levels of unemployment. A strict adherence to administrative bureaucracy has also led to a state of paradoxical widespread inefficiency where citizens are commonly ignored and overlooked in preference for clinical expediency. Put simply, individuals have become disenchanted with state imposed control measures and are seeking greater control over their own destinies. For symbolic interactionists human action provides a basis for optimism, whereby individuals actively create and recreate society in accordance with their own perceptions of free will, goal setting and subjective motivation (Willis, 1993:99-100). Where rigid institutional structure fails, flexible human action prevails, or so the interactionists would have us believe.

Flexible human action, as Goffman articulated it, is carried out in the everyday world by way of role-playing. Individuals, in the course of their routine lives, find themselves playing a range of carefully constructed roles in order to successfully negotiate a range of specific tasks and expectations. These roles are made necessary as a consequence of the structured, and somewhat ceremonial, nature of human interaction, which enables individuals to place themselves within a societal context in

accordance with the actions and appearances that are conveyed by those around them.[35] As such, these roles are not of a fixed nature, but rather are flexible and set in response to the physical and/or emotional climate that an individual inhabits at any given time.[36]

Erving Goffman has investigated the intricate nature of human expression at length. It is for this reason that the thesis will draw theoretical inspiration from two of Goffman's works, *The Presentation of the self in everyday life* (1959) and *Stigma* (1963). Whilst these studies (circa 1960s) predate the contemporary computer-mediated communications phenomenon, they nevertheless remain integral for the insights they provide into carefully constructed and subtly manipulated modes of human interaction. More specifically, Goffman's ideas on role playing and team performance will underscore my own discussion of virtual identity and community, wherein elements such as netiquette and group behavioural conventions serve to moderate individual understandings of, and participation in, online environments. The need for netizens to conform to the requirements of the group so as to participate in it effectively further detracts from the 'multiple selves' approach to virtual identity, with most online users showing a greater tendency toward singular expressions of self that more readily gain acceptance from other group members (Kendall, 1999:65; Morton, 2001b:77).

There are three main reasons why Anthony Giddens has been selected as the third key theorist on which to build a broader discourse of the concept of identity. Firstly, he will provide the discussion with a dimension that is decidedly contemporary and unmistakably sociological.

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[35] Goffman's view is necessarily founded on the notion that individuals rely on a sound comprehension of both self and others in order to successful negotiate human interactions in everyday life. The importance of consciousness, expressed as an indicator of individual competence links Goffman to Giddens, as evidenced in the writings of Domingues. "[Human interactions] are processes that are to be understood as the outcome of the *conscious action of individual actors* — notwithstanding the fact that... actors command always limited knowledge of conditions and consequences of their action. Giddens is entirely committed to a conception of social life in which the 'constitution of society' depends on the ability of individuals and, therefore, he characterises it as ''skilled achievement' (1995:25; italics in original).

[36] The overtones of George Herbert Mead are difficult to miss here. As Baldwin (1986:105) puts it — "Mead saw role taking as an important means of socialization, bringing people together and increasing understanding. Not everyone becomes highly proficient in role taking; but Mead believed that developing our capacity for role taking

Secondly, Giddens' ideas have been influenced by Goffman's, but tend to extend out from them insomuch as they do not attempt to ignore the role of social structures in both mediating and being mediated by the vagaries of human action. Finally, his views on social structure ensure that his usefulness will not be confined to notions of individual identity alone, as his work will also be incorporated into the chapter on nationalism.

If each of these theorists can be linked in some fashion it is in the fact that each of them, to varying degrees, aligns to a human agency model of social behaviour.[37] The human agency approach has an aptness to the sphere of cyberspace for reasons that are three-fold. Firstly, the splintered and dispersed nature of the cyberspatial environment is such that it encourages individuals to act with considerable autonomy when within its confines. This is not to contend that cyberspatial interaction is entirely devoid of structural concerns, but rather that it is only minimally affected by them. In social relations there are seven forms of external restrictions that are placed on human actions and interactions: economic embargoes, political motivations, bureaucratic conventions, behavioural norms, judicial law, policing measures, and physical qualifiers. For the online citizen, however, it is generally only the 'behavioural norms' restriction that appears to apply (*via* netiquette). Secondly, the lack of an established system of judicial law and associated policing measures in the virtual world has enabled some online actors to conduct themselves in a manner that pays little heed to established societal conventions and institutions. Thirdly, and this point flows nicely from the previous one, the inability of Western governments to set and agree upon viable policies and legislation pertaining to cyberspatial conduct has also served to promote self-regulation among Internet users (Slevin, 2000:224-226).

This last point is worth expanding upon here, as it is illustrative of the gulf that separates the machinations of contemporary Internet, from

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would help in creating a better world."

[37] As I mentioned in the introduction, this is less obvious for Erikson than it is for the other two. Erikson does not officially belong to the social sciences, much less the human agency sphere, but I choose to align him with the approach here as a matter of critical interpretation. Many of his key ideas carry remarkable similarity to those of Goffman, which may suggest that the social sciences and the behavioural sciences are not nearly always as removed from one another as some would care to believe.

the bygone inspirations that influenced its initial creation. It is indeed a strange paradox that the Internet should now present world governments (the United States in particular) with immense problems relating to matters of regulation and control. There could be few more conservative institutions than the American military, and it was certainly the intention of this governmental body to create a communications/information network that could be carefully controlled and administered.

Cyberspace, originating from the American state apparatus (The US Department of Defense) in the late 1960s, has since been predominantly overseen by scientific bodies in the 1970s, academic influences in the 1980s, and—most recently—corporate interests. Such fluctuating and loosely articulated control mechanisms have afforded netizens almost unprecedented management over their own affairs. The high levels of online confidence and competence attained by netizens throughout this prolonged period of self-determination should see individuals strongly positioned to actively mediate their place in the scheme of things when the state, inevitably, moves to tighten regulation of the virtual sphere.

At this point Giddens' central argument that societal structures serve to both constrain and enable the activities of social actors becomes critical to the discussion. Giddens contends that humans structure societies in accordance with three pregiven resources, these being: "meanings (things known, the stock of knowledge), morals (value systems), and power (patterns of domination and divisions of interest)" (Giddens, 1976:118). The first two resources and, in some instances, power, as well, are also manifest in symbolic interactionist accounts of human agency. These inter-weaving stimulants of individual development and expression nurture and nourish the peculiar social patterns that constitute everyday human existence. In simple terms, we are referring to notions of routine, wherein the sustainment of regular procedures is as crucially meaningful to any analysis of the process, as are the origins of the procedures themselves.

This point is emphasised by Ira Cohen when writing on the emergence of social structures:

> configurations of relations between social agents do not
> emerge from social conduct, but rather remain embedded
> in the ongoing course of activity. The routine repetitions
> of institutionalised modes of interaction between agents is
> not something apart from the patterns they form; it is the
> very stuff of which these patterns are made (1989:77;
> original italics removed).

Elaborating on this view, Giddens further implies that the reification of these routine repetitions results in the constitution of broader social structures at the macro-level, which, in turn, reinforce the constitution of social action at the micro-level (Giddens, 1984:25-28).[38] The circular connotation apparent in this concept consolidates human agency theories by collocating the social action process to applicable social structures, rather than treating both elements as mutually exclusive phenomena; as proponents of the theory have been roundly criticised for doing in the past (Browne, 1993: 138-139; Holmwood & Stewart, 1991:100).

The theories of Giddens, in conjunction with those of Goffman and Erikson, will provide a fertile theoretical platform on which to construct a broad-based overview of the self-identity concept. I have shown over the preceding pages the manner by which the views of each theorist implicitly recognise, then build upon, the ideas of the previous one. Erikson informs us of his belief that notions of self formulate within the individual, but how can the individual comprehend their sense of self without a frame of reference to operate from? Goffman, following on from this, suggests that such a framework is evident in the everyday interactions between individuals, wherein one's sense of self is formulated internally, but validated externally as the individual positions themself in response to the behavioural traits of others, and of their responses and reactions (Goffman, 1961:168). Giddens, goes on to contend that these interactions

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[38] The influence of Goffman is also on display here, with Giddens' perceptions of the manner in which individuals stabilise set societal roles around devotion to time-space routinisation of these roles working from Goffman's prior assertion that individuals must be capable of reifying their societal roles around commonly acknowledged cultural and historical understandings in order to successfully participate in social situations (Gregory, 1989:211).

allow individuals to imprint their needs and wants onto the political agendas of social institutions (structures), whose machinations—in turn—mediate and modify the actions and desires of individuals in what is essentially an ongoing cyclical relationship. Such cyclical relationships are clearly in evidence online, be they between netizens and moderators developing an online community, netizens and corporations negotiating viable markets, or netizens and government bodies forming faster and more open lines of communication and exchange.

Defining Self-Identity

The forthcoming chapter on *Appraising Community* emphasises the complications that are apparent in attempting to define a term (community) that is so profound in its breadth of scope and meaning. Much of this complication stems directly from the considerable argument that has endured (within the social sciences) over several decades regarding the respectability and plausibility of the community concept as a whole.[39] It is ironic, therefore, that the marked lack of attention devoted to the concept of self-identity during this same period has led to similar difficulties in defining the terminology for this chapter. The problematic nature of the defining process has been exacerbated even further by the recent rise to prominence of virtual or 'online' identities. This development is welcomed for the manner in which it has indirectly thrust self-identity back onto the social science agenda. In qualifying this statement, however, it need also be understood that online interactions have served to further confuse attempts at refining the broader self-identity concept.

Throughout the twentieth century notions of self-identity tended to emphasise the overriding sense of 'sameness' that is characterised in the unique relationship that a person establishes with their persona (Turkle, 1995:12). This sense of sameness was implicit in Erikson's understanding of personal identity, wherein an individual was able to simultaneously perceive "of one's selfsameness and continuity in time", along with "the fact that others (also) recognize one's sameness and continuity" (1959:

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[39] This point will be explicated in greater detail in Chapter 4.

22). Richards echoes this theme in alluding to the paradox of subjective identity, whereby individuals simultaneously evaluate their notions of self through being able to comprehend their difference from, and sameness to, other individuals (1994:79). Working from this the concept of self-identity (traditionally) has been largely reducible to the act of attaining a sound comprehension of one's internal thought processes and everyday external actions. Giddens puts this thought forward with greater elegance when suggesting that:

> We begin from the premise that to be a human being is to
> know, virtually all of the time, in terms of some description
> or another, both what one is doing and why one is doing it
> (1991:35).[40]

Cyberspace has brought into question the veracity of this viewpoint; however, with some social commentators arguing that self-identity can no longer be safely expressed *via* the simple criteria of sameness and singularity of being. "In terms of our views of the self, new images of multiplicity, heterogeneity, flexibility and fragmentation dominate current thinking about human identity" (Turkle, 1995:178). Because of this, it becomes necessary to delve beyond the limited confines of the individual and their character traits, focusing instead on the complex ways in which such traits are influenced and sustained by a range of external sources.

Recent works highlight the need for fresh interpretations of the self-identity concept. Richards argues that an individual really consists of two peculiar forms of self-identity, the 'official' (bureaucratic) identity and the 'subjective' (personal) identity (1994:78). Under this system, personal identity exists as a necessary subsidiary category to social identity, affording individuals the scope required to adequately distinguish themselves from their social similars (1994:81). Personal identity, as Richards sees it, "refers to the particular qualities, weaknesses and resources that are unique to the individual as a result of the unique

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[40] Giddens makes it perfectly clear, in his own words, that this view has its origins in the work of Goffman when he writes that — "Goffman points out that to be a human agent is not just to be in command of what one is doing (in some sense or another), but is also routinely to *display* to others that one has such command" (1989:255; italics in original).

relationships within which that individual grew up" (1994:81). Ostensibly, Richards is explaining self-identity as entailing a mode of self management wherein the individual maintains their projected personality separate from, yet simultaneous to, their expected social actions (or roles). Such an explanation finds a mirror in the words of Castells, who states that:

> For a given individual, or for a collective actor, there may be a plurality of identities. Yet, such a plurality is a source of stress and contradiction in both self-representation and social action. This is because identity must be distinguished from what, traditionally, sociologists have called roles, and role-sets (1997:6).

The roles of which Castells speaks here pertain explicitly to individual referents such as: father; baker; footballer; and so forth (1997:7). They should not be confused with the types of roles that Erving Goffman espouses.

When Goffman speaks of roles he is not alluding to status indicators, but rather he is describing the manner in which human actors present themselves to others within their specific society. While it is necessary that an individual must adopt a role of some description whilst interacting with another (or others), it does not automatically follow that the individual should comprehend the veracity of this role.[41] An individual may perceive their actions as being natural and unprejudiced or, alternatively, they may be fully aware that they are shaping their actions for the benefit of others (Goffman, 1959:15). An individual will base their role playing on a number of underlying factors, but essentially these factors are reducible to two dominant behavioural stimulants — 'belief' and 'cynicism' (1959:16). An individual displays genuine 'belief' in the sincerity of his/her role when

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[41] It should also be noted here that individuals are not necessarily the principle 'authors' of their interactions, as Verhoeven explains in greater clarity when writing that "interactions take place in a particular historical sequence, which means that there is already a meaning given to this reality. Moreover, there are unintended acts that are part of the encounter without constituting the main parts of the encounter, e.g coughing and sniffling. However unimportant they seem to be, they are part of reality, which is out there" (1985:76). This point is especially pertinent in that it would appear to mark the juncture point at which the key thoughts of Goffman and Mead overlap.

trying to please another person, and unabashed 'cynicism' when trying to deceive, manipulate or curry favour with another person. In certain circumstances these two factors can exist interchangeably within the same set character role (1959:18). Internet vigilantes provide an example of this when they pose as children in order to attract and titillate paedophiles whilst, at the same time, deceiving them into exposing their criminal tendencies (van Bakel, 1996).

Symbolic interactionist perspectives of self-identity challenge the validity of psychoanalytic interpretations of the concept by stressing the ongoing nature of individual development, sternly questioning lines of psychoanalytic thought that privilege childhood primalism theories. By way of response, Erikson employs 'identity diffusion' as a means of explaining instances where post-pubescent individuals struggle to fulfil, and effectively adapt to, their (ever evolving) social roles and actions. 'Identity diffusion' occurs when overwhelming doubts as to the veracity of their ethnic and/or sexual identities dramatically weaken the individual's control over their overall self-identity (1959:97). Although it is not expressly stated here, the underlying implication of this notion is that individuals can battle with post-pubescent roles and expectations when their pre-pubescent 'life education' has been inadequately imparted to them by the responsible care givers.

The importance of the care giver is thus reinforced and reconstituted as the parent makes the transition from trusted mentor to maligned other. This opinion gains support from Richards who believes that feelings of isolation and hostility (particularly toward one's parents) appear to be an integral component in the construction of personal identity (1994:85). In stark contrast, Giddens agrees with Erikson on the impact that uncertainty over sexual identity can have on the self-identity of an individual, but he nevertheless disagrees as to the central cause of such uncertainty. Working from his structuration model Giddens asserts that the twentieth century privatisation of passion *vis-à-vis* the marked social delineation between public sexual discourse and private sexual practice has unsettled people's confidence in their sexual identity, resulting in further confusion regarding self-identity (1991:205).

The corporeal self

In simplistic terms, Giddens defines the concept of self-identity as standing for "the self as reflexively understood by the person in terms of her or his biography" (1991:53). At a glance this statement is somewhat misleading in the way in which it appears to insinuate that self-identity is purely an inherent psychological construct. The imperativeness of one's corporal being to the broader constitution of their self-identity is addressed by a range of writers participating in the relatively fresh 'sociology of the body' sub-discipline. This approach suggests that the body is central to any viable discussion on the self-identity concept for a variety of reasons, three of which carry particular pertinence to the issue. At a primary level the body is unavoidably co-aligned to an individual's sense of self-identity because, as Shilling imparts — "In addition to the possibilities of agency that exist by virtue of us *having* bodies, we are also constrained by the brute fact of *being* bodies" (1993:23, italics in original). At a secondary level, the body is a crucial player in identity formation because it acts as the apparatus through which personal symbolism is formulated and expressed, making it possible for the individual to appropriately transact with their external environment (Dutton, 1995:12). At a tertiary level the ability to control and comprehend one's body is an essential prerequisite for being able to reflect beyond the self, so as to attain more expansive levels of personal growth and meaning (1995:12).[42]

The relationship between the body physical and the body social is also one that is underscored by a long line of historical development. Bryan Turner refers to this line of development in his book *The Body and Society:*

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[42] This view builds from the early musings of Mead, who saw reflective thought as a primary element with which to differentiate humans from animals. As Mead saw it, an animal was unable to separate mind from body (thought from action) and would thus act immediately to physical stimulus. Humans, on the other hand, were capable of reflective thought wherein they could temporarily put their bodily actions on hold so as to access a memory base in order to find an appropriate response (Baldwin, 1986:84-85; Ritzer, 1996:338-339).

> The king's sacred body was symbolic of the coherence and continuity of the whole society; the king's person embodied the body politic so that regicide was an attack on the person of the king and on the society as a whole… [Also] When *persona* in Roman law came to equal the 'self', it still excluded slaves who did not own their bodies, had no personality and had no claims over property… [Thus] From a sociological point of view, it makes sense for the person to have two bodies, since the person is both a thing and a sign... [For] In socio-historical terms, 'the body' is not necessarily the individual animate organism, because what will count as a body is an effect of social interpretation (1984: 55-56; italics in original).

To some extent, such social interpretation of body and self is an appreciable by-product of the long-term religious sovereignty over Western societies. With humans, according to Judeo/Christian scripture, being shaped in God's image and everyone existing, to differing degrees, as servants of God, it is unsurprising that people's senses of self should have become bound by broader social expectations and conventions. For all intents and purposes the only option available to individuals wanting to construct their sense of self outside of this framework was to challenge theocratic ideals, which was likely to result in isolation or expulsion (at best) from the wider community.

It is true that citizens in the contemporary world are also obliged to attune their personalities to those commonly exhibited by the wider society in order to find acceptance; although it is clear that greater tolerance now exists for individual attempts to transgress the boundaries of mainstream conventions. This tolerance is qualified, however, by the extent of the transgression, which is why cyberspace has become such a popular environment for those seeking an outlet through which to reside outside the set social mainstream (Hill & Hughes, 1998:137). This is also the key reason behind much of the mistrust and apprehension that some citizens have towards cyberspace, wherein such citizens view it as a dangerous vehicle for subversive and anti-social behaviour. In cyberspace the human body is hidden along with the signs that it otherwise nakedly conveys and it is basic human nature for individuals to fear what is hidden.

The fact that, in real-life situations, every act we commit and every expression we portray invokes an immediate physical transaction with others is often overlooked on account of the 'oblique obviousness' of human interaction.   It is for this reason that self-identity is often rudimentarily dismissed as being a construct of the mind, which erroneously neglects the fact that identity requires avenues of expression, as well as modes of absorption, in order to be successfully managed. Such presumptuousness would appear to be common to the psychological realm, although 'self schema theory' exists as a clear exception to this rule. This approach contends that individuals gauge their sense of self by way of the reflective processes that arise explicitly in response to their perceptions of how other people choose to perceive of them. Working from these perceptions, an individual is then able to isolate inherent personal attributes that appear to be *most* valued in their social environment (Grogan, 1999:101).

Ostensibly then, self-identity pertains implicitly to obtaining confidence in one's ability to understand the requisite nuances of one's social world, along with achieving sufficient corporal coordination and control to effectively convey oneself to others. In essence, self-identity seeks legitimacy through control, which in turn provides some scope for personal empowerment. This is particularly evident when viewed from a wider social vantagepoint, whereby sovereignty over self permits comforting (albeit small) degrees of authority to individuals who are otherwise powerless in the face of societal subjugation (Shilling, 1993: 7).

Fronts

This transactional angle on human interaction relates neatly to Goffman's role-play analogy, which provides an excellent lead-in to further comment on the dramaturgical approach to identity.   According to Goffman, for individuals to be able to play out specific roles, it is necessary for them to provide a backdrop for their performances. Goffman refers to this backdrop by the term 'front', which he describes thus:

It will be convenient to label as 'front' that part of the individuals performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance. Front, then, is the expressive equipment of a standard kind intentionally or unwittingly employed by the individual during his performance (1959:19).

Front, in the first instance, involves the setting in which a role is played out and revolves around elements that are generally fixed in dimension, such as geographical locale and props (eg. houses, offices, shops) (1959:19). Front, in the second instance, pertains to personal presentation and is divided into two categories — appearance and manner. Appearance, as the term suggests, deals with personal identifiers, such as: age, sex, race, weight, height and so forth. Manner, on the other hand, relates to action identifiers, such as: looks, expressions, body language, mannerisms and tone of voice (1959:21).

Fronts tend to carry with them certain expectations and are generally chosen by individuals, not created by them. For example, when a woman joins the police force she does so on the express understanding that she will have to imbue a persona that is relevant to the rigours of police work. This is not a persona she can create from scratch, moreover she will adopt a persona based on socially acceptable notions of police demeanour that have been carefully devised and reinforced over several generations (Goffman, 1959:24).

For Goffman there are three principal players for any given performance. Firstly, we have the individual (as previously outlined above) or team-based actors in their several guises. Secondly, in order to have a performance it is therefore essential that an "audience" exists for whom the individual or team-based actors perform. Thirdly, as these performances are only geared to a select group of people who, by definition, encompass the "audience", it is necessary to have another group that is removed from both the giving and receipt of a performance. Goffman refers to this group as being the "outsiders', as they reside outside of a performance scenario.

Team performances

Not all performances are given on an individual basis, as many of our everyday interactions are presented within a group dynamic. Goffman describes group-based role playing by the term 'performance team' ('team' for short), and justifies its significance by contending that:

> Whether the members of a team stage similar individual performances or stage dissimilar performances which fit together into a whole, an emergent team impression arises which can conveniently be treated as a fact in its own right, as a third level of fact located between the individual performance on one hand and the total interaction of participants on the other (1959:69).

Team performances can be utilised for the purposes of inclusion, as is the case with staff infrastructures where familiarity with co-workers and established routine is essential for productive and efficient job performance. Conversely, team performances can also be geared toward exclusivity, as is the case with membership infrastructures (eg. white nationalism) that allows for certain individuals to be kept removed from the specialist team environment. Team performances can also provide a means for sustaining societal expectations of how individuals should exist in a group environment (Branaman, 1997:lxiv-lxv). Many office managers emphasise this point by referring to their secretaries by Christian name in private, but calling them by their surname when strangers enter the office (1959:69).

Team performances can be empowering for individuals in so much as they instil them with a knowledge base and resource network of which "audience" members are deprived. On the other hand, team performances place pressures and obligations upon individual members that, in turn, place constant stress on the ongoing viability of the team itself.[43] Should an individual act inappropriately during a team

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[43] Goffman's ideas on team performances also find their genesis in the earlier works of Mead, most specifically his emphasis on the distinction apparent between the 'I' and 'me' in any given sense of self. "On the one hand, the self may enter into conduct as a meaningful stimulus for the intelligent control of action. In this case the self functions as an object; this is what Mead had in mind when he spoke of the "me"... "On the other hand, as Mead's discussion of subjectivity makes clear, the human individual may also enter into conduct as an agent of reconstruction... The self-functioning in this latter sense

performance then the veneer that the team has built in order to shield it from outsiders may be weakened or destroyed entirely (Goffman, 1959:71). Similarly, should some team members withhold information from other team members re: how they should conduct themselves during a performance, then again it is possible for the group dynamic to be corrupted (1959:77).

Teams need also be wary of initiating new members who, in the past, have been on the receiving end of the group's performance. If, for example, a shop-based team performance has been centred on selling merchandise to particular customers at inflated prices, it would be inadvisable for this team to enlist such a customer as a new member (employee) (1959:81). It should also be noted that team performances, in spite of their unmistakable clique overtones, are not always reliant upon the existence of wilful fraternity among individual members. Goffman explains this paradox when he writes that:

> the isolate in the factory who becomes a rate-buster is none the less part of the team, even if his productive activity embarrasses the impression the other workers are attempting to foster as to what constitutes a hard day's work. As an object of friendship he may be studiously ignored, but as a threat to the team's definition of the situation, he cannot be overlooked (1959:72).

Thus, some individuals are unavoidably incorporated into a team performance just as surely as others are deliberately removed from it. The most common reason for such instances of exclusion surrounds concerns that certain individuals will (innocently or otherwise) act in a manner that is inconsistent with, or contrary to the aims of, the team performance.

Audience and outsiders

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is what Mead meant by the "I"(Cook, 1993:54). Assessed against Goffman's team performance notion, we can see that an individual need necessarily have a sound grasp of his/her objective (me) identity in order to appreciate the expectations placed on him/her by the rest of the team; as well as an equally solid grasp of his/her subjective (I) identity so as to have the necessary confidence and assurance to negotiate the role.

If we are to accept the notion that human beings express themselves through (individual and/or team-based) performances, then we need also recognise that another group should also exist in order to view such performances. Goffman continues the 'stage' analogy for this group when he refers to it as the 'audience'. On the surface, the role of the audience in relation to the performer(s) appears straightforwardly defined, but some overlaps exist in this regard that require further explanation. Firstly, the audience in observing a performance is also, paradoxically, playing a role itself. In effect, the particular role chosen by a performer will often be tailored so as to suit the needs or expectations of the audience unto which it is given. Secondly, it is not always an easy task to distinguish the performer(s) from the audience.[44] Ostensibly then, the roles of performer and audience are often interchangeable and intertwined, and can only be accurately differentiated by taking note of the individual(s) that is conversing or gesturing at any given moment. This is especially true when the interactions concerned are occurring in cyberspace, and the normal visual cues that form an integral aid to the communication process are sorely missing (assuming a webcam is not being used).

The concerned individual could thus also be interpreted as constituting a member of the audience, although they are also removed from this classification on account of the fact that none of the conversations observed are being staged implicitly for their benefit. As such, the individual is effectively fulfilling the role of the 'outsider', and is neither the performer nor the audience. In a perverse way, however, the outsider is also both performer and audience. This is the most intriguing

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[44] This is made all the more problematic when the 'performers' concerned are enacting roles in a cynical manner. "Two such [adverse audience] roles are essentially those of the *impostor* (one who poses as a member of the team and so is allowed backstage, where he may acquire information which can damage the impression the team seeks to create) and the *shill* (someone who acts as a member of audience but is in fact in league with the performers). There are also what might be called accredited imposters: those who police the goings-on at performances and displays as the official or unofficial agents of an otherwise unsuspecting public (Burns, 1992:136; italics in original). This last form of 'imposter' has resonance in cyberspace where online fora are commonly inhabited by monitors who both participate in discussions and police the group interactions taking

facet of human interaction; the capacity for the individual to fulfil multiple roles at any one time, as Goffman explains:

> the performer comes to be his own audience; he comes to be performer and observer of the same show. Presumably he intracepts or incorporates the standards he attempts to maintain in the presence of others so that his conscience requires him to act in a socially proper way. It will have been necessary for the individual in his performing capacity to conceal from himself in his audience capacity the discreditable facts that he has had to learn about the performance; in everyday terms, there will be things he knows, or has known, that he will not be able to tell himself (1959:70).

Regions

Up until this point the discussion on human interaction has dealt specifically with the individual actors themselves, along with the idiosyncrasies that are apparent in acts of human expression. This would therefore be an appropriate juncture at which to apply a sense of setting to the art of social interaction and to explain the significance of region to the careful manner by which individuals (and groups) construct their exchanges. Goffman speaks of three specific types of region in his books; the 'front region', 'back region', and the 'outside region'. The front region, by definition, is where the individual or team-based actors deliver their performances to the audience (1959:93). By way of contrast, the back region provides an audience-free sanctuary for the actor(s):

> it is here that illusions and impressions are openly constructed. Here stage props and items of personal front can be stored… Here the team can run through its performance, checking for offending expressions when no audience is present to be affronted by them; here poor members of the team, who are expressively inept, can be schooled or dropped from the performance. Here the performer can relax; he can drop his front, forego speaking his lines, and step out of character (1959:97-98).

The back region, as with the front region, implicitly denotes the setting for a performance. This performance may be of an informal nature (as for the

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place.

back region), or a formal nature (as per the front), but either way these regions are defined by levels of performance. Conversely, the outside region is explicitly removed from the performance sphere, and exists solely as a locale in which individuals, who are neither actor nor audience in a specific performance, reside (1959:117).

The careful negotiation of front and back region performances has become a particularly troublesome characteristic of contemporary white pride politics insofar as movement leaders are concerned. Kathleen Blee alludes to the precarious nature of the 'public' front and 'private' back regions in white pride environs when she writes that:

> Relying on the Klan's reputation for racial violence to attract avidly racist members and at the same time recruiting mainstream whites for a "new Klan" is a delicate balancing act, and the contrast between the Klan's front and back stages has created dissatisfaction and factionalism in some Klans (2002:170).

Tara McPherson reported similar findings from her own study of 'Neo-Confederate' online groups, where the public face exuded by such groups was clearly a cause for considerable angst among the webmasters charged with winning new converts to the movement:

> Often, the pages express dismay (some seemingly genuine, others less so) over the continued perceptions that protecting Southern heritage means one must be racist. Hence, these sites abandon the overt racism of the Lost Cause era for the more palatable covert racism characteristic of the post-Civil Rights era (2000:124).

For many white pride organisations, the WWW has become the public front office for their operations and, just as it is in fleshspace, this front region is accessible to friend and foe alike. While many key figures within the broader white pride movement would not see strong negative reactions to alternative races as being a negative thing they nevertheless recognise the limitations imposed upon them by stringent racial vilification legislation (the Internet is not removed from such laws). As such, it is unsurprising that white pride web sites should be showing a preference for expounding positive messages about white masculinity as distinct from the

negative outbursts about blacks and Jews that have preoccupied movement figureheads in past times. These sites have to give people a reason to embrace racialism and emotive rhetoric on heroic white struggle can prove just as appealing to the deluded and bereft as savage exhortations about Jewish conspiracy and modern society's affliction with 'black' cancer.

Places

The above mentioned discussion on *regions* outlines the manner in which Western social conventions frame human interactions within carefully selected and clearly delineated spatial boundaries. These *regions* are pertinent to interactions that occur within the greater societal spectrum, but Goffman also refers to the spatial boundaries that insulate stigmatised groups from the broader community landscape. These boundaries are known simply as 'places', and are briefly defined by Goffman as entailing:

> Forbidden or out-of-bounds places, where persons of the kind he (the stigmatised person) can be shown to be are forbidden to be, and where exposure means expulsion… There are civil places, where persons of the individual's kind, when known to be of his kind, are carefully, and sometimes painfully, treated as if they were not disqualified for routine acceptance, when in fact they somewhat are. Finally, there are back places, where persons of the individual's kind stand exposed and find they need not try to conceal their stigma, nor be overly concerned with cooperatively trying to disattend it (1963a:81).

Forbidden places are contrived and politically charged spaces that allow non-stigmatised individuals to isolate the stigmatised from access to vehicles of power and influence. Back places provide stigmatised individuals with a sanctuary through which they can interact with similarly outcast persons and, in some instances, organise themselves as a viable political unit. Civil places, by way of comparison, exist ostensibly as neutral territories in which stigmatised individuals can interact, albeit under the tacit control and patronage of the non-stigmatised. The rise of the

Internet has impacted heavily upon these interactive spaces of humankind, with the most profound change occurring in relation to back places, around which political activist groups are organising their activities largely free of governmental and police interference.

Stigma

The symbiotic relationship that exists between aspects of identity formation and established units of social institution can result in the formation of negative identity traits within individuals. When Giddens speaks of negative identity traits he does so from a bipolar framework that distinguishes between the levels of *pride* and *shame* that reside within individuals. As he sees it, "(s)hame bears directly on self-identity because it is essentially anxiety about the adequacy of the narrative by means of which the individual sustains a coherent biography" (1991:65). For Giddens, a sound degree of personal pride is of paramount importance to the construction of a healthy self-identity in individuals. When an individual is capable of feeling pride in oneself, then they are capable of acknowledging their 'ideal self'. The 'ideal self' constitutes a key segment of the self-identity construct by serving as a driving force for individuals, providing them with the impetus to formulate aspirations (which are often directly oppositional to those prescribed by peers and care givers) and to challenge the restrictive limitations of their immediate environment (1991: 68). When personal pride gives way to feelings of shame, however, the capacity for the individual to successfully negotiate his/her social world is dramatically reduced.

Erikson believes that negative identity traits can arise for either of two reasons. In the first instance, they can arise *via* the subconscious selection of identities perceived to be either undesirable or dangerous (1959:141). This happening usually fulfils the individual's unconscious need to attract the attention that they feel they are being deprived of in the course of their everyday life. In the second instance, negative identity traits act as a defence mechanism against the excessive ideals pushed upon an individual by over zealous relatives (1959:142). Both of these explanations appear to be reasonable enough, although they fail to

explicate the tendency for societies (by way of law, policing agencies, and community mores) to impress negative identity traits upon individuals. By returning our attention to Goffman we can better appreciate the role of societal institutions and conventions in stigmatising individual citizens, and the effects that such stigmatisation has on those afflicted by it.

Negative identity traits can corrupt an individual's capacity for social interaction in three noteworthy ways. Firstly, they can impact by way of what Goffman refers to as "blemishes of weak will" (Goffman, 1963a:4). With this form of stigma, undesirable character "stains" such as: criminal records, violent tendencies, dishonesty, addiction to alcohol or drugs, and so on, leave the "impaired" individual in constant threat of rejection from participation in social scenarios. Likewise, the existence of a "tribal" stigma can also result in social rejection for the "afflicted" person (1963a:4). A tribal stigma refers to the taint that accompanies an individual's affiliation with (predominantly minority) races, religions or political causes. Finally, if a person's body fails them, or somehow becomes branded as undesirable, then that person's standing in society is greatly diminished, and their sense of self consequently weakens and constricts (Shilling, 1993:85). When this occurs, we have what Goffman terms 'abominations of the body' (1963a:4). These debilitating physical afflictions such as: gross disfigurement, communicable disease, physical handicap, and the like, leave the "restricted" individual at risk of non-acceptance into social settings. Even where circumstances allow for the tentative acceptance of such an individual, the fragile nature of their acceptance will often see them banished to the peripheral boundaries of group interaction where they exist as ignored spectators to the event, rather than *bona fide* participants in it. The import of shame and stigma to the concept of self-identity will be elaborated upon in the ensuing chapter, where the commentary will focus upon the attraction that the Internet holds for individuals wanting to *pass* on their real-life identities.

'Passing' refers to the act of suppressing unsavoury elements of one's persona (Goffman, 1963a:42). This can occur on the Internet, and netizens will commonly conceal their racial and/or ethnic origins for fear of appearing backward or having their ideas disregarded by closed thinking

Westerners (González, 2000:29). Interestingly, this type of passing also occurs on sites like Stormfront.org, where participants are often forced to pass on ethnic and regional information for fear of being rejected as "non-white".[45] Although it is somewhat uncommon, on certain occasions an individual may choose to indulge in a show of 'reverse passing' by deliberately concealing creditable facts about oneself (Goffman,1963a:42). This can also happen in virtual spaces like Stormfront.org, with law enforcement officers often needing to withhold information on their education and training so as to gain the confidence of the white priders that they are observing and monitoring.

Recent studies on the white separatist movement have given prominence to the ways in which movement leaders (and everyday disciples) have sought to diminish the sense of stigma attached to their beliefs. The most common tactic is to wear the white pride mantle as something of a badge of honour, effectively turning the stigma back on their opponents, as Ezekiel exemplifies in quoting from a movement leader's speech at a white pride rally in the early 1990s:

> The children of Satan, he reports, are in rebellion against Christ. They want to change us. They hate us because we love our nation, our morals, our families. We look at what has happened in the last twenty-five or thirty years — the abortions, the homosexuality, the race mixing. We can see that the idea of the Jews is to change us; that the United States will be ruled by God or by tyrants (1995:44).

The white nationalist movement offers a fascinating case study of stigma, as it involves a societal minority projecting shame onto the broader majority, when almost invariably stigma is projected in a one way direction, the opposite way. It is also true that white pride devotees have sought to position themselves within the wider political mainstream in recent years, seeking to increase the power base of the movement by making their beliefs appear more central and normal to everyday voters (Dobratz &

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[45] The diverse and often dubious criteria that differing white pride devotees apply to the notion of "whiteness" are worthy of a major research study in their own right. It is very common, however, for devotees from the larger Western nations to adopt a somewhat supercilious and patronising approach to devotees from smaller regions.

Shanks-Meile, 1997:212). After enduring countless decades on the frustrating and ultimately fruitless periphery of political action and idealism, it would seem that key figures within the organisation have accepted the truism that it is almost always only mainstream political entities that raise the power required to impact on mainstream social institutions (Marx & McAdam, 1994:121).

The monitored & manipulated self

The preceding pages have sought to establish the primacy of the body in the construction, maintenance and expression of human self-identity. This credo is indicative of a contemporary revision of the self and differs noticeably from previous ideologies on self-identity dating back to the Enlightenment period that perceived of the self more in terms of inner feelings and emotions, rather than physical expressions, established regimes of acting, and routine control over one's body (Giddens, 1991: 171). The disciplines of psychology and psychoanalysis are still somewhat committed to this viewpoint, but researchers within the social sciences can ill afford to overlook the effect that the body has on both the individual and their surroundings. As Giddens contends, routines and "regimes are of central importance to self-identity precisely because they connect habits with aspects of the visible appearance of the body" (1991: 62). To put this another way, routinised forms of action, display and expression reinforce an individual's command over their sense of self, and minimise potential confusion in others as to their continuity of being.

It should be noted that the continuity of one's being becomes less and less fixed in accordance with an increasing array of choices in regard to bodily presentation. Shilling throws further light on this subject when he writes that:

> We now have the means to exert an unprecedented degree of control over (our) bodies, yet we are also living in an age which has thrown into radical doubt our knowledge of what bodies are and how we should control them (1993:3).

Featherstone builds upon this contention by presenting the body/identity relationship from a consumer-orientated angle:

> Within consumer culture the body is proclaimed as a vehicle of pleasure: it is desirable and desiring and the closer the actual body approximates to the idealised images of youth, health, fitness and beauty the higher its exchange-value. Consumer culture permits the unashamed display of the human body (1982:177).

Market forces are encouraging people to reassess their perceptions of self by reconsidering the manner in which they present their physical bodies to the world. Health service institutions and medical technology innovations are also aiding in the malleability of contemporary self-identities by allowing people to *revise* themselves (mentally and physically) through psychiatric counselling, self-help programs, diet programs, hypnotherapy, plastic surgery, artificial limb and joint replacements, and the like (Marx, 1997:490-491).

In Western capitalist societies the territorial expanse that divides individualist notions of self-identity from a society saturated with an ideology of consumerism is bridged by the loosely defined term — 'lifestyle'. The idea of lifestyle is significant to self-identity, as the routinised practices that are axial to the lifestyle bolster an individual's inherent sense of worth and being (Giddens, 1991:81). The socially constructed dimension of self-identity, as exemplified by the conterminous elements of consumerism and lifestyle, increases the value of Giddens' correlative actor/structure theory of human agency. An individual's self-identity is thus explicitly tied-up in their inherent sense of self-worth, which in turn, is implicitly dependent on their standing within the wider social setting.

Self-identity, therefore, exists largely as a tandem feature of the actor's social identity and relies heavily on constant social interaction and awareness so as to maintain congruity with the actor's particular communal environment. While this suggests that self-identity demands flexibility to allow for fluctuations within the actor's societal sphere (Giddens, 1991:52), it must also be settled enough to ensure solid

comprehension of one's individual biography, and to permit scope for the actor to participate in the 'life-planning' process. Life-planning involves reflexive preparation for future events and entails the internal construction of a life calendar that details significant junctions in one's life (Giddens, 1991:85). To this end, self-identity forges intrinsic links to elements of self-discipline, whereby an actor must constantly be aware of who they are, why they are, where they are, and where it is that they are heading. Such thinking also underscores Castells' suggestion that the real issue surrounding identities is not that they *are* constructed, but rather *how* they are constructed, from *what*, by *whom*, and *for* what? (Castells, 1997:7)

The sheer diversity of the self-identity question clearly supports an actor/structure approach to human agency. This reality is only further reinforced when one looks beyond everyday institutionalised structures such as: families, peer groups, educational institutions, and market forces; to consider the influence that state procedures have on individual perceptions of self. In the centuries that have followed the Industrial Revolution (in Britain), identity formation within Western capitalist nations has predominantly been structured around strict liberal conventions. To offset this slightly, universal perspectives (such as communism and socialism) have acted as counter-hegemonic ideals to liberalism and its associated capitalist mechanisms. This has afforded citizens access to a counter-culture around which they could formulate individual notions of identity in accordance with their own peculiar "lived experiences" (Aronowitz, 1995: 116). In the context of this thesis, it is fascinating to note the manner in which white nationalist adherents appear to be building a counter-culture (heavily augmented through CMC vehicles) that stands in defiant opposition to communism, socialism and liberalism.

Movements*,* such as those concerned with the cause of white nationalism, can be very significant to notions of individual identity because they show that people's lives have a "world-historical" meaning (Aronowitz, 1995:117). This point not only reverberates Giddens' stance on the 'ideal self', but it also fortifies the links that bind notions of self-identity to the wider realm of community. At a basic level, community formation relies implicitly on individuals having a tangible sense of self; a

willingness to express this sense of self to others; and, most importantly, an understanding of linear historical developments that were only achievable through processes of carefully considered human interaction. Political motivations and concerns have thus been central aspects in identity formation, although the transitory nature of some political ideologies leaves citizens at risk of being disenfranchised from a crucial self-identification mechanism.

Aronowitz, who claims that the recent decline of the "ideological left" has robbed some individuals of the alternative means through which they could form their personal identities, supports this view. He qualifies this statement, however, by stressing that new social and cultural formations (nationality, race, gender and sexuality) have arisen as potential replacements for these lost political identifiers (1995:116). For Aronowitz, the avenues to identity formation are becoming more and more plentiful, largely as a consequence of globalisation, but the one singular common denominator inherent to the whole process remains — identity *via others*. "In this framework, identity entails a metonymic selection of certain characteristics—race, gender, or whatever—that are taken as irreducible and privileged over all competitive claims" (1995:122). Such a framework also carries relevance for discussion pertaining to group identities and will certainly be revisited amid Chapters Six and Seven when the focus switches to nationalism and online activism.

Matters of gender

Earlier in this chapter it was indicated that an individual's body could not be removed from the identity formation process principally because, to all intents and purposes, an individual *is* his/her body and vice-versa. The physiological certainty of the body/identity union provides a fascinating point of comparison with its psychological counterpart — the gender/identity relationship. Gender, and the sexual aspects imperative to it, is a structural qualifier that every human actor must requisitely factor into their everyday thoughts, behaviours and actions. For just as one's body will not let you forget it is there, neither will one's acquaintances

(subconsciously or otherwise) let you neglect your specified gender and the normative ways of being that are necessarily derived from it.

In the aftermath of the Industrial Revolution Western men came to have their senses of self moulded implicitly around what Erikson refers to as their 'occupational identities' (Erikson, 1959:97). This had a sweeping effect on male self-identities that thereafter became routinely associated with the personal attributes of practical skill, self-sufficiency and material worth (Buchbinder, 1994:11). Conversely, women were effectively limited to playing *supporting* roles, which firmly affixed their perceptions of self-identity to the personal attributes of nurturance, empathy and non-competitiveness (Grosz, 1994:84). In recent times, however, men have been forced to reconsider their senses of self *via* alternatives to occupational qualifiers, hence the alleged evolution of the SNAG (Sensitive New Age Guy). Buchbinder is very suspicious of the SNAG, questioning whether his appearance is indicative of an admission that change is needed among the sexes, or merely a cynical male attempt to maintain the patriarchal *status quo* by stealth (Buchbinder, 1994:19). For their part, contemporary women are finding it difficult to convert their newly acquired social and political legitimacy into cultural and material significance, as long established patriarchal impediments prove increasingly onerous to negotiate (Grint, 1991:212-238).

In spite of the changes that are occurring en masse across the gender terrain, it is still the age-old Western preponderance for sexual classification that dominates in so far as identity formation is concerned. Connell laments the tendency for Western cultures to trivialise the gender debate, when he writes:

> Social practices that construct women and men as distinct categories by converting an average difference into a categorical difference - 'men are stronger than women' - negate the major pattern of difference that occurs within sexes rather than between them (1987:80).

This clear cultural tendency for generalising behaviour and attributes among the delineated sexes is substantial grist for the self-identity mill, particularly when one considers how such identities are fundamentally

posited upon the establishment of *differentiation from those who are similar.*

Social norms also seek to ensure that self-identity, in gendered terms, "is acquired at least in part through the repudiation of homosexual attachments" (Butler, 1995:25). This social construction of gender, as it applies to homosexuals, contradicts conventional "two-sex" explanations of being by portraying men as feminine and women as masculine entities (Connell, 1987:80). This contradiction has encompassed a double impact for homosexuals who have found themselves divested of their true physiological means of identification; whilst simultaneously having the legitimacy of their psychological perceptions of self debased and discredited. In this way, social norms act as barriers of exclusion for socially minded individuals.

In the case of homosexuals, exclusion from the social mainstream is further reinforced by community hysteria over the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) epidemic. This scenario may have as much to do with human insecurity over body image and its capacity to bolster or diminish one's sense of self, as it does with worries pertaining to illness and death. With the onset of rampant consumerism (circa 1960s), notions of body image became central to the thinking of many Westerners, thanks largely to its prominence in media advertising campaigns. These campaigns encouraged a celebration of the body that continues to excite consumer imagination in the present day, although such excitement has been tempered by the subsequent surge of eating related disorders and AIDS-related illnesses from the 1980s onwards. Media advertising privileges the body as a site of sensuality, vitality, sexuality and expression; ingredients that are desired by all individuals and are attainable by most, providing that the body stays healthy. AIDS, by way of contrast, erodes these ingredients, rendering the body weak and undesirable, diminishing the afflicted individual's sense of self in the process (McDowell, 1999:36).

The combined potency of consumerist ideals and media marketing have served to ensure that the notions of gender, body, self and community are rarely too far removed from one another. Despite this,

recent developments in technology and medicine are enabling individuals to combat the debilitating impact of marketing on their fragile senses of self, as McDowell explains:

> Perhaps the most radical change now possible is gender reassignment, in which the association between sexed identity and embodiment is altered. Indeed, some critics have identified the body as the last frontier in postmodernity, the most challenging arena in which to achieve variation (1999:37).

The real effect of such 'variation' remains limited, however, given that identity formation that is structured around biologically determined gender differences simply does not allow for those who do not correspond to physiological and psychological mores; with homosexuals, transsexuals, and eunuchs[46] prominent among those outcast (Connell, 1987:81). In accordance with this, extreme steps such as gender reassignment are only likely to impact positively on an individual's sense of self for as long as the person concerned is able to keep secret their prior gender status. Gender has come to be seen as an entity that is organic to human development, so that even when an individual comes to inhabit a physical body that, to the naked eye, clearly represents the identifiers common to a specific sex; the capacity for this individual to find acceptance in this altered state is almost invariably negated by resilient cultural conventions that perceive of gender as an inherent biological characteristic that can be masked, but never completely or acceptably overturned.

Feminist writers such as Judith Butler are devoted to the task of debunking these cultural conventions. As Butler sees it, gender is neither a natural nor internal phenomenon, but rather it is socially inscribed on the body and acted out to others through "*performative* acts, gestures and enactments" (Butler, 1990:136). She then goes on to expand upon this line of thought in writing that:

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[46] This is a reference to the small population of unfortunates who have been divested of their genitalia through accident, injury, illness or crime, and NOT to the social subclasses that once existed in regions like China and the Middle East.

> Gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts.* The effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self (1990:140, italics are my emphasis).

Such a view borrows intellectually from Goffman's interpretations of carefully prescribed and enacted role playing, along with Giddens' accounts of the manner in which such role-plays are culturally reified *via* processes of routine and repetition. It is important to fully comprehend Butler's argument, given that it helps (albeit indirectly) to explain cyberspace's popularity as a medium in which gender identities can be—temporarily, at least—manipulated and modified to meet with individual preferences. In essence, this capability to override restrictive social conventions acts as a much needed 'release valve' for individuals who are frustrated and/or disillusioned by their senses of self, but unwilling to risk permanent alteration in the form of gender reassignment.

Uncertainty over gender also arises in cyberspace with specific regard to how an individual goes about expressing him or herself to members of the opposite sex. McDowell talks of how patriarchal dominance has long characterised interactions within general social environments wherein "men are [endowed with] presence in space and women are [seen as encompassing] insignificance" (1999:41). In line with this, men have been seen to commonly reinforce this perceived dominance in cross gender conversations by 'interrupting' female speakers whenever possible so as to shape the discussion in accordance with their own needs or agendas (Aries, 1996:92). Subsequently, the act of interrupting has become synonymous with notions of power, meaning that confident (usually well-educated) men will interrupt less forceful men and confident (high powered) women will most likely do likewise to less forthright women (Aries, 1996: 93-95). In cyberspace, a netizen's gender is not always immediately recognisable, which helps to minimise the

instances of 'interruption' that occur purely in response to visual gender cues. To this end, it is fair to argue that cyberspace is an empowering vehicle for women, although it does fall short of indicating that women are openly modifying their communication styles when online.

Cyberspace, it is often said, pays no heed to the constrictive categories that limit and mediate an individual's participation in real-life societies, but such a suggestion is questionable to say the least. Men and women cannot leave the internal residue of lifelong adherence to such categories at the modem when they log-on to online chat groups. Nor can gender power inequalities be ignored in cyberspace when men are predominantly responsible for creating and maintaining virtual environments, and where males, with few exceptions, frequent these online sites in greater numbers than their female counterparts (Norris, 2001:83).[47]

The sexual and gender dimensions of identity expression in virtual environments, while not central to this study, are nevertheless worthy of isolated mention here. There are three significant aspects to online gender — the power issue implicit in male/female usage levels of computer technology (Herring, 1993; Norris, 2001:82-84; Spender, 1995); the virtual cross-dressing phenomenon wherein the Internet has allegedly become a prime site for sexual experimentation (Foster, 1997; O'Brien, 1999:83-84; Stryker, 1995); and the less obvious factor of female netizens using cyberspace as a means of transcending the gender-based impediments that limit their actions and interactions in face-to-face situations. The last aspect is as intriguing as it is under-researched and will provide much of the impetus for the section on gender that appears in the following chapter. This section will take a close look at female users

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[47] This is, admittedly, a source of great debate among cyber researchers. Many studies are showing that the once pronounced gender gap is decreasing, although few (if any) would be willing to contend that male users no longer constitute a clear majority of overall Internet users. A major study of Internet usage across fifteen European nations by the Eurobarometer organisation revealed that male users were more prominent in all fifteen nations. The difference was minimal in countries like France and the UK, but was very pronounced in nations like the Netherlands and Luxembourg. Meanwhile in the USA, it is believed that male users outnumber female users by 5% and upwards — Norris

on the Stormfront.org website, highlighting the paradoxical disparity that distinguishes their online behaviour from their offline devotion to white pride ideology and gender conventions.

A working definition of self-identity

While the aim of this chapter centred upon the presentation of a critical and operational overview of the self-identity terrain in both its historical and contemporary guises, it was also intended that the content of the chapter would inform the development of a working definition on the self-identity concept. The production of a 'working definition' framework for use in each of the online-based chapters [3, 5 & 7] occurs in each of the lead-up chapters [2, 4 & 6] and corresponds to the same format in each instance.

As a starting step, the working definition decides upon a meaning for the concept under review that reflects, and is instructed by, the literature material related in the chapter. With regard to self-identity, the meaning of the term that is central to its deployment in this thesis is expressed as follows. *The continual process of internally comprehending and externally expressing culturally mediated forms of belief, emotion, desire and knowledge that are ontologically fundamental to an individual's everyday state of being.* This definition of self-identity borrows heavily from the ideas of the three main theorists outlined earlier in this chapter. Firstly, it owes much to the early works of Erikson for its slant on internal comprehension. Secondly, it carries with it unmistakable overtones of Goffman by way of its focus on external expression (role-playing). Finally, it proffers allusion to Giddens on account of its firm emphasis on everyday processes of continuity (routine and repetition). This meaning differs from most conventional definitions of the self-identity concept in that it is at pains to recognise and stress the presence of external influences in the formation of an individual's sense of self. The recognition of culturally mediated influences on identity development is crucial if personae are to

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(2001:69).

be explained as non-static and potentially multi-dimensional entities, as would certainly appear to be the case in online environments.

The working definitions also incorporate a range of investigative variables that serve to drive much of the explication surrounding each key concept. These 'variables' are not utilised in the rigid statistical fashion that underscores most psychological exploration of phenomena; rather they perform the duty of shaping the ensuing discussion around explicit thematic lines, which is more in keeping with qualitative approaches to research. The four variables selected for use in the following self-identity chapter are presented here as follows — 'regulation of identity', 'inspiration for identity', 'sovereignty of identity', and 'identity problematics'.

The 'regulation of identity' variable is concerned with the number of identities that netizens choose to employ in the virtual realm, the extent to which they coordinate these identities, and the instances of these identities being used in real-life interactions. Identities, as they pertain to cyberspace, are predominantly conveyed *via* the nicknames (also known as 'handles') that a netizen chooses as his/her point(s) of identification in the online realm. Considerable academic attention, particularly from postmodernists, centres around the propensity for modern day individuals to *fragment* their expressions of self through the creation and implementation of multiple personal identifiers (Ewing, 1990; Moore, 1994; Turkle, 1995; Gergen, 1996; Kolko & Reid, 1998). An opposing scenario can also be evidenced, however, in online interactions whereby netizens afford considerable primacy to the one overriding handle. In light of this, it is possible to perceive of cyberspace as an environment wherein individuals can express a singular, stabilised sense of self, as well as a flexible, transitory variation of the concept.

Online nicknames carry deeper import than the everyday names that serve to label individuals in the 'bricks and mortar' world. This is not to contend that such real-life names exist only as superficial terms of distinction, as individuals clearly invest them with greater personal import than this, but rather that online nicknames are almost invariably more colourful and descriptive. This is primarily due to the fact that such identifiers can not rely on bodily features and expressions to imbue them

with additional strands of character and meaning. One's body and behaviours contribute markedly to one's expression of self through the largely unconscious signs one admits to others. In cyberspace, such physical expressions are practically impossible (outside of video conferencing and webcams) so it is the job of the nickname to fill in here as best it can. The second variable to be more closely implemented in the discussion on online identities seeks to analyse the implicit meaning attributable to online nicknames. I have termed this category the 'inspiration for identity' variable and it primarily aims to provide a better sense of the multifarious stimulants that underscore a netizen's choice of nickname(s).

Following on from this initiative, the 'sovereignty of identity' variable is employed in an effort to divulge the level of attachment netizens display towards their online nicknames. Do netizens feel a similar level of attachment to their online handles as they do towards their real-life names? How flexible are they in relation to creating and using alternative identifiers in situations where online participation on a site demands this be done? How much respect do netizens accord to the handles employed by fellow Internet users? Will they be more likely to refer to them by name or nickname if the chance to use either identifier arises? These are the questions that drive the operationalisation of the 'sovereignty of identity' variable.

A significant portion of this chapter was devoted to a commentary on the ways in which certain cultural conventions influence and impact upon the process of self-identity construction. The final variable, 'identity problematics', works from this commentary, exploring the levels to which a range of cultural elements (gender, occupation, education, race and ethnicity) shape and arbitrate the personae that netizens come to express online. This variable, as with the others, delves into data gleaned from the empirical investigation [refer Chapter 1], along with information uncovered from the study of cyberspatial texts, as well as from the content material of this chapter.

Closing discussion

The ensuing chapter takes over from where this one leaves off; keeping discussion focused on the topic of self-identity, but shifting the content focus from fleshspace to the virtual realm. All of the major lines of inquiry alluded to in this chapter are elaborated upon further, along with fresh lines of thought that are presented from literary works relating specifically to cyberspace and CMC. The four variables outlined above are operationalised throughout the following section, with a greater emphasis placed on empirical observations of identity formation as it occurs on the Stormfront.org white nationalist website.

In summation, the content presented in the following chapter endeavours to address the following key research stimuli. Firstly, I offer a brief insight into the structural conventions that serve to oversee, organise and nurture identity development in online environments. Secondly, I address the ways in which online identities can be seen to diverge from the patterns implicit in the construction of real-life identities. Thirdly, I highlight the role that nicknames play in the expressing and affirming of online senses of self. Finally, but most significantly, I seek to challenge the commonly held belief that netizens freely and prominently adopt multiple identity tenets and signifiers when participating in cyberspace.

CHAPTER

3

Internet Identities: Investigating the online self

Putting the 'you' in CPU (Central Processing Unit)

The significance of preserving face in online interactions is a prominent factor in discussions of virtual identity, with netizens in general taking considerable care to nurture and protect their particular strands of public self-image. The desire to be "liked, valued and understood" (Harrison, 2000:69) is, it could be argued, intrinsically common to human beings; although such desire is necessarily heightened in an environment such as cyberspace, where romanticised notions of personal growth and freedom are part and parcel of the attraction that draws many new users into the realm. In cyberspace it is possible to have "as many electronic personae as one has time and energy to create" (Donath, 1999:29). As I will contend later in this chapter, however, the ability to create multiple personae is a largely self-defeating exercise if these personae are ineffectively implemented. Accordingly then, persona development in cyberspace is essentially similar to persona development in fleshspace. The main objective for an individual here is to adequately coordinate their comprehension of the world around them, whilst simultaneously ensuring

that this comprehension of worldview is competently conveyed to other individuals during everyday social interactions (Giddens, 1984:25-28).[48]

This process becomes decidedly more problematic in cyberspace on account of the dearth of transactional cues and supportive information that are normally provided by the physical body. Donath explains the importance of this supportive information and the need for netizens to find alternative ways of expressing it when she writes that:

> Identity cues are sparse in the virtual world, but not non-existent. People become attuned to the nuances of email addresses and signature styles. New phrases evolve that mark their users as members of a chosen subculture. Virtual reputations are established and impugned. By looking closely at these cues, at how they work and when they fail, we can learn a great deal about how to build vibrant online environments (1999:30).

The cues that Donath speaks of are many and varied, but they all interlink and interweave to assist netizens with the ongoing transaction of their online identities with other Internet users. Thus, if a netizen wishes to effectively convey his or herself to an online community then he/she would need to, even at a preliminary level, incorporate some understanding of online communication aids. The most commonly employed communication aids in the virtual realm are emoticons and online abbreviations.

Emoticons and online abbreviations[49]

The virtual realm is often mistakenly spoken of by the uninitiated as a reckless, lawless environment wherein netizens have *carte blanche* to utilise cyberspatial media in a completely *ad hoc* and anarchic manner. In

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[48] As will be shown later in this chapter, many of the interview/questionnaire subjects used more than one online handle for their interactions in the virtual world. In spite of this, these users still tended to use just the one nickname whilst participating on the Stormfront.org site. Poster credibility (for both proponents of white pride and agitators) on the Stormfront.org site is largely dependent on operating from a single, established and clearly identifiable handle.

[49] Some online researchers prefer to use the term 'acronym' here, which is suitable for most instances wherein the modifier is used, but descriptors such as ZZZ [refer Table 4] are not acronyms, hence my preference for running with the term 'abbreviations'.

Table 3. Emoticons and the feelings they are used to express.

Typical US/European		Typical Japanese	
:-)	regular smile	(^-^)	regular smile
:^)	happy	(^o^)	happy
;-)	wink/mischievous	(^ . ^)	girl's smile
:-o	wow	(*^o^*)	exciting
:-|	grim	(^o^;)	excuse me!
:-||	anger	(-o-)	I'm sorry
:-(	sad	(;-;)	weeping
:^(	unhappy	(^ ^;)	cold sweat
.oO	thinking	(^-^;;)	awkward

Source: Adapted from Aoki (1994).

Table 4. Examples of online abbreviations

AFK	Away from the keyboard
BRB	Be right back
BTW	By the way
CUL8R	See you later
FAQ	Frequently asked questions
IMHO	In my humble opinion
LOL	Lots of laughs
MorF?	Male or Female?
RTFM	Read the F***ing manual!
URAQTINVU	You are a cutie, I envy you
ZZZ	Boring, hurry up!

Source: Adapted from Third Age Media (1997).

reality, however, netizens must conform to the etiquette requirements that are in place for the specific community in which they are participating. The most unique aspect of netiquette, as it pertains to a broad range of online environments, surrounds the use of 'emoticons' to supplement and hasten the conversations and interactions that take place within the domain. Emoticons enable netizens to enrich and dramatise their conversations by substituting keyboard symbols for the "voice inflection, eye contact, and body mannerisms" that accompany fleshspace conversations (Kitchin, 1998:7). Emoticons are many in number and vary from one online domain to another, but Table 3 provides a working example of this particular mode of communication.

Online communications are also regularly complemented by the judicious addition of 'online abbreviations' [refer Table 4] that fulfil a similar function to emoticons. Whereas emoticons are limited in the sense that they must in some way act as symbolic representations of human facial expressions and associated body language, abbreviations are ostensibly boundless in that they can represent all manner of human actions, feelings and/or idioms. Some abbreviations, LOL in particular, are used far more commonly than others, but the lexicon of abbreviated online language continues to grow in accordance with ever increasing Internet usage and the seemingly constant cyberspace predilection for speed and efficiency of communication exchange (Leaning, 1998:35).

On the surface emoticons and abbreviations appear to be little more than trivial asides, but they do fulfil substantial duties when utilised by netizens. In the first instance, the ability to use and comprehend a range of emoticons and abbreviations can serve to identify the netizen concerned as an experienced Web user, as opposed to an uncertain newbie.[50] By extension, if a user is recognised as having 'net savvy' then

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[50] Some site facilitators are providing a diverse range of emoticons that can be inserted into the text. These tend are mainly basic ones, however, as creative users constantly add new emoticons and abbreviations to the ever growing online communication lexicon. Newbies can often also be identified through overuse of symbols, and are in danger of doing so when site facilitators make them so easy to implement. Similarly, the more common abbreviations are becoming more readily accessible from media articles pertaining to the Internet/WWW. Again, these articles tend to predominantly focus upon abbreviations that are 'stock standard' across a range of online fora.

he/she is also likely to be more easily identified and/or accepted as a viable member of a given online community. 'Net savvy', it should be noted, is not always a guarantee of acceptance into a particular online community, as in certain circumstances, Internet competency and knowledge is seen as a decidedly less valued commodity than devotion to the political cause at hand. This is especially true of white pride web groups such as Stormfront.org, as will be made clear later in the chapter.

On a secondary level, emoticons and abbreviations are a key communicative tool for netizens as they help to distinguish genuine posts from 'trolls'. Trolling carries with it clear overtones of Goffman's (1959) 'team performance', as discussed at length in the previous chapter. The cliquey team-like nature of human groupings is often very evident in online communities; where participating individuals place great stock in attaining a privileged position in the group and jealously guard such status by surrounding themselves with others of similar community standing. Once these alliances are formed they are thereafter maintained *via* regular recognition of fellow "team members" which is, barring unforeseen circumstances, repaid by these members in kind. It must be remembered, of course, that one's place in the "team" is neither automatically nor indefinitely granted. As such, an individual needs to establish him or herself as a worthwhile addition to the community in question, and this can not always be accomplished in online environments by unswerving devotion to the group's particular shared aims and beliefs alone.

Trolling is fast becoming an integral part of the Internet landscape, yet, at the time of writing, it remains surprisingly under researched by cyberspace investigators. In accordance with this, it is also very difficult to happen across a firmly detailed definition of the term, although it would appear that online trolling occurs in the following three ways. Firstly, it is realised through an act of deception by a computer user who posts a message online with the intent of tricking other netizens into believing that the message originated from someone else (Bond, 1999:5). Secondly, trolling involves the pretence of inhabiting an online domain and passing yourself off as sympathetic to its beliefs and aims, whilst simultaneously agitating and unsettling other group members with posts and comments

that surreptitiously work in opposition to these beliefs and aims (Donath, 1999:45).

Such versions of trolling centre on the destructive and, in some cases, criminal aspects of the process, but the third and most common way is used for decidedly less sordid purposes. On such occasions trolling involves the asking of stupid questions or the posting of subtly sardonic posts as forms "of joke used to distinguish group insiders from outsiders" (Baym, 1998:53). An example of this common form of trolling is outlined in Figure 3. Five postings from a single message thread involving 58 posts have been included in this figure.

The first post from 'Dragonette' expresses her joy at the prominent role that female fans are playing in contemporary rugby league by attending matches and involving themselves in discussion about the game. The second post from 'grays' also shows support for women in rugby league, but does so in a patronising manner, ignoring the place of female fans at the "coal face" of the game; preferring instead to focus attention on the support role that women have played for men involved with the sport over the years. The third post from 'ozbash' (highlighted in grey shade) is the troll, with the writer recognising the patronising overtones of the previous post and replying to it with overstated sarcastic wit.[51] 'Dragonette' (the original poster) remains completely oblivious to the troll in post four and it is significant that she opens this message with a reference to her inexperience on the forum, given that regular users would be unlikely to mistake the intent of ozbash's post. One of these regulars, 'Billy the pig', closes out the example by outlining his amazement at the inability of other members to recognise the troll in the final post.

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37 It should be noted that one would require some prior knowledge of the 'ozbash' online persona to be able to identify this post as a troll. I found such identification to be easy, having conversed with ozbash on several occasions prior to this posting and from having perused his posts over a prolonged period of time. This serves to further highlight the importance of the 'lurking' process (discussed in Chapter One) for netizens and online researchers, as it helps the reader/viewer to get a clear sense of the posting styles of various participants, minimising one's chances of mistaking troll posts for serious ones.

Figure 3. An example of a 'troll'. `(Source: NineMsn, 2000)`[52]

Started by: <u>Dragonette</u> Sent: 22/03/2001 9:58 AM 58 Replies

I must say that having read through a lot of the discussions that are going on, escpecially from the girls out there, that i am very proud to be a "footy chick". Not only are we voicing our opinions and thoughts on "our teams" should's and should not's, but we are getting involved in the technicalities of the game. I hope that the men out there will take our thoughts and opinions seriously, and not scoff and assume that we are all "butchy lesbians".

From: <u>grays</u>	Sent: 23/03/2001 9:46 AM	9 of 58

Dear Dragonette us guys would all agree that the women form a large part of the Rugby League world, your support over the years is absolutely outstanding, to all the mums who put up with the washing ,mending the scatches, having a shoulder to cry on when young johny or fatty comes home crying cause his side lost again to the wives who support there husbands through the good times and the bad 10 out 10 well done . i do beleive you women deserve a pat on the back and keep up your support for the league. Oh and a special thankyou to all those lovely cheer girls too, keep those pom poms twirling.

From: <u>ozbash</u>	Sent: 23/03/2001 9:56 AM	10 of 58

you,re onto it there grays.a womans place is in the background as a support person.they are not ideally suited to offering opinions about footy as they have little or no understanding of the game and usually only repeat what they have heard from us.also,a womens brain is smaller and less likely to be as efficient as a males. so i think the majority of sheilas do a great job in the background,washing,ironing ,cooking,,,,,,,,,,,,

From: <u>Dragonette</u> Sent: 27/03/2001 10:08 AM 36 of 58

Well, after 2 or so weeks on the "world of rugby league" i can spot the *genuine* league fans from the uneducated sloths to the smart asses who have nothing better to do with their time than sledge everything that wasn't THEIR idea. Thanks to everyone who loves the game for what it is, and not who it should represent. As for Ozbash and the other ignorant males, it is quite obvious that you are one of those males who do nothing but denegrate women, yet you can't stand one night alone without them. I won't comment further with respect to the likes of the ignorant out there, as I have an education and can expand my mind further than which sex is better than the other.

From: <u>Billy the pig</u> Sent: 27/03/2001 12:36 PM 41 of 58

Ozbash, It is a serious worry to me that so few 'get it.' Perhaps they have not had the grounding in feminism that you and I would get from working in an industry dominated by militant feminists.
CyberKev, Thank God you understood, I was begining to think there was something I was missing here.

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[52] Postings taken from empirical observations of online environments will be presented in this thesis as they were originally written. The large number of grammatical errors inherent in these posts render the 'sic' function inappropriate in this instance.

In a realm like cyberspace unblinking group devotion is applicable to the majority of participants, meaning that even those netizens with the best of intentions can get lost in the crowd. This comes as an unpleasant surprise to many who naively embrace cyberspace as a haven for the building of relationships in defiance of restrictive social and cultural qualifiers, only to discover that the virtual realm is an equally unforgiving place for those found lacking in communication skills. Confident and colourful self-expression is thus a prized commodity in the virtual world, which is why humour is so often injected into online interactions:

> Humor creates and transforms the social structure of the community. It is in part through humorous performance that particular posters overcome the seeming anonymity of the computer medium to develop their own voices. In an ongoing parade of screens of posts that look almost identical, strong individual voices emerge, gaining recognition, status and enhanced power to shape group consensus (Baym, 1995:21).

The seemingly constant presence of humour has led to the Internet evolving from a sterile, austere environment, as per the early science dominated days of online interaction, to what Danet et al. have come to describe as the "inherently playful medium" of the present day (1998:41-44). The playful nature of the virtual arena clearly suits some netizens more comfortably than others and is a somewhat surprising aspect of cyberculture, given that the medium lends itself more openly to speed and efficiency of information and communications exchange.

Humour and playfulness can be helpful assets for netizens attempting to shape an impacting identity for themselves in a virtual community but, in general terms, they are largely insufficient in and of themselves to guarantee a netizen solidity of place within that community. Ostensibly, humour and playfulness act as powerful supplements to identity structures founded upon knowledge competencies (both in terms of Internet usage *per se*, as well as the understandings pertinent to the aims, beliefs and intentions of the virtual community concerned) and the personal capacity to effectively express this knowledge to others. It is at this point that the use of "high style", described simply as the ability to

employ language elements elegantly, constructively, creatively and in a way that reflects favourably on the assumed intelligence of the writer (Goffman, 1981:189) becomes something of a double-edged sword. This point is neatly articulated by the following message posts extracted from the 'Stormfront.org' unmoderated discussion forum:[53]

> **Jesse Jackson:** Make your invective more effective. Tell 'em Jesse sent you ☺… It has come to my attention that many of you have poor English writing skills. Unless something is done quickly employers will not be able to tell you from the Niggers you hate so much… When you finish the course [I propose for you] you'll be able to read books like The Turner Diaries and The Protocols of the Elders of Zion just like a pro. Imagine being able to talk about Niggers, Kikes, Chinks, Japs and other minorities without embarrassing grammatical errors
>
> **Euroman:** Well hello Jesse "Headmaster" Jackson! **Your** enormous love for **us** White folks is indeed touching. Thank you kindly Jesse for that information. Just one more thing there "Headmaster" Jesse… Do you have more of an urge to play basketball or play the stockmarket [given your combined negro and Jewish genes]?
>
> **Anonymous:** Hey Jesse I see I have gotten you riled up now would you like to discuss factual differences between the negroes and caucasoids… How come most of africa can't pull itself out of the stone age except of course south africa but that doesn't count because the white man built that. P.S. this is a computer message board not a english composition paper for college… MUCH DISRESPECT GARY

In white pride fora such as 'Stormfront.org' the employment of 'high style' expression by community members is treated with equal parts indifference and disdain due to the manner in which it is regularly used as a weapon against the movement. Message posts like the one put forward by 'Jesse Jackson' are commonly directed at Stormfront.org participants,

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[53] The reader is advised that quotes presented in this manner throughout the thesis have been expressly from one of two possible sources. Some will have been taken from messages posted on the Stormfront.org unmoderated discussion forum between the months of February and April (inclusive) of 1999, with this period representing the 'lurking' stage of the thesis. The quotations not derived from observation of the lurking stage have been gleaned from the interviews/questionnaires conducted with Stormfront.org members during September 2000.

and carry with them the underlying subtext that white pride followers are uneducated rednecks.

Posts in the vein of Jackson's and the predictable white nationalist responses to them carry extra venom in that they are indicative of left versus right political struggles and the ongoing attempts of each to obtain the upper moral ground. It is therefore not uncommon for those aligned to the left to dismiss their right-aligned opponents as uneducated, racist and selfish. The willingness to disparage along these lines is no less pronounced in cyberspace as it is in fleshspace, but the process of haranguing an opponent for their alleged knowledge deficiencies is made all the more easy when poorly written posts appear on the screen for all to see. It should also be noted that a key tenet of white nationalist thought surrounds the idea that non-white persons (Blacks and Latinos in particular) are inferior to white persons on account of their poorer levels of performance in I.Q. tests (Bushart et al. 1998:143-144). As such, opponents of white pride can use posts like Jackson's as a means of turning the inferior intelligence argument on its head. Conversely, persons who are sympathetic to right-wing ideologies will readily counter claims that they are racist and poorly educated by dismissing their left-aligned foes as mischievous elitists. In this way, online white priders launch counter attacks on their antagonists by mocking the 'high style' language employed in their posts and suggesting that the authors are attempting to hide insubstantial ideas and deceptive agendas behind deliberately obscure forms of prose.

Online language use does not have to be structured in 'high style' format and nor does it, in most cases, have to be grammatically polished to find acceptance from other community members. In spite of this, it is very evident that language use online encompasses its own unique forms of 'register'[54] and that such forms will necessarily alter when the communication being transmitted is in asynchronous format, as distinct from synchronous format. Online communication in the synchronous

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[54] Register = the differing types of language that can be used for the purposes of writing and speaking.

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sense (i.e. Internet chat, video conferencing, MUD participation) favours a style of communication use that economises language in order to replicate face-to-face interaction as closely as is possible (Wallace, 1999:11). By way of contrast, asynchronous online communication is seen to closely resemble "the public interview style of speech" wherein netizens post lengthy and detailed messages, knowing as they do so that the message is being viewed by a wide audience and that they are not going to be (as is often the case with face-to-face interactions) interrupted prior to completing it (Wallace, 1999:12).

Online language use is, at the basic level, dependent upon the netizen's 'communicative competence', described by Cherny as the things "a speaker needs to know to communicate appropriately within a speech community and how (he or) she learns it" (1999:23). In order to attain a viable level of communicative competence it is necessary for the netizen concerned to familiarise themselves with the basic communicative idioms of other participants within the community and to obtain a working understanding of what is and is not acceptable to other members on the site. This inevitably results in a circular action whereby "discourse processes generate social structures, which in turn affect discourse processes" (McLaughlin et al. 1995:94).

It is at this point that individual identity, as expressed through online communication, becomes immediately identifiable as a key stimulus and reinforcing agent in Giddens' process of structuration. It is structuration theory that ties all three major concepts of this thesis to the broader over-arching concept of society, as outlined in the diagram that I constructed below [Figure 4]. While I have already discussed the major tenets of structuration theory in the preceding chapter it is intended that this diagram will help to isolate the integral ways in which the theory is serving to underscore and influence this overall body of work. The dualisms apparent in the diagram are central to Giddens' assertion that human action influences institutional development and is not, as structural functionalists would contend, wholly directed by the vagaries of institutional development.

Figure 4. The reflexive and regulative processes of structuration.[55]
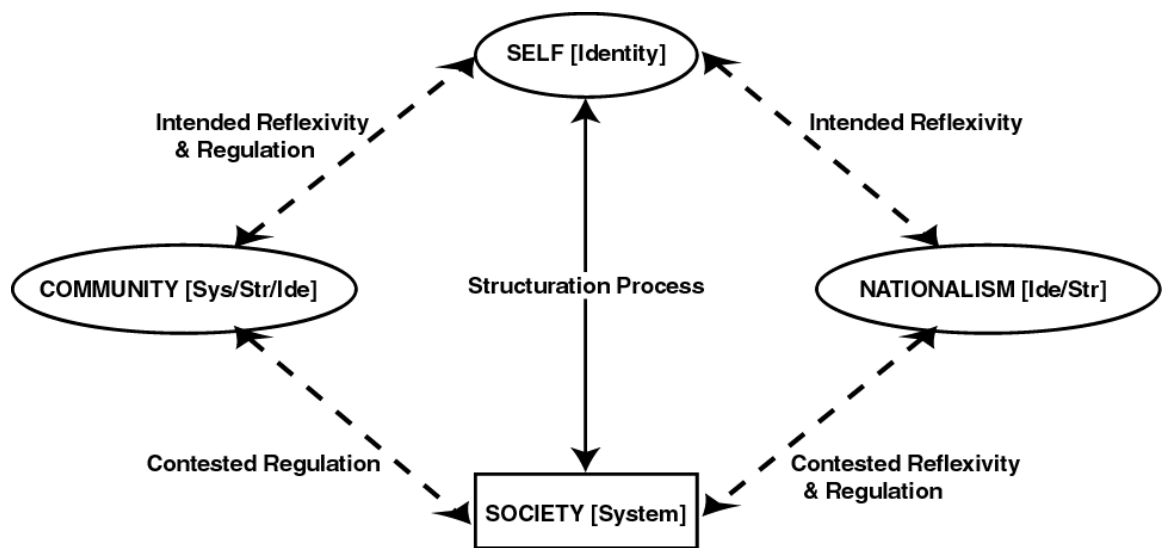
On a basic level structuration theory is aimed at providing explanations for how "interaction should be conceptualized and its relation to (societal) institutions" (Giddens, 1984:xvi). In a broader sense it is designed for the linking of human actors (at the micro level) to the overarching entity that is human society (at the macro level), taking into account the many institutional and political bodies (at the meso level) that nurture and mediate these links.

From the above diagram we can see that the links between the individual and the community are characterised by strong levels of practical and discursive consciousness on the part of the former. Self-identity is predominantly concerned with the plausible development of each consciousness so that the individual is competently able to comprehend the "conditions of their own actions" (Bryant & Jary, 1991:8). With regard to community, an individual will use this developed sense of consciousness to negotiate their presence and standing in a group

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[55] The abbreviations 'Sys', 'Str', and 'Ide' stand for 'System', 'Structure' and 'Identity' respectively. 'System', in this instance, relates implicitly to the broader human processes that are realised through human interaction. 'Structure', in accordance with this, pertains to the laws, rules, regulations and physical infrastructures that mediate between individual human actions and these broader system processes. 'Identity', as the term suggests, alludes to the development of human identity in its multifarious micro, meso and macro level forms.

dynamic of which they want to be a part. This community will demand things of the individual and will provide things for them in return, but—for all intents and purposes—the individual is generally free (in the virtual realm, at least) to withdraw from participation in the community if he/she feels inclined to do so. The community will apply intended measures of regulation to ensure that individual idiosyncrasies do not serve to overshadow or diminish the harmony and cohesiveness of the group dynamic and these regulatory measures will in turn be influenced by the needs and preferences of the individual.

Virtual communities, for the most part, run on a majority rules basis and individuals tend to accept this on account of their personal preferences generally corresponding to those of most other members of the group. Webmasters, by and large, accept that the viability of the virtual communities they create is implicitly dependent upon enough members sharing a favourable view of the group regulation practices that he/she has put in place. Individual netizens approach these regulations reflexively, putting forward possible amendments where they see fit and either conduct themselves in a manner that conforms to these conventions or seek out alternative options elsewhere. If too many netizens choose the latter option then the community will collapse, which is also the likely result should a community fail to maintain group stability through adequate implementation of regulation.

As is the case with community, nationalism undergoes contested processes of regulation when linked directly to the broader social system of society. 'Contested' as the term is employed here is drawn from what Giddens' calls 'homeostatic loops', where regulation of human action is influenced by structural developments that are derived from unintended consequences and unacknowledged conditions (Bryant & Jary, 1991:8).[56]

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56 Bryant & Jary (1991) refer to these "contested" processes as unintended consequences and unacknowledged conditions of action. The main point behind Giddens' stressing of intended and unintended factors was so that he could clearly highlight the central weakness (as he saw it) of structural functionalist approaches to self-identity. This weakness being that structural functionalism does not allow for individual human actor influence in the creation and maintenance of social systems and structures. For structural functionalists, the impact of social systems and structures on human actors are entirely beyond their control or influence. The above diagram shows that this is not

Nationalism also provides states with the opportunity to incorporate reflexive modes of thinking and acting into their governing practices. This allows the governing bodies in such states to deeply assess and analyse the nationalist objectives of counterpart states prior to finalising their own policy regulations. The state is essentially a body of institutions and is thus a world removed from the organic construct that is the human individual. In spite of this, the state can still be seen to operate (at times) along reflexive lines in a manner akin to the way in which human actors assess and formulate their unique senses of self.

More than just a (nick) name

In the online realm, as is the case with real-life, the starting point for any viable expression of self-identity begins with a name(s). The act of naming people and objects is, in the first instance, a crucial activity through which human beings come to distinguish between other people and objects *via* the process of labelling. In a less obvious manner the act of naming is also used as a means of diminishing fear of, or apprehension with, someone or something by applying a comforting title or label to them/it (Bechar-Israeli, 1995:6). In the computerised world such name usage is common, but when it comes to cyberspace, the user is usually quite competent with the technology and will generally choose a name that either suits their character or carries with it some sort of attention grabbing content.

At this point it is worth dwelling on the possible reasons as to why most netizens do not choose to run with their real-life names while online. Security and privacy factors obviously play a considerable part in the decision to select a virtual *nom de plume*, with four potential pitfalls in

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entirely true and that scope does exist for human actors to impress themselves (to varying degrees) on the broader social landscape. I have preferred to run with the overriding term "contested" in this instance, as I feel that the contested nature of social/structural policy and development is the main reason for these processes having unintended consequences for individual human actors. "Contested", as it is used here, also allows for situations that arise whereby the impact of social structures/systems on the individual actor is—by and large—in accordance with the individual's expectations; in so much as they either override the consensus of the community of which the individual is a part, or in that they are arrived at by means that are largely incidental to the individual's particular knowledge/reading of the situation.

particular preventing netizens from being openly forthright with their true details. Firstly, there is the possibility of being stalked by another user who would not only know of your online specifics (were they suitably versed on Internet and computer technology), but could also track your movements in real-life. Apprehension over an unresolved stalking situation almost led to the termination of one of my online interviews, as seen in the following exchange:

> **Vamp 88:** you aren't local to me are you?
>
> **CyberKev:** Not unless you class Australia as being a state of the USA.... Some do, apparently :)
>
> **Vamp 88:** well Aussie was the best I could trace you to, but still i know proxies… I'll be blunt I've have had a cyber stalker locally the entire time I've been online which is one of the reasons for the nick change… I'm serious interview over if I find this guy on my steps.

Vamp 88's predicament illustrates the potential for virtual occurrences to cross-over into an individual's real-life, when the illusion of global anonymity gives way to the reality that other geographically proximate individuals can also surf the same Internet (Horn, 1998:45). This would be an exception to the rule, of course, with most instances of cyberstalking being confined to the virtual realm, where difficulty remains in convincing large sectors of society that "crimes of the mind" are genuine crimes nonetheless (Spender, 1995:209).[57]

Some netizens also suppress their real-life identities out of concern at the prospect of their online life and activities being traced back to their

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[57] It is only recently that cyberspatial regulators have seriously turned their attention to cyberstalking and confusion still remains as to exactly what constitutes the offence. According to a 1999 report published by the US Department of Justice, cyberstalking refers "to the use of the Internet, e-mail, or other electronic communications devices to stalk another person. Stalking generally involves harassing or threatening behavior that an individual engages in repeatedly, such as following a person, appearing at a person's home or place of business, making harassing phone calls, leaving written messages or objects, or vandalizing a person's property." Cyberstalking is complicated further by: netizen uncertainty as to whether they have been offended against; netizen confusion over who to report a suspected offence to; the tendency of law enforcement officers to downplay the offence; and—in cases where such officers do treat the report seriously—law enforcers not possessing the technological knowledge and competency to adequately deal with the problem (Attorney General to the Vice President, 1999).

everyday professional lives. This concern can present itself in two differing manifestations. Firstly, as fear at the prospect of being disciplined by one's employer over overt use of online vehicles during work hours and/or *improper* use of such vehicles for the pursuit of gambling, random chat sessions, or pornography. And secondly, the concern can be a largely political one, where the individual is afraid of having their employers discover (and react unfavourably toward) revelations that they have been supporting causes online that run contrary to the practices and ideologies of the employers.

With regard to netizens who frequent online sites that openly foster and encourage right or left-wing political views, the need to suppress one's real identity is also a necessary step in avoiding possible prosecution from government or police agencies. Members of the 'Stormfront.org' online discussion fora are acutely aware that the site is being monitored by police, governmental and 'anti-hate' bodies as evidenced in replies to the following interview/questionnaire question:[58]

If you had to use your real name to participate on the Stormfront.org forum, would you be willing to do so? Why or why not?

YES = 10,   MAYBE = 4,   NO = 7

Redshift: No. Since it is currently "socially unacceptable" to be "racist", this might have negative repercussions in the form of termination of employment or expulsion from university. Also, with the lack of freedom of speech in Germany, to which I intend to relocate soon, it may even lead to a jail sentence.

Njord: Probably [although] I tried to keep a lower profile for a while on the grounds that my home country [Germany] issued an arrest warrant against me, threatening me with long-term imprisonment for [advocating] politically incorrect thoughts.

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[58] The reader is advised that questions displayed in these grey-shaded boxes throughout the thesis have been reproduced from the interview/questionnaires undertaken with Stormfront.org members. A full reproduction of the question list that was implemented in order to direct these interview/questionnaires is displayed at the conclusion of the thesis [refer Appendix B].

> **Madame Blavatsky:** Absolutely not. That site is monitored so heavily by hate groups: JDL [Jewish Defense League], ADL [Anti-Defamation League], etc. I only reveal my real identity to people I know and trust, and they are few and far between on the Internet.

While the above comments are reasonably instructive of standard white pride approaches to online participation, it is interesting to note that ten of the interview/questionnaire subjects were unfussed by the prospect of revealing their real-life names online. If this indifference is to be taken at face value then it serves to add further speculation as to why an individual would choose to forego their real-life name and identity in preference for fabricated alternatives.

Comparative name studies

The reasoning behind a netizen's decision to forego their real-life name and some of the persona elements that are associated with it, can often be revealed in the nicknames that they use when interacting in the virtual realm. Bechar-Israeli (1995) delved heavily into the study of online nicknames and argued that these nicknames operated with noticeable similarity to the 'stage names' (used by celebrities) and 'graffiti tags' (used by youths) in fleshspace. These names and tags act predominantly as links between the individual and their mode of performance. With entertainers this is often characterised by a switch from a run-of-the-mill real name to a romantic sounding stage name that proffers the opportunity of sophistication and fame (Bechar-Israeli, 1995:8). Graffiti artists differ slightly in that they normally select a tag that relates implicitly to their personality, or other people's perceptions of their personality (Bechar-Israeli, 1995:9). For the most part these names and tags are used to put individuals firmly in the spotlight, but sometimes they are employed to help the individual with 'passing' on their identity (Goffman, 1963a:42), as Bechar-Israeli makes clear in alluding to the tendency of 19th century women writers to hide their female identities behind masculine pen names in order to find acceptance as authors during this overtly male-centred period of history (1995:9). Online nicknames thus act similarly for netizens

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in that they provide individuals with an element of sovereignty over their privacy when participating in what is a very public domain.

Bechar-Israeli's study of online nickname typologies encompassed an analysis of 260 handles taken from IRC (Internet Relay Chat) participants across four differing channels on the medium. Initially these handles were organised into sixteen individual categories before Bechar-Israeli ultimately collapsed the data down into seven pertinent typologies, consisting of six peculiar nickname identifiers and a leftover category pertaining to real names [refer Table 5]. Of the 260 handles originally analysed, only 231 would remain for the final results table as 29 were found to be unclassifiable.

We can see from this study that by far the most popular nicknames for IRC users are those that relate back to their personality or character in some fashion. Danet et al. (1998), in earlier discussion, informed us of the inherently playful nature of IRC, which appears to link neatly to Bechar-Israeli's allusion to the similarity between entertainment 'stage names' and online handles. Perhaps there is also something to be made of the relationship that exists between online "play" and the individual self, whereby the former can be seen to arise more freely and effectively from embellishments of personal knowledge and experience than from uninformed invention. This would be in keeping with the textual nature of IRC communications where netizens essentially function as both readers and writers of life story narratives of varying lengths, genres, and levels of historical accuracy. In this way IRC users have much in common with authors and poets who also prefer to draw inspiration for their narratives from events lifted directly from personal life experiences. It is thus likely that a large part of IRC's attraction to netizens can be found in the medium's capacity for enabling individuals to make themselves the message of the media; a point that is representative of Marshall McLuhan's (1994) famous assertion "the media is the message."

Table 5. Six types of Nicks*. (Bechar-Israeli, 1995:15)

CATEGORY	NUMBER	PERC
Real names	18	7.8%
Self-related names	103+1	45.0%
Names related to medium, technology and their nature	33+6	16.9%
Names of flora, fauna or objects	36	15.6%
Play on words and sounds	20+6	11.3%
Names related to figures in literature, films, fairytales and famous people	13+1	6.1%
Names related to sex, violence and provocation	8+1	3.9%
TOTAL	231+15	106.6%

Totals add up to more than 100% because of multiple coding.

The other figure that is worthy of mention from Bechar-Israeli's study is the one that accords to names structured around the (CMC) medium, overall technology, and their nature. This figure indicates that roughly one in every six IRC users either hails directly from the computer industry, is a person who embraces computer technology as a hobby, or is a college/university student doing a degree in the information technology sector. There is definitely much to be made of the ties that bind an individual's self-identity to their occupational identity.

Writing in the later stages of the 1950s, Erik Erikson (1959:97) spoke of youth rebelliousness as an occurrence that could be effectively traced to youth uncertainty and frustration over their place (or lack of it) in the workplace. The 'performances' of "computer geeks" on IRC and associated CMC vehicles could be seen as a contemporary manifestation

of this occupational uncertainty and frustration. This is to contend that the information technology sector, for all of its potential earning possibilities, is in many cases a dull and inflexible working environment for young people with even the most rudimentary desire for creative expression. Internet media offer a vibrant outlet for such creative expression and are especially attractive to individuals from within the computer industry, given that such people almost invariably have the necessary equipment (or access to it) and the computer literacy to participate regularly and confidently online.

Morton (2001b), using Bechar-Israeli's work as her inspiration, launched an investigation into the identity structures of users of the Kava Bowl (a predominantly Tongan Internet discussion forum) during the later stages of the 1990s.[59] Morton's study revealed a downturn in the percentage of Kava Bowl users running with real names in 1998, highlighting the differences of intent that are often apparent between synchronous and asynchronous modes of CMC. Synchronous forms of CMC (such as chatrooms, ICQ, IRC and MUDs) pitch netizens into an often crowded textual space wherein they will generally have to compete frenetically with other netizens for a fair share of the attention. Asynchronous alternatives (such as discussion forums, BBS and e-mail exchange), by way of contrast, do not pressure netizens into the intense performance prized environment, allowing them instead to adopt a more relaxed and considered approach to their interactions. It is true, of course, that on certain asynchronous vehicles the capacity to out "perform"[60]

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[59] The Kava Bowl differs slightly from the IRC channels researched by Bechar-Israeli (1995) in that it is a Bulletin Board System (BBS), meaning that it deals with asynchronous exchanges of message postings, as distinct from the synchronous chat sessions that occur on IRC. Morton adopted a similar methodology for her study, however, choosing to break her nicknames down into categories. Eventually she settled upon six distinct typologies, with 'real names' being included in this grouping [refer Table 6].

[60] Matters of performance are significant, although it is also worth keeping in mind Morton's view that the larger than normal presence of 'real names' on the Kava Bowl implies that users fear they may not be taken seriously unless they post under their actual name (2001:73). Such a scenario is in line with Tongan approaches to communication and also highlights the manner in which fleshspace conventions commonly cross-over into the virtual realm.

others can lead to your attaining of elite status within the group, and this will be spoken of further in Chapter Five.

Table 6. Six variations of online name. (Morton, 2001b)

CATEGORY	No. '96	% '96	No. '98	% '98
Real names	306	74.09	27	27.27
Nicknames	51	12.35	40	40.40
Descriptive names	26	6.29	20	20.20
Tongan words	19	4.60	8	8.08
Group names	8	1.94	0	0
Tongan identifying	3	0.73	4	4.04
TOTAL	413	100	99	100

While the overall numbers of participants employing nicknames within the Kava Bowl may be small in comparison to other chat and MUD vehicles, the fact that such nickname use more than tripled on the site inside of two years is worthy of mention here. This would appear to indicate that netizen cross-over between varying synchronous and asynchronous CMC vehicles is becoming more common and that discussion forum participants are tending to find it easier and preferable to locate their overall online interactions around single handles (Danet, 1998:137). The following extracts taken from the interview/questionnaire process support this point:

> **Viking:** Viking is me, that's how everyone calls me, because of my interests and my deepest origins. Viking88 is viking + something that distinguish user viking from the same user viking in other occasions. 88 is a good number to attach to my name... I'm always Viking, at school, on my cds, when I write a message to a friend.
>
> **Njord:** [With regard to online nicknames I only use] Two. Because someone else registered 'Njord' on DALnet.
>
> **Bryn:** The nickname I use allows others surfing the Net to make certain assumptions about my political/cultural leanings. Using an overtly nationalist/racialist nickname

> allows me to attract and make contact with other nationalists or those interested in nationalist thought.
>
> **Raine:** I only use one [nickname] on stormfront, and one other name [when online], because my normal handle is sometimes taken...

Frustration pertaining to a netizen's inability to use their preferred nickname on a forum due to it already having been taken by someone else is commonplace on the Internet. For Bechar-Israeli, nicknames on IRC exist under protection of unofficial 'copyright', with disputes over naming rights generally being settled by awarding sovereignty of a nick to the netizen who has been using it online for the longest period of time (1995:18). On other occasions, name disputes are resolved by site moderators on the advice of an aggrieved party toting considerable support from the community rank and file.[61] It would be exceedingly rare for community members to side with an interloper on such an issue, as netizens invariably view nicknames as sacrosanct individual identifiers; given that they are reliant on knowing exactly who is who on their site for their own comfort and security (Myers, 1987:240).

Security matters aside, the tendency for virtual communities to limit nicknames for use by individual netizens serves to only further depict online identities as being closely linked to notions of performance. One of the most noticeable aspects of films, plays and television programs is the way in which they almost unerringly cast characters that do not share the same onscreen/onstage name as a fellow character. This is, of course, very much removed from conventional reality where individuals are regularly expected to interact with multiple others sharing the same name during the course of their everyday life. The main difference between real-

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[61] In April 2001, an antagonistic newcomer entered the 'World of Rugby League' (WORL) forum and began to post flame trolls using the handle of a long-term netizen on the forum. The newcomer was quickly identified, however, as his version of the handle in question differed to that of the original user in that it ended in a fullstop (on WORL two people can not use the exact same identifier). In response to the posts, the original "owner" of the handle sought support from other community members, leading to a

life and the 'world on the screen' is that with the latter, people are, in most cases, acutely aware that the actors involved are treating them to performances. Erving Goffman (1959) went to considerable lengths to inform us that everyday interactions, in and of themselves, are also performances. Despite this, it would seem that the media (and associated entertainment world) has done too good a job of conditioning people to the viewpoint that performances are something removed from the everyday; exercises in escapism to be watched and enjoyed, as opposed to merely endured. As a consequence, few people take films and television programs seriously, which may also help to explain why some people in today's society treat the Internet, with its heavy emphasis on performance elements, with disdain and/or indifference.

Inspiration for identity

In the previous chapter I proposed a plan to devote critical sections of this chapter to the task of investigating online identity in line with four specific analytical variables. The first of these variables — 'inspiration for identity' will build upon the groundwork laid by Bechar-Israeli (1995) and Morton (2001b) in their respective studies into online naming practices. Similarly to these two researchers, I present below a discussion that revolves around the differing stimuli that led members of the Stromfront.org discussion fora to choose the nicknames that they did in order to participate on the site. This discussion is also interspersed with relevant material gleaned from the interviews/questionnaires that were conducted with selected members of the Stormfront.org community.

In December 2000 the Stormfront.org website was subject to damage by hackers, which forced the closure of the site's discussion fora for four weeks while the site owner repaired the damage. At the time of the site's closure it had 20,000+ members (registered users) on its database, a figure that I saw as being too large to comfortably accommodate a nickname analysis of the type constructed by both

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collective lobbying of site assistant managers (moderators) to ensure the removal of the interloper.

Bechar-Israeli (1995) and Morton (2001b). The site problems over the summer of 2000/2001 helped to solve this dilemma, however, as when the fora reopened in mid-January 2001, it became necessary for people to re-register on the site in order to resume their membership to the site. In accordance with this, the overall site membership figure had dropped to 2500+ when it came time for me to conduct the name analysis in early March 2001. Even this figure would have served to make the procedure unwieldy, but fate again intervened to render the site search engine faulty, meaning that I could only access 909 (36% approx) of the total nicknames available on the fora.[62] Of these 909 names, a further 155 were excluded for being effectively "unclassifiable", leaving a grouping of 754 (30% approximately of overall total) names for the final analysis.

In keeping with asynchronous media conventions, the quota of 'real names' (33.82%) recorded in my analysis was significantly closer to Morton's (2001b) BBS readings (27.27%) than Bechar-Israeli's (1995) IRC ones (7.8%). This would certainly seem to back-up the results recorded in the interviews/questionnaires, where almost half the respondents claimed that they would be unfazed by the prospect of using their real name on the site. As was the case with Morton's 1998 sample, however, a clear minority of the real names in my analysis were full names (17% approximately, compared with Morton's 30%); with first or last names constituting 43% (approx) of those analysed, and modified names accounting for roughly 40% of the entire real name sample. A not inconsiderable number of nicknames from the 'modified names'[63] sub-grouping also crossed-over into the category pertaining to white pride related handles (22.81%). The modifiers "white", "race", "pride", "14" and "88"[64] were commonly coupled with real names, which may suggest that

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[62] The site search engine would bring up all 2500+ nicknames, but it would only do so on a page by page basis (25 names to a page). This was fine, but at random moments a glitch in the search engine would lead to the displaying of the same 25 names across several pages. In spite of this, it is felt that the 909 nicknames finalised upon were diverse and random enough to provide a viable sample for the final analysis.

[63] 'Modified names' are those that contain part of the individual's real name accompanied by a descriptive modifier. The nickname 'Ryan88' is an example of a modified name.

[64] 14 stands for the 'fourteen words' — We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children. 88 is the numerical sign for Adolf Hitler, which is derived from

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some users are more at home with keeping their fleshspace names online, making slight additions where necessary to ensure that other users are aware of the depth of their affiliation to the group or cause at hand.

Interestingly enough, in the process of searching the ICQ database for potential Stormfront.org interview subjects, I happened across four examples of Stormfront.org members who were simultaneously operating two ICQ accounts. In all of these cases, the individuals concerned reserved one account for white pride activities and the other for general interactions, enabling them the flexibility to interact with a large section of global chat enthusiasts while, at the same time, ensuring that white pride aficionados could trace them (to the second account) via the interests and hobbies component of the search engine. It is occurrences such as this that lead me to contend that netizens are not so much embracing multiple identities online, as they are tailoring specific elements of their self-identities to complementary Internet vehicles and communities. This view needs to be explicated further and I will return to it again shortly, but for now I would like to return attention to the names analysis.

By far the most popular variant of handle employed by Stormfront.org members in the sample was the one that centred around 'self-related names' (46.29%). Self-related nicks are those that refer to aspects of the user's: personality (Katie Alpha-Bitch), appearance (asian_beauty), espoused qualities (Equality_and_Justice) or sphere of interest (Europhile). Self-related names were also the most common type to be found in the Bechar-Israeli (1995) analysis (45%), indicating a profound human tendency for attempting to "personalise the impersonal machine" (Bechar-Israeli, 1995:6). On top of this, self-related nicknames also permit netizens to present themselves to the virtual world in a manner that is denied them by their real names in fleshspace:

> A person's first name is one of the most obvious
> components of his or her identity. Whereas family names
> usually help establish one's group identification (e.g.,
> tribe, old/new stock, religion), first names mirror parents'

HH (Heil Hitler) expressed in two eights that work from the understanding that H is the eighth letter of the alphabet.

hopes for their children and often possess an emotional quality that may or may not be related to phonetics. Semantic associations of names elicited from various age groups, such as students and young children, have tended to be invariant across samples, suggesting that first names have a stereotypic nature (Dinur & Beit-Hallahmi, 1996:1).

Table 7. Stormfront.org nickname types.*

CATEGORY	NUMBER	%
Real names	255	33.82
Self-related names	349	46.29
Names related to medium, technology and their nature	8	1.06
Names of animals, objects, and miscellaneous culture	97	12.86
Play on words and sounds	87	11.54
Names related to famous figures & events from history, literature, mythology & film	70	9.28
Names related to sex, violence and provocation	19	2.52
Names indicating affiliation or opposition to the white nationalist movement	172	22.81
Names that are place or region specific	60	7.96
Names related to notions of colour, creed, age and occupation	126	16.71
TOTAL	754+(489)	164.85

* Percentage totals exceed 100% on account of multiple coding

The stereotypical overtones apparent in first names serve to imbue individuals with perceived characteristics that may well be out of sync with the actual personality of such individuals. Mehrabian (2001) conducted a study into the "characteristics attributed to individuals on the basis of their first names" and discovered that the sound and structure of names was a noteworthy factor in the way that people form impressions of individuals whom they have never met.

The overt influence of biblical, historical and entertainment world figures on contemporary naming practices and the impact that such names have on the broader society is all too apparent in this study. For males, biblical names such as Moses, Jonah and Jacob extend to others the largely subconscious impression that the individual concerned possesses a more ethical and caring attitude than can be found in men sporting names like Adolph, Buck and Zeke. Conversely, names such as Charles (used by many English monarchs) and Duke (the nickname attributed to tough guy actor John Wayne) inspire impressions of success and masculinity, respectively, in the minds of unfamiliar strangers. When it comes to women, names such as Hope and June conjure images of ethical and caring people, while alternatives like Roxanne (linked to prostitution through popular rock band 'The Police') and Brandy (bearing unmistakable overtones of alcohol) are almost invariably looked upon in a less favourable light. With this in mind, it is little wonder that parents deliberate so carefully over the selection of a child's name.

While discussion to this point has revolved principally around the name types that were most common to the Stormfront.org fora, much remains to be said about the two categories that were the least common. In stark contrast to Bechar-Israeli's (1995) figures (16.9%), a mere 1.06% of the Stormfront.org handles analysed bore a relationship to the (CMC) medium, technology and their nature. The marked disparity between these two figures is probably attributable to the more serious nature of the Stormfront.org environment, although this does not account for the similarities between the two studies with regard to (seemingly) frivolous categories, such as — names that play on words and sounds (11.3%/11.54%) and names of animals, flora, fauna, objects and miscellaneous culture (15.6%/12.86%).

Perhaps a more viable explanation for the disparity between levels of technology-inspired names on each site can be found in the age of the Bechar-Israeli (1995) study. Seven years, the span between Bechar-Israeli's (1995) study and mine, is almost an eternity in the realm of computerised technology and associated media. Not surprisingly then, Bechar-Israeli (1995) was implementing her analysis at a time when CMC

was barely past its formative development stage and the cyberspatial landscape was still dominated by computer industry types. This is not to suggest that such users have diminished online over the past seven years, but rather that the spread of technology throughout society has led to a firm increase in netizens from outside of the computer industry. It need also be mentioned that the glamour and gloss has worn-off many aspects of computerised technology as people have grown somewhat blasé about technological advancements, making technology related nicknames considerably less attractive propositions than they were in the earlier days of the cyberspace revolution.

Of greater surprise is the figure pertaining to 'names related to sex, violence and provocation' (2.52%), which comes in behind Bechar-Israeli's (1995) statistic of 3.9%. This is surprising insomuch as one would expect to see a greater number of these name types in white pride fora with some tendencies toward aggression and violent behaviour, as distinct from generalised chat servers that are more openly inclined towards fun, play and laidback conversation. As Tara McPherson reveals, however, the tone of the white pride movement is definitely less fearsome and aggressive in the present day as it was in the halcyon days of the Ku Klux Klan:

> Gone (from white pride media) too is any overt imaging of blackness or explicit expression of racism. A concern with white masculinity and its preservation replaces representations of blackness, and almost all of the sites decry any racism, hate-mongering, or Klan or neo-Nazi activity (2000:124).

Recent racial vilification laws (with particular regard to the United States of America) have helped to force the white pride movement's hand in this regard, given that advocating white supremacist ideology is likely to result in legal prosecution, while pushing white separatist views, in most cases, only serves to make you unpopular.[65] For this reason, even most white supremacists online are likely to be cloaking themselves under the less

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[65] White separatists call for the creation of separate states for different races, whilst white supremacists desire the eradication of "mongrel" (non-white) races.

provocative banner of white separatism; ensuring that for every 'Kill_Jew_Scum' nickname on Stormfront.org, there are likely to be another fifty names of a decidedly gentler nature.

None of this is meant to foster the impression that nicknames (or names in general, for that matter) are the be all and end all of self-identity construction. It is nevertheless explicitly clear that names and online nicknames cannot be removed from the identity equation, as they serve as the "shopfront" for individual views and personality traits around which an individual's sense of self is implicitly created. Names are in one-sense labels, but in another way they differ significantly from labels in that they are almost invariably invested with emotive connotations. When a child (in Western cultures) starts out in life they are given a name by their parents, although in most cases the name itself is chosen by the mother (Khatib, 1995:2). At a later stage it is not uncommon for young children and adolescents to have a (generally affectionate) nickname bestowed upon them by peers and schoolfriends. Online handles are somewhat unique in that the individual chooses the name for him or herself, which affords considerable license for the individual to set-up an identity "shopfront" that most accurately conveys a key sense of his/her personality and/or character. If anything, online nicknames are even more inextricably linked to an individual's self-identity due to the lack of distracting elements such as body and mannerisms that assist people with fleshspace interpretations of others. In the virtual realm there are only pieces of text attached to a nickname, which undoubtedly invests the latter with extra levels of mystery and potency, when the body is not in frame to belie the views and suggestions being put forward.

Regulation of identity

The second thematic variable, 'regulation of identity', deals implicitly with netizen construction and maintenance of their online identity(s). It is at this point that I would like to further challenge the notion that the virtual realm is awash with individuals looking to experiment with multiple forms of identity.

Kenneth Gergen (1996) was one of the first writers to devote page space to the concept of identity fragmentation. As he sees it, citizens need four particular social conditions to be in place in order for them to be able to preside over "an identifiable and pivotal psychological interior" (1996:129). The first of these requirements is a clearly articulated and understood 'ontological configuration' wherein an individual is familiar with the "basic distinctions (of vocabulary) necessary for describing or explaining (his/her) mental conditions" at appropriate times (1996:129). In today's world, however, the 'ontological configuration' capacities of individuals have been eroded by the onset of 'multiple ontologies'; with "social saturation"[66] extending the social vocabulary of individuals to the point where individuals no longer have the security of "a single satisfying intelligibility within which to dwell" (1996:132).

The second peculiar social condition to which Gergen refers is known as established 'modes of expression'. The overtones of Giddens[67] are all too evident here, with this notion effectively mirroring his preoccupation with 'ontological awareness' and the requirement for individuals to be competent in the art of soundly internalising popular forms of behaviour and expression as a precursor to externalising these actions in social interactions with others (1996:130). This act of internalising has come under threat in recent times though, with social saturation also being blamed for the rise of 'contested expressions' that obfuscate the meaning of behaviours and expressions in line with competing cultural interpretations of human action (1996:133).

The third factor that Gergen brings into play with regard to credible conditions of self relates closely to the previous one. 'Context of expression' is a crucial element in the overall ontological awareness of an individual, who not only needs to be able to command a strong knowledge of expressive traits, but must also be competent at comprehending

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[66] The largely technological inspired situation that has seen individuals put into contact (*via* cyberspace and the mass media) with a range of events, cultures and people that they previously wouldn't have come into contact with.
[67] I am suggesting here only that Gergen's ideas are of a similar vein to those of Giddens, and NOT that Gergen has been influenced intellectually by the works of Giddens.

appropriate times for such traits to be employed (1996:130). This condition is also thought to be on the wane, however, with cultural groups reshaping the behavioural and expressive traits of others to suit their own needs and purposes — 'appropriated usage' (1996:133-134). Such appropriation, in turn, repositions these actions and behaviours in the broader society in diluted and diminished meaning, further agitating and disorientating human actors in need of stability.

The final condition of which Gergen speaks of is that of 'valued goals', whereby "homogeneity in the language of value (what action is likely to result in a positive outcome), buttresses commitment to a given ontology" (1996:131). Once again the merging of cultures and peoples has allegedly undermined this necessary strand of human actor understanding, with the increasing politicisation of society resulting in development of 'controversial goals' that blanket the language of value beneath cynical and undeclared political ideologies and motives (1996:134).

There is little doubt that the onset of the information age and the accompanying overlap of cultures have presented individuals with new ontological challenges, but it remains doubtful as to whether these challenges have served to alter dramatically human actor approaches to self-identity. The rise in Internet participation rates is both recent (being a phenomenon of the 1990s) and overstated in global population terms, and yet much of the support for the multiple identity argument stems directly from academic perspectives on cyberspace. This preoccupation with generalising from what is still a markedly under-researched social realm ignores the long-term trend (since the Industrial Revolution) of human actors attuning their senses of self to constantly evolving social circumstances.

Katherine Ewing refers to this ongoing identity modification process in proposing her model of 'shifting selves' whereby:

> (i)ndividuals are continuously reconstituting themselves into new selves in response to internal and external stimuli. They construct these new selves from their

available set of self-representations, which are based on cultural constructs (1990:258).

The external stimuli experienced by human actors throughout the hundred year period that preceded the rise of Internet communications more than sufficed in conforming individuals to this 'shifting selves' model. The inception of electrical power, onset of public transport, move to suburban living, developments in reasonably affordable overseas travel, global pain of war, growth of mass media communications, the dramatically altering nature of work and education practices, and increasingly volatile political landscapes ensured that citizens of the twentieth century (generally speaking) endured arguably the most complex period of social upheaval in human history. In defiance of this understanding, however, some contemporary social commentators still insist on addressing the human struggle for self-cohesion as a fresh by-product of the virtual realm.

Western societies have changed constantly over the last two and a half centuries, with the opportunities for, and pressures on, individuals increasing in line with this constant change. Not surprisingly then, the human need for devising and testing new ways of adapting to social change has led to greater instances of 'identity experimentation' during this time. Wallace highlights the psychological significance of identity experimentation to human actors when she writes that:

> Experimenting with identities is an important part of lifespan development, and those identity crises we experience, particularly in our youth, are valuable to personal growth. If we don't try things out, we never know what fits best. That exploration is not confined to adolescence, as many people assume. Especially in fast-paced industrial countries where lifestyle and career options are abundant and change quickly, many of us return again and again to questioning our values and beliefs, and then re-establish a firm commitment to a set of life goals (1999:47).

To a certain extent, scholars of postmodernity (Ewing, 1990; Moore, 1994) are correct in arguing that identity construction is not contingent on unitary understandings and expressions of one's essential self. Where they tend to fall down, however, is in the finer detail of the term 'unitary' which, in

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postmodern vocabulary, is all too often reducible to notions of limitation and singularity. Wallace's comments are significant here in that they outline the objective nature of human identity traits, which are firmly geared to directing the individual concerned toward the achievement of a series of pre-ascertained goals. These goals are many and varied and the means of achieving them are similarly diverse, but the individual will nevertheless attune their self-management methods to nurturing the personality traits that best facilitate the successful pursuit of these life aims.

In this way, the term 'unitary' takes on an extended meaning that explains self-identity as a process that is underlined by the human need for locating individual traits and expressions under a unified, but nevertheless flexible, psychological umbrella. Self-identity is thus a necessarily fragmented concept, but in the majority of cases it is only fragmented to the extent that it best meets the broader social needs of the 'shifting self'. Surprisingly enough, everyday people appear more adept at understanding the distinction between 'controlled identity fragmentation' and 'ad hoc identity multiplicity' than some cyberspatial researchers are. Individual understandings of friends and family members are conventionally formulated on the knowledge that such persons will conduct themselves in line with certain traits, emotions and behaviours that are unique to their particular persona. Such individuals are viewed as multi-faceted beings and it is anticipated that some elements of their personae will gradually alter to meet changing times and personal circumstances. Yet, for the most part, we perceive of friends and family members in accordance with expectations of them behaving in a fashion that is consistent with their clearly delineated personality traits and our intricate knowledge of such traits. As such, when a friend or family member acts in a manner that is not in keeping with their peculiar brand of 'controlled identity fragmentation', we perceive of them as being somehow 'out of character'. Given that individuals depend on solid support networks to aid in the achievement of life goals it is highly unlikely that the individual concerned would want to step too far out of character, as this could lead to estrangement from those who are close to them.

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┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│                                                               │
│  How many different nicknames do you use online?             │
│                                                               │
│  ONE = 3   TWO = 8   THREE+ = 6   SIX+ = 3   TEN+ = 1         │
│                                                               │
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The stable/fragmented selves debate has been at the forefront of social-based cyberspace research for over five years now although, in recent times, many scholars have viewed the issue as more of a *fait accompli* than a genuine bone of contention. The above response to a question from my interview/questionnaires with Stormfront.org members[68] appears to, on the surface, provide considerable support for the notion of netizens' employing multiple identities online, but it is nonetheless misleading in this sense. The question seeks to establish the number of nicknames that the interview subjects use in the virtual realm, which is markedly different to asking how many modes of identity such individuals put into action when online. Nicknames are certainly significant to analyses of how individuals interact when online, but they should not automatically be freely and wholly interchanged for the rounded identities that they serve to promote.

Sovereignty of identity

The argument for 'multiple identities' has, it would seem, been advanced in a manner disparate to its true plausibility. The first reason for this pertains to the difficulty some cyber researchers have had in accurately distinguishing between the number of nicknames netizens have employed online, as opposed to the number of identity constructs these netizens have chosen to implement. In the second instance, the argument has also been aided by the inability of these same researchers to fully differentiate between online interactions that regularly occur in MUDs and

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[68] This response links neatly to the material outlined in Figure 4, but does not operate from the same raw data. The findings from Figure 4 are in keeping with broad scale quantitative measures as gleaned from the three-month observation of the discussion forum, whilst the figures here are more qualitative in scope having been taken only from the interview/questionnaire process.

MOOs (and assorted chatrooms), as distinct from the more grounded interactions that commonly occur in discussion fora, on newsgroups, amid listservers, and in chat environments that are less inclined toward aspects of play and performance.

Kevin Robins laments the tendency for cyber researchers to exaggerate the reach and importance of MUVES when he writes of how:

> All this rhetoric of 'age-old' dreams and desires—which is quite common among the cyber-visionaries—is unspeakably vacuous and devoid of inspiration. It is a familiar old appeal to an imaginative space in which we can occupy new identities and create new experiences to transcend the limitations of our mundane lives. It is the aesthetic of fantasy-gaming; the gag-end of a Romantic sensibility (1996:80).

MUVES were initially derived from fleshspace Dungeons and Dragons role play games and, even to this day, most online MUVES revolve implicitly around fantasy role playing. Dungeons and Dragons provided individuals with the opportunity to step outside of themselves, for brief moments, and to pursue a fantasy existence secure in the knowledge that they were only playing a game. Many cyberspace studies, particularly in the early days, focused upon role playing MUVES, as they were not only fresh terrain (in study terms), but they also constituted a prominent portion of overall online interactions at that time. The subsequent rise and rise of miscellaneous chat rooms and assorted bulletin board, news group, and discussion fora vehicles have markedly altered the broader state of online interactions since then, but MUVE vehicles continue to dominate thinking on identity construction in virtual environments.

Netizen communications on the varied asynchronous vehicles of the Internet tend to largely defy suggestions that individuals are utilising cyberspace as a haven for rampant identity play. This point is supported by the following quotes taken from the interview/questionnaires process:

> **EmperorCS:** Yes [my handle] is the sole nickname that I use for all my Internet participation... The only reason I use the same [handle] is that I like having an identity that

is fixed and my level of responsibility must remain high because I am the same wherever I go.

Bryn: I feel it's important that people take a stand for their belief system. Using a "fake name" allows you to insulate yourself a bit too much occasionally. Using a real name definitely promotes a higher degree of responsibility.

Diabloque: Well it would not kill me [changing handles], but most people know who I am and ident me and know my real name when I use diabloque or one of the others [nicks], yet they would soon find out who I was even if I did change my nick.

cain_1798: The more one feels part of a community the harder it is to change [handles]. I have one or two nicknames that would have to be pried from my cold, dead hands before anyone got to them, but cain_1798 is not one of them.

MadameBlavatsky: I would never change my nickname... [To me it is] Very important! It is my online identity.

Raine: It wouldn't bother me that much [changing handles], but it would some [others], since everybody knows me by this [nickname].

There are several key aspects of the online identity issue to emerge from these quotations. Firstly, the decision of netizens to run with single nicknames is seen as providing them with credibility on "serious" discussion fora, with stability of projected persona promoting responsible behaviour among community members and leading to respect from other users (Donath, 1999:30). Cyberspace is no different from fleshspace in that most relationships are built over time, with adherence to set modes of expression and behaviour being central to this development. Echo (online chat community) founder, Stacy Horn, describes this process eloquently in writing:

> Over time, personality and character is inevitably revealed, reputations are established. [Also, Echo is not anonymous. Here, everyone knows your real name]. In the end, people can't help being themselves. I once heard Maya Angelou comment on Thomas Wolfe's idea that you can't go home again. Her take was: *You can never leave.* The first thing we do when we get online is recreate the world as we have always known it (1998:10; italics in original).

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Secondly, the maintenance of a stable identity online is important for netizens wishing to be recognised by others for their ideas, beliefs, wit and overall world view. In the words of Bechar-Israeli: "(I)f our relationships with Netters whom we have met by chance and who know us solely by our nickname are important to us (and most IRC friends are made by chance), then we will usually keep our nickname as though it were an important part of our identity" (1995:19).[69] Finally, the dominance of identity over nickname is highlighted by Diabloque, who contends that other users would quickly identify her by her new handle, given their familiarity with her particular modes of expression, writing and behaviour. The name used is thus not crucially significant in itself, but it is integral to users wishing to create and nurture a recognisable ongoing "online biography".

Identity problematics

Earlier in this chapter I spent some time situating the concept of the self within the broader setting of society using structuration theory as my theoretical guide. During this part of the discussion it was suggested that the individual connects to elements of community within his/her society *via* symbiotic processes of 'intended regulation' and 'intended reflexivity'. Much of this reflexivity and regulation surrounds the cultural elements (body image, gender, race and ethnicity) that shape an individual's place in society and their standing in relation to other members of the society. The self cannot be fully constructed without the individual having first taken these elements into account, as it is a major role of the self-identity to react and respond to cultural stimulants, and to signpost the individual's stance on a range of cultural issues. Giddens refers to these elements (along with cultural bodies and institutions) as influences that both constrain and enable the activities and actions of human actors

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[69] The identity is clearly more significant (in the beginning) than the nickname that gives presence to it. Some people choose online handles randomly, but find that they cannot part with it once others come to recognise them by the nick. This reinforces the above comment from Raine, who would baulk at changing her nick only because it could unnecessarily agitate fellow netizens who are familiar with her through this handle.

(1976:118). The remainder of this chapter will focus on the ways in which specific cultural elements enable and constrain human actors in the virtual realm.

The human body is a crucial element in an individual's identity structure on account of how it allows one to have command over their self, permitting a sense of control when individuals face inevitable moments of helplessness and uncertainty over their tenuous place within the greater society (Shilling, 1993:7). In real terms, a netizen's nickname substitutes for his/her body in the virtual setting, which is another reason why users tend to become overtly protective of their online handles. Not only is a nickname used for expression and identification, but it also permits a user significant control over their place in cyberspace. The gulf that separates the human body from the netizen handle is further diminished in some MUVE environments wherein users utilise avatars (computerised representations of objects) in order to "embody" themselves whilst interacting online (Dodge & Kitchin, 2001:161-162).

Avatars can be minimalist in nature, or they can be elaborate constructs that mirror human body forms. It is with avatars, more than self-identities that netizens are most likely to take liberties with the presentation of self that they choose to convey to others. In contemporary times, the availability of cosmetic surgery has resulted in considerable numbers of people making alterations to their body parts they deem undesirable (Marx, 1997: 490-491). This is indicative of the enabling aspect of "physical embodiment" in the virtual realm, but even avatar creation has its constraining elements:

> For example, as with many other websites, visitors to the site (Bodies@INC) must agree to recognize and abide by various copyright restrictions, legal disclaimers, and limits of liability — including liability for *disappointment* in the outcome of the body one constructs (González, 2000:36; italics in original)

Such 'disappointment' can also be rendered by the limitations placed on the netizen in his/her attempts to structure a satisfactory avatar. Science fiction representations of cyberspace have already delved into scenarios

whereby the quality of one's avatar is directly proportionate to the level of computer technology available to the user concerned (Clark, 1995:124-125). This could be the natural virtual extension of a flesh and blood world where contemporary ideals of physical attractiveness are often linked to an individual's capacity to afford the necessary cosmetic substances and surgery required to "perfect" the body. In some MUVE environments it has long been the norm for site owners and creators (Wizards) to oversee online representations of self that are essentially "godlike" in comparison to lower tier site users (Cherny, 1999:46-47; Reid, 1999:109-111).

CMC appears to instil an individual with a sense of dissociation from their body, radically revising modern tendencies toward acute 'self-relatedness' of one's body to one's overall sense of self. In one sense, this tendency looms as a revisitation of the gnostic "body as garment" metaphor, wherein the netizen casts of their inhibitions along with their physical shell (Frank, 1991:52). The existence and continuing development of avatars serves to qualify this viewpoint, however; reminding us "that human bodies continue to be the material and visible form through which human subjectivities are defined and contested today, despite the now popular belief in cyberspace as the ultimate realm of disembodiment" (González, 2000:48).

Question marks also surround the Internet's perceived place as a de-gendered space, in spite of the medium's capacity for cloaking gender determinants. As Stacy Horn sees it, gender differences online are limited to the ones that can be "expressed with words" (1998:81). This may be so, but given that the lion's share of inter-gender interactions involve spoken or written communication, it is unlikely that women stand to make significant gains in the virtual realm. For feminists, much of their concern with the status of women in contemporary society has stemmed from irritation at women being seen predominantly as women, and not as 'persons' in the same way that men are (Graham, 1999:143). Power issues come into play here with men long having dominated the political, financial and occupational sectors of society and women finding themselves valued as individuals largely in accordance with how they position themselves in relation to male partners and work peers.

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Considerable contention exists as to how well placed female netizens are in the cyberspatial realm. It is commonly thought that fewer than 30% of netizens are women (Whittle, 1997:271), but a recent report on Internet usage in America has downplayed this view, intimating that gender difference is mainly located "among men and women who are not working outside the home" (Nie & Erbring, 2000). It is probable that the latter interpretation is correct, with impressions of a male dominated cyberspace standing as residue from the proliferation of MUVE-based studies during the early to mid-1990s.

Participation rates aside, the most pressing concern pertaining to gender difference on the Internet appears to relate to the treatment of females online. Some women users, particularly in MUVE and discussion fora settings, are often forced to behave like "one of the boys" online in order to fit in with the pro-male group and avoid obnoxious male flirting and sexism (Kendall, 1999:65). Online nicknames that are openly feminine in nature will undoubtedly garner significantly more attention from male netizens in MUVE and chat environments, leading some women users to 'virtual cross-dress' as a form of defence-mechanism (Whittle, 1997:271).

Some feminist scholars do not like assertions that women are vulnerable online, however, as they are seen to reinforce patriarchal notions of women being subordinate communicators and reliant on male protection (Silver, 2000:26). In light of this it is interesting that virtual cross-dressing is largely frowned upon by MUD users on account of the way that male users exploit 'female' identities as an avenue to obtaining special privileges from "chivalrous" male users (Reid, 1995:180). This may help to explain high rates of gender swapping in MUVES (outside of the obvious curiosity excuse), with a study of one large Japanese MUD showing that 80% of the participants were men, but only 67% of the characters on display within the MUD adhered to a male gender (Turkle, 1995:212).

Some MUVES have actively sought to dimish gender inequities online by implementing software that enables users to employ non gender-specific language conventions in their interactions (Danet, 1998:141-144).

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This is achieved in a varying range of ways, but—at its simplest—usually involves the substitution of gender specific terms (he/she) with ambiguous determinants such as 'per' (for person). Initiatives such as this lead Danet to contend that women users may utilise synchronous CMC vehicles as a means to the eventual overthrow of gender subordination online (1998:136-137). The perception that females are more adept at synchronous communication techniques and the heightened female presence in online chat rooms may provide significant support for this assertion.

That is, of course, provided that a genuine gender disparity does actually exist online. Dale Spender (1995) believes that there is a communication gap that is serving to subordinate females unto male netizens online, outlining four differing ways in which this gap is being reinforced. Firstly, men are tending to dominate discussions, meaning that they are talking more often and for longer, and that they serve to set the topical agenda of these discussions. Secondly, men are dismissive of women who disagree with them in conversations and will commonly interrupt female speakers/writers in order to correct them and realign the discussion to their point of view. Thirdly, men (according to studies) appear to encompass 70%+ of overall online conversational space on the Internet. Finally, men are far more likely to get aggressive and resort to insults if corrected or denied primacy on the conversational front (Spender, 1995:193-195).

Wallace (1999), by way of contrast, adopts a differing standpoint on this issue, citing a range of studies that suggest the gender disparity online is decidedly less prominent than many academics think. In the first instance, women do not tinge their posts with emoticons to a noticeably greater degree than men posters. This also helps to weaken another stereotype that has men being more inclined to information driven message posting, as distinct from women users who are allegedly seen to prefer posts relating to emotion and opinion. Recent studies to the contrary appear to be showing that men and women users bear remarkable similarity in the content of their message posts online. Thirdly, and most surprisingly, women are displaying an equal tendency toward

flame posting as men, and are also more likely to employ 'opposed-variant' posts (replies to messages that oppose the view of the initial poster) than men who regularly initiate 'align-variant' posts (replies to messages that support the view of the initial poster) (Wallace, 1999:215-217).

On white pride websites, as in the fleshspace white nationalist movement itself, there appears to be considerable contradiction as to the role of women within the organisation. White nationalist ideology invariably positions whites at the vanguard of human progress and the technological successes of Western societies are constantly put forward as evidence of white persons being God's chosen people. This seemingly reverential awe of progress must necessarily be kept in check, however, given that the ramifications of progress have impacted negatively, in the eyes of some white priders, on other key aspects of white existence — Christian religion and the family in particular. It is therefore the unwritten role of white women within the white pride movement to lead the way in responding to and rectifying ongoing social decay.

For white pride devotees, feminists rank only slightly lower than Jews and white liberals on the overall disdain scale. As they see it, feminism has helped in the decline of Western societies by corrupting the innocence of women. This 'corruption' has been achieved through the seduction of white women that has led to their alienation from femininity, distanciation from God, permissive attitudes toward sex, willingness to pander to the false idol of materialism and, most tellingly, contribution to the decline of the nuclear family.[70] The erosion of traditional family forms is of extreme concern to the movement, given that it is identified as the gateway to single mother situations that deprive children of important male role models; gay couple scenarios that decrease moral values and increase the risk of the children becoming homosexual; and interracial pairings that result in further dilution of the recessive white gene (Ferber, 1997).

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[70] All of these factors are highlighted on the 'Women for Aryan Unity' website that can be located at — http://www.stormfront.org/crusader/texts/wau/wau2.html [2001, December 2].

In response to this, white women on sites such as Stormfront.org are urged to rail against feminist beliefs and objectives, as evidenced by the following exchanges:

> **LMcLoughlin:** Then we had the "new Jew" feminist movement which sought to tell parents they could wait until 40 and still have time for kids. They told parents kids NEEDED day care. They alleviated parental GUILT and allowed women to pursue their selfish desires... Now when a woman says she wants to be a stay-at-home mom, she is shunned and debased... When did not raising children become fashionable? Why have we allowed our families to be torn apart? For whites, it is IMPERATIVE that we stop dividing ourselves [off] from our men.
>
> **Sick Of Bigots:** Yeah ladies, Let's go back to the dark ages where we are nothing more than baby making machines! Let's go back to having men tell us that our place is in the kitchen barefoot and pregnant. While we are at it, let's bow down and cower to men whom view us as nothing more than their personal slaves!
>
> **New Order:** There is no cause more noble than protecting, with force if necessary, the integrity of our blond white womanhood. She is the fount of civilization, the Holy Grail. Prize of all nations, beloved of all men, the blonde white woman stands as a symbol of purity and beauty.
>
> **Pure_race:** Not all of us are born gods/goddesses L, and it is immature to base your opinion of someone on how they look... You might not like the 'mix' L, but don't fool yourself, you are a mix as well ☺... Strawberry blond? Seems like you have Celt in you. Maybe you are only fit to breed with people with strawberry blond hair?
>
> **LMcLoughlin:** You [pure_race] have exaggerated what I said and hounded me the way the inter-racial people do. I am TIRED of it. You men are supposed to support and validate, not attack from within.

These snippets are instructive for the way in which they shed light on the confusion and uncertainty that regularly accompanies inter-gender interactions on the Stormfront.org site. In the first instance, white "warrior" women demand respect for their strength, virtue and purpose, but nevertheless find cause to castigate men for not rushing to defend them when their views are challenged. Secondly, women Aryans consistently deride the feminist movement for promoting unabashed sexual promiscuity

in contemporary societies, and yet flirtatious and suggestive banter is rife within the discussion fora. Finally, women on the site commonly post under aggressive warrior-type handles, yet they also hasten to position white women within traditional homemaker roles that are openly submissive to males.

Closing thoughts

For all the talk of cyberspace entailing a bold new electronic frontier to which people can retreat in sanctuary from cultural constraints; it would appear that it also serves equally as well as a space in which individuals can embrace the enabling elements of their life and share in them with others. Stacy Horn offers a beautiful summation of the primacy of identity traits and stimulants to Internet users when she writes:

> we can't leave ourselves behind when we get online.
> Even when someone is just playing around or in disguise,
> something true is revealed, it is never completely
> invented. I've never met someone who was faking it who
> wasn't still disclosing something. People are incredibly
> tenacious when it comes to their personalities.   If
> anything, people open up more (1998:6).

There are people who are indeed tenacious when it comes to their sense of self. Just as certain individuals take enormous pride in small material objects that mean little to others, purely because they are *theirs*, so to do certain individuals place great stock in the protection and preservation of identities that are *theirs* and theirs alone*.* Even those aspects of our selves that we find somewhat unpleasant are difficult to abandon entirely as they remind us of the struggles we have endured in reaching this particular point in our life history. On top of this, they also play a part in directing the course of the forthcoming acts in the Goffman-like reality play that is our everyday existence. My studies show that it is advisable that we approach talk of discarded and freshly invented Internet identities with considerable caution. For at this stage, more extensive research is clearly needed to prove that such identity constructs are anything other than

stress relieving incursions into MUVE worlds by creative individuals in search of leisure and play.

CHAPTER

4

Appraising Community: Clarifying a contested concept

Introducing community

What is community? Few questions could be so simple to ask, yet complex to answer. From a sociological perspective, at least, it is encouraging to see that it is once more a question considered worthy of concerted intellectual debate in academic circles. For many decades during the twentieth century this was not the case as the concept of community was overlooked in social policy and political debate in favour of the more prominent concepts of family and state. Given the greater obvious visibility apparent in the latter concepts, it is hardly surprising that they should have proved more successful at raising and maintaining researcher interest. This scenario has been discouraging enough for the sphere of community research, but of greater concern has been the tendency for the concepts of family and state to misdirect investigations into community, rather than overshadow them. This is to argue that in recent times the community debate has found itself unnecessarily clouded by the attempts of some social scientists to overtly extend or restrict dimensions of the concept by making it practically interchangeable with the complementary, but nevertheless separate, concepts of society and family (Stacey, 1974:14).

In essence, these bygone attempts to, consciously or otherwise, obfuscate, simplify or diminish the dimensions of the community concept

were a predictable response to academic uncertainty over a term that has historically been "notoriously vague and indefinite" (Kautz, 1995:2). Such uncertainty was underscored by the post-war favouring of structural-functionalist models of social inquiry. These models served to politically legitimate notions of family and state as distinct from community, which was too elastic, and therefore contested, to fit neatly into a consensus view of harmonious society.

It is somewhat ironic then that political machinations have resulted in a renewed interest in the concept of community in recent years. In the first instance, this political reinvigoration has occurred as a direct consequence of the ongoing struggle between liberal and communitarian ideologies that arose in the early 1980s as a response to the Reaganist and Thatcherite policies of the time (Etzioni, 1993; Kautz, 1995; Newman & de Zoysa, 1997; Watson, 1999). This development will be elaborated upon further in the sub-section 'Community as a political sphere' that appears at a later stage of this chapter. In the second instance, interest in the community concept has been rekindled due to the highly politicised nature of the term and the growing trend of groups and individuals choosing to employ it as a means of establishing or reaffirming their hegemony over others (Watson, 1997). The political potency attached to the community moniker should be foremost in the minds of social scientists engaged in explication of the terrain and it is an aspect of the debate that will be revisited throughout this piece of writing.

Political aspects aside, the other major factor that has brought the community concept back into the intellectual limelight has been the exponential growth of cyberspace over the latter stages of the twentieth century. Cyberspace exists predominantly as an information and communications network. This means that regardless of its numerous subsidiary functions its primary role in contemporary society has been to stimulate and facilitate human interaction on a broad scale. When this statement is assessed in conjunction with the initial meaning of the word

community and its unambiguous association with human communication[71], the reason for cyberspace's profound contribution to the rejuvenated debate over community becomes clear.

Interestingly, the conflict between liberals and communitarians over fleshspace communities has found a mirror in the arguments among computopians and computropians over virtual communities. Both sets of combatants can be seen to share an interest in notions of community with a specific focus on how the concept can best meet the needs of individuals at the micro-level. Computopian ideals are commonly found in the press releases of politicians, the glossy advertisements of global corporations (particularly those implicitly linked to computerised technology), infotainment magazines (e.g. *Wired*) and in the writings of social commentators who champion the impact of computerised technology on the greater human population (Dyson, 1997; Horn, 1998; Rheingold, 1993; Whittle, 1997). Conversely, computropian sentiments invariably arise from many conventional Christian groups, organisations and campaigners concerned with environmental matters, and social commentators who are extremely critical of cyberspace's impact (Brown, 1997; Postman, 1992; Slouka, 1995; Stoll, 1995).

From the above discussion it can be seen that any suggestions of an Internet inspired 'community of the future' need to be approached with considerable caution. With this in mind it is necessary for such a claim to be dissected and analysed acutely. As such, before any discussion can take place on the reshaping of communities, it is imperative that the concept of community itself be explored in greater depth. A considerable portion of this chapter will be devoted to this task, wherein a four-layered outline of the community concept will be depicted in preparation for the empirical observations that follow. It is hoped that this multi-layered design will flesh-out the concept in sufficient detail, finding something of a middle ground between Kenny's (1994) intuitive, albeit restrictive, dual

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[71] The word community stems from the word *communicare*, as does the word *communis* (to share material goods or ideas, meanings, information), the term from which *communication* is derived. See - Bouissac (1998:132) and Williams (1983:75-76).

faceted definition of the term and Hillery's (1955) comprehensive, but decidedly laborious, ninety-five tiered treatise on the subject.

Community as geographical entity

The notion of community as geographical entity is one of the oldest and most commonly utilised explanations of the concept (Bell & Newby, 1974; Bender, 1978; Frankenberg, 1994; French, 1969; Kenny, 1994; Minar & Greer, 1969; Poplin, 1972; Sanders, 1966; Stein, 1960; Warren, 1972; Wild, 1981; Williams, 1983). This is perhaps the easiest way in which to define a community due to the relatively clear existence of arbitrary perimeters and parameters. Yet it is probably also the most fragile means of designation in that it weakens the import of the concept by privileging inanimate elements over the inherent interactions and relationships that uniquely characterise them. In spite of this, the geographical explanation maintains solid contemporary currency on largely socio-economic grounds, wherein governments and corporations employ census and surveys to target policy and product initiatives around quantitatively established "communities of need". In this way, current day geographically-based interpretations of community serve to further dehumanise a concept that, for all intents and purposes, undervalued the significance of the individual in the construction of community from the very beginning.

Recent interpretations of community prefer to stress the emotive and psychological aspects of the concept, whereas geographically-based explanations of the term presuppose the existence of physical structure and are easily attuned to studies that involve empirical observation. At a basic level, this approach defines "community as a geography or territory, that is, a finite and bounded physical location" (Wild, 1981:14). As well as this, the geographical approach also gives understated credence to peripheral aspects such as landscape and available resources.

To a large extent the significance of landscape and resources to bounded communities can be seen to be self-reinforcing. Communities, regardless of type, necessarily involve the presence (in some shape or form) of a group dynamic. In the normal scheme of things, human group

dynamics generally congregate around landscapes that are easily assessable and hospitable to comfortable and convenient living (Poplin, 1972:10). As humans gather in these places of common suitability, cultural resources and institutions arise in tandem to furnish the needs of the growing group dynamic.

In the words of Warren, "the larger the cluster of people, the more numerous and varied the institutional services in the area" (1972:22). As the resources develop in a particular region so does the surrounding population inevitably expand, as others encouraged by the facilities on offer, relocate to the area. Extending out from this it is not uncommon for residents of a region to increase their affiliation with a particular geographical province through reshaping and renovating it to suit personal taste (Poplin, 1972:11). Such underlying motives and stimulants are unlikely to register with most site-dependent quantitative studies into community, but they clearly support assertions that the community concept cannot be reducible to sterile notions of place and boundary.

Gary Marx (1997) outlines the manner in which technological innovations are prompting societal institutions and groups to transgress and redefine the borders that have previously restricted their peculiar modes of being. According to Marx, this redefinition is affecting a variety of personal and societal borders, which he describes as being four-fold in nature. Firstly, the globalisation of economic and market forces is eroding physical, spatial and geographical borders, resulting in the subsequent decline and fragmentation (in certain European, Russian and African areas) of the traditional 'nation' state. This decline in the fixity of place on a global scale has also been reflected at local levels, with innovations such as: telecommuting, modems, mobile phones, and fax machines leading to the widespread dispersal of populations (between cities and rural areas) and the accompanying breakdown of traditional home/workplace distinctions (Marx, 1997:485-486).

Secondly, the borders of senses and perception are being constantly revised and expanded at both a societal and individual level. In this instance, Marx is talking of "a cognitive or experiential border between the known and the unknown, or the experienced and what can only be

imagined". Thirdly, the rapid advancement of information and communication technologies has impacted markedly on long-standing forms of temporal borders. Time has duly ceased to be a problematic issue as news can be related as it happens, individuals can converse with one another simultaneously regardless of location, and events can be recorded (by electronic means) conveniently and efficiently. Finally, and most importantly, the borders of the body and the self are no longer the sole preserve of the individual. Some governments, social institutions and large corporations accumulate vast computer databases that profile the key details and personal information of often-unwary individuals. A corresponding growth of psychiatric services and rapid advancements in medical technology has also allowed some individuals to change faulty or undesirable body parts and thought processes (1997:487-491).

In short, spatial and physical borders are breaking down en masse, but community is not necessarily eroding with them. The perception that diminishing boundaries are leading to diminishing communities is a contemporary manifestation of nineteenth century sociological writings that all but dismissed community as a traditional (agrarian) entity made extinct through the "disruption of communal life" by industrialisation and urbanisation (Bender, 1978:15-16; Lyon, 1987:13-14). The recent onset of cyberspace and the fervent debate over virtual communities has thus been particularly opportune in providing a modern example of community's ability to transcend both time and place. While geographical-based interpretations of community were crucial in that they "helped to launch it [community] on its career"; their days of dominating discourse on the concept are over (Elias, 1974:x).

Community as a space for interaction

Community as a space for interaction is also a dominant strand of thought within the field of community research (Bell & Newby, 1974; Bender, 1978; Giddens, 1990; Kenny, 1994; Lyon, 1987; Minar & Greer, 1969; Poplin, 1972; Sanders, 1966; Tönnies, 1974; Warren, 1972; Wild, 1981). This perspective deals implicitly with the notion of *association,* itself an indistinct term of reference in community studies. Association is

most commonly known for the manner in which it was applied by Ferdinand Tönnies (1974) in his celebrated early work on *gemeinschaft* (community) and *gesellschaft* (society). Tönnies employed association in a dualistic fashion, on one level referring to it as encompassing the peculiar relationships and actions that both characterise and result from everyday instances of human interaction (1974:37). This explanation appears to use association as something that modifies human behaviour, but that nevertheless is in some way equally attributable to each concept. On a secondary level, however, some social commentators have used the term to firmly differentiate between community and society, ensuring that association only relates to the latter concept. In this way, the community-association relationship has been favoured as a means through which contemporary Western societies could "return to an earlier stage in the development of societies where life was simpler and appeared to possess all those desirable qualities that are missed in the present" (Elias, 1974:xi). This overt romanticism would effectively banish Tönnies from the intellectual landscape during the halcyon days of structural-functionalism (circa 1950s & 60s).[72] Yet, ironically, it is the romantic attraction of community that keeps the concept fresh and desirable in the public mind.

Tönnies ideas on community were gratefully received by a cross-section of audiences of the day, but Elias suggests that this may have had more to do with the timing of the publication than its contents. This was due to a backlash against industrialisation and technological progress and showed that the romanticising of community was as much reflected, as it was promoted by social commentators (Elias, 1974:xiii). In this way, romanticised views on community serve the understated purpose of providing individuals with a source of nostalgia and comfort in the face of uncertain times. This may go some way to explaining the surge in community research and writings that occurred (most prominently in America) during the prosperous, but anxiety-riddled post-war decades of the 1950s and 1960s.

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[72] This is not to suggest that Tönnies' ideas were entirely disregarded at this time. Talcott Parsons derived his "pattern variables" formulae from elements of the gemeinschaft/gesellshaft typology. See - (Bender, 1978:21) for more on this.

Foremost among these writings were the works of American and British sociologists (Frankenburg, 1994; Stein, 1960; Warren, 1972) eager to explicate the broad community concept by way of focused case studies that firmly aligned community to tighter subsidiary notions of town and suburb. The influence of such studies was helped in no small part by concurrent social developments that placed the 'suburb' at the hub of rhetoric pertaining to idealised notions of the 'Great American dream':

> In this historical context, neglect of the past by present-day adolescents and repudiation of the past by their parents becomes intelligible. More so than ever before, energies have been thrust into creating a worldly paradise based on material acquisition. This version of the American Dream is embodied with greatest clarity in the prosperous suburb and can therefore be studied most conveniently in that setting (Stein, 1960:282).

To this end, the suburb obtained something of a mythical status, proffering the opportunity for individuals to find a comfortable haven from inner-city crime and ascension to a "hyperactive social life" revolving around regular interactions with similar others (Berger, 1974:230-231). From the 1930s onwards the suburb became symbolic of twentieth-century American living and loomed large in the domestic consciousness as the new American 'frontier' (Donaldson, 1969:147-171). The impact that it would have on the American people would prove even more pronounced than the fabled Western frontier of the previous century, and the disparity between both settings could scarcely be more marked. Just as the nineteenth-century West had appealed to potential settlers on account of its sense of mystery and guarantee of privacy, so too did the new vogue suburb with its alternative emphasis on stability and safety in numbers. These differences aside, the two settings did share one very significant commonality with one another — an abundance of available and (relatively) affordable land on which new family units and aspiring couples could realise an impressive quality of life (Thorns, 1973:66). In theory, at least, the suburb appeared likely to stimulate new and profound forms of community, but close proximity did not necessarily result in close

relationships, hence the essential flaw in geographically orientated notions of community.[73]

With regard to 'association' then it is the meaning of the term as evidenced in recent media portrayals of the term, more than Tönnies' explanation that carries greater currency in present day debate over community. Susan Kenny gave voice to this revised perspective of association when writing:

> The first notion of community is based on reflections of differences in kinds of human association… Community comprised (of) direct, personal forms of human association, formulated around notions of sharing, mutual commitment, common interests and a sense of belonging (1994:2).

In its modern incantation, association has evolved from entailing human interaction at an indifferent and distant level, to encompassing human interaction of a personal and mutually beneficial nature. As such, association is no longer representative of Tönnies' antithesis to community, but rather it is now evocative of the late writer's much desired model of community itself.

The ambiguity apparent in the term association means that it is awkward to employ it (on its own) as a description/definition of community. Neither is the association cause helped by the unconscious neglect it has for the structural elements that are integral to human organisation and purpose.[74] This is to argue that community in its association guise encompasses significantly more than the mere arranging of human actors into cliques in accordance with their mutually shared likes and interests.

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[73] This is evidenced by Gans' findings from his in-depth study of the Levittown suburb. These findings disputed the (then) common city planner assertion that physical components of community were the key determinants of community development and maintenance; suggesting instead that community ties almost invariably formed around commonly shared aspirations and class/cultural indicators (1967:289).

[74] This is largely a semantic matter, but Kenny's views on association tend to focus noticeably on the positive aspects of community that are achieved when the individual is most comfortable with his/her group dynamic and when his/her interactions within the group are at their most personally rewarding and favourable. To some extent, community is being romanticised here also. Community cannot be made reducible to positive outcomes or extraordinary instances of group interaction only, it must be accountable for the less favourable outcomes and everyday interrelations as well.

In real terms it also involves the seemingly mundane processes of everyday human interaction, with all its highs and lows and the necessary interplay with others that may not share your particular interests or views of the world. For community is as much about *exclusion* as it is about *inclusion*[75], thus association needs to take into account the crucial nature of all interactions as media for rounding one's own view of community, reshaping this view to keep it abreast of evolving circumstances, and setting the parameters for community by identifying those with whom the individual has little in common.

Notions of inclusion and exclusion as they pertain to community groupings figured conspicuously in the works of several classical sociologists. Georg Simmel, by way of example, wrote of the importance of elements of association as a means by which smaller community forms could be distinguished from the larger "mass" of society.[76] Simmel, while not specifically referring to the term 'community in these writings, was nevertheless an early pioneer of the association model of the concept. As he saw it, humans were compelled to interact with one another and that this interaction was necessarily organised around symbiotic dependencies between superordinates and subordinates (Frisby, 1984:117; Ritzer, 1996:161). As such, association was also a key vehicle through which the individual came to be embedded within various forms of social structure, wherein the framework of superordinate and subordinate behaviours was intrinsically located. At this point, however, Simmel's ideas on agency and structure veer considerably from those espoused later by Giddens. While the idea of a two-way relationship between the individual and social institutions would become central to structuration theory, Simmel could only envisage a mono-directional connection between the two; with

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[75] Traditional approaches to community unerringly refer to communities as entities that incorporate a class structure that is inclusive of practically all inhabitants. In reality, however, the larger the mass the more exclusive communities tend to become. See Simpson (1974:315-316) for a broader explication of this theme.
[76] Simmel would be an influence on Giddens work on account of his keenness for seeking broader associations between individuals and the larger society (Frisby, 1984:49-50 & 1992:8; Ritzer, 1996:157).

individuals helping to form structures, but being helpless to impact upon them from that point onward (Ritzer, 1996:159).

Simmel is important to this thesis in that he was one of the first key thinkers to lucidly articulate the idea that larger groupings within society (communities, by way of example) were implicitly mediated by—and emerged out of— lower tier formations, that took their starting point at the individual (Ritzer, 1996:157).[77] For Simmel, societal groupings (communities) will generally run on relatively simple and clearly articulated guidelines, given that it is imperative that group objectives are "accessible even to the lowest and most primitive among them" (Wolff, 1950:93). This is in keeping with the inclusive dimensions of community and the common human need to forge interactive relationships with like-minded people who share one's worldview. It is also indicative of the historically developed need for humans to maintain hierarchical divisions, even in social groupings where the differences between members are decidedly minimal.

By way of contrast, the need for communities to be exclusive entities stems from the desire of inclusive groupings to viably compete with those social groupings whose inherent worldview deviates markedly in tone. It is this idea that constitutes a cornerstone in Simmel's broader platform of conflict sociology where group exclusivity is realised in ongoing competition that incorporates the following three factors. Firstly, the guiding elements of a particular group are centralised so as to unite the group in adverse situations, and clearly defined so that competing groups can easily isolate possible bargaining points should inter-group negotiation be possible or desirable (Turner et al. 1989:265). Secondly, competition between groups leads to heightened levels of solidarity within groups as a response to the threat posed from rival groups, and also results in increased levels of intolerance for the individuals within these rival groups (Turner et al. 1989:265-266). Finally, competition between groups can lead to situations where rival communities form 'coalitions' with one

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[77] Interestingly enough, Simmel also had ideas on identity that would appear to constitute precursors on Goffman's notion of 'roles'. He saw individuals as being organised into 'types' based predominantly on their relationship to the interactional structure (to provide

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another as a means of improving their broader powerbase (Turner et al. 1989:266-267).

Simmel's ideas on competition and conflict are particularly pertinent to communities, such as right wing and white power groups that form in the present day around nationalist concerns. According to Simmel, 'radical' communities must necessarily remain small in order to successfully maintain and promote radical objectives (Wolff, 1950:94-95). This can cause considerable angst, however, when such small groupings are linked together with others in order to form political coalitions of the type described above. White pride groups have been largely segregated from one another by physical distance for the best part of a century, but this tyranny of distance has recently been overcome as a result of information communication developments. The miles between them may have eroded, but the policy differences accrued through years of separate activity remain steadfastly in place, making the construction of a united white nationalist movement a near impossibility.

Max Weber also addressed the community issue, although the depth and significance of his views on the concept are understandably overlooked on account of his more pressing interest in matters of religion, economy and bureaucracy. For Weber, communities, which he referred to as 'communal relationships', were predicated upon the "subjective feeling of [interacting individuals], whether affectual or traditional, that they belong together" (1978:40). This is clear illumination of Weber's favouring of an "association" model of community, a fact that is only further reinforced by his decision to refer to such social relationships as being "associative" in tone. Weber also alludes to the inclusive and exclusive nature of communities in writing that communal relationships are nominally open to anybody wishing to join, but often closed to anyone who is unlikely to provide the group with goods, services, or ideas that will improve and/or support its overall situation (Weber, 1978:43).

Other writers have also chosen to locate notions of association within a broader terminological framework. Poplin (1972) provides an example

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Internet examples, moderators and netizens) and their orientation to the world at large

of this when he refers to the concept of 'community as a unit of social organisation'. In doing this he allows scope to talk of association as a structural dualism. On the one hand, he is able to mirror the views of Kenny (1999) and Wild (1981) by speaking of community as a 'social group', that is a body of members with shared interests and mutual obligations and expectations in relation to prescribed roles and set norms within the group (1972:13). Outside of this, he can also speak of community as a 'network of interaction', which recognises the necessary everyday interactions between individuals, groups and institutions that serve to isolate, establish and reinforce the dimensions of the community in question (1972:16-17).

Community as political sphere

Community as political sphere pertains specifically to the power relationships encapsulated in the everyday relationships and interactions that underline conventional community processes. It was the political aspect of human interrelations that played a major role in Tönnies' decision to construct the notion of association in opposition to his view of community. As Tönnies saw it, all persons were "alike in one respect: they want the means or the power which guarantees them, through their very use, as much of the pleasures as they desire" (1974:146). For Tönnies, such motives were so maligned as to be incompatible with his romanticised take on community. This view, however, only served to obfuscate the fact that political power plays are often formulated at the micro and meso levels of society and therefore cannot be isolated from the community process, as appealing as this ideological separation may appear. Having had the opportunity to view the terrain in retrospect, Giddens' structuration approach to the concept is far more useful in that it accepts Tönnies' premise of 'individual political will', but explains it as

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(for example, trolls & antagonists). See Ritzer (1996:158) for more on this.

something that can be (and is) challenged and mediated by acting selves supported by constraining and enabling forms of institutional apparatus.[78]

Irwin Sanders, writing under the banner of 'community as allocation of power', expressed power relations within communities as having three atypical faces: reputational, positional and decisional (1966:442-443). With regard to reputational modes of power, members arise to positions of privilege within group dynamics through the references of community members who respect their potential for progress and leadership. By way of contrast, positional modes of power are designated through a community member arising to a position of respect and authority through prescribed institutional processes (promotion, long-term involvement in a particular field, and so forth) that are not explicitly dependent on finding favour with the rank and file members of the greater group dynamic. Decisional modes of power, conversely, are reliant on individuals comprehending the processes by which decisions are institutionally arrived at and using this understanding as a means of informing and consolidating their own interactions within the community.

This line of thought is also expanded upon by Warren, who neatly summarises the power perspective into a pithy statement that reads as follows:

> [the growth of community power-structure analysis] has been a means of coming to grips with the observable fact that certain individuals in the community exercise much more influence on what goes on than do others (1972:40).

This approach to power mechanisms within communities was particularly widespread in community research circles prior to the 1980s. It is an approach that still has present day applications, although over the past fifteen years discussions on power structures in community studies have, by and large, switched tack to assess the concept in terms of the scope

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[78] It is here that undertones of 'conflict theory' arise, but Giddens prefers to see such contestations of will as examples of *contradiction.* Contradiction being the "opposition of structural principles, such that each depends upon the other and yet negates the other; (and also the) perverse consequences associated with such circumstances." Expressed another way, power plays within communities are reliant on knowledge of—and access to—particular resources and rules apparent in specific institutional structures. Paradoxically, however, such resources and rules can also be utilised by others to restrict

and facilities available for individuals to utilise community as a means of social empowerment. Kenny (1999:152-153) talks of community empowerment as a concept that is realised when hitherto subordinate groups in society reach a heightened awareness of their tenuous status and use this understanding as a springboard to increased levels of democratic participation within the community. Empowerment overlaps with ideological standpoints on community, but cannot prove to be of any practical value unless disadvantaged groups have the courage and confidence to fight for their own affairs.

Kenny's perspective is reiterated and expanded upon by Lynn (1997), who writes of community as being either a 'vehicle' or a 'problem' depending on the social condition and outlook of its members. A community can serve as a vehicle of change if its members participate actively in the group's actions, or if it contains members that hold significant power in a wider society setting. Conversely, community can also be seen as a problem if its constituents experience "loss of control over the decisions affecting it, or loss of identification [with the community], leading to apathy or socially dysfunctional behaviour" (Lynn, 1997:330).

Lynn's ideas provide an ideal point of entry into the communitarian/liberalism debate that has monopolised discussion on community power in recent years. During this time, struggles over community (particularly in the USA) have been reducible to contests between parties wanting to preserve traditional family and religious values, and parties wanting to free citizens from the restrictions that are alleged to exist in such traditional communities (Kautz, 1995:5). Once again the binary dualisms that are so characteristic of broader community studies terrain come into play. Outside of this, debate over community appears to agree on only two points; that community is "essential to the smooth functioning of civil society and that it is intangible… an idea, a belief, or set of values" (Champlin, 1997). From this point on, however, there is little that liberals and communitarians *seem* to have in common on the topic.

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or moderate these power plays. See - (Giddens, 1984:373) for more on this.

A considerable portion of the contemporary dissension surrounding the concept of community stems directly from the widely held Western predilection for liberalism. A central tenet of this thought surrounds the view that progress is invariably to the good of humankind and that "history is a more or less continuous emancipation of men (sic) from despotism and evil" (Nisbet, 1970:214). Communitarians, on the other hand, indulge a mindset that is essentially polar to liberal ideology; it is a way of thinking that is—at least in part—nostalgic for past ways of being and decidedly romantic in tone. Newman & de Zoysa summarise the ideological cornerstone of communitarian thinking in writing that:

> The movement deplores the decline of the family and of community life, it condemns isolation and the loss of a clear faith, while resolutely setting its face against the immorality that is blamed for the decline in public morale (1997:1).

Thus, in so far as the communitarians are concerned, progress has not brought humankind emancipation, but rather it has led to (Western) community decay through the onset of: capitalist greed, pornography, homosexuality, flexible attitudes to parenting, rampant unemployment and an ever worsening drug crisis.

For their part, those of the liberal faith would not necessarily be eager to openly support any of the aforementioned elements (capitalism excepted), although they are steadfast in supporting the basic human right to participate in them. The notion of individualism is seminal to liberal ideology, resulting in unabashed support for "freedom of membership in groups of all sorts, freedom of belief and speech, even freedom of action in any area that did not obviously hurt another" (Robertson, 1986:187). When it comes to community the concept is generally incorporated into liberal thought via 'individualisation', which occurs through the pursuit and creation of social capital[79] (Champlin, 1997).

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[79] "The idea of social capital begins from an interest in people's ability to associate with each other. It refers to features of social organisation, such as trust, reciprocity, norms and networks that increase a society's productive potential. Social capital facilitates coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit." Kenny (1999:63-64).

The threat of war or dispute promotes community formation wherein humans "seek allies because they have enemies" (Kautz, 1995:32). The tone of these larger allied communities is then often forged in reaction to the opposition, more than in overt agreement with the other group members. For liberals, community provides a means of ensuring peace and order in their world, the cost of which is paid by their public moderation of activities and opinions[80] (Kautz, 1995:43). Such enforced moderation is indeed precarious, however, given the classical liberal belief that humans "constitute our [own political] communities; they do not constitute us" (Kautz, 1995:32). Liberals are convinced that community in the ideal sense is a purely private entity and thus can only be hindered by unwanted and unnecessary state involvement in its processes (Champlin, 1997).

From the above discussion it is difficult to conceive of the two warring parties finding any common ground in the debate. Bradley Watson (1999) is one social commentator who is willing to argue that communitarianism is more favourably inclined towards liberal views than its devotees would care to admit. As he sees it, communitarians are happy enough to let individuals dictate for themselves in some cases, but nevertheless demand state intervention into communities in others. This raises two very pertinent questions as to how accommodating society should be in acquiescing to communitarian "demands" over community development and policing. Firstly, "which communities are worthy of special protection against the universal norms of liberal neutrality?" And secondly, "should any self-styled group be able to define itself as a community?" (Watson, 1999). Both of these questions will carry particular aptness as social commentators continue to explore the contentious realm of virtual community in ever growing numbers.

The online world would appear to represent fertile ground on which communitarians could continue their push for "changes in values, habits, and public policies that will allow us [communitarians] to do for society

what the environmental movement seeks to do for nature: to safeguard and enhance our future" (Etzioni, 1993:3). They will need to markedly alter their approach to impress Watson, however, as he is very critical of key proponents (such as Etzioni) of communitarianism. Watson's criticism relates implicitly to his assertion that communitarian spokespersons are bereft of soundly articulated or clearly delineated theory, espousing instead an incoherent jumble of reactionary grievances toward alleged liberal excesses (Watson, 1999). Kautz is more accepting of communitarian values though, contending that:

> the task of contemporary partisans of community is to constitute a political order that can satisfy the powerful human longing for unstinting attachments to other human beings, among the other moral advantages of community, and yet accommodate citizens who "have learned" from liberalism, "to think of themselves as individuals" (1995:21).

The Internet is clearly capable of facilitating both of these specified tasks and much contemporary political activism will necessarily be formulated in community groupings at the meso-level. In spite of this, it is nonetheless apparent that cyberspace can also act as a bridging agent between the proactive (but essentially impotent) individual at the micro-level and the decreasingly autonomous state ruling bodies at the macro-level.

Idealised and imagined communities

Idealised and imagined forms of community cut across several other spheres of the community territory, not the least of which is 'community as political sphere'. On a simple level it stands to reason that anything pertaining to political process must, by definition, be underscored by a governing ideology no matter how loosely articulated. The main barrier that separates these two strands of community thinking is that 'community as political sphere' presupposes the obligatory implementation of participatory action on behalf of community members, whereas idealised

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[80] This means simply that aspects of contemporary society, such as public welfare, are endured with relative silence by liberals as a means of maintaining public goodwill and security of state.

and imagined forms of community are perfectly capable of existing in theoretical format only.

Idealised and imagined forms of community lack the research profile of most other strands of community thought, yet several key writers cover it in their work (Anderson, 1991; Cohen, 1985; Turner, 1967; Wild, 1981). Anderson's interpretation is by far the best known of the four, although he has written it largely with the notion of nationalism in mind. This brings two aspects of the community concept firmly into focus. On the one hand, if Anderson is to be taken seriously as a guide, then community must be interpreted as entailing a vital preliminary stage in the eventual development of nationalist sentiment. Following on from this, if membership of a nation-state has, as Anderson suggests, become dependent on individuals "imagining" commonalities with fellow citizens (thus severely downgrading the physical manifestations apparent in conceptions of community and nationalism) then surely the plausibility of *virtual* communities is more readily acceptable than many social scientists would care to admit.

If Anderson's musings lean heavily toward the nationalism end of the spectrum, one need only turn to Wild in order to relocate the discussion back in the community sphere. According to Wild , community as ideology is one of the most intriguing of all community categories, existing "as an expression of what should be rather than what is" (1981:14). This definition bears some similarities to Anderson's, although Wild's refers unambiguously to structural and institutional concerns, whilst Anderson alludes mainly to individual thoughts and actions.

Idealised and imagined forms of community, particularly as expressed by Wild, can also stand accused of romanticising notions of community in that most imaginings of what community *could be* are generally predicated on wistful recollections of what community allegedly *was.* Community in this guise also takes a 'back to the future' approach to the community concept, although it is less concerned with romanticising past ways of being as it is with defending past (and present) ways of being from enforced extinction (Cohen, 1985:104).

It is at this point that aspects of symbolism become crucial to individuals whose communities are under threat from larger, dominant cultures. Rituals and festivals are indicative of primary ways by which beleaguered cultural groups attempt to preserve and transmit elements of community in defiance of mounting global pressures. Anthropologist Victor Turner has conducted deep research into rituals and festivals and provides ample explanation of their crucial significance to contested notions of culture and community. Ritual, as Turner sees it, is a *transformative* procedure, which subtly reshapes the role and place of individuals within a wider social network, whilst simultaneously legitimising the network in question and the individual's participation in it (Turner, 1967:95). Festival, while often confused with ritual, fulfils a *confirmative* role within a culture, giving visual representation to cherished and idealised functions of the community to which the festival pertains, once more legitimising the group dynamic through shared involvement and performance (Turner, 1967:95).

Rituals and festivals provide evidence of the ways in which groups can confirm and reaffirm inherent notions of community identity on a semi-regular or cyclical basis. In some circumstances, however, it becomes imperative that a group dynamic can have an ongoing visual and spiritual referent(s) on which to base its sense of shared community heritage. To a certain extent, this process can be facilitated through storytelling and the regular relating of historical anecdotes from generation to generation. The use of symbols is another avenue that groups can take in order to satisfy this objective. A symbol is most conveniently defined as "any gesture, artefact, sign or concept which stands for, signifies or expresses something else" (Abercrombie et al. 1994:421). This is really only part of the equation, however, as Cohen illustrates in writing that:

> Symbols, then, do more than simply stand for or represent something else. Indeed, if that was all they did, they would be redundant. They also allow those who employ them to supply part of their meaning… Community is just such a boundary-expressing symbol. As a symbol, it is held in common by its members; but its meaning varies with its members' unique orientations to it. In the face of this variability of meaning, the consciousness of

community has to be kept alive through manipulation of its symbols (1985:14-15).

The use of symbols as a means of preserving and transmitting community identity is exemplified in the activities and movements of white nationalist movements on a global scale. This is especially true of white pride groups online and will be talked about in greater detail in the following chapter.

Community as a form of ideology can also be viewed as a temporal bridging agent although this is perhaps the least commonly articulated form of ideological community. This extension of community thought overlaps with the symbolic expressions of the concept outlined above and is explained succinctly by Arensberg & Kimball when they write of how:

> Communities, animals and human, exist over time. Each one of several stages of an individual's life span is represented in its membership at any one point in time. But the community extends backward and forward in time beyond the life history of any one individual. The biological expression of this transgenerational quality is generalized in the concept 'gene pool'. Its cultural expression is contained within the knowledge and behaviour generalized in customs, institutions, and values. Temporal succession, however, presents no smooth, unvarying pattern. The rhythms and periodicities of individual group move within recurring cycles of altering relationships and the processes of natural history (1974:340-341).

It is these "altering relationships and processes" that are causing angst for subordinate cultures attempting to find a place for their own brand of community in a world that is shifting rapidly towards commonly preferred Western capitalist models. Community as temporal bridging agent is perhaps more effectively applied to group dynamics in a broader historical sense, wherein it relates more closely to matters of transitional *process* than transitional *being.* Ostensibly, the inability of past social scientists to accept the survival capacity of community has stemmed directly from their inability to see it as entailing a continuous process "in the course of which one type of society (transforms) itself into another, and still transforms

itself into another under our very eyes" (Elias, 1974:x).[81] In this way, it is easy for investigators to empirically observe practical changes to a society and to express this as change in toto, without realising that considerable psychocultural residue remains below the surface.

The structuration of community

The structuration of community carries with it overtones of community as a space for human interaction, but the focus here is implicitly on institutional structures within a society, rather than the everyday interactions between group members. It must be stressed that this is not meant to downgrade the import of the everyday interactions, as it is these interactions that simultaneously direct and reproduce institutional processes as they exist within a particular community. It is at this point of the community debate that human agency approaches to the concept break down, as the individual is forced to assess their position and actions from a standpoint that is influenced by unavoidable external factors. Human agency is untenable here as it fails to give adequate recognition to the role of societal institutions in shaping individual interaction, but structural functionalism is equally unacceptable in that it refuses to respect the role of the individual in mediating institutional process and reform.

Where both of these theories fail, structuration theory succeeds in finding the middle ground. It does so largely on account of Giddens' decision to address human actions and institutional structures not as an opposing dualism (as per structural functionalism), but rather as entailing a complementing duality (Browne, 1993:139; Swingewood, 2000:209). It is noticeable that Giddens, in spite of his acceptance of institutional influence, nevertheless favours, however slightly, the acting self (human agent) as being the crucial stimulant in community creation and development (Giddens, 1976: 74). Institutions, as Giddens sees it, are

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[81] This way of thinking is, of course, also indicative of the popularity and longevity of the evolutionist heritage within the social science sphere, with Spencerian theories on 'natural selection' finding continued favour well into the twentieth century (Ritzer, 1996:35).

neither forceful manipulators of human will, nor autonomously functioning vehicles directing human action. Moreover he contends in a manner "reminiscent of Weber, that social institutions and structure have no meaning apart from the actions they embody" (Swingewood, 2000:209).

For the most part, the actions embodied by institutions in contemporary communities serve the vital purpose of enabling or constraining the activities of the acting self, as Cohen alludes to in writing:

> It directly follows from viewing structural constraints as implicated in opportunities for action that they not only limit possibilities for activity and the generation of outcomes *vis-à-vis* individuals, but they also appear to the agent as pre-structured enablements associated with opportunities for action which remain open to them (1989:220).

Expressed most simply, societal institutions proffer *enabling* opportunities to community members through facilitation of required resources and regulation of actions (among community members) so as to permit individuals to negotiate their social world in a secure and effective fashion. At the same time, however, societal institutions can constrain community members by ensuring that they adhere to behaviours and actions that have been normalised and regulated by previous actors.

Warren (1972) also writes of community in terms of its symbiotic relationship with institutional structures. Referring to this type of group dynamic as 'community as shared institutions and values', he finds overlapping links between geographically-based (on a local scale) and interaction modulating communities, with institutional processes and resources serving as the glue that holds each element together:

> the function of making accessible locally the various institutional facilities for daily living needs is, from the ecological standpoint, the chief reason for existence of the community. If these institutional provisions are conceived broadly, they go far beyond the provision of employment opportunities, stores, and personal or professional services. In aggregate, they constitute a total pattern of living, involving the comprehensive organization of behavior on the locality basis (1972:32).

Once again we can see that while notions of place are significant to the concept of community (mainly for ease of identification and empirical investigation), community is nonetheless more accurately related as an (ongoing) experience, of both a physical and psychological nature, more than a *place* (Bender, 1978:6).

The import of structuration theory to discussions on virtual community will be emphasised in the following chapter. In past times, studies into cyberspace have regularly incorporated human agency thought into their investigative frameworks, and these approaches have invariably emphasised the 'enabling' features of CMC participation for newly empowered individuals. There is validity in this line of thinking, but it is also crucial that cyberspace studies devote similar attention to the 'constraining' elements that are implicit in online interactions. Community leaders (moderators) and participants themselves can apply these constraints, as with netiquette and group guidelines, or they can be enforced externally, as evidenced by recent legislation outlawing 'hate' propaganda in virtual environments.

An operational definition of community

This chapter was not meant to encompass the terrain of 'community' in its entirety, nor was it intended to stand as the final word on the concept. Moreover it was intended that this chapter would serve as an investigation into the term community, and the marked variety of ways in which it is defined and interpreted. The early twenty-first century is an interesting time for the study of community, with its gradual return to serious academic debate after having endured "unforgiving critiques" throughout the 1970s & 1980s (Kenny, 1994:2). This reversal of fortune is reinforced by the steady growth of interest in virtual communities and the accompanying need for a plausible working definition of the concept. It is the aim of this sub-section to provide such a definition, and to utilise it as the core problematic on which this study is based.

The definition of community that is employed here will concern itself implicitly with the notions of 'community as a space for human interaction' and 'community as political sphere'. At its most straightforward, this

definition will be explained as *the regular interacting of like-minded individuals for the express purpose of sharing similar interests and/or pursuing common objectives; and the structures and processes through which this interaction is formalised and mediated.*

This definition borrows heavily from Kenny's notion of "community as a form of human association" and Wild's interpretation of "community as a particular kind of human association or relationship irrespective of location." The emphasis upon human association or relationship is seen as integral if the term community is to be clearly distinguished from alternative concepts, such as group, town, suburb, club, and so on. A functioning community can encompass any or all of these entities, but without adequate clarification, none of these entities can accurately be alluded to as forms of community. To express this thought another way, suburbs are often referred to as being communities, even though the majority of residents within suburbs have little if any social interaction with other residents. As a consequence, such residents generally hold few ties to the suburb and are divested of all links to it upon moving to an alternative region. A suburb can, however, be classified as a form of community provided that a significant portion of its population initiate and exchange regular social contact with fellow residents. In this way, a resident will most likely retain ties to the suburb, courtesy of friendships and acquaintances, should they choose to take-up residence elsewhere.

Ostensibly then, the concept of community resides within the spiritual and emotional confines of the individual and exists independently of spatial boundaries, such as site and locale. This interpretation of community is therefore removed from Kenny's alternative perspective of "community as a geographical location or social space (site)" and Wild's similar portrayal of "community as geography or territory." This is not to suggest that the notion of community as site no longer has any validity or use, but rather it is a realisation that site has little relevance to the virtual. This realisation is particularly significant in relation to the choice of structuration theory as the underlying theoretical base for this study. As virtual communities have no firm boundaries, and are not subject to the institutional interference and control that sometimes impacts upon, and

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initiates, embedded communities, they are essentially dependent on human agency for their construction and maintenance.

As a working model, this interpretation of community will be endeavouring to identify evidence from a concerted analysis of the following elements. Firstly, the level and extent of communication between individuals will be assessed as a means of gauging the solidity of, and depth of commitment to, the alleged community. This element will be referred to as the 'regular interaction' variable and, for the most part, will be concerned with supplying quantifiable data on the frequency of instances of interaction among group members.

Secondly, the tendency of group affiliates to pursue and maintain links with other group members (and belief sharers) outside of the confines of the focus group will be ascertained and documented. This aspect of the working definition will be known as the 'external relations' variable and, contrary to its regular interaction counterpart, will contain elements of both quantifiable and qualifiable data. In this instance, the quantifiable aim is to assess the numerical frequency with which the out-of-group exchanges take place; whilst the qualifiable aim is to provide a clearer sense of why the exchanges took place. For example, are these extra-curricular rendezvous for the express purpose of reinforcing the group's beliefs, or do they afford group members the opportunity to share intimate and personal moments with one another?

Thirdly, the degree of reverence that individual group members bestow upon the primary beliefs of the group will be investigated. This factor will be alluded to as the 'ideological solidarity' variable and, given that any analysis of human thought and emotion is almost necessarily of a subjective nature, will concern itself implicitly with the accrual of qualifiable information. This category will be particularly relevant to the scrutiny of White Nationalists, given that these individuals are splintered into a range of affiliated sub-groups in accordance with the degree of commitment that they uphold toward the pursuit of a 'White Israel'. As such, some White Nationalists adopt an aggressive action-orientated political approach to the issue, whilst some prefer a non-violent stance that relies upon the widespread dissemination of their peculiar brand of religious doctrine. By

way of contrast, others are driven less by religious or political leanings and employ White Nationalist ideology as a means of affording structure to their blatantly racist beliefs. Differentiating between individuals on account of their ideological leanings will be an important exercise insomuch as it will offer indications as to the underlying motives that are promoting and sustaining the alleged community. Are the group members primarily maintaining contact with the group on account of their ideological beliefs, or are they merely using their sympathetic status as an excuse for prolonged contact with other individuals regardless of creed?

Finally, an attempt will be made to isolate etiquette guidelines that are inherent to the focus groups. This element will be referred to as the 'identifiable customs' variable and will necessitate the outlining of a list of behavioural conventions that are enforced by the groups in question. In an embedded community, failure to abide by the behavioural conventions that apply to the overall group will result in censure, punishment, or expulsion from participation in the community. This reality also applies to virtual communities, although in cyberspace the etiquette requirements are less numerous and even less well defined. The process of articulating the 'identifiable customs' that are intrinsic to the focus groups will be a crucial act in portraying these groups as carefully structured and legislated *communities*, as opposed to loosely integrated gatherings. The tendency for individuals to appreciate these peculiar behavioural conventions and staunchly adhere to them would also highlight and reinforce this point.

Conclusion

The ensuing chapter shifts emphasis from discussions of community in conventional forms, to addressing the concept of community as it exists online. This chapter combines literature on online communities with empirical observations gleaned from the three-tiered methodological procedure outline in Chapter One. Using this material as a guide, the chapter endeavours to assess the veracity and validity of online forms of community within the working definition framework presented here earlier. The impetus of the chapter is decidedly multi-faceted, although three simple guiding sub-issues serve to instruct the direction of the piece.

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Firstly, there is considerable justification for arguing a case for virtual communities equating to fleshspace communities on account of both sharing a particular style of associative group dynamic. Secondly, the appeal of virtual forms of community to netizens is profound enough to belie computropian assertions that cyberspace is a weak environment for the obtaining and maintaining of firm interpersonal ties. And finally, some thought is given to the ways in which members of online communities reconcile these group dynamics to the conventional strands of community of which they are also a part. The anxiety shown by many group members when the Stormfront.org discussion boards were forcibly shutdown late in the year 2000 exemplified the emotional and psychological significance that netizens can attribute to virtual communities. For such individuals, the collapse of an online community, for whatever reason, could have a telling impact on their particular sense of self and society.

CHAPTER

5

Cyberspace Communities: Virtual or *virtual?*

Politicising Community

> Consider the following question: why argue about an online forum being a community or not? Why does such a debate matter? That is not a cynical question. If we can get to the heart of the answer, we may find the tools with which to resolve the seemingly endless "yes-it-is; no-it-isn't" debate. Is there some power to be had in claiming a word like "community"? (Watson, 1997:102).

This quote was also used in the closing stages of a previous piece of work (Thompson, 2001) in which I addressed the political connotations apparent in contemporary perspectives on community and advocated the need for further investigation into this aspect of the concept. It will be the aim of this chapter to continue the exploration of online community that began in that journal article. The chapter itself will essentially be one of two halves, with the first section focusing purely on the 'technical' aspects apparent in virtual communities and the second part delving more deeply into the less obvious social elements. My guiding belief for this section of the thesis is that cyberspatial communities, in certain contexts, are every bit as viable as the fleshspace communities to which they have come to be seen as inferior.

The main problem with denying legitimacy to online communities lies not in the dimensions of the media itself, but in the difficulties associated with clarifying and ratifying the term community. The previous chapter

highlighted the way in which a community's "validity" is often directly proportionate to the level of socio-political potency engendered in its membership. At this point in time cyberspatial interest and support groups clearly lack the overall weight of numbers, social respectability and political presence to have obtained the firm credibility necessary to wear the 'community' label. In spite of this, many of these online groupings can be seen to be communities in all but name.

With regard to cyberspatial communities it would appear that many commentators have shown a preference for referring to them in keeping with the "insubstantial" version of the term 'virtual'. For some writers, cyberspatial communities are seen to be somewhat suspect on account of their apparent impersonality and lack of physical exchange (McLaughlin et al. 1997:146; Stoll, 1995:43). This alleged deficiency is further compounded for other writers by their belief that cyberspatial communities are limited to trivial exchanges of likes and dislikes with scant regard for the broader social concerns that occupy "real" communities (Miller, 1996:334; Nunes, 1997:171). Willson (1997:159) continues this line of thought in deriding virtual communities as vehicles that serve to detach individuals from their "political and social responsibilities" in fleshspace settings. The list of negative views toward the virtual community concept is too large to exhaust here, but I would like to introduce two of the more prominent ones. Firstly (and this is also endemic to community explorations in general), they are tending to write of community as if it were an entity that is singular and monolithic in its dimensions. This is misleading in the sense that most individuals would not consider themselves to be part of a *community*, but rather they would see themselves as having largely unspoken membership of several *communities*. To talk of community as entailing a singular platform from which individual human actors conduct their multifarious social interactions is to inadvertently conflate the term with the related concept of society.

Such errant conflation is also common to contemporary political figures, many of whom regularly speak of community in impossibly broad and abstract terms, enabling them to allude to an entity that is paradoxically nowhere and yet everywhere simultaneously. Thus, when

Australian Prime Minister John Howard refers to the 'Australian community' he is ostensibly making a sweeping statement about the Australian people as a whole — the Australian society.[82] The monolithic concept of society conflates a range of elements into its overall makeup, including: social communities, geographical terrain, political ideology, common currency, and a clearly articulated legal system. The extent of its overall scope and diversity of its integral functions ensure that society should never be mistaken for the concept of community and vice-versa. Aside from this, the concept of society is removed from its community counterpart on account of its perceived inclusiveness. Communities, be they virtual or otherwise, are necessarily exclusive entities and this is a key point that will be explored further at a later stage of this chapter.

On a secondary level cyberspatial scholars have shown a disturbing tendency for demeaning the virtual community cause by focusing too heavily on technical aspects of the CMC medium at the expense of the social ones, as Slevin lucidly articulates in arguing that:

> We cannot properly acknowledge the opportunity for new modes of relationship if we focus primarily on the attributes of the technical medium while ignoring the structured social relations and contexts within which information and other symbolic content are produced and received (2000:113).

This is not to contend that the technical aspects of CMC are not interesting in and of themselves, but rather that to concentrate on such aspects is to proffer an unbalanced perspective on the everyday way in which they are commonly being utilised. For example, the capacity for chatrooms to enable identity play and cloaking among participants should be addressed separately from the actual instances of netizens using them for this purpose. Over the ensuing pages I will spend some time explicating the various CMC vehicles through which virtual community *may* be pursued, constructed and developed. None of these media are communities in and

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[82] "And we certainly don't want a community in this country where the advantages of the Internet and the advantages of information technology are only fully available to people who live in Melbourne or Sydney or Brisbane and the other large population centres of our nation" — Howard (2001, September 6).

of themselves, but each of them could be used by netizens to promote community infrastructure if desired.
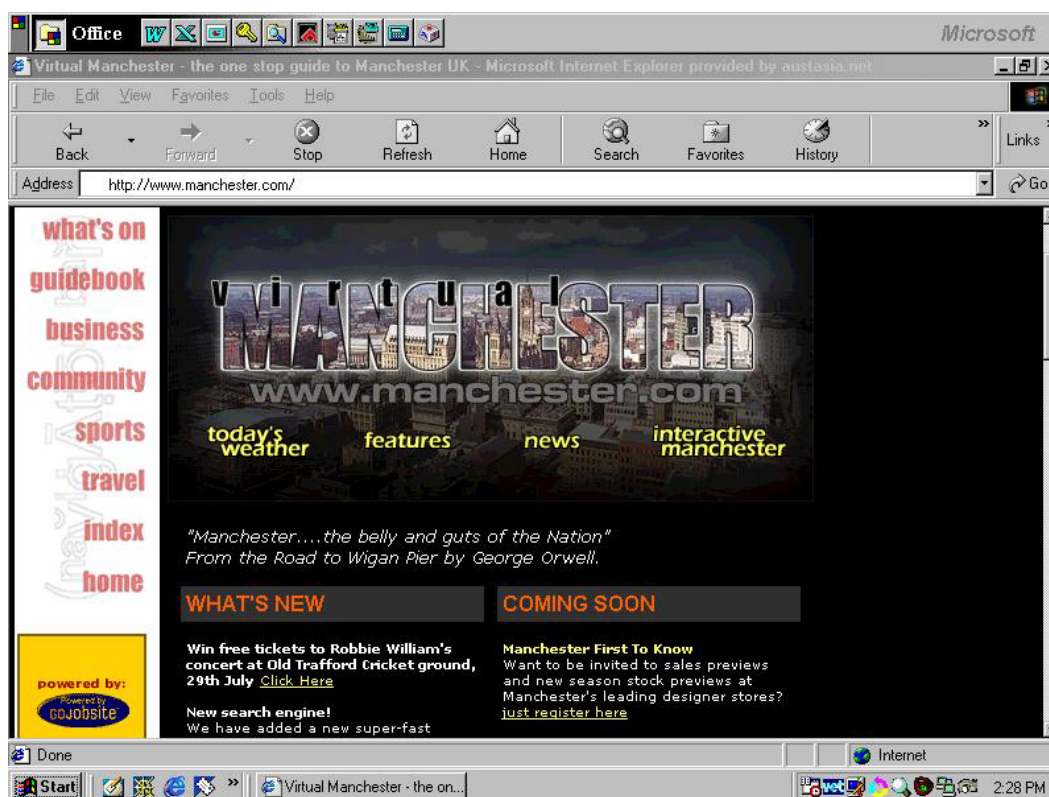
Virtual cities

The first type of CMC vehicle that lends itself neatly to the potential construction of community forms online is the 'virtual city'. Virtual cities are constructed in a variety of formats in order to serve a variety of differing requirements. In the first instance, they are sometimes created by municipal councils as a means of making local government more accessible to its constituents. Some of these "cities" are constructed purely as information databases, although they tend to be more successful if they allow for "citizen to citizen communication", along with the capacity for citizens to actively partake in debate over issues that are central to the city's developmental agenda (Rheingold, 1993:272).

Conversely, other municipalities also like to create electronic versions of their cities, but not for the express purpose of informing and governing their own populations. These versions of virtual cities are implicitly concerned with tourism, and presenting a broad spectrum pen portrait of the positive aspects pertaining to the real city on which they are based. The most prominent example of such a virtual city is 'The Digital City' of Amsterdam, which electronically promotes its real city as a series of **"**town squares". Each of these squares provide the viewer with a glimpse of Amsterdam's unique local culture, with squares focusing on technology, education, homosexuality, television, politics and sport.[83]

Few virtual cities show such a predilection for representing intrinsic local culture, however, with most choosing to focus on street maps, bookstores, restaurants, local attractions, travel agencies, accommodation venues, public services and assorted factors [refer Figure 5] that are most likely to interest potential visitors (Carter, 1997:145-146). Dodge et al. (1997) suggest that virtual cities come in four differing formats, including 'web listing' style (as per *Virtual Manchester*, which makes "no attempt to

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[83] This site can be accessed in six different languages: Dutch, German, English, Spanish, Italian & French. See – http://www.dds.nl/.

Figure 5. The virtual city of Manchester (www.manchester.com)

represent the built form of cities") and 'flat' style constructs (such as *Virtual Shinjuku* — refer Figure 6) that arrange their web material around "flat map" representations of established cities (Dodge et al. 1997:1). These variants aside, virtual cities can also be seen in three dimensional form (which is more for architectural and software modelling purposes) and may one day be seen in 'true' format:

> *"True" Virtual Cities* are ones which are an effective digital equivalent of real cities, providing people with a genuine sense of walking around an urban place. To fulfil this demanding criteria a true virtual city must have a sufficiently realistic built form interface, a rich diversity of services, functions and information content, and crucially, the ability to support social interaction with other people (Dodge et al. 1997:2; italics in original).

Ostensibly, 'true' virtual cities would combine a range of currently existing cyber technologies (three dimensional platforms, avatars, and MUD style communication vehicles) in an attempt to most accurately recreate real city living in a virtual setting (Dodge et al. 1997:4).

FIGURE 6. The virtual city of Shinjuku (`www.shinjuku.or.jp/`)
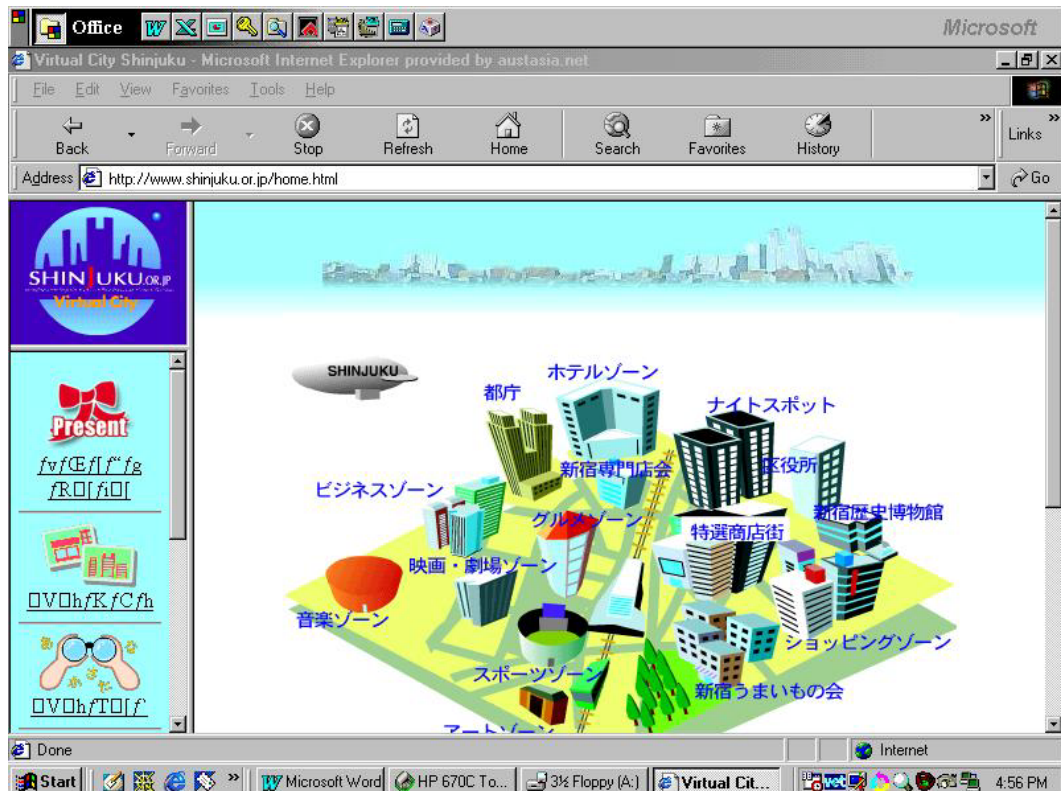
As with the WWW itself, virtual cities have both their supporters and their detractors. The former see virtual cities as providing "a new public sphere supporting interaction, debate, new forms of democracy [which lead to] a renaissance in the urban, social and cultural life" (Graham, 1996). The latter see virtual cities as indicators of erosion of public spaces that mirror "communities riddled with violence, fear, crime, mistrust and widening gaps between rich and poor" (Graham, 1996). While it is fair to argue that public spaces are diminishing and that virtual cities are out of reach of those in the lower socio-economic bracket of Western society, the links between virtual cities and crime are tenuous at best.

Virtual communities and virtual cities are by no means one in the same, with the former involving regular interaction between human actors around one or more shared interest spheres, and the latter facilitating infrequent "visits" from human actors seeking information or advice on civic/political matters. This aside, there are very few (if any) virtual cities that contain a strong commercial/corporate element and it is primarily dotcom sites that are afflicted by instances of cybercrime (hacking, credit card fraud and multi-level marketing scams). There is also little solid evidence to support assertions that virtual communities are environments "riddled with violence, fear, mistrust and crime." Were such comments aired in relation to conventional communities, they would be derided for being generalist and alarmist in tone, and yet it is not uncommon for social commentators to freely disparage virtual communities along similar lines.

In some ways virtual cities are serving to steer discussion on virtual communities back toward seemingly obsolete geographical perceptions of the concept. To be a worthwhile contributor to 'Virtual Manchester' it stands to reason that you are going to have pressing concerns that are driving you to participate in its ongoing maintenance and development. As a natural extension to this, if you are going to have such pressing concerns then it is highly likely that you are going to be a citizen of fleshspace Manchester. Because of this, sufficient doubts need exist as to the nature of cyberspace as a medium that disintegrates borders and subjugates the local beneath monolithic expressions of the global. This point will be explicated further when discussion turns to online nationalism in Chapter Seven.

Multi-User Domains (MUDs)

Another prominent cyberspace vehicle for the construction and maintenance of virtual communities is the Multi-User Domain (MUD).[84] Lori Kendall provides the following definition of MUDs:

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[84] These sites can also be referred to as MUSEs (multiple user social environments), MUSHes (multiple user social hosts) and MOOs (multiple object-oriented domains). See Kitchin (1998:7) for more on this.

MUDs are a form of interactive, online, text-only forum. MUD originally stood for Multi-User Dungeon, based on the original multi-person networked dungeons and dragons-type game called MUD. MUDs are also sometimes referred to as Multi-User Domains or Dimensions. As in other online chat programs, people use Internet accounts to connect to mud programs running on various remote computers. They can then communicate through typed text with other people currently connected to that mud. MUDs also allow participants to create programmed "objects," which facilitate the feel of being in a place, thereby adding richness to the social environment. There are hundreds of muds available on the Internet and through private online services. Many still operate as gaming spaces. Others are used for meetings, pedagogical purposes, and as social spaces (1998:3).

MUDs exist as a hybridisation of the Internet newsgroup medium and the WWW chatserver forum. Both of these entities serve as discussion vehicles in a wide variety of interest areas, with newsgroups entailing a considered exchange of emails and chatservers facilitating the more immediate process of conference style conversations between two or more computer users. Unlike MUDs, however, neither newsgroups nor chatservers concern themselves with the cyberspace environment itself, and see no need for creating artificial settings for the express purpose of promoting familiarity and reassurance among their users.

In the case of MUDs, however, great care is taken to create and nurture a sense of setting that is not only unique to an individual MUD, but also a source of comfort to its members. Shelley Correll emphasises this point in her descriptions of the Lesbian Café MUD:

The LC was clearly created to resemble a bar… TJ (the LC founder) described the bar using features that everyone would recognise as a bar. There was the bar itself, highly polished so that she could slide drinks down to her patrons. The pool table was to be a gathering place, but "no one is to knock the balls off the table." She added a fireplace and a hot tub, making this bar "a place more grand than any lesbian bar that actually exists"… the setting evolves as patrons discuss new features of the bar or fail to discuss old ones. For example, one day a patron mentioned in the public post that she was sitting in the rocking chair by the fireplace. Never before had a

<blockquote>
rocking chair been part of the features of the café (1995:5).
</blockquote>

Some MUDs (particularly those that employ café or bar backdrops) choose to employ "bots" within their settings as a means of promoting and mediating interactions between members. "Bots", expressed most simply, are computer programs that run within MUDs, and their primary purpose is to act as servants and guides for MUD participants. Sherry Turkle refers to these computer programs when she writes – "When you enter a virtual café, you are usually not alone. A waiter bot approaches who asks if you want a drink and delivers it with a smile" (1995:16).

Essentially then, the setting and "staffing" of a MUD are devised in order to achieve two outcomes. In the first instance, the setting instills a sense of calm and familiarity into the participant due to its virtual representation of a real-life place. The participant can then use their knowledge of real cafes and bars as a signpost to their activities, actions and conversations within the virtual environment. The participant may, for example, enter a secluded corner or backroom of the bar so as to conduct a quiet and personal conversation. Alternatively, they could position themselves in the centre of the bar where the flow of conversation is heavier and more boisterous in tone.

In the second instance, the staffing and object-placement that characterise virtual bars and cafes prompt participants to become active in the MUD, as well as providing them with reference points for their conversations and actions. Shelley Correll highlights this point, when she writes:

<blockquote>
A green bean bag chair was created in a similar manner (to the rocking chair) and quickly became the coveted spot for early arrivers [sic]. Patrons would enter the café, read the notes posted thus far that day, and determine whether anyone was sitting in the green bean bag. If it was found to be empty, a patron would occupy it by posting a note such as this one: "I'm over here in the bean bag, waiting for all the ladies to arrive… where is everyone???" (1995:6).
</blockquote>

MUDs can also be clearly differentiated from newsgroups by virtue of another key characteristic – the incorporation of fabricated participant identities. For some users this fabrication extends no further than the

Figure 7. An example of a text-based MUD.
(SOURCE:http://mud.lysator.liu.se/java/Telnet/)

```
The Java Telnet Applet                                    _ |8|x|
                    detach/reattach window

There is general news available.  Use News to read.
Your last login was from guest@mud.lysator.liu.se
You are in the local village church.
There is a huge pit in the centre and a door in the west wall. There is also a
clock on the wall. This church has the service of reviving ghosts. Dead people
come to the church and pray. This is a holy place and you feel safe here.
There is an exit south and a back door leads north.
  There are four obvious exits: east, west, north and south.
> Belgarath arrives.
Belgarath leaves east.
Jennifer arrives.
Jennifer leaves south.
***
*** You should read your newbie booklet.
*** Try out 'read page 1' for some help!
***
readJennifer arrives.
Jennifer leaves south.
read page 1
What?
> Gonzo enters the game.
Gonzo leaves north.

Warning: Applet Window
```

deployment of a nickname to protect their fleshspace anonymity. For others the capacity to devise a new identity enables them to bypass a range of fleshspace boundaries and restraints, such as: physical appearance, occupation, educational background, gender, race, class and age (Reid, 1995:178-179).

MUDs can be either purely textual [refer Figure 7] or they can encompass graphical elements such as "physical objects" and avatars [refer Figure 8]. The vast majority tend to correspond to the former type, however, given that the imaging demands of graphical MUDs warrant access to servers of greater speed and bandwidth than textual MUDs, which commonly operate from clumsier, but decidedly less resource

Figure 8. Screenshot of a graphical style MUD.

(SOURCE: http://www.realmsofkaos.com)

intensive, Telnet vehicles. MUDs are also more commonly utilised for game playing, but small pockets of the WWW have recently arisen wherein netizens utilise MUDs as social environments. These types of MUDs can be akin to the type outlined earlier by Correll and Kendall, encompassing *ad hoc* socialising amid virtual cafe or bar surrounds. Alternatively, they can involve role-playing interactions that are "more akin to improvisational acting in an ensemble than [the pursuit of] individual identity exploration" (Cherny, 1999:7).

The interactive capabilities of graphical MUDs could revitalise future perspectives on virtual community as netizen numbers inevitably rise and individuals become sufficiently comfortable with, and educated about, the use of cyberspatial vehicles. Whilst gaming MUDs *per se* appear to offer little of substance to the community debate on account of the highly focused and individualised nature of gaming endeavours, it is not so easy to dismiss the claims to community that are presented by social-orientated MUDs. In the first instance, these MUDs could facilitate links between

dispersed fleshspace bodies and institutions via the training and development capacities apparent in the 'virtual reality' like spaces of MUD environments. Such scenarios would also be open to everyday individuals, bringing them into social networks and situations that may otherwise be denied to them in fleshspace situations. A prime example of this is the 'Virtual Writers Community' MOO (VCWMOO), which allows potential writers to interact with other writers and graphical representations of stories and/or possible plot ideas. In this case, the environs are the same as for game players, but the emphasis is on community spirit through the forging of contacts and sharing of ideas and pieces of work. The emphasis on future developments should not, however, be seen as an admission of the limited use and nature of MUDs in the present day. For those netizens currently involved in MUDs of the type mentioned above the community feeling already runs deep, it is just that at this point in time MUD environments lack the broad user knowledge and understanding to be more widely used for the fostering of community ties and interactions. The basis for such MUD usage is unlikely to change dramatically in future years, but a marked increase in employment of the media for broader communal purposes, as distinct from recreational gaming, remains a very real possibility.

Newsgroups, bulletin boards and listservers

Newsgroups and listservers constitute the third major mode available for the purpose of creating online communities. Neil Barrett gives a succinct explanation of how a newsgroup functions:

> News items—'articles'—are gathered into 'groups' of related items depending upon the topic. Users submit articles, rather like electronic mail messages, to a particular newsgroup. These messages then appear in the list of articles when subsequent users examine the contents of newsgroups to which they subscribe. There are many tens of thousands of newsgroups with topics ranging from the sublime to the ridiculous; from the most esoteric elements of advanced programming languages, to blow by blow reports on TV soaps (1996:23-24).

Unlike some chatrooms, newsgroups are always structured around a particular topic or interest area. Most newsgroups are open to any individual that chooses to contribute, but others permit entry only after a strict screening process is conducted by the person(s) responsible for inaugurating the group. These newsgroups often also employ an editor to censor and filter messages so that obscene, disrespectful and spammed messages do not contaminate the carefully ordered confines of the group.

'Spamming' is the most prevalent form of etiquette abuse to be found amid newsgroups. Rob Kitchin outlines the spamming phenomenon when he writes that:

> Spamming involves sending the same message to many lists. This practice is discouraged, because it needlessly multiplies traffic, occupying valuable bandwidth. Community administered 'punishments' consist of other users mail bombing or mass flaming the offender's mail account or a vigilante programmer deleting offending messages from a list on behalf of everyone else (1998: 104).

While spamming can involve the mass posting of obscene or offensive material, for the most part it encompasses the wide-scale distribution of advertising for a multifarious range of goods and services. The aggressive response that net users afford to spammers is fascinating insomuch as it represents a backlash against the 'free speech' that cyberspace protagonists loudly trumpet as being the prime virtue of computer-mediated communication. In some ways, this anti-spam response can also be looked upon as a form of 'defense mechanism.' Prior to the 1990s, the Internet existed largely as a medium that was removed from the corporate sphere of commercial interests. As the new millennium unfolds, however, commercial enterprises are focusing their attentions toward Internet trading en masse. By protecting their newsgroups from advertising material, netizens are creating a sanctuary from what they perceive as a rabid consumer machine that plagues their fleshspace existence.

Figure 9. An example of a browser based newsgroup.
(SOURCE: `alt.politics.white-power`)
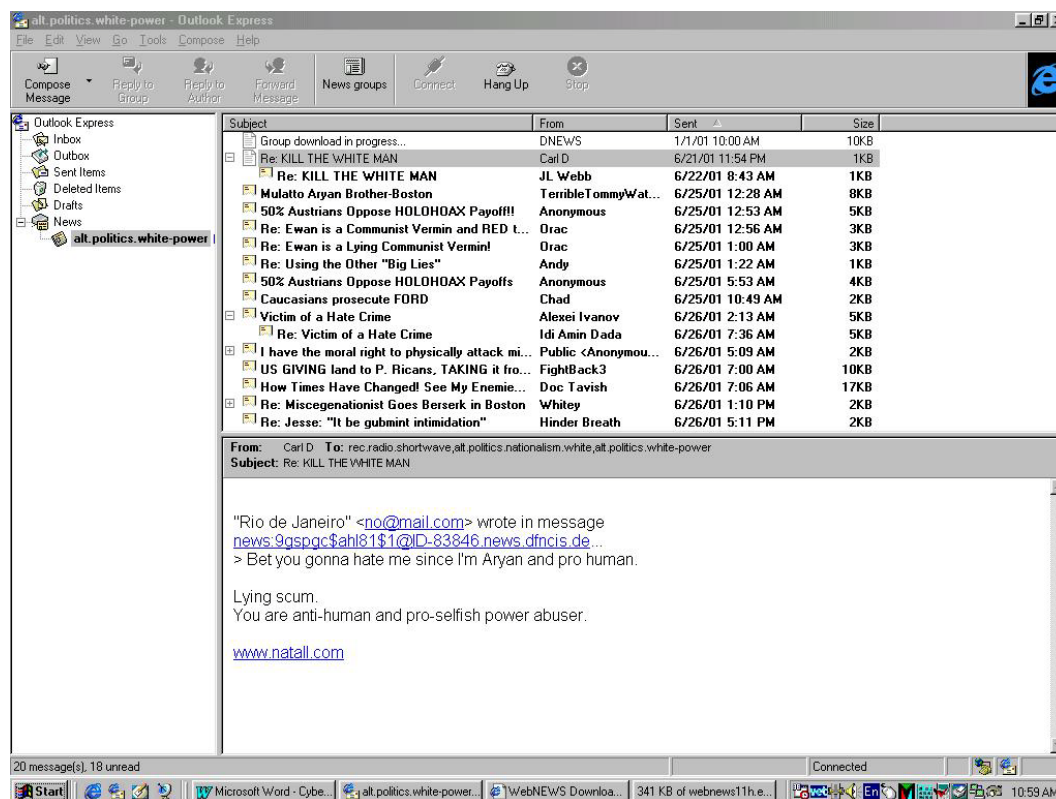
Newsgroups are conventionally accessible from Internet browsers [refer Figure 9], although they can also be viewed via the WWW, a method that is growing gradually more common. Notwithstanding the obvious costs associated with maintaining an Internet service, some netizens are willing to pay the price for WWW access because the groups that they wish to participate in are not always available on their Internet vehicle. The availability of newsgroups in browser mode is dependent on them being carried by the ISP that is overseeing the Internet account in question. Internet service providers will often leave certain groups off their listings due to their lack of overt popularity (meaning that they are not worth carrying for the stress they put on system resources), or on account of their somewhat 'unsavoury' nature, for example, some pornographic and right-wing aligned groups.

Cyberspace is by no means the haven for free speech that many of its protagonists would readily have us believe. Control of cyberspatial vehicles is widely spread, unlike control of conventional mass media

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outlets, but whilst this increases the prospect of free speech on the one hand, it just as easily decreases the probability on the other. This is primarily because ISP operators invariably lack the power that broadcast media moguls enjoy and are decidedly more prone to the pressures brought to bear by public opinion and moral standards.

Newsgroups can successfully accommodate community infrastructures, but only if two factors are present and accounted for. Firstly, the group need have a solid core of regular participants serving to direct and moderate the informational input and social fabric of the group in question (Smith, 1999:210). While communities imbue a distinctly egalitarian bent in regard to ideological concerns, they are nevertheless dependent on key individuals taking charge. Ad hoc machinations diminish community solidity given that human actors intrinsically require sound levels of control and direction in their everyday lives. Thus community members gain considerable confidence and comfort from adherence to firmly articulated modes of social form and structure. Secondly, the group should have a low "thread-to-post ratio", meaning that its message threads are mostly long and indicative of extensive levels of diverse and ambiguous interaction (Smith, 1999:210). Such groups would appear to be in the minority, however, and it is likely that newsgroups are less directed toward community ties as they are concerned with pure information and announcement exchange.

Listservers (also known as 'listservs' or 'mailing lists') are similar to newsgroups in the way that they are built around specific spheres of interest. Where they differ from newsgroups is in the alternative manner by which they are administered and accessed. Listservers "automatically move written discussions around to those who subscribe; the latest rounds of every discussion show up in the subscribers' electronic mailboxes, and the subscribers can send responses around to the rest of the list by replying to the email" (Rheingold, 1993:264). Whereas newsgroups take individuals to the discussion, listservers bring the discussion to the individual. Despite this key difference, however, listservers tend to mirror newsgroups in the manner by which they are often inundated by spam

mail. For this reason, many mailing lists are edited and made available only to carefully scrutinised subscribers (Mann & Stewart, 2000:13).

Mailing lists are invariably smaller than most newsgroups participation wise, given that they are rarely advertised with any prominence and normally require some research to find or, in certain cases, an invitation to join. For Susan Clerc, this gives support to her reasoning that listservers are more inclined toward community nurturing than newsgroups:

> Although some newsgroups manage to attain a sense of community, mailing lists are more likely to do so because of the way in which they are set up: few people post to them, so there is a feeling of familiarity (sometimes you wanna go where everybody knows your name)... In contrast, newsgroups have more posters and more anonymity (1996:222).

This view has merit, but should still be treated with considerable caution. Personal experience with academic-orientated listservers has taught me that such vehicles are more openly employed as a means of transmitting information and solving isolated problems than encouraging interpersonal warmth and routinised interaction. More research is needed to better clarify this issue, but I have some difficulty in accepting the premise that mailing lists, by and large, are significant contributors to the virtual community debate.

Bulletin board systems (BBS), also known as discussion boards or fora, are similar in design and intent to newsgroups, but are generally linked to websites and are accessible from the WWW [refer Figure 10]. BBS, for all intents and purposes, are usually better situated to promote community ties than listservers are. This has much to do with the location of BBS in cyberspace, with many of them existing in close proximity (in terms of HTML links) to associated chatservers and information databases that relate implicitly to the central theme of the participatory group. Whereas newsgroups and listservers exist as relatively isolated social spaces, BBS normally provide users with the opportunity to reinforce and

extend interactions with fellow users through associated links and CMC vehicles.

Figure 10. Visual representation of a Bulletin Board.

(SOURCE: http://webboard.stormfront.org:8080/~1/guests)
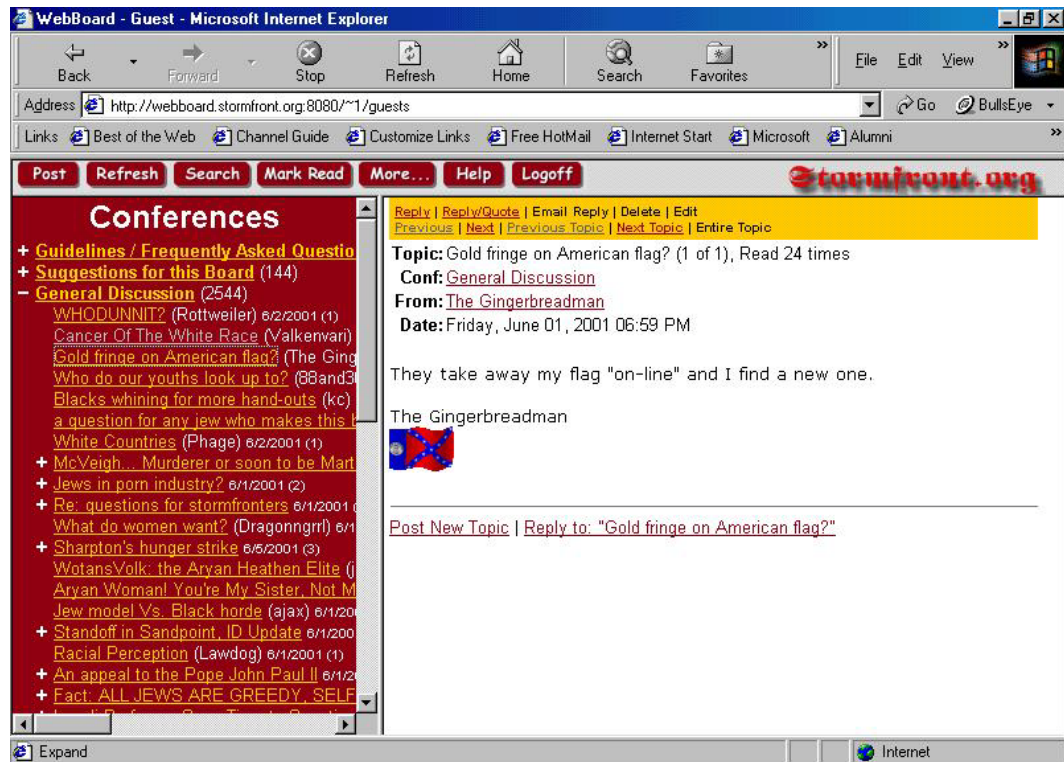
This capability should not be undervalued as a stimulus for community spirit and sentiment, especially as it is not uncommon to see messages on BBS inviting users to participate in chat sessions with fellow members. This interchange between asynchronous and synchronous modes of social interaction online can be a significant factor in the building of closer personal relationships and provides individuals with the opportunity to expand their understandings of fellow members through immediate (and noticeably less structured) exchanges with them. BBS also promote community "feel" by establishing stable, but loosely enforced codes of conduct; clearly articulated strands of netiquette; and tight, uniform expressions of culture within their confines (Gattiker, 2001:24-26).

IRC and assorted chatservers

The final major mode of communication to be found on the WWW is the chatserver (also known as the chatroom). Chatservers exist in a variety of forms and offer "synchronous communication on a one-to-one, one-to-few and one-to-many basis" (Kitchin, 1998:13). The most popular chatserver outlet to be found in cyberspace is Internet Relay Chat (IRC), described by Reid as being "a mode of interaction on the Internet in which people are able to communicate synchronistically on different 'channels' from disparate locations" (Reid, 1992). It is the synchronous nature of chatrooms that differentiate them as a medium from email and newsgroups. By way of comparison, email and newsgroups are asynchronous entities that deal in one-to-one and many-to-many communications respectively (Kitchin, 1998:13). This synchronicity of conversation is more closely identifiable with the interaction that takes place within MUDs and MOOs. Chatserver groups are not, however, predisposed toward the elaborate construction of setting and placement of "objects" that MUD groups conventionally devote such intricate detail to.

In spite of this, chatservers closely resemble MUD environments by virtue of their capacity for encouraging and promoting the use of virtual identities by their members. For chatroom devotees, it is this ability to escape from the confines of their fleshspace identities and to reside instead in an anonymous "role-play" that attracts them to the IRC. For Rheingold, these "role-plays" are constructed in accordance with three fundamental elements: "artificial but stable identities, quick wit, and the use of words to construct an imagined shared context for conversation" (1993:176).

As is the case with fleshspace meetings and get-togethers, chatserver interactions necessitate the adoption of colourful and expressive behaviour as a means of making an impression and garnering attention. The IRC offers individuals a clear advantage in that they are not hindered by the impediments of age, race, class, and gender that are often unavoidably revealed in face-to-face meetings. This advantage is counterbalanced by the narrow scope that exists for IRC users to choose

a viable identity, to have this identity accepted, and to successfully maintain the required demeanour of the identity over a prolonged period of time. For writers such as Turkle, the success of individuals in creating virtual identities can often come at the expense of fleshspace identities:

> As more people spend more time in these virtual spaces, some go so far as to challenge the idea of giving any priority to RL at all. "After all," says one dedicated MUD player and IRC user, "why grant such superior status to the self that has the body when the selves that don't have bodies are able to have different kinds of experiences?" When people can play at having different genders and different lives, it isn't surprising that for some this play has become as real as what we conventionally think of as their lives, although for them this is no longer a valid distinction (1995:14).

Figure 11. An example of a chat interface.
`(SOURCE: http://www.advancedchat.com/maturechat/)`
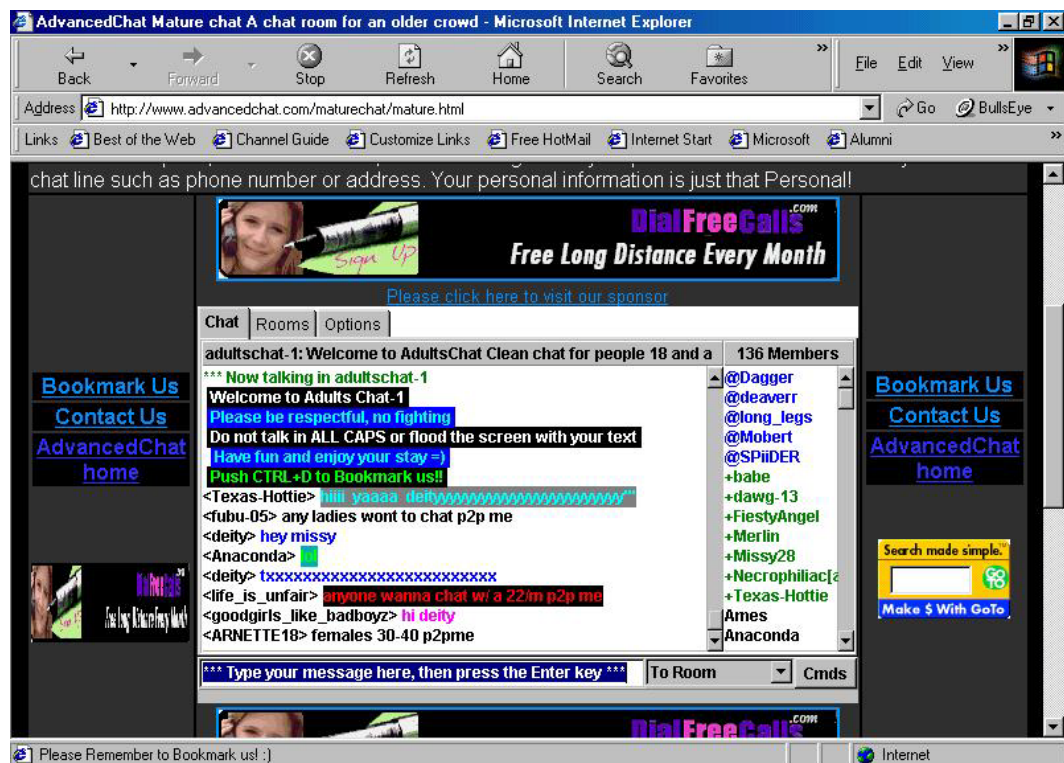
This is not to suggest, however, that all chatservers exist as recreational havens for individuals that have grown disenchanted with their everyday

personae. Chatservers can also be utilised for one-to-one conversations in place of the telephone, saving the participants from considerable interstate or international telephone call fees. Chatservers also prove highly effective conferencing tools, given that they are both cost-effective and removed from the logistical problems associated with assembling every delegate in the same physical location.

Chatrooms are wonderful media for the building of relationships in defiance of time and space restrictions, but not overly effective mechanisms with which to pursue the construction of virtual community. This is largely due to the fact that chatrooms, when densely populated, require considerable skill to negotiate competently. Essentially, a netizen will only get value out of a densely populated chatroom provided they have three prerequisite qualities — efficient typing skills, an inherent knack for rapidly filtering condensed information, and the capacity for hastily preparing articulate and intuitive replies to the comments and questions aired by fellow participants.[85] Such stresses and the inability of many netizens to cope with them ensure that chatrooms rarely reach the level of group cohesion, coherence and clarity necessary for the formulation of binding community ties. Chatrooms also carry limitations in that, unlike discussion fora, they are entirely reliant on individuals being present in order to facilitate interaction. As such, many chatrooms are used infrequently because individuals regularly enter into them when they are empty and do not linger waiting for a potential chat partner to arrive (McLaughlin et al. 1999:170).

Virtual spaces are still real world places

While cyberspace is increasing in presence as a research area, it continues to be hindered in its quest for academic recognition as a direct

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[85] Chatroom screens flash by quickly when the traffic is heavy, causing slow and/or inexperienced users to swiftly lose track of the interactions taking place. When more than six users are participating simultaneously in a chatroom it becomes a taxing task to remain constantly aware of who is who and who is actually talking to you. Because of this, it is not uncommon for many netizens to prefer the more sedate and sensibly paced BBS and listserver vehicles as online communication media.

consequence of some commentators unwisely choosing to portray the virtual realm as a space that is somehow removed from 'real world' spaces. James Slevin reinforces this point when he writes of how cyberspatial authors:

> consistently cordon off these forms of association [virtual community] from the real world. Rheingold refers to them as self-defined electronic networks. Reid regards them as an alternative virtual world where social boundaries have become deconstructed. Turkle sees them as occupying a space that we can only reach by a ladder which we must later discard (2000:107).

Such views present another example of cyberspace researchers slanting their discussions too heavily in favour of the technical aspects of assorted CMC media. The inevitable ramifications of this approach assist in the devaluing of virtual communities in the eyes of other social theorists who, not without some justification, take the approach that if virtual communities are not of the "real" world then they are not entities of any firm substance. This is in keeping with the romanticised perspectives of community that were alluded to in the previous chapter.

The romanticisation of community all too often gives the surface impression that places and spaces are foremost in the minds of community members, but this is somewhat misleading. Recent cinematic offerings such as *Fever Pitch* (1999) — English soccer; *Mystery, Alaska* (1999) — ice hockey; *Celtic Pride* (1996) — American basketball; *Field of Dreams* (1989) — Baseball; and the voyeuristically insightful documentary on Australian Football — *Year of the Dogs* (1997) provide subtle illustrations of this point. Each of these films addresses the concept of community from varying angles that range from *Field of Dreams'* portrayal of a whimsical loner ostracised from his community and ultimately reconciled with it through their collective love of baseball; through *Fever Pitch's* portrait of a disparate collection of soccer fans merged into a community through their combined passion for the Arsenal team; to *Year of the Dogs'* real-life drama of battlers united through a common link with a football team and a shared working-class heritage.

The common thread of community that ties these films together is symbolised by the almost spiritual reverence to place displayed by the main players in each movie. John Bale refers to such displays of reverence as being representative of topophilia, or "love of place" (1994: chapter 6). With regard to communities constructed around sport, this love of place will be expressed through an overt fondness for sporting grounds, buildings and stadia and individuals will commonly articulate their feelings and emotions via explicit reference to the sporting sites themselves. In many cases, however, what the individual concerned is really expressing is not so much a love of place, but a love of what that particular place has come to represent. It is clear that sport has had a regular tendency to mediate communities in fleshspace settings over the past century. As online groups continue to pop-up around sporting interests it will indeed be interesting to track their development, to see if the virtual environment can be as successful as the bricks and mortar stadium in symbolising community for future generations of sport devotees.

This will be for other researchers to investigate, but these sporting films share some common ground with cyberspace when it comes to the concept of community. In watching films an individual is not journeying anywhere in the physical sense, but they are being taken on a metaphorical journey that is directed by their unique emotions. With CMC vehicles the situation is markedly similar, although the experience is necessarily heightened (in the short-term) for the individual concerned on account of the added capacity for interactivity that cyberspace brings to this process.

It is also important that we comprehend that neither of these scenarios can be viewed as being somehow extraneous from the "real" world in which they take place. Films can certainly contain fantasy elements and may present the illusion of otherworldliness, but they still necessarily exist in this world and are viewed in accordance with fleshspace understandings of real world places and events. The same is true of cyberspace which, regardless of its marked absence of visual face-

to-face interaction, is still very much physically rooted in the real world and dependent on fleshspace conventions and delineators.

Perhaps the most important notion to grasp from this section of the discussion is that community exists *within* individuals and not, as conventional perspectives of community would have us believe, outside of them. External factors will certainly impact upon the individual's creation, maintenance and comprehension of 'community', but for the concept to have any significant value to a person it must be experienced, moderated and expressed from within. This is why human actor-based interpretations of community are so crucial to investigations into the concept, as they build our knowledge of the phenomenon from the point at which it originates — the micro-level stage of identity realisation and development.

Goffman (1959) knows this only too well, as it constitutes a key plank in his broad platform perspective on human socialisation and interaction. Thus, when he speaks of roles he is referring explicitly to the constantly evolving understandings of one's peers and circumstances that an individual incorporates into their everyday life and the express way in which they convey these understandings to those around them (1959:15-18). Giddens, extending out from this view, sees such roles as entailing routinised and repetitive processes that served to link individuals to other social actors and institutions (1984:25-28). For both, community was indeed internally experienced insomuch as it was founded on individual appraisal of social stimuli and the comfort and confidence that human actors gleaned from the stable and repetitive nature of the environment they regularly inhabited.

By adopting the 'internal' explanation of community we can also provide a fresh reasoning for the ongoing popularity of 'geographical' perspectives on the concept. There would certainly appear to be considerable truth in the view that 'geographically-based' versions of community are normally the most tight-knit. This is primarily the case due to individual's conducting almost all of their daily routines and interactions within the geographical sphere that is "home" to them. If we are to accept the premise that community is formulated and maintained through the comprehension and enacting of repetitive roles and routines then it should

hardly be surprising that most community ties would be formed in these localised contexts.

Accordingly, when an individual deviates in some fashion from the carefully prescribed confines of their localised context, the prospect of having to endure disorientation and discomfort increases considerably. Such disassociation can be temporary, as is the case when one takes in a movie, or extended when one takes an overseas holiday and is forced to adapt to fresh surrounds and unfamiliar persons. We can see from this that while geography is not entirely insignificant, in such instances it is not removal from place and people that causes the major angst, but removal from established roles and routines. Thus, if an individual were to move overseas it would seem as if they were moving to another world (at least in the short-term). This may also be true of persons branching out into cyberspace for the first time, given that the technical aspects and social expectations of the virtual realm are clearly extraneous to those that occupy individuals in the world of bricks and mortar. And yet leaving your home in Australia for cyberspace is no more indicative of leaving the 'real' world than is leaving your Australian home for Luxembourg. In either scenario, once the roles and rules of the new terrain are identified and learnt, the individual is able to reposition their modes of community to attune with their particular living environment and requirements.

Of course, this should not discount the similarities evident in both scenarios with regard to the elements of risk involved. Risk has always been prevalent in all manner of human action and interaction wherein such action has been predicated upon the making of decisions and the consequences (sometimes unintended) that arise from these choices (Beck, 1999:3-4). Risk is also a calculable process in that it has "something to do with anticipation, with destruction that has not yet happened but is threatening" (Beck, 1992:33). The possible threats apparent in travel are never far from the minds of human actors conditioned to the prospect of 'worse case scenarios' by the global tragedies portrayed by global media outlets on a daily basis. The vast majority of travel plans are enacted without undue incident, but there is always the unsavoury prospect of having one's flight hijacked, of having

one's plane crash, of falling foul of unfamiliar laws, of being robbed and/or assaulted, and so forth. The implicitly physical nature of overseas travel ensures that the risks associated with it are suitably transparent to human actors, but online participation is also prone to the realisation of unintended and undesired consequences.

"An increasing dependence on information and communication systems results in a decreasing capacity to understand, represent and control risk" (Van Loon, 2000:173). When a netizen goes online they do so with little (if any) fear of falling victim to death or physical harm. This lack of foreseeable physical peril can be comforting, but it can serve to obscure the risks associated with online participation. As such, many netizens give little thought to the possibility of being misrepresented online, of having their credit card details fall into the wrong hands, of being tracked by an unknown stalker, and the like. In an odd way, however, the risks inherent in online participation only serve to further rebut the view that the virtual world is somehow removed from the real world in a critical fashion. If online participation proceeds on the understanding (albeit sometimes obscure) that decisions must be made by netizens and that these decisions will carry with them the prospect of very real consequences, how then can we seriously downplay the validity of the virtual world and deride it as being little more than an elaborate play space?

Urs Gattiker (2001) is one of the first cyberspace writers to devote significant attention to the place of risk in virtual environments [refer Table 7]. Risk, as he sees it, can be broken down into two distinct typologies — 'systematic risk', which involves controlled hazards that can be planned for and (to some extent, insured against); and 'unsystematic risk', which involves unforeseeable hazards from which individuals cannot be protected (2001:200). For the most part, online risk falls firmly into the latter category and, the prospect of cybercrime aside, is conventionally realised in the following three ways.

Firstly, in structural terms online risk impacts at both micro and meso levels through occurences of hacktivism and associated instances of electronic malice (Brown, 1997:202-203; Lupton, 1995:486). This has

been regularly evidenced on the Stormfront.org site in recent years, with hackers focusing on politically contentious websites in their endeavours to disturb and transgress networked security systems. Secondly, it has long

Table 8. Potential opportunities and risks associated with cyberspace culture.

People will be Able to Advance/Improve or Increase/Decrease:	People will Face the Challenge/Risk or Opportunity to Cope with a Situation Offering Them an Increase/Decrease of:
Experience (visual, cognitive and others)	Loss of reality, social relatedness, friendship
Creativity and imagination	Influence and wealth
Communication and knowledge transfer through the processing of additional information	Too much of too little information and productivity
Independence and loneliness	Internet or cyberspace use/addiction
Cooperation and dependence	Privacy
Efficiency and effectiveness	Variety in consumer demands
Direct participation in the political process	Dependency on having the financial resources to afford surfing the Net
Access to data and information	Confusion and apathy

(SOURCE: Gattiker, 2001:171)

been presumed that instances of online risk arise in web environments that are loosely monitored and poorly regulated in terms of group behaviour (Gattiker, 2001:138). It is for this reason that almost all websites relating to regular group interaction have adopted particular forms of netiquette and behavioural guidelines as a means of formalising modes of conduct and reducing the instances of malicious and unethical CMC use.[86] Finally, online risk can also be seen to involve issues pertaining to user morality and privacy, with the enabling aspects of online freedom being counterbalanced by the wide viewing audience that online posts can be distributed to. There are two sides to this morality issue also,

with individuals necessarily risking compromise to their own peculiar worldviews during online participation, and individuals risking censure or disadvantage as a result of their online interactions running contrary to the moral preferences held by those in positions of influence and power.

Stormfront.org

To this point in the chapter, the discussion on virtual community has been broad spectrum in dimension, but from here on in I would like to narrow the focus in order to discuss the concept from a case study perspective. The Internet, unlike previous media that have existed essentially in one-to-one or one-to-many mode, has unmistakable potential for political organisations wanting to increase and interlink their membership bodies in defiance of mainstream social restrictions. With this in mind, it is surprising that so little research (to this point) has been conducted into right wing political groups in virtual environments.

Susan Zickmund (1997) was one of the first writers to branch into this topical area when she wrote of the ways in which "radical others" were using the Internet as a means of "waging war" on those who would oppose their views or challenge the way of life to which they would like to become accustomed. Michael Whine (1997) also took a look at this phenomenon, going into particular detail with regard to political developments and closing his article with a discussion on possible legal remedies with which to combat right wing cyberactivism. By way of contrast, Tara McPherson (2000) broke new ground in this area by focusing attention on 'neo-confederates' and the manner by which they were using cyberspace as a means of reshaping and representing their particular vision of the southern United States to fellow neo-confederates and potential converts. McPherson's study is the one to which my own will most closely correspond. Yet, unlike McPherson's and to the best of my knowledge any other studies on online right wing groups, my investigation into the 'Stormfront.org' white pride website will include views and commentary from site members themselves.

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[86] There is also the related issue of webmasters being held legally liable for the content

The Stormfront.org website [refer Figure 12] is the oldest and largest white pride related site on the WWW. In its halcyon days it entertained a registered membership of more than 20,000 users, but following its December 2000 restructuring has steadily risen to a revised membership quota of 13500+ (as of December 2002). Prior to the restructuring Stormfront.org was gaining new members at the rate of between 30 to 40 per day and it is interesting to note that the new discussion boards are attracting newcomers at a similar rate. Stormfront.org's discussion boards offer a prime example of the 'core group' users outlined earlier by Smith (1999), with the site's list of 'top ten posters' encompassing members who have posted between 700 and 1200 messages to the boards within a six-month period. Some of these core group posters also fulfil the role of board moderators on the site. Moderators are like the police officers of the virtual environment, upholding the laws of the group in question, ensuring that posts are appropriate for the boards (both in terms of content and language use) and dealing with errant group participants. As is the case with fleshspace police, moderators on Stormfront.org are regularly disparaged by group members for being over zealous in their treatment of chatroom and discussion fora users. In spite of this, they are tolerated by the rank and file as a necessary evil in keeping the site respectable and viable for white pride devotees.

Stormfront.org can be looked upon as encompassing a viable virtual community for a varied number of reasons. Firstly, the presence of moderators and core group posters provide fellow users with a focused and comforting environment in which to pursue their ideological beliefs. The moderators are the policing agents in these virtual environments, the managers of risk. Van Loon writes of the paradoxical relationships that exist between "the unknown predications [that accompany virtual risks] and the identified 'need' to control or limit them" (2000:173). It is indeed true that online participation carries with it the added attraction of greater freedom to express oneself and to interact outside of carefully established offline conventions (to a degree), but such freedom could lead to anarchic

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that appears on the sites that they oversee.

chaos if allowed to go entirely unchecked. The moderators are therefore responsible for ensuring that personal liberties do not run contrary to group cohesion and harmony, although it is often difficult for individuals to accept the need for such protection from risk.

Secondly, the structure of the site is diverse to the point of catering for most white pride needs no matter how eclectic (Bushart et al. 1998:236). This structure incorporates a host of discussion boards that are pertinent to white pride issues in specific countries or regions; the scope for participants to access the site in English, German or Spanish languages; fora that address members' entertainment (music), parenting (home schooling), romantic (white singles), theological (religious issues) and political (white activism) requirements; and a large array of links to web material on all aspects of white nationalist practice and ideology. As a final point, Stormfront.org also allows users access to powerful yet user-friendly search engines and paging devices that put them in constant touch with fellow registered members on the site.

Figure 12. Screenshot of the Stormfront.org website.
(SOURCE: http://www.stormfront.org/)

Regular interactions

At the conclusion of the previous chapter I outlined a four-tiered working definition model of community that I planned to implement in this investigation into virtual community. The first of these thematic variables to be explored in this chapter looks primarily at the consistency with which users of the site avail themselves of the site's fora and take the chance to interact with other registered members. Community, at a basic level, is heavily contingent on communication between its members, and while CMC vehicles are prime avenues for communication exchange, not all of them facilitate modes of communication sharing that would be considered profound enough to inspire and stimulate community ties.

One of the more startling aspects to arise out of the questionnaire/interview phase of this study surrounded the contention that existed in regard to clarifying a user's status on the Stormfront.org site. The following quotations taken from the questionnaire/interview transcripts stand as firm testimony to this:

> **Jager65:** Ok, to verify I am not a "member" per se, I do however use the Stormfront webboard and discussion rooms to converse with like minded people.
>
> **Jacklynch:** well, let's say 2 yrs although i'm not clear as to my "member" status.
>
> **Nordic Fury:** I am not aware of Stormfront being an official organization that has members. I am not a member.
>
> **Vamp88:** 3 years. And BTW [by the way] it is not an organisation it is a meeting place (non-profit) for White Nationalists to contact each other.
>
> **Njord:** I'm not a member of SF or anyhow associated. I use its communication facilities—the webboard and the chat—sometimes to exchange thoughts, ideas and news.

The descriptive term 'member' was employed in my survey in a very subjective fashion, so as to distinguish between participants on the site and "guests" who do nothing more than lurk.   There were obvious shortfalls in this approach, not the least of which being that this form of categorisation also served to classify me as a "member" of the site, when this was patently not the case.   Nevertheless, most interview subjects were unfazed by the choice of terminology, making it all the more interesting when the occasional interviewee did choose to object.

a) How often do you access the Stormfront.org site?
DAILY = 9;   WEEKLY = 4;   MONTHLY = 2
REGULARLY = 2; RARELY = 1; INFREQUENTLY = 3
----
b) Are you a regular poster (contributor) on the site?
REGULAR = 4; IRREGULAR = 14; HEAVY = 2; SEMI-REGULAR = 1

The mere fact that some individuals did not consider themselves to be members of the site does not serve to damage its claims to community status. It is unlikely that most individuals would adequately grasp that they are members of a particular community, given that individuals are commonly more predisposed toward physically participating in the community, as opposed to philosophising about their role or place in it. It need also be noted that several of the respondents who queried their status as members of the Stormfront.org site, still managed to place themselves among the majority of respondents who described themselves as regular participants on the fora. Equal intrigue centered on the high proportion of respondents who claimed to be irregular posters to the site, with a considerable number of the high access grouping putting themselves in this category.

Some would probably contend that high access rates coupled with low posting rates would result in high thread to post ratios, weakening the argument for virtual community status in this instance. It is possible to counter this contention, however, by suggesting that the act of posting is, in some circumstances, an individualistic process where the poster wishes to display themselves to an audience with little pressing interest in the thoughts and well-being of fellow users. Conversely, if individuals are willing to regularly access CMC vehicles without needing to be the central focus of the interactions taking place around them, it could be argued that they are involved with the group principally to partake in what it has to offer. This explanation is definitely in keeping with the sharing-centered definition of community that I outlined in the previous chapter.

One of the biggest criticisms of virtual communities, when depth of participation becomes a key piece of criteria, pertains to the huge numbers of lurkers who saturate online chatrooms and discussion boards. In earlier cyber times lurking was looked upon with almost total disdain by Internet users (hence the unpleasant nature of the term), but more recently it has achieved respectability—if not unconditional acceptance—in the eyes of the greater cyberspatial population (Whittle, 1997:60). Some netizens still take a dim view of lurkers on ideological grounds—cyberspace is a communication vehicle so people should be using it to communicate, not

eavesdrop—but it is groups such as Stormfront for whom lurking remains a significant cause for concern.

Stormfront.org, as with other right wing websites, is under constant surveillance from policing agencies and so-called anti-hate organisations (Brown, 2000). This reality does serve to reinforce the community spirit within the environment, however, by establishing limits on participant postings (no allusions to violence, no advocating of illegal activity) and cementing the "us versus them" mentality on which much present-day white nationalist sentiment is fuelled. The lurkers who inhabit Stormfront.org would certainly not consider themselves to be part of the Stormfront.org community, but Katie Argyle contends that lurkers are not so easily excluded from the greater virtual community picture:

> The default method for coping on the Net then lies in the choice between writing or lurking. Lurking is participation by watching without revealing your presence to the group. The catch is, others may not know you are there, but you know you are, and so you are as involved as they are. You are still part of the group (1996:137).

This is indeed true, although even when it comes to lurkers there are differing degrees involved with their level of online participation in a group. Wallace identifies this factor well when she suggests that some lurkers would be better described as 'deleters', meaning that they delete more messages than they actually read (1999:35). Deleters would, one suspects, be very prominent on mailing lists (where the messages are brought to the user), but less common on discussion boards where the netizen has made the effort to register and must (of his/her own volition) return to this site to remain abreast of the interactions taking place there.

An indication of the number of users making repeated visits to the Stormfront.org website can be gleaned by inspecting the number of 'total impressions' and 'unique' hits that were made on the site[87] [refer Figure
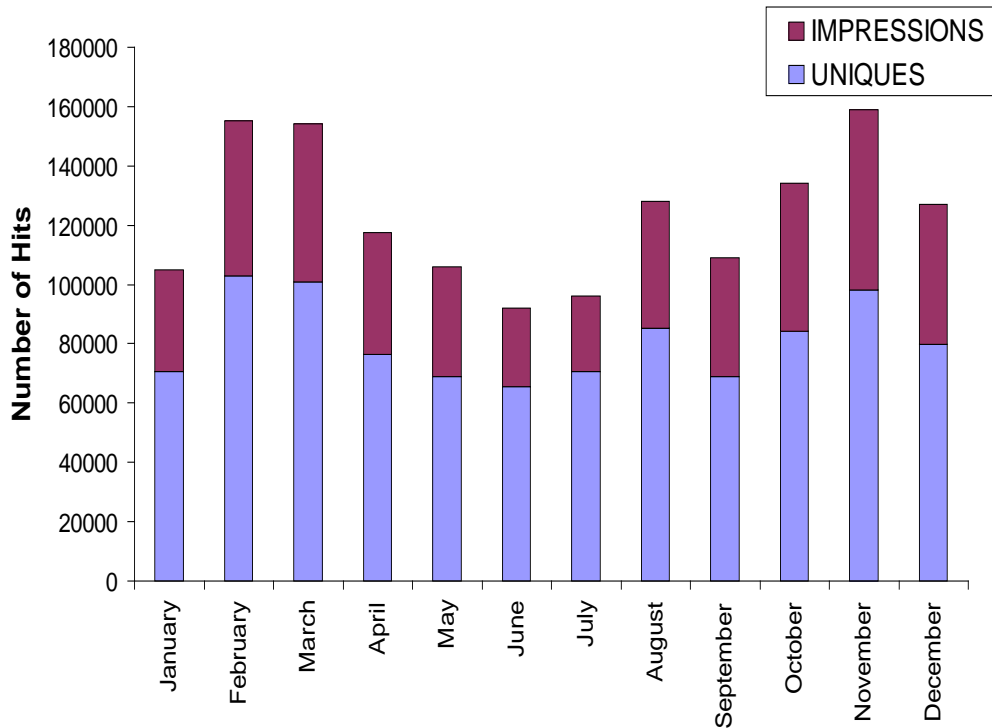
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[87] Impressions are the total number of hits made on the Stormfront.org website each month, while Uniques are the total number of hits made each month from a "unique" CPU. For example, during the month of May 68,838 hits on the Stormfront.org website were registered from different individual computers. For the same month, 106,021 hits

13]. Over the year 2000, a combined total of 1,484,184 hits (impressions) were registered on the Stormfront.org website, with 973,011 (approximately 66%) of these hits being unique in nature. The percentage of unique hits made on the site remained fairly constant from month to month, ranging from a low of 62% in November to a high of 73% in July. The consistency of these figures throughout the year allows for the deduction that regular participation on the Stormfront.org site is limited to a maximum of one-third of all users choosing to access the site. Small number users (less than 5 message posts in total) do have to be taken into account here, however, and it is probable that regular participation on the website is likely to run at a figure that is between 10-20% of the overall site usage for the year. This estimate would closely align to the number of non-lurkers utilising the site, but it is impossible to draw a firm correlation between these sets of figures from the level of data available.

Figure 13. User 'hits' on the Stormfront.org website during the year 2000 expressed in terms of total impressions and uniques. [SOURCE: www.stormfront.org][88]

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were registered on the Stormfront.org site in total. From this we can see that 37,183 hits were made by users returning to the site on two or more occasions.

[88] The data for this graph was derived from the monthly usage statistics as generated on the site via *WebSideStory* software.

Number of Hits

180000
160000
140000
120000
100000
80000
60000
40000
20000
0

IMPRESSIONS
UNIQUES

January February March April May June July August September October November December

External relations

Stormfront.org appears to hold up strongly in regard to matters of regular user access to—and interaction with—the site's content. This is not unusual for a densely populated web forum, but—in concrete terms—it does not offer support for the virtual community argument beyond the pejorative "banal affirmation of likes" description put forward by Nunes (1997:171). To expand the exploration further I will now enter a new thematic variable into the discussion — 'external relations'. This variable will look implicitly at Stormfront.org's capacity for facilitating and encouraging extra-curricular interactions and relationships among its membership base.

The expectation that netizens will meet in an online environment and use this as a springboard to a face-to-face relationship outside of cyberspace is a largely unrealistic one. Cyberspace is hailed as a faceless, anonymous medium and many netizens find themselves attracted to the medium for this very reason. Fleshspace interactions do occur between online acquaintances, but these interactions usually only

arise when the theme of the Internet forum frequented by the acquaintances is neatly linked to a certain geographic location. This is best exemplified by CMC vehicles such as 'World of Rugby League' and 'Big Footy', both of which pertain specifically to elite level football in an Australian context. In fora such as these, it is not uncommon to see rugby league fans arranging to meet at a weekend game in Sydney, or Australian football devotees making similar arrangements in Melbourne.

Stormfront.org may endeavour to be a flagship medium for the cause of "White Pride Worldwide", but there is little doubt that it remains an American preserve with between 50-70% of its registered membership residing in the United States.[89] The remainder of its membership quotient is dispersed across the globe, with Canada encompassing the second largest membership body accounting for 3-5% of the overall Stormfront.org population. A density breakdown of the Stormfront.org population across the United States of America [refer Figure 13 a)] strengthens this assertion, with several medium density membership pockets residing in close geographical proximity to each other. Its also worth noting that 37% of members who gave the United States as their country of residence neglected to nominate the state in which they were living, ensuring that the figures outlined here are almost certainly lower than they would otherwise be.

White nationalism, in its American context, has long been associated with the Southern States due largely to their long-term participation in the slave trade and the difficulty that some sectors of these States had in coming to terms with the demise of slavery at the end of the American Civil War. It is true that openly racist behaviour was in evidence on American shores as far back as the seventeenth century, when the earliest reports of tension between Northern American settlers and Native American tribes came into being (Kemp, 1999; Stock, 1996:5). In a more refined sense, however, racial extremism would not become a noteworthy

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[89] The global nature of ISPs ensure that these sort of figures are difficult to clarify with any certainty. 30% (approximately) of the sites registered membership stated that they were from outside of the USA, while 50% stated they resided inside the USA. The

part of the United States political landscape until around the middle of the nineteenth century with the rise of the nativist American Party, consisting predominantly of multi-generation locals opposed to increasing immigration levels (Swain, 2000:82). Interestingly enough, it was during roughly the same time period that the first appreciable signs of British-Israelism were detected on the American continent, marking the birth of what we have now come to know as the Christian Identity Movement (Barkun, 1997).

The commonly-held perception of the American South as a white pride stronghold also derives impetus from the black romanticism that has long accompanied media-fuelled general public impressions of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK). Bushart et al. (1998) provide a succinct account of the history of the KKK in the USA when writing that:

> The Ku Klux Klan came into existence in 1866... [and was] Founded as a "social club" for Confederate veterans, the Klan soon became politicized to combat the harsh policies of Reconstruction... Outlawed during Reconstruction, though certainly not neutralized, the Klan resurfaced in 1915 and reached its apex in the 1920s when it was indeed a source to be reckoned with on the political scene. The Klan of the Roaring Twenties was strong enough to have members elected to public office, to sway elections and to influence political policies... However, after this brief period of glory, the Klan once again faded into the background of American society[90]

The white pride movement retains a firm presence in the South, although there does appear to be a general attempt to move away from radical KKK

Figure 14. Density breakdown of a) Stormfront.org membership levels in U.S. States and b) estimated white nationalist fleshspace participation in U.S. States [as at December 2000].[91]

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remaining 20% did not state their country of residence, although it is likely that most of them were Americans.

[90] The Klan retains a presence to this day, but common public impressions of the KKK as white nationalist movement flagship are misguided, as it is just one small (albeit colourful) section of the broader white pride organisation. It is estimated that the Klan accounts for approximately a sixth of the overall movement in the USA (Swain, 2002:78-79).

[91] The figures for map a) have been adapted from the raw data that I compiled from the Stormfront.org website during 2000. The figures for map b) have been adapted from data gleaned from the Southern Poverty Law Centre. The groups (602 in total) from map b) constitute a variety of white pride organisations including the Ku Klux Klan (110); Neo-Nazis (180); racist skinheads (39); Identity Christians (32); Black separatists (48); neo-confederates (88) and other miscellaneous groups (105).

a)
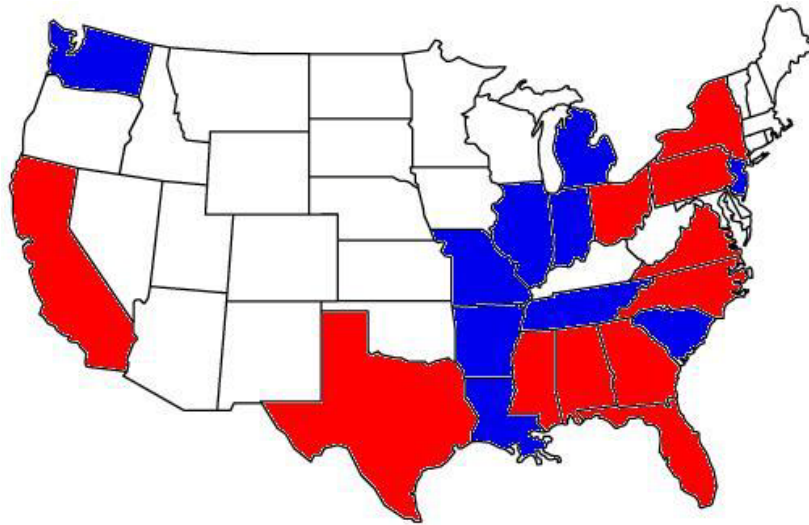
b)
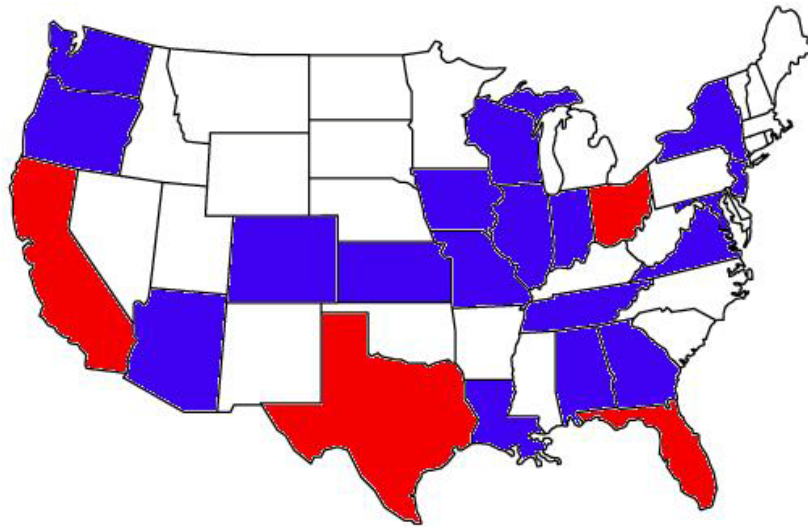
a) Stormfront.org	**b)** Fleshspace
WHITE (low) = 0 – 49 persons	WHITE (low) = 0 – 10 groups
BLUE (medium) = 50 – 149 persons	BLUE (medium) = 11 – 20 groups
RED (high) = 150+ persons	RED (high) = 21 – 40 groups

beliefs and activities in order to afford the organisation a more public friendly image in the region (McPherson, 2000:124-125).   Southern Poverty Law Centre data indicates that hate groups still have a higher concentration in the South, with States such as Alabama (39); Florida (39); Texas (38); Georgia (30); California (29) and Mississippi (27) accounting for roughly a third of all known American white nationalist groups in existence during the year 2000 [refer Figure 14 b)].   This finding is

reinforced by data mined from the Stormfront.org website during the same year, which also shows that a third of all 'known' North American participation on the site originated from users residing in the six above mentioned U.S. States[92] [refer Figure 14 a)]. Historical factors may well be a strong factor in the continuing development of the white pride movement, although it would be difficult to argue this line firmly without being privy to similar data from past eras.

The problem with geographical proximity is just one factor impeding the successful pursuit of fleshspace relationships between online acquaintances. On another level, the possibility is hampered by the time needed to form relationships online, as opposed to face-to-face situations. Online interactions are usually slower than face-to-face ones, given that most of them occur in asynchronous format and are commonly restricted by Internet participation costs and the subsequent need to rush oneself online so as to make best use of limited access hours (Wellman & Gulia, 1999:180). Accordingly, it takes longer to get to know people intimately online and longer to trust them sufficiently enough to make a fleshspace meeting viable. There are also some netizens who refrain from allowing online acquaintances to cross-over into fleshspace settings for fear that it will diminish the online relationship. This is to be expected, as online relationships are commonly invested with more naked trust and emotion than real-world ones as a direct consequence of the confidence that is gleaned from sharing intimate details with someone physically removed from your everyday life.

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a) **Do you keep in contact with other Stormfront users on a regular basis?**

YES = 12; NO = 9

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b) **Have you mixed socially with other Stormfront members in a 'real life' setting?**

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[92] Again it need be emphasised that approximately 37% of the 5621 North American based users on the site during this year declined to provide a State of residence when registering. Of the 3523 North American based users that did provide this information, however, 1154 were seen to come from Alabama, California, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi and Texas.

External relations were surprisingly common for the Stormfront.org members interviewed for this study.   The nature of these relations is outlined in the following quotations taken from the interview process:

> **Diabloque:** Yes on a daily basis [and] I also keep in contact with members which once went and no longer go to Stormfront... Yes I have met many of them [Stormfront members] in person and continue to keep contact in person and by phone on a regular basis.
>
> **Raine:** A lot [of my contact with other Stormfront users] is just through IRC, but I'm friends "in real life with a few members".   Actually, my boyfriend and I met on Stormfront, around 3 years ago, but he's not on there much anymore. I'm in a group that some other Stormfront members are in too, so we see each other then...   At meetings of another group and also as friends. We had a party last summer, and a lot of the younger members (teens and 20s) from #skinheads on Stormfront IRC attended.
>
> **Alex:** [Do I mix socially with other Stormfront users?] Yes and not.   I am talk[ing] with aders [other] member of Stormfront in web IRC, ICQ & email but Stormfront is not a community... (i)t is a instrument for talkin like ICQ... I am never say with proud "I am a member of ICQ (etc) group!"   Stormfront forums [are usually just] an instrument... We have a party "Russian Action" and some people of us use Stormfront.

The first key aspect implicit in the extra-curricular relationships maintained by Stormfront.org members centres on the importance of location. The majority of respondents who claimed to enjoy relationships with fellow site users outside of the virtual realm were Americans, but two Europeans, one Canadian, and one Russian also answered yes to this question.   Not surprisingly, all respondents who answered in the positive made it known that they only socialised with fellow Stormfront.org users from their own continent.   It was also interesting to note that the majority of the 'yes' answers were accompanied by further information that indicated that the socialising usually took place in fleshspace gatherings held by (region specific) white nationalist orientated political groups.   When assessed in

conjunction with one another, the previous two points cast fresh light on the immense difficulty confronting the white pride movement as it attempts to contain long engrained nationalist preferences and sentiments under a single, global 'White Israel' umbrella. This line of thought will be expanded upon as discussion turns to online nationalism in Chapter Seven.

For the most part, however, interaction between Stormfront.org members took place within the confines of the site itself, or in other virtual environments that also related to white nationalism. In spite of this, several of the respondents intimated to me that while they did not maintain ties with fellow Stormfront.org users, they did embark on "relationships" (of varying degrees) with netizens whom they met in other (non-white pride) sites. It is also significant that all twenty-one respondents were diverse Internet users in the sense that they maintained virtual presences on generalised CMC vehicles such as ICQ and IRC.

ICQ and IRC are problematic to discussions on virtual community as a consequence of their being colonised by transient netizen populations (Kitchin, 1998:88). This is certainly true of many ICQ and IRC users, but it need be said that such transience is not confined to cyberspace alone, with human actors constantly moving from relationship to relationship until they find one(s) that best provide for their individual needs. Often, this search will result in a netizen forging 'intimate secondary relationships' online whereby he/she nurtures "informal, frequent and supportive community ties that nevertheless operate only in one specialized domain" (Wellman & Gulia, 1996:181). This is true of many white nationalists online, but there are still Stormfront.org users who like to employ cyberspace as an entry point to deeper personal relationships.

Ideological solidarity

One of the strongest inhibitors to the successful creation of white nationalist communities in recent times has been the diverse array of beliefs and ambitions that inhabit the greater white-pride movement:

QUESTION — Do you have a problem with the differing viewpoints (among white nationalists) on the Stormfront.org site?

Madame Blavatsky: Yes, I do find it disturbing that there are so many disparate groups. Most of them have the same goals, but each group seems to have its own egotistical leader who wants nothing to do with the others.

SSkingirl: Yes, many, because almost all the kids in Stormfront don't know what they are talking about, many of them look like they are skinheads or Nazis because they saw it like a fashion, and it is really sad [that I] saw that things, and when I heard that kind of things I really get #$%%#$# (well you understand it :O))!

Njord: I still insist that the most unpopular speech deserves the highest protection... once you are in the free speech movement, you will find that you waste most of your time defending morons; because "hate speech laws" are made primarily for morons... but one has to stop the infringement of freedom where it starts.

MarktheTopGeezer: Certainly, I have had many disagreements over the IRA with many American sympathisers that try to convince everyone that the IRA are a nationalist organisation when I know that they are a bunch of murdering Marxists.

The Stormfront.org terrain is an ever volatile one, thanks largely to the wide range of controversial topics that white nationalism necessarily covers, including home schooling, aggressive or non-aggressive activism, religion, degrees of whiteness, attitudes to law enforcement, expectations of women and representations of history. On the one hand, this overt contentiousness increases the viability of Stormfront.org as a virtual community by presenting plentiful material for the members to exchange views on. On the other hand, such volatility threatens the creation of community by impeding the development of trust and consensus within the group environment.

Is it too easy for people to participate on the Stormfront site?

YES = 7;   NO = 14

This last point is of particular concern to the moderators on the Stormfront.org site, who attempt to lessen the destructive impact of intra-

group dissent by subtly manipulating group antagonists. Stormfront.org, as with any political organisation seeking improved rates of membership, is (initially, at least) welcoming of individuals who oppose and/or decry white nationalist doctrine. This allows the group to portray itself as free thinking and open to debate, which is true—to some extent—but in the main this 'open book policy' serves a markedly less generous purpose:

> antagonists are not part of the subversive community, [but] their responses may serve an important function. Antagonists allow group members to counter-attack and to support their own peers, thus strengthening the internal cohesiveness. The language game of rudeness and insults allows the style of the radical culture to more forcefully emerge (Zickmund, 1997:203).

Ironically then, anti-white pride antagonists on the Stormfront.org site are probably doing more good than harm to the group they so desperately wish to weaken. Essentially, group moderators allow antagonists to post almost anything, all the while goading them on, provoking retaliatory responses from group members in the process. This process continues for a short undefined period until the moderators perceive that the antagonist has overstepped the mark or outlived their usefulness. It is at this point that the antagonist is swiftly and unceremoniously K-Lined (forcibly expelled) from the Stormfront.org site; an event that is often accompanied by considerable fanfare from the moderator responsible and much mirth from the antagonised members.

This would go some of the way to explaining why most Stormfront.org members are content with the seemingly lax entry requirements stipulated by the site owner. Such requirements propagate the illusion of inclusiveness that almost all communities pretend to embrace, but Stormfront.org is as exclusive an entity as all other forms of community inevitably prove to be. A community *must* be exclusive for membership of it to carry value, purpose and meaning; which is another reason why society should never be interchanged for the term community. Virtual communities are all too readily disparaged for involving netizens who are too closely affiliated by their particular likes and preferences; a

criticism that absurdly neglects the reality that such affiliation is the metal on which contemporary communities are invariably forged. To this end, virtual communities are probably purer than their fleshspace counterparts in that they do not commonly 'imprison' individuals in geographical, occupational and familial cells as some bricks and mortar communities are prone to do to unwilling, accidental members.

Identifiable customs

The final thematic variable to be discussed in this chapter is the one that applies to the shared customs inherent in a virtual community. Emile Durkheim put forward the idea that an individual could only truly be free if they accepted certain conditions and regulations (constraints) under which this freedom would be enacted (Ritzer, 1996:102-103). This was the line of thought that would later come to influence Anthony Giddens as he searched for a way to interactively connect human actors to societal structures. In structuration theory, Durkheim's views on individual freedom came to be encapsulated in Giddens' notion of constraint and enablement (1984:163). As Giddens saw it, an individual accepted prescribed social and institutional rules and laws as constituting the means by which they could most safely and efficiently negotiate their everyday world. As was the case with other aspects of structuration theory, it was understood that the individuals would not merely conform to these rules and laws, but would play a part in their continuing evolution through their responses and reactions to the regulatory guidelines set in place.

With regard to cyberspace, the regulations and conventions that bind individuals to the virtual communities that interest them are commonly referred to as 'netiquette'. Netiquette exists primarily as a prescribed set of customary laws that seek to "balance individual and collective rationality" within an online group (Kitchin, 1998:104). Netiquette does not protect the individual *per se,* but rather it safeguards the group from displays of individualism that would threaten the social fabric of the virtual community. In essence, it is meant to "facilitate efficient and effective communications and minimize the distractions that are caused by our [netizens] inherent sensitivities" (Whittle, 1997:105).

In the first instance, netiquette serves to outline a range of communication conventions that enable individuals to produce online interactions that are brief in tone and length but, at the same time, intelligent, clever and unambiguous of meaning. The emoticons and abbreviations referred to in Chapter Three are key tools in the expression of netiquette for this purpose. Effective participation within specific virtual environments can often depend upon comprehension of these conventions, which are sometimes manipulated in order to restrict and/or stratify group memberships. Virtual communities are no different to conventional communities in that they also utilise specialised forms of "language to erect barriers to membership" (Bailey, 1996:38).

In the second instance, netiquette also accounts for the expected levels of politeness, civility and geniality that netizens display toward fellow users within the group (Mann & Stewart, 2000:59). This also extends to unspoken agreements among netizens where individual nicknames are viewed as sacrosanct totems of stable identification, and interactions proceed on the understanding that the people using the handles are the same people that have always used the handles (Willson, 1997:50). Again, this is to safeguard the group more than the individual, with community security being compromised by abuse and misuse of individual identities, a situation that is particularly perturbing for online groups such as Stormfront.org.

A final role of netiquette is "to counteract the worst effects of low-bandwidth text-only forms of communication" (Everard, 2000:78; issue is also discussed in Smith et al. 1998:97). Online groups are inevitably at risk from self-interested and commercially-affiliated individuals who see the opportunity to exploit the cheap and broad-reaching capabilities of CMC vehicles as a means of increasing personal exposure and/or profit. Spam posts not only detract from the community content wise, they also antagonise and upset members who may withdraw from the environment if too many breaches of this type occur.

It is for these reasons that netiquette is of such importance to virtual communities, with group moderators commonly employed to enforce the conventions laid down by the community. Of course, netiquette can also

be enforced by group members themselves who sometimes shame errant users into compliance and/or apology for transgressions to group regulations and guidelines (Baym, 1998:61; Mabry, 1998:14). Netiquette policing (be it by member or moderator) is not always objective, however, nor is it necessarily unproblematic or fairly implemented.

Susan Herring (1993) expressed concern with what she perceived as the "maleness" of netiquette constructs, which she saw as being responsible for "oppressive power arrangements that disadvantage women and non-adversarial men." There is little doubt that male users dominate Stormfront.org, but there has been little sign to this point that females are the ones being predominantly scared away from the site by virtue of its netiquette requirements. If anything, netiquette conventions would appear to work against netizens with overtly forceful personalities and creative streaks that struggle with the demands of operating within narrow and strictly defined guidelines. From the other angle, particularised forms of netiquette are exceedingly difficult to maintain as a CMC vehicle grows exponentially in terms of both population and global reach (Gattiker, 2001:28). It is at this point that the viability of the community is at its most tenuous, as the comfort and confidence of the group must necessarily take a back seat to the community's need to develop and expand its membership base.

Netiquette is by no means uncritically accepted by the members of virtual communities, however, as it is not uncommon to see netizens challenging the necessity of unpopular group conventions. By and large, Stormfront.org members are happy to be involved with the site and readily conform to most of its regulations, but the interview process did identify the following points of dissension:

If you were in charge of the Stormfront.org site, would you change anything about it?
YES = 15;   NO = 6

Diabloque: [I would] change the web board so that they [users] were not allowed to bicker like little children

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because a person does not like another person, but limit it to strictly messages regarding the first post.

Vlad Tepes: I would use my waning 1st Amendment rights to lift restrictions on chat/board content, and counter-sue any legal attacks thereupon.

Jacklynch: Yeah I'd change most things simply put. I think they go about things all wrong actually, [and] I am rather unclear as to their purpose.

EmperorCS: Yes, I would. I would make it a forum where the discussion of whiteness and race would be grounded in intellectual rigor as there are many books (available even on Amazon.com) that relate to these studies. [As a consequence] members could become educators and students of whiteness and Identity politics in general.

Lycia: I would make all of the web board conferences moderated so that all posts would have to be approved for public viewing. I would also update the information regarding mailing lists and fix the broken links on the site.

Madame Blavatsky: Its hard for me to say. Don Black must have some valid reasons for the draconian restrictions in the chat [room]. I do think that the entire WP movement should tone down and be more pro-White than anti jew or negro, because we do have a really positive message for our people.

The splintered nature of white nationalist beliefs, coupled with the highly subjective nature of individual approaches to web presentation ensure that the Stormfront.org website is an ever contentious virtual environment for its members.

There are five specific aspects to this contention, which I will outline briefly. Firstly, Stormfront.org users are at times frustrated by the loosely defined direction in which white nationalist doctrine appears to be heading on the site. This is an inevitable by product of trying to cater for a diverse range of interests on the one site, and would suggest that smaller could be better in so far as right wing websites are concerned.

Secondly, it is obvious that some registered members feel hamstrung by the limitations placed on their language use and topic choices on the Stormfront.org fora. Such restrictions are forced upon Stormfront.org by political legislation, but it is clear that an element within the white pride movement detest the tendency for sites like Stormfront.org to accept such restrictions without concerted defiance.

Thirdly, the regular instances of intra-site bickering between white pride followers are prompting some members to reconsider their participation in the Stormfront.org fora. Argument and debate is seen as both necessary and desirable for the movement to move forward, but the Stormfront.org site has shown a tendency for such argument to turn hostile and personal in recent times, sapping the confidence of many participants in the process.

Fourthly, for those members who wish to provide the movement with academic respectability, the heavy emphasis toward personal attacks and repetitive unsubstantial comments on the web boards is seen as a hindrance to the cause's progress. This is the main reasoning behind the ever present push for increased monitoring of postings to the site, with these members preferring tighter censorship and surveillance to minimal controls that (as they see it) only serve to subjugate the movement to uneducated liabilities.

Finally, several of the interview respondents and considerably more users during the lurking phase of my research were critical of the moderation standards in place on the Stormfront.org chatserver. The general feeling was that policing of the server had become so regimented that it was impossible to pursue constructive discussions on the vehicle.

For a community, virtual or otherwise, to carry any significance for its members they must be able to look upon it as an entity that they have considered input into (even to a small degree). Thus, while Stormfront.org has had its fair share of detracting elements in its pursuit of community ties over the years, it nevertheless showed its "grassroots" face to the world at the beginning of 2001 when the webmaster responsible for the site decided it was in need of major revamping. In line with this, Don Black shut down the original chat and discussion boards on the site, effectively cancelling all memberships to Stormfront.org in the process. From early January, anyone who attempted to access the site's discussion fora met with an announcement that they would need to re-register on the site in order to participate, and a request for advice and suggestions on how the new discussion fora could be structured and regulated. Black conceded that—like many Stormfront.org participants—he was unhappy

with the way the fora were being used and the direction in which the site was heading. It was therefore left open to the membership as to how they would best like to have "their" site run, and Stormfront.org entered into a member-driven second stage of its online existence.

Discussion

Investigations into virtual communities all too often polarise the concept by either treating it as a fait accompli, or, at the other end of the scale, blanketing it beneath narrow perspectives that show bias toward 'fleshspace' communities (mainly on account of their greater political respectability). Regardless of whether the commentators concerned are pro or anti virtual community, however, it has regularly been the case that the inquiry being conducted has placed too great an emphasis on the technical capabilities of the media being utilised, more than the social configurations being created and pursued. Perhaps the most telling factor about the investigations we have seen to this point, however, is that almost none of them have bothered to ask the netizens themselves whether or not they look upon their virtual environment as a community.

There are two major points that I would like to impart to the reader at this stage of the thesis. The first one of these being that no manner of investigation and no deluge of data pertaining to the virtual community concept will prove substantial if the express thoughts and feelings of the netizens at the coal face of these online environments are not taken into account. It was for this reason that I asked the following question of my interview subjects, with the most revealing answers to it reading as follows:

When you're participating on Stormfront.org do you feel as if you're part of a community?
                    YES = 8;   NO = 7; Unsure = 6

> **EmperorCS:** Actually no I do not, because the divergent views led to many schisms and constant arguments, therefore without strongly shared beliefs and viewpoints it was a group of individuals not a community.

> **Alan:** Yes I do.   [Italics are interviewer response] *This is really interesting.   You say you feel like you're participating in a community when on Stormfront, yet you also say that you have precious little contact with other Stormfront users.   What does community mean to you?* People with similar goals and attitudes.
>
> **Njord:** No, not really.   I'm an elitist...   There are few participants with whom I share most of my views; with the overwhelming majority I do not...   Nor do I feel part of their 'community'.   I hardly want to be associated with them; although there are, of course, some common grounds with them.
>
> **Bryn:** Yes, Stormfront is one of the few sites where, when I participate, I can chat and exchange ideas with people from all over the world and from all factions of nationalist thought.   Stormfront illustrates that national, geographic and cultural boundaries are easily bypassed in the name of nationalism/racism.

If nothing else, this little exercise did highlight that we are indeed still a long way from verifying the existence of virtual community in a concrete sense (assuming that such proof would be possible, or even desirable). The disparate array of answers that the respondents provided to the question may have made the whole exercise look pointless, particularly as the individuals themselves appeared to be uncertain as to exactly what was constituted by 'community'. Such confusion, far from being futile, gets to the very crux of the human actor approach that I have brought to the community debate.   If we can neither firmly prove or disprove the existence of virtual communities in the cyberspatial realm then maybe it is time that we stepped back from the impotent indicators that have failed us up until now. Maybe we could do worse than to switch focus to the Internet users themselves for the answers, as open as these findings may prove to be.

The second point that I would like to broach is that virtual communities should not be disparaged purely as a response to the seemingly 'narrow' focus of their pursuits.   It is too easy to look at community from a multi-focal standpoint, whereby the 'community' in question is seen to fulfil a major role in numerous aspects of an individual's everyday life.   Once again, however, I would stress that with

such a view we are really looking at "communities" in these instances, not community in the singular. Almost all human beings participate in several-to-many overlapping and divergent communities, all of which provide the individual concerned with an accumulated network of contacts, support mechanisms, and associated resources that enable them to competently assume their place in the greater society. Virtual communities more than capably fill this role for many online users on an everyday basis and warrant increased attention and regard from researchers and social commentators as a consequence.

Closing thoughts

In the earlier chapters of this thesis I have provided discussion on the development of human identity from the base level of the self through the continuum that leads to group identity in communities. The final two chapters conclude the identity exploration, focusing upon the way in which identity is expressed through nationalism at the macro-level of society.

The next chapter centres on representations of the nationalism concept as social commentators throughout the twentieth century have commonly expressed it. It begins by positioning the concept as a contemporary issue of significant political and media importance. From here the discussion moves to a historical angle, alluding to primordial approaches to the concept and providing reasons for the resilience of such explanations in defiance of changing academic understandings of the subject. This discussion then leads into an explication of more readily accepted treatises on nationalism, starting with the standpoints adopted in the sociological canon — Karl Marx, Max Weber and Emile Durkheim. The theories of these great figures is then counter-balanced by the more recent offerings of key commentators in the field, easing carefully through pre-industrial, industrial and imagined variations on the phenomena. Throughout the piece attention is necessarily diverted to the separate, yet interconnected concepts of ethnicity and globalisation, and the manner in which they both impact upon (and are impacted upon by) nationalist sentiment. Finally, the chapter concludes with the construction and description of a working definition of nationalism; complete with three

thematic variables that are pursued in the final chapter as a means of more intricately assessing the virtual nationalism terrain.

6

Addressing Nationalism: Contemplating the notion of nation

Introducing nationalism

The concept of nationalism bears remarkable similarity to the fellow concepts of identity and community that share the focal spotlight of this thesis. Until recently, much of the debate surrounding the concept of community implied that it was at best too loose an entity to treat seriously, at worst a fanciful notion that could not be empirically proven to have existed in a concrete sense. This is not to contend that community did not have its ardent supporters, but rather that it did not have them in significant numbers until 1980s political machinations returned the community debate to public and intellectual prominence. The liberal/communitarian dichotomy preceded these machinations by some years in the theoretical sense, but prior to this time it had lacked the political impetus and the policy directives necessary for nourishing the practical implications on which it could grow and thrive.

The concept of identity can be seen to have had similar legitimacy problems to community and nationalism in a historical sense, although recent social and political developments have nonetheless served to endow it with rejuvenated research energy. The perception that geographical and structural boundaries are somehow disintegrating carries with it the implication that personal identifiers are being constantly reshaped in order to attune to these revised social circumstances.

This last point carries with it a pair of subsidiary questions that are contentious enough to occupy social researchers for many years to come. Firstly, the suggestion that geographical and structural boundaries are eroding as a direct consequence of globalisation gains most of its present credence from educated assumption rather than observable evidence. It is a contention that is regularly found in contemporary texts relating to globalisation and nationalism, yet few of the key writers on each subject are willing to argue in support of it. In most instances where the contention is supported, the level of support falls short of trumpeting the demise of nationalism, preferring instead to contain the argument along distinct economic lines.

Such an argument is commonly expressed in global system terms, where widespread Western financial deregulation and *laissez-faire* approaches to economic markets by national governments are seen to have resulted in the subsequent rise of multi and trans-national companies that dominate and direct economic developments on a global scale (Castells, 1996; Giddens, 1990; Hirst & Thompson, 1996; Suter, 2000). Even within this framework, however, writers such as Castells and Giddens hasten to distance themselves from claims of economic determinism; choosing instead to make it clear that the development of global markets has been reliant on governmental initiatives and policies at the national level. By doing so, these writers are essentially locating themselves within a broader sphere of nationalist thought that emphasises the essentialness of nation-states in the governance and mediation of cultural and political machinations at the regional level (Friedman, 1994; Holton, 1998; McCrone, 1998; Robertson, 1992). Francis Fukuyama (1992) stands out as an exception in that he writes of a world that is rapidly succumbing to liberal democratic rule. Waters (1995) agrees with this contention, although he prefers to view it as being more of a possibility than a probability at the current time.

Secondly, just as globalisation cannot firmly be spoken of as new phenomena, neither can the geographical and structural boundaries of the pre-1980s be retrospectively represented as having been unambiguously stable. Stable borders stand as the bedrock on which forms of individual

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identity are composed and maintained, if romanticised treatises on identity construction are to be fully trusted. In spite of this, world history (circa 1880-1980) is heavy with instances of colonialism, imperialism, wide-scale war, civil skirmishes, political upheavals, and the like; ensuring that instability was rife during this time, particularly throughout the African and European regions. The world of today is thus no less stable than it used to be (Hirst & Thompson, 1996:chapter 1), making it somewhat uncertain as to why individuals would be experiencing disjuncture of identity, on socio-cultural cohesion grounds, any more acutely than they may have (or should have) been in the past.[93]

These questions are not outlined here in the hope of obtaining firm answers, but rather to provide a basic sense of the integral ways in which identity, community and nationalism interweave and interlink as sociologically noteworthy concepts. Such a revelation should not be surprising, although it is decidedly rare to see cyberspace texts that are willing to address these micro, meso and macro-level entities in the same self-contained text. It is far more common for cyberspace writers to conventionally focus on single level elements, or discuss identity and community in isolation from nationalism. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, academic works relating to the role of nationalism in cyberspace (and vice-versa) are surprisingly sparse. Community appears to be monopolising researcher attention at this time, which is to be expected, given the plethora of potential focus groups that exist online. These make for cheap and plentiful study matter, particularly in light of the time and cost restrictions that frame most contemporary research projects.

Nationalism must not be ignored here, however, as it symbiotically connects with community as inextricably as community interconnects with identity. Community is indeed more highly visible. People commune with one another on an extremely regular basis, whereas individual identity is rarely displayed in its totality, and nationalism (with few exceptions) occupies human thought and action in a semi-regular fashion at best. Yet

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[93] I am not wishing to argue that the world is more stable at the turn of the twenty-first century than it was at the turn of the twentieth, or vice-versa. Rather I am merely

all three concepts share the same common denominator in that they are all expressions of identity. Individual identity does not lead to community and then to nationalism in a carefully graded process of linear development, however. Furthermore an individual is required to exhibit micro, meso or macro level identity traits in accordance with the specific situation he/she find themselves in.

This identity selection process also underscores the manner in which some cyberspace users choose to express themselves in virtual environments. The tendency for some netizens to adopt multiple strands of identity during their life online understandably captures the imagination of researcher and layperson alike, but it can also lead to the mistaken impression that such identity construction is wholly a product of the *information age.* Multiplicity of identity certainly preceded the inception of the WWW, although cyberspace has afforded netizens greater freedom and comfort to experiment with this process.

The relationship between the media of cyberspace and the concept of nationalism will be further explicated in the following chapter. This chapter will set the scene for the one that follows by summarising the key themes that characterise the concept of nationalism in its offline guise. As was the case with the earlier chapters on identity and community this section will be too brief to enable an all-encompassing explanation of the nationalism terrain. Rather it will focus implicitly on the main ideas and developments to have occupied the sociology of nationalism field up until the end of the twentieth century.

Clarifying the nationalist typology

For all intents and purposes there are three overriding types of nationalism that exist at the beginning of the twenty-first century — 'social', 'ethnic' (Kellas, 1998:59) and 'stateless' nationalism. The first type is common to contemporary Western societies and while it encompasses a variety of cultural elements in its make-up, it is nevertheless intuitively concerned with matters of market and economy. The second type is

suggesting that significant doubts arise as to the relative levels of socio-political stability

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noticeably less driven by fiscal matters as it is by a range of pressing and often historically reified issues such as religion, race and territorial sovereignty. In many ways, this dual faceted approach to modern day nationalism mirrors that which was evidenced in the bygone era of imperialism; with social strands of nationalism substituting for that which was once displayed by the colonisers, and ethnic strands of nationalism standing for that which was once the preserve of the colonised.

These two types of nationalism do share common ground in the sense that they both tend to be contested in macro-level arenas and are considered to be legitimate political ideologies, even allowing for the tendency of 'ethnic' strands to antagonise the state sanctioned *status quo.* The third nationalist type, 'stateless' nationalism, differs from its counterparts in that it is rarely permitted a voice in macro-level debates over state policy. In conventional political arenas, stateless nationalism is almost always only a fringe phenomenon, hence the need for proponents of the stateless typology to seek out alternative vehicles for the dissemination of their worldviews and objectives.

Cyberspace, given its relative affordability, speed and efficiency of communication, and widespread availability (in Western nations, at least) makes an excellent media vehicle for stateless nationalists. This is hardly surprising, given that cyberspace is itself a "stateless" entity, although another fascinating paradox can be identified in the use of CMC for online patriot causes. For the most part, stateless nationalism encompasses a clear focus on domestic issues and its proponents only seriously consider international matters when they can be seen to threaten the security and stability of the 'home' country. Stateless nationalism is thus a very prominent ideology among right-wing organisations, many of whom believe that their home country has been adversely compromised by the foreign and human rights policies of their government.

At this point, it is probably worth emphasising the point that stateless nationalism should not be confused with anti-state or state-free

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that has existed during each of these eras.

organisations. There are groups such as these in existence[94], but stateless nationalists are not seeking the abolition of state governance, just a revised and introspective new model of it. In a similar vein, cyberspace itself should not be seen as a state-free entity on account of the heavy and broad nation-state involvement within its confines [as outlined in the Introduction to this thesis]. The stateless form of nationalism, as it exists online, will be the central focus of the ensuing discussion in Chapter Seven. It is, however, unwise to explicate unconventional stateless nationalism without first outlining the dimensions of conventional state nationalism out of which it has arisen and against which it is opposed.

The resilience of 'primordial' explanations of nationalism

The debate over nationalism is one that is fought across three particular spheres of social and political inquiry.[95] In the first instance, disagreement arises with regard to the origins of nationalism and whether it exists as a 'primordial', 'pre-industrial', or 'industrial' phenomenon. In the next instance, argument surrounding the concept centres upon the *true* dimensions of nationalism, which has resulted in difficulty for those who would like to locate it under a single plausible definition:

> Nationalism is too diverse to allow a single theory to explain it all. Much of the content and specific orientation of various nationalisms is determined by historically distinct cultural traditions, the creative actions of leaders, and contingent situations within the international order. What can be addressed in more general, theoretical terms are the factors that lead to continual production and reproduction of nationalism as a central discursive formation in the modern world. These do not explain all the implications or characteristics of nationalist discourse, but they offer a first step in the attempt to understand why it exists and retains its importance (Calhoun, 1997:123).

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[94] American survivalists are very strongly opposed to state machinations, policies and intervention, as are the devotees of *Posse Comitatus,* a small offshoot of the white pride movement that argues for a return to non-centralised, local governance.

[95] Colin Kidd (1999) presents a strong and succinct summary of the key lines of thought pertaining to nationalism prior to the twentieth century. Kidd takes a particular interest in the dissent that exists between primordialists and modernists, and is especially eager to confront the role of ethnicity in shaping and informing broader nationalist discourses.

The end result of this inability to condense nationalism into a single unified meaning sees the concept expressed today under a variety of qualifiers, including 'secular', 'religious', 'neo', 'individualistic' and 'collectivist' nationalism. In line with this, it is necessary for researchers of nationalism to lucidly articulate the typology(s) inherent in their particular approach to the concept, so as to avoid the pitfalls that can accompany attempts to apply a blanket nationalist model to a specialised nationalist scenario. Finally, the imbroglio over nationalism is realised in academic and political attempts to predict and direct its future progress and uses, in both theoretical and practical terms.

Sociological thought altered markedly during the closing decades of the twentieth century. Grand theories such as functionalism and conflict theory gradually faded from prominence, while smaller theoretical perspectives like symbolic interactionism and sociobiology underwent noticeable revivals (Smith, 1995:32). Sociobiology, as the name suggests, is expressly concerned with genetic influences and stands in direct ideological opposition to structuration theory, given its lack of interest in "the additional properties of social behavior that are created in human interaction and as the result of social structure" (Abercrombie et al. 1994:396). Whereas structuration theory draws heavy criticism for its inability to substantiate its claims with empirical evidence (Abercrombie et al. 1994:416), sociobiology gains disapproval for (among other reasons) the way in which its practitioners choose to shape their perceptions of empirical evidence.

For the sociobiologists, nationalism is seen as a 'natural' construct in that it provides scope for the extension "of kin groups that are selected by genetic evolution for their *inclusive* [italics added] fitness" (Smith, 1995: 32). The Darwinian overtones are clearly evident here, but of greater interest is the usage of the term 'inclusive'. In Chapter Four of this thesis, much was made of the dualist nature of attitudes toward the community concept wherein communities are commonly spoken of as inclusive entities, regardless of the exclusive restrictions that are almost invariably afforded to community memberships. Nationalism mirrors community in this respect, as the usage of the term 'inclusive' in this context could (and

probably should) be substituted with the oppositional term 'exclusive'. To suggest that kin groups expand their thinking and activities to better facilitate the life opportunities of their members and that the formation of large-scale social, political and economic blocs (nations) occur as a result of this process (Smith, 1995:32), can not feasibly be seen as anything other than open recognition, and sanctioning, of systematic social exclusion. Nationalism as an agent of exclusion is not restricted to sociobiological interpretations of the concept, however, and it will be revisited in relation to other perspectives at a later stage of this chapter.

The primordial approach to nationalism is not exclusive to sociobiological readings of the concept either. Smith, in expanding on the primordial theme also reveals its popularity among "early nineteenth-century German Romantics [and] the followers of Rousseau in France" (1995:31-32). Romantic perceptions of nationalism saw its successful creation and development as being an inevitable result of divine planning, as Greenfeld illustrates in writing that:

> By placing a society in a specific environment, God provided a particular principle around which the society was organized. The material conditions were not chosen; they were given, and the moral perfection of a society, like that of an individual, consisted in abandoning itself to its nature determined by these given circumstances (1993: 345).

In this instance primordial is not a pre-programmed genetic influence (as the Sociobiologists may wish to contend), but rather it is a societal outcome bestowed discriminately upon some (invariably Western) cultures by God as a seal of approval for living and interacting in a suitably moral and civilised manner. The exclusive nature of both community and nationalism again comes to the fore here, with the economic and ecological fortunes of a social bloc being seen as indication of God's favour and approval, rather than examples of what can be achieved as a result of fortuitous conditions, particularised ambitions, and no small amount of exceedingly good luck.

Calhoun also writes on the subject, touching upon the relationship between the concepts of nationalism and ethnicity, implicating anthropologists (in certain quarters) as proponents of the primordial approach (1997:30-32).[96] The very nature of anthropology and its prior preoccupation (consciously or otherwise) with legitimising and defending the authenticity of tribal actions, interactions and oral histories ensures that it is an obvious target for such criticisms. In spite of this, such criticism is unfair in that while anthropology has chosen to concern itself with the investigation and explication of ethnic cultures, it has mainly done so from a social construction framework, as opposed to the biological imperative option:

> We [anthropologists] study *peoples* rather than *people.* Our primary units of reference are 'societies', that is, distinct and relatively autonomous communities whose members' mutual social relations are embedded in, and expressed through, the medium of common culture. Culture is a key term here. Not only does the possession of culture conventionally mark the great divide separating humans from other animals, but *different* human societies tend to possess *distinctive* cultures [italics added] (Lewis, 1976:16).

This reasoning aside, it need also be appreciated that the concepts of nationalism and ethnicity are very much separate ones, despite their instances of mutual inclusion (Kellas, 1998). In line with this, any attempts to apportion blame to anthropology for misguided primordial accounts of nationalism (a notion which anthropologists are seldom captivated by) are generally based on out-of-context interpretations of ethnicity, rendering such claims largely erroneous and ill conceived.

Late twentieth century developments, most notably in African regions, have helped to bring ethnicity to the forefront of the nationalism debate. This has also assisted in reigniting the primordial approach to nationalism, with newly developing nations organising themselves in response to contested internal ethnicities. At the same time many

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[96] It is likely that Calhoun's comments were primarily geared toward the earlier social-evolutionist anthropologists like Tyler, Morgan and Spencer, as distinct from more recent scholars of the discipline.

established nations have had to confront the task of addressing ethnic-based minority groups that have threatened the legitimacy and stability of the preferred form of nationalism in place.

Primordial approaches to nationalism, while never far removed from the overall debate, are nevertheless viewed with considerable caution by most commentators on the concept. In spite of this, residue from the primordial approach remains useful when considering nationalist sentiment in relation to ethnicity. Calhoun best exemplifies this in asking, "how can nations that are in fact historical creations come to seem 'primordial'?" (1997:33). The answer to this question is anything but clear, although it is possible that the picture may become clearer when the accompanying variables of 'imagined community' and 'calendrical'[97] nation-building are brought into play.

I will momentarily deviate from this discussion in order to draw attention to the need for nationalism scholars to remain familiar with primordial approaches to the concept, regardless of their academic repudiation. White nationalists (regardless of typology) see white peoples as entailing the ultimate form of race. This viewpoint gains considerable currency in the broader white nationalist scheme of things thanks largely to the internal presence of the Christian Identity Movement (CIM), whose central ideology is described here by Bushart et al.

> For the Identity Christian, history itself is another element in the ongoing struggle between good and evil *begun in the Garden.* It is important to note that Identity Christians, and some other fundamentalist faiths, *view prophetic history as the only history* which really matters. All that has ever happened, or is ever going to happen, has already been addressed *scripturally*. This does not mean that historical interpretations are not given some credence, or that Identity Christians are not interested in history. Indeed they are. And certainly, they see

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[97] "The idea of a sociological organism moving calendrically through homogenous, empty time is a precise analogue of the idea of nation, which also is conceived as a solid community moving steadily down (or up) history" (Anderson, 1983:26). Calendrical notions of nationalism are thus linked to imagined notions of community whereby an individual's imagined sense of nationhood is nourished by their comprehension of the nation's past and ongoing linear development. From this, an individual feels secure in the knowledge that other individuals within the nation who have been privy to the same interpretations of history commonly share their understanding of the nation.

conspiracy in current interpretations (1998:122; italics my emphasis).

In so far as the CIM is concerned, the destiny of white peoples was primordially instituted with the creation of Adam and the fact that history has not borne out this destiny is less an example of flaws in their logic, as it is of the strength and tenacity of evil forces to temporarily derail the realisation of this destiny.

As Abercrombie et al. (1994:150) so succinctly put it "The ambiguity of the definition of 'ethnic group' thus reflects the political struggles in society around exclusive and inclusive group membership." The day to day machinations of white nationalism, as with almost all nationalisms, are forged upon perceptions and instances of such struggle. The main difficulty apparent in writing of white nationalists as encompassing an oppressed ethnic group is that insufficient evidence exists to support their argument of long-term anti-white prejudice. On top of this, it need also be said that ethnicity is rarely spoken of in relation to white races and barely paid lip service to in Western countries *per se.*

Thus it is exceedingly difficult for white nationalists to achieve any worthwhile form of legitimacy for their views, when such views run contrary to historically and politically orthodox worldviews. Hence the crucial role that white revisionists have to play within the white-pride organisation. White revisionists perform the task of offering "both a new interpretation of the Bible and a new account of historical events connected with migration patterns that populated Europe and the British Isles" (Barkun, 1997:245).[98] Ostensibly then, for white nationalists, ethnicity is a concept that influences nationalist objectives, as much through collective mindsets as through collective actions. White revisionists are therefore key figures in

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[98] Barkun (1997) was referring mainly to early British-Israelism revisionists here, although contemporary white revisionists also undertake the same tasks. Contemporary white revisionists also occupy themselves with modifying and discrediting commonly accepted versions of historical figures and events (Nazi Germany and the Holocaust are prime targets). As well, revisionists have recently turned their attention toward questioning statistical data relating to things like socio-economic levels, crime figures and job opportunities as they correspond to racial groupings. In short, white revisionists are trying to justify white pride in biblical terms, rewrite history in literary terms and reconstitute ethnic disadvantage in socio-political terms.

the movement as they offer forth alternative histories, ideologies and *facts* to the *status quo*. This affords the organisation some hope, at least, of permeating these mindsets and increasing their share of the overall political market.

Revisiting the classics

We can see from the aforementioned example that primordial approaches to nationalism remain persistent despite being consistently out of favour. For many scholars of nationalism, however, the primordial approach is good for little more than novelty value, with most attention being afforded to the pre-industrial and industrial strands of the debate. This leads us back to the classics, where nationalism played a part in the early development of the sociology discipline, but did so in a manner that was seldom made obvious by the discipline's primary practitioners. To use the words of McCrone, this was due "in part because the discipline grew up with another agenda, namely to explain the Great Transformation from pre-industrial, pre-modern to industrial, modern society, and to develop a more general theory of 'society'" (1998:17).

On the surface, the 'founders' of sociology appeared to largely ignore the concept of nationalism in their ideologies (Smith, 1983:19). This is very misleading, however, given that Karl Marx saw nationalism as an obstacle to his greatly desired vision of a "worldwide community of workers", ensuring that the concept was never far from the centre of his thoughts (McCrone, 1998:17). In actual fact, Marx (along with Engels) was one of the first commentators to write of nationalism as constituting an *exclusive* rather than *inclusive* phenomenon, as his famous "(t)he working men have no country" claim all too clearly emphasised (Marx & Engels, 1967:102).

There is little doubt that Marx was opposed to nationalism on account of its capacity for privileging the claims and aims of the bourgeoisie over the proletariat. It is ironic therefore, that Marx's ideologies should have found support from twentieth century nationalist movements that were intent on pursuing objectives that would have been anathema to him:

> The combination of Marxism and underdevelopment has created political problems, and particularly a tendency to authoritarian government, that bear little relation to Marx's own conceptions. For Marx, communism would be the inheritor of all the positive tendencies inherent in Western capitalism, particularly its political liberties (albeit very partial) and its economic wealth. It is difficult, therefore, to see much connection between Third World socialism or Chinese communism and the ideas of Marx. In many developing countries a version of Marxism combined with nationalism serves as little more than an ideology to encourage mass participation in the modernization process (McLellan, 1983:10-11).

Essentially then, Marx's long ago dread of nationalism coming to serve the express needs of the capitalist elite *via* its overseeing role in broad market expansion has been unmistakably realised (Marx & Engels, 1967:37). If anything, Marx's worst fears to this end have only been exceeded, with late twentieth century global initiatives restricting the available opportunities for many Western workers, whilst simultaneously crushing their counterparts in underdeveloped countries under the weight of oppressive conditions and pitiful wages. He may have taken some consolation, however, from the manner in which some contemporary workers (and work bodies) are employing cyberspatial media to combat capitalism and preserve their ever-diminishing wages and conditions.[99]

The second of sociology's canonised figures, Emile Durkheim, also dealt with the concept *via* his concern for the capacity of nationalism to replace religion as the key arbiter of power and cohesion within the broader political community (McCrone, 1998:18). Durkheim was earlier than most to gauge the impending decline of religious control over the state, not that this prospect troubled him as he:

> maintained that it was of no consequence whether what was celebrated was the life of Christ or the life of the nation. The best example that he provided of a society setting itself up as a god or creating new god(s) was his own country in the three years immediately after 1789.

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[99] 'Workers World' [http://www.workers.org] is arguably the most prominent left-wing web site on the Internet, regularly appearing among the top 1% of the most accessed sites on the WWW. A considerable number of alternative sites and forums also exist on the WWW around the topic of "Workers Unite".

> What occurred at the time was the sacralization of the secular (and particularly of the idea of the nation) (Llobera, 1994:137).

Society thus worked to assure cohesion among the social blocs that constituted it by assuming the role of 'God', wherein the state laid down laws for the people to adhere to as a means of maintaining control, order, and morality. For Durkheim this was the positive aspect of the state given that individuals paradoxically needed firmly articulated social restrictions and controls (over the entire population) in order to be able to achieve a degree of freedom over their own activities (Durkheim, 1986:50).[100]

In essence, this is practical nationalism in its domestic guise, whereby citizens form their understandings of collective self via state apparatus and policy and are, for the most part, content to devote themselves to this strand of ideology in order to maintain ontological awareness and social harmony. Durkheim was, however, fearful that the internal sanctity of nationalism was in danger of being overshadowed by the external crises of war, and the "morbid patriotism" that such crises engendered in modern states. The nationalism prevalent in displays of morbid patriotism was "only exhibited in forms of collective action directed to the world without [meaning that citizens] could only show loyalty to [their] own patriotic or national group at times when it is at strife with some other group" (1986:204). This view carried considerable prescience in that Western citizens throughout much of the twentieth century were, by and large, too preoccupied with individualistic pursuits to be concerned by nationalist sentiment outside of their nation's participation in sporting contests and war engagements.

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[100] Giddens notion of the duality of structure can be seen to borrow from Durkheim's perception of the individual and state, even if the link here may seem decidedly oblique. This point is supported by Jones who writes that "(T)he significance of Durkheim's rejection of the state as a 'transcendent being', superior to individuals, is evident in his treatment of the issue of rights. He rejects the moral consequences of this type of social and political realism, and repudiates the idea of a 'reason of state' and the 'false antagonism' between the individual and the state; indeed, the moral role of the state and the constitution of individuality imply each other. He argues that when the role of the state as fostering individualities is recognized, then the state can grow without diminishing the individual (2001:175). In this statement we can see the seed of Giddens later standpoint that decried the notion of the state (and the structures that constituted it)

Durkheim's disdain for external nationalism was clear enough, but his writings only hint at the probability that he adopted an industrial stand on the concept. Marx' pre-industrial stance on the subject was decidedly more lucid, although Durkheim's take on internal nationalism has proven equally apposite to contemporary developments. This is highlighted by the 'back to the future' approach of some fundamentalist Christian movements during the twentieth century, where religious nationalism arose in opposition to the modernist nationalisms and their inherent predilection for: secular law, intellectual scepticism and individual moral choice (Juergensmeyer, 1997:1). For these movements, state control has deviated too sharply from the firm moral framework that was bequeathed it by prior religious autocracy, meaning that theocratic rule is once again required to deliver contemporary citizens from the vice, greed and corruption inherent in highly individualistic liberal states.

To some extent, this desire for a return to religious ideological power is reminiscent of similar longings [as expressed in Chapter Four] for a return to highly romanticised pre-industrial forms of community. Essentially, group identity, in its pre-industrial guise, rarely operated outside of set religious conventions, which was comforting for individuals within these groups in so much as it provided them with a precise sense of *who* they were, *why* they were, and *what* they could and could not do.

This 'precise' sense of self was not realised in the philosophical sense that is of particular concern to individuals in the present day, but rather in the practical sense. There was no overwhelming need for individuals to know their place in the broader celestial scheme of things, so long as they were comfortable with their position in the everyday world. Religious rule was more than adequately tailored to meet this need. When religion and the state were effectively indistinguishable from one another in political terms, individuals were confidently aware of their place in the overall chain of command. One was ultimately answerable and subordinate to God, who in turn delegated his supreme power through the auspices of his chosen representatives on Earth. These representatives

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as an all-powerful entity that was superior to the sum of its parts and, thus, unable to be

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existed largely on a clearly articulated sliding scale that began with the monarch, and moved down through the clergy, nobility, vassals, and so forth (Marx & Engels, 1967:80; Anderson, 1991:Chapter 1).

With the eventual switch (in many regions) from religious-based political power to secular alternatives, such comfort was inevitably eroded with the gradual bureaucratisation and specialisation of group dynamics, along with political chains of command. This served to reify the links between individual identity—or at least, perceptions of it—and nationalism by presenting the latter concept as a broad extension of practical human thinking as it necessarily develops from the micro-level. The problem was that although the needs and obligations of individuals were now to varying degrees fashioning the structure and operations of state institutions, the processes by which such fashioning was taking place had become decidedly opaque. In simple terms, the chain of command had grown unwieldy through the presence of too many links, causing considerable uncertainty and angst to citizens who were now no longer certain as to their own place in the chain and whom they were answerable to at any given time. At such time some individuals became uncertain as to the ontological security of their particular sense of self; calling into question contemporary attempts to privilege instances of identity disjuncture as phenomena that is unique to the online realm.

The significance of nationalism was by no means lost on Max Weber either. Weber perceived of "the state [as] essentially a political instrument, but one which both requires a distinctive ideology, and is required in turn to make its protection its main aim" (McCrone, 1998:21). The place of the individual in the context of this perspective is not openly apparent, although the emphasis that is placed upon the "distinctive ideology" component of nation building indirectly pays homage to micro-level concerns. It is difficult to imagine any nation finding success in constructing a superable version of national identity were it not to reflect, even at an abstract level, the projected hopes and needs of a significant majority of its people.

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shaped (beyond its initial construction) by individual action and interaction.

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The use of the term 'majority' here returns the discussion to notions of inclusivity and exclusivity, as Weber himself indicates in writing:

> If the concept of "nation" can in any way be defined unambiguously, it certainly cannot be stated in terms of empirical qualities common to those who count as members of the nation. In the sense of those using the term at a given time, the concept undoubtedly means, above all, that it is *proper* to expect from certain groups a specific sentiment of solidarity in the face of other groups (1978:922; italics in original).

As was the case with both Marx and Durkheim, Weber also speaks of the impact that nationalism can have on its adherents. As he saw it, a central tenet of nationalist ideology related to the careful control of violence wherein it was strongly discouraged at the domestic level, yet openly legitimated (when convenient) for deployment against other nations. The thinking behind this was that individuals were naturally prone to acts of violence, thus if the state could control how and against whom this violence was perpetrated, then it could satisfy this basic human need and its own territorial ambitions at the same time (Weber, 1978:904-905).[101] In simple terms, the individual had to hope that their preferences were popular enough to be adopted by the nation-builders and that, following on from this, the nation-builders would not subtly reconstitute the features of such preferences in a manner that may ultimately work against them.

For Weber, the successful realisation of nationalist objectives were implicitly dependent on their acceptance at the micro-level, given that a "nation [only] exists where people believe themselves to be one" (Beetham, 1985:122). This presupposed that individuals were significantly comfortable with their place in the overall scheme of things to feel affinity to the state and to accept its governance uncomplainingly. Such

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[101] It is here that Weber also speaks of primordial human characteristics, while at the same time being careful to remove resultant political processes and initiatives from strict primordial explanations for their being. For example, on page 904 of *Economy and society* he writes - "Violent social action is obviously something absolutely primordial. Every group, from the household to the political party, has always resorted to physical violence when it had to protect the interests of its members and was capable of doing so. However, the monopolization of legitimate violence by the political-territorial association

acceptance, according to Weber, was impeded by the state inception of bureaucratic administration, which subordinated individuals to specialised divisions of labour and rationalised spheres of social existence. Bureaucracy, as he saw it, created a "new iron cage of serfdom" that served to dehumanise life for many individuals (Swingewood, 1991:186). With this in mind, it is probable that he would have approved of online patriotism as an effective means for current day citizens to bypass bureaucratic impediments in order to actively shape and influence, albeit often minutely, the more intricate affairs of state.

'Pre-industrial' versus 'industrial'

The preceding discussion on sociology's canons is important insomuch as it casts fresh light on the role that nationalism played in shaping and influencing their seminal views on broader sociological issues. These perspectives on nationalism were decidedly oblique in scope, however, meaning that the founders' views on the concept have all too often been overlooked by social researchers. Such oversights have inadvertently supported assertions that nationalism is a relatively recent phenomenon, even though most industrial views on the concept work from a point of origin that clearly precede the writings of Marx and his contemporaries. The industrial argument most commonly contends "that nationalism as a political doctrine did not exist before the eighteenth century and that the rise of nationalist movements coincides with the development of nation-states in Europe after the Napoleonic period" (Abercrombie et al. 1994: 276).

Sociology, whether by accident or design, has approached the historical development of societies in a fashion that keenly privileges key events as basic stimuli for a range of wider social concepts, ideologies and institutions. In keeping with this approach, nationalism is commonly perceived of as a prerequisite for, or result of, industrialisation and capitalism (as derived from the onset of the Industrial Revolution), despite it having come before the inception of both of these movements

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and its rational consociation into an institutional order is nothing primordial, but a product

(Greenfeld, 1996). Similarly, some also suggest that modern nationalism had its genesis in the French Revolution, which resulted in other countries being greatly influenced by the French success in creating "an organic relationship between the language, the culture, and the state" (Crick, 1993:78).

Crick's comments are in keeping with the definition of nationalism that was put forward by Smith, who explains the term as being descriptive of "a named human population which shares myths and memories, a mass public culture, a designated homeland, economic unity and equal rights and duties for all members" (1995:56-57). The probability of each of these elements being adequately engendered in a nation has, to a large extent, depended upon the nation's members sharing a common understanding of language. This last sentence has been very carefully worded so as not to give the mistaken impression that shared language, in and of itself, is an *essential* requirement of modern nationalism.

Nor can language be put forward as the primary distinguishing feature of nationalism, as Hobsbawm explains in writing that:

> No doubt Mandarin tied together a vast Chinese empire many of whose peoples could not understand each other's language, but it did not do so directly through language, but through the administration of a centralized empire which happened to operate through a common set of ideographs and a means of elite communication (1990:62).

Hobsbawm is effectively articulating his opinion that even in instances where widespread language comprehension is lacking, a viable nation can still be realised provided that strongly articulated centralisation structures are in place. There is certainly merit in this view, given that innumerable examples exist of citizens residing within an established nationalist structure despite having a superficial (at best) grasp of the preferred form of dialect. Of course, communication competency skills should not be undervalued on account of their capacity for enabling individuals greater and deeper participation in broader nationalist initiatives.

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of evolution."

Structuration theory is again useful at this point, as it provides support for the above-mentioned contention on three differing platforms. In the first instance, this support stems from the notion of 'mutual knowledge', which Cohen defines as "knowledge that is shared by all who are competent to engage in or recognise the appropriate performance of a social practice or range of practices" (1989:27). The echoes of Goffman's notions of role-playing are unmistakable here, although Giddens clearly looks upon this knowledge process as an open, rather than hidden one.

In the second instance, we can see that language, as it pertains to notions of 'ontological security', can markedly impact upon the level of feeling and confidence that an individual invests in nationalist sentiment (Kaspersen, 2000:136). Ontological security derives explicitly from 'mutual knowledge', and is realised when the latter element is sufficiently internalised by the individual to allow for the sustenance "of a cognitively ordered world of self and other, and the maintenance of an 'effective' order of want management" (Giddens, 1976:118). An inability, on the part of an individual, to attain ontological security usually results in exclusion from mainstream society and severe disjuncture of identity. In some cases it can also lead to occurrences of anomie, as Cohen explains:

> But where agents experience instabilities in their routinised activities and social relations, the 'givenness' of social life is necessarily disrupted. These disruptions are experienced as insecurities or anxieties, and these psychic tensions can lead agents to develop an interest in *participation in conflict,* or to be 'mobilised' for participation in *organised movements which engage in conflict* (1989:270; italics have been added).

The rise of religious-based and neo-nationalisms is often instigated by inadequacy over matters of ontological security at the meso-level. Language is only one of several cultural elements that can inspire ontological insecurity in societies, but it is certainly one of the most telling qualifiers of inclusion and exclusion insofar as notions of nationalism are concerned.

In the third instance, comprehension of language proves integral to an individual's (and group's) prospects of gaining knowledge of, and

access to, 'authoritative resources', which are described by Cohen (1989:28) as "capabilities that generate command over persons" (life-chances, spatio-temporal positioning, organisation and relations between human beings). In essence, this point builds from the oft-spoken maxim that 'knowledge is power', and that such power is expressed and reinforced in the day-to-day grind of everyday society, rather than imposed upon citizens from higher powers at prescribed moments. It is both a power that subjugates individuals and simultaneously draws from this subjugation:

> All social systems of any duration involve an 'institutional mediation of power'. That is to say, domination is expressed in and through the institutions that represent the most deeply embedded continuities of social life. But in the context of any collectivity, association, or organization, domination is expressed as modes of *control*, whereby some agents seek to achieve and maintain the compliance of others (Giddens, 1985:9; italics in original).

Giddens' thoughts bring added meaning to the nationalism debate in that they serve to portray the concept as encompassing a form of ideology that is as much concerned with expressions of internal (domestic) power as it is with external ones (Giddens, 1985:119-121; Calhoun, 1997:19-20; McCrone, 1998:98). As such, any suggestion that nationalism is crumbling under global forces, may tend to underestimate the resilience of national power hierarchies as they strive to reinforce control over their domestic territories.

The right of control over authoritative resources at the domestic level does not, in and of itself, result in favourable financial advantages for those in control. What it does tend to lead to, however, is subsequent sovereignty over 'allocative resources', which are the material resources involved in the generation of power, including the natural environment and physical artifacts (Kaspersen, 2000:68-71). As Giddens himself states - "(O)nly with such an extension of authoritative resources does it become possible to concentrate the allocative resources upon which a flourishing modern economy depends" (1985:256). Localised control is thus

inextricably linked to notions of economic advantage, which makes exclusive forms of nationalist sentiment well worth perpetuating for those in power.

Language is indeed a significant element in so far as discussions on nationalism are concerned, mainly due to the power structures that it helps to initiate and articulate. Such power structures are not only applicable to the individual and domestic groups, however, as economic stresses force smaller nations into conforming to the needs and standards of larger ones. During the twentieth century, many smaller European countries found themselves pressured into adopting the English language and American work practices in order to survive and partake in the booming US-driven global economy. This led to the subsequent decline or extinction of some ethnic languages and cultural practices (Eriksen, 1993:140). There is evidence to suggest that similar practices are at work (albeit on an individual scale) in the current day, whereby netizens are being compelled to adopt the English language in order to participate broadly on the US-driven WWW.[102]

The elements of language and power are commonly associated with industrial approaches to nationalism. Liah Greenfeld opposes these approaches, expressing dissatisfaction with established dichotomous explanations of society and rejecting the notion that industrialisation lies at the core of modern society, suggesting instead that nationalism is more befitting of this honour:

> nationalism, while it did not determine the nature of the modern economic system, has undoubtedly contributed to the development of its chief component: industrialization… In England, the birthplace of industrialization as well as nationalism, nationalism changed the criteria of human dignity and thus combined with Protestantism in making economic activity respectable… Economic exploits were also interpreted as a service to the nation. The growth of the English

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[102] This is indicative of the present state of the WWW, but it does not necessarily mean that the situation is beyond the boundaries of change in future. Spanish-speaking Americans have long been the staunchest opponents of the United States' insistence on English language use (in real-life), so they may continue this defiance as their participation on online fora increases (Eriksen, 1993:142).

economy in the century and a half preceding the onset of the industrial revolution would be impossible without the respect enjoyed by the merchant classes, which, with a few exceptions such as Holland, was unknown at the time to merchants anywhere else. In England, as elsewhere, nationalism redefined social stratification and justified occupational mobility, which was another indispensable condition for rapid economic growth. Through its encouragement of science it was also partly responsible for adding to the process an essential technological dimension (1996:12).

For Greenfeld, the origins of nationalism can be traced back to sixteenth century England, when the first noticeable signs of individual empowerment, in the political sense, became apparent (1993:6). Until this point in history, the concept of nation was seen as solely the preserve of the elite, meaning that the 'common' folk were seen as being separate from the concept, in physical, ideological, and economic terms. In the sixteenth century this meaning was changed so as to refer to the more general notion of 'people', simultaneously divesting the word nation of its elite status, reasserting the word 'people' as a positive entity, and encouraging a level of political solidarity that was essentially country-wide (Greenfeld, 1993: 6-7). In this way nationalism essentially evolved as a vehicle for upward mobility, although it necessarily depended on the elite coming to recognise that their privileged positions in society would be under threat if they refused to find some common ideological ground to share with the 'common' people.

Eriksen believes that this occurrence set in stone a basic *pro forma* for subsequent nationalisms that invariably begin as "urban elite" phenomena before gradually permeating the broader society as a whole (1993:105). Nationalism is not a static ideology, however, and it constantly requires new initiatives, processes, and strands of thinking in order to stay fresh and meaningful. Perhaps the recent rise of online activism can be seen as an attempt to shake-up established nationalist thought, as concerned netizens attempt to change societal thinking (by degrees) from the lower levels up.

As a final point, some industrial interpretations of nationalism rely overwhelmingly on 'invented traditions' in their construction. Alluding so

fervently to the past in attempts to explain the present is misguided, however, given that greater than half of all existing 'official' states (circa 1990) were less than forty years old (Hobsbawm, 1990:171). The vernal nature of these nations can nevertheless be misleading, given the rich traditions and histories that compel the inhabitants of such states to fight for an equitable place in the burgeoning new world order. This point is colourfully emphasised by Gellner who uses 'navels' as a metaphor for 'traditional' forms of nationalism. As he sees it, the navel is the most telling birthmark that an entity can be endowed with; providing its owner with both the comfort of being part of a lineage, as well as the confidence that comes from being somehow 'unique'. The inference here is that to not have a navel is to be either a clone or an inferior copy, hence the need for certain nationalist movements to stress the length and durability of their origins. To have an ancient or long acknowledged past affords a nation considerable respect and privilege, whereas fresh nations formed from the collapse and/or restructuring of other states need to work harder in order to earn such respect (1997:101).

The notion of traditionally informed nationalism, regardless of its merit to the wider nationalism debate, is of significant import to this study on account of its regular employment by white nationalists. The white power movement, despite priding itself on incorporating a progressive approach to political reform, tends to devote considerable energy to the task of seeking inspiration from the past. Revisionists within the movement are constantly putting forward information that glorifies bygone ancient, medieval and colonial white nations while, at the same time, rewriting history so as to absolve these nations of wrongdoings against non-white peoples (Thompson, 2001:33). In this way, the white pride movement is able to use tradition as a source of comfort and inspiration that compensates for the lack of direction, support and political legitimacy that characterises the organisation in the present. This firm adherence to tradition also manifests itself in the movement through the adoption and usage of symbols and tribal practices as a means of providing white nationalists with a singular form of common identity. This point was dealt with in greater depth in the previous chapter.

Imagined communities

Benedict Anderson is one of the most prominent proponents of the nationalism concept in its contemporary form. His celebrated notion of "imagined communities" was referred to in Chapters Four and Five concerning community, although it is more commonly applicable to discussions on nationalist sentiment. Anderson's ideas are pivotal to the theme of this thesis in that they depict bodies of nationalism as encompassing extensions of the community concept, whilst also stressing that nationalist thought is most tellingly formulated and constituted at the micro-level.

Anderson, unlike Greenfeld, thinks that nationalism arose in the eighteenth century, at the same time that "fundamental cultural conceptions" began to recede from societal dominance:

> The first of these was the idea that a particular script-language offered privileged access to ontological truth, precisely because it was an inseparable part of that truth… Second was the belief that society was naturally organized around and under high centres — monarchs who were persons apart from other human beings and who ruled by some form of cosmological (divine) dispensation… Third was a conception of temporality in which cosmology and history were indistinguishable, the origins of the world and of men essentially identical (1991:36).

It is interesting that Anderson should echo the ideas of modernist thinkers such as Durkheim and adopt a similar functionalist stance by contending that nationalism grew directly out of the vacuum that arose with the decline of religious autocracy. Of even greater interest still, however, is the manner in which Anderson subtly connects modern nationalist sentiment to seemingly disparate aspects of individual thought by outlining the need (among citizens) for new ways of situating themselves within society following the loss of long ingrained, religiously mediated forms of social identification.

As alluded to earlier, nationalism is a significant means by which countries can—ideologically, at least—override prescribed class boundaries (Eriksen, 1993:102). In this way, the viability of a nation rests unerringly on its ability to create "a socially integrated body" united around commonly held perceptions of "a singular identity" (Calhoun, 1997:77). For this "singular identity" to be viably achieved, it becomes necessary for states to furnish initiatives that assist citizens in believing that their nation demonstrates "the possession of a unique, authentic and adequate cultural heritage and ethnic past, one which will bear comparison with those of other nations" (Smith, 1995:67). As well as this, the state must also be able to present its peculiar strand of nation in a manner that ensures that most, if not all, citizens feel as if they are contributing to its development and perpetuation in some quantifiable way.

The need for states to present themselves internally and externally as unique entities is not new as in past times "all great classical communities perceived of themselves as being cosmically central" (Anderson, 1991:13). In such times, external projections of civilisational identity were exponentially more crucial for states than internal ones, given the carefully pre-ordained nature of individual identity and the knowledge that citizens had of the place of themselves and others in the social hierarchy. As societies have grown more dispersed and specialised in recent times, however, it has become necessary for the connections that bind society together to be imagined by citizens:

> *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion (Anderson, 1991:6, italics in original).

The need for citizens to cerebrally embrace these images of communion and for states to successfully facilitate them is evidenced by McCrone's assertion that "The state constitutes society as well as being constituted by it" (1998:92). This statement not only serves to summarise the desired outcome of Anderson's process of *imagining*, but it also pithily reiterates structuration theory's central tenet of human agency and social structure

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co-existing together in a relationship of mutual dependency (Giddens, 1984:25). Put simply, the state is made up of human actors.

The process of imagining community also expands out to indirectly account for the preoccupation with symbolism that is prevalent in many expressions of nationalist sentiment. Anthony Cohen expounds on this idea further in writing of how:

> Community exists in the minds of its members, and should not be confused with geographic or sociographic assertions of 'fact'. By extension, the distinctiveness of communities and, thus, the reality of their boundaries, similarly lies in the mind, in the meanings which people attach to them, not in their structural forms. As we have seen, this reality of community is expressed and embellished symbolically (1985:98).

These symbols are of paramount significance to nations as they shape and define boundaries and provide recognisable pathways for shared senses of purpose and direction. They are also conveniently flexible, ensuring that they can thus be easily adapted to fit specific purposes as they unexpectedly arise (Smith, 1995:31).

Such symbolism is expressed in a variety of ways, although in contemporary times the most common mode employed is through the media. The sharing of lives *via* the broadcasting and transmission of domestically orientated media vehicles aids the ground-up creation and sustenance of nations through cultivating a climate of shared anonymity (Anderson, 1991:36). As Anderson sees it, citizens gain an enormous sense of quiet confidence through knowing that fellow citizens are absorbing and accessing the same material as they are in newspapers, radio programs, television shows, and so on. Similar instances of shared symbolism within nations can be found in devotion to flag, national anthem and geographical silhouette (McCrone, 1998:41).

This last aspect has become so routinely internalised within countries that it is rarely considered in a concrete sense. Maps are by no means a new innovation, but their employment by states in the pursuit of national solidarity is a decidedly recent occurrence. The presence of maps and globes in educational settings has been a very deliberate modern initiative,

the result being that practically all intellectually capable, adequately educated citizens can recognise the geographical silhouette of their particular nation on a map, atlas or globe. This, of course, has considerable repercussions for people such as the Kurds who do not inhabit a set geographical location that is (politically) considered to be their own.[103] It also raises interesting questions in relation to white nationalists and their pursuit of states that are not clearly delineated in the cartographic sense.

Most expressions of national symbolism are neither truly original nor unambiguously unique to the nation incorporating them, although there can be benefits for nations who are first to inaugurate them. England was the first country to invent postage stamps and, in line with this, was also the first country to use them as a nationalist marker. With regard to its fellow British countries, England was able to produce commemorative stamps that did not openly include written reference to England at all (McCrone, 1998:48). This capability is mirrored by contemporary USA, with its people, institutions, and corporations being able to colonise the WWW free of national domain referents, simply because their scientists were responsible for initially creating the environment.

Following on from this, we have seen symbolic nationalism commonly expressed throughout history in metaphoric kinship terms, as exemplified during the great wars of the twentieth century[104] when opposing nations would identify their allegiances to either the 'mother country' of England or the 'fatherland' of Germany (Eriksen, 1993:108). These terms have clearly been decreasing in popularity in recent decades and are unlikely to undergo a renaissance in the virtual realm, given that the United States offers the only articulation of both entities in this context. Nationalism, as an imagined community, also shares ideological ground with virtual communities in that they both evoke distinct metaphorical qualities. Each entity has had the propensity to challenge traditional representations of religious ideology: nationalism by symbolising the concept of nation "as a sacred community"; and online communities by

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[103] Kurdistan is recognised by some nation-states, but NOT by the USA or the UN.

allowing netizens to operate in defiance of temporal and physical restrictions, effectively placing them outside of God's will (Eriksen, 1993: 107).

Globalism vs localism

In contemporary times, the lion's share of discussion over the concept of nationalism has centred upon questions of its viability and whether or not it has been superseded by 'globalisation'. In sociological terms, globalisation refers to economic, cultural and political processes that operate and impact at a global level in defiance of set national borders and qualifiers (Abercrombie et al. 1994:184). Globalisation, as a term, is a relatively fresh one, although some would readily argue the true age of the concept itself:

> Marx and Engels were not the only 19th century social observers to perceive and anticipate the importance of global themes… Marx's immediate 19th-century forebears, Saint-Simon and Comte, had both advanced views of social science as an element in the unification of humanity. For Saint-Simon, science and industrialization reflected the same logic of advancing internationalism and interconnection between nations (Holton, 1998:22).

As with Nationalism, the act of definitively assigning a birthdate to the concept of globalisation is only likely to be met with a range of possible alternatives.[105] This study has no interest in assigning an age to globalisation at any rate, preferring instead to build upon the contention that globalisation is not leading to the death of nationalism, but rather it is leading to "the creation or strengthening of local identities, as well as to the emergence of strong counter-ethnicities" (McCrone, 1998:35).

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[104] I am referring here to World War One and World War Two.

[105] Pieterse (1995) offers up five different perspectives on this issue from five different theorists. Karl Marx saw globalisation arising during the 1500s in line with the onset of modern capitalism. Immanuelle Wallerstein also used 1500 as a starting date in keeping with his writings on the modern world-system. Roland Robertson, conversely, looked upon globalisation as a multidimensional entity that encompassed two distinct phases; the first beginning in 1500 and the second occurring between 1870 and 1920. Giddens, by way of contrast, presupposes that globalisation is a modern entity, arising during the 1800s; whereas Tomlinson prefers to run with the 1960s on account of his predilection for the theory of cultural planetization.

In recent decades, the ideology of nationalism, as practiced in Western nations, has been largely tied to economic developments and pursuits as individual countries have endeavoured to best position themselves in a global network driven by ever expanding market forces. The potency apparent in these burgeoning market forces has led some social commentators to presuppose the demise of nationalism as an entity of any firm substance (Hockenberry, 1998; Marx, 1997; Wallerstein, 1976). For Hockenberry, this process has been hastened by the seemingly irresistible processes of technological innovation that have characterised Western political and economic development since the 1950s. As he sees it, these processes have resulted in the creation of information and communications technologies that exceed the capacity of independent nations to properly administer and police their use and potential (1998:264). Marx, although adopting a less technologically-determinist stance on the issue, also predicts a bleak future for traditional nation-states as contemporary responses to information and communication media threaten established political, temporal, geographical and personal borders (1997:485-491). These writers continue a line of thought originally articulated by Marshall McLuhan (1994) and Immanuel Wallerstein (1976) during the 1960s and 1970s; when the first clear indications arose of a world interconnected in space and time by highly developed media innovations.

The fresh links forged by these ever expanding fiscal and media interests have clearly helped to alter political climates across the globe. This has resulted in fears that Western culture is being homogenised (predominantly along American lines), but this view would appear to underestimate the resilience of localised responses to globalised initiatives. Some writers (Barwell & Bowles, 2000; Castells, 1997; Everard, 2000; Hakken, 1999; Miller & Slater, 2000; Mitra, 1997) have—in varying ways—been diligent in recognising the significance of these reactions to global machinations; broaching ideas that have helped to ensure the viability of nationalism as a study sphere within the broader cyberspatial research agenda.

While McLuhan's (1994) long ago vision of a media-inspired "global village" has been realised, to some extent, through the rise of large media conglomerates and their relentless push for extensive pay and cable TV audiences. Anandra Mitra tells of how some countries have become adept at using television for nationalist purposes:

> Given the fact that such mass media are produced by groups with specific interests, there is some ideological work to be done and the hegemonic tendency is to produce one particular closure over others... [For example] the Indian state-owned television system had a particular Hindu image that it was trying to portray through an array of texts. In a similar fashion it is possible to identify a specific colonial/oriental/neo-colonial image that has been produced in literary texts and movies [from other regions] (1997:74).

The state control of principal media outlets in a host of present day nations (mainly in Asian regions) ensures that the interests of these nations remain paramount in defiance of cultural-colonialist overtures from the West. Nationalism is thus intricately associated with notions of power as Western countries seek to improve their economic strength through expansion into foreign markets. Similarly, Eastern countries, although not entirely removed from market maneuverings, try to consolidate political control over their dominions by setting unambiguous (albeit subtle) constraints on the domestic social agenda. Human actors are ostensibly vulnerable to the vagaries inherent in the culture to which they choose to identify and it is for this reason that the proponents of both nationalism and capitalism invest substantial energy and resources in attempting to permeate these cultures.

Globalisation, in the economic sense, is enabling corporations to extend their market reach, but technological advances are, at the same time, permitting political bodies and movements (non-governmental) to monitor their progress and, to varying degrees, keep them in check (Giddens, 1998:49-50). For the most part, this is a largely positive development, but it does open the door to covert occurrences of global crime:

The technological and organizational opportunity to set up global networks has transformed, and empowered, organized crime. For a long time, its fundamental strategy was to penetrate national and local state institutions in its home country, in order to protect its activities… However, in recent times, globalization has added a decisive twist to the institutional strategy of organized crime… the high mobility and extreme flexibility of the networks makes it possible to evade national regulations and the rigid procedures of international police cooperation (Castells, 1998:202).

The WWW has been a major boon for such criminal activity, forcing individual nations into assessing their levels of security in response to 'cybercrime'. Even when crime is not a factor, it is nevertheless apparent that countries approach global economics from a localised perspective. This involves the construction of local industries and markets that are distinct in that they permit the country concerned to participate globally in a way that simultaneously strengthens its position (others want what they are producing) and tempers it (others have what they want). In this way the global economy does not so much diminish national economies as it does interlink them, ensuring that recessions in some economies may result in similar downturns elsewhere (Jones, 1995:36).

With this in mind it is often in the best interests of a country to align itself with other countries of like interests or minds. Economic concerns often drive attempts to forge regional-continental associations, as was best exemplified by the creation of the European Union. At one level, such associations weaken the primacy of individual nationalisms by forcing the countries concerned to moderate their political and economic activities so as to conform to the needs of their partners. On the other hand, however, these associations inadvertently solidify nationalist sentiment at the micro-level by blatantly favouring political and economic concerns over cultural ones (Smith, 1995:127). At the end of the day it is difficult for British citizens (by way of example) to see what they are gaining from arcane financial imperatives with Germany, but it is nonetheless perfectly clear to them that they do not speak the German

language.[106]

The relationship between individuals and the particular national cultures to which they have become accustomed, ensure that localised responses to globalisation are prolific enough to keep nationalist sentiment vibrant and profound. The perceived cultural domination of the United States over the rest of the world (Americanisation) was once looked upon as the means by which the entire globe would eventually be homogenised:

> The assumption that all particularities, local cultures, would eventually give way under the relentless modernizing force of American cultural imperialism implied that all particularities were linked together in a symbolic hierarchy. Modernization theory set the model into motion, with the assumption that as each non-Western nation eventually became modernized it would move up the hierarchy and duplicate or absorb American culture, to the extent that ultimately every locality would display the cultural ideals, images and material artefacts of the American way of life (Featherstone, 1995:87).

That aspects of American culture saturate the globe cannot be disputed, but proponents of modernization theory clearly failed to appreciate the capacity of ethnic groups to rally against Americanisation with exported tokens of their own particular cultures. In the words of Featherstone and Lash — "today we can not only speak about Europeanization and Americanization, but also of Japanization and even Brazilianization… The range of and pluralization of responses to modernity means that it may well be preferable to refer to global modernities" (1995:3).

As Calhoun and Weber inform us, the concept of nationalism is necessarily contested, as any attempt to espouse a singular definition of the term would clearly favour some societal groups at the expense of others (Calhoun, 1997:98; Weber, 1948:21-22). Insofar as contemporary situations are concerned, technological advancements are complicating the ever-tenuous filiation that binds state and individual together. For nation-states, territory is no longer a crucially significant notion, given that the 'information age' has switched politico-economic emphasis towards

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[106] The European Union (EU) is not overtly popular with European citizens who believe that it lacks democracy and relevance to the individual. Giddens thinks it is important,

"knowledge and competitive capability" (Giddens, 1998:140). In line with this, nation-states are revisiting the notion of characterising their dominions as 'frontiers' rather than 'borders' due to the overlapping ties they create with "other regions and transnational groupings of all kinds" (Giddens, 1998:130). Such actions, whether by accident or design, almost invariably prejudice against communities of citizens, particularly when they are located in 'frontiers' that are ostensibly out of sight and out of mind to the state responsible for their administration.

Giddens' reference to the 'transnational' is of particular interest in that it gives voice to an aspect of globalisation that is so feared by today's cultural pessimists (Waters, 1995:75). Transnational companies are looked upon with distrust and revulsion on account of their capacity for achieving financial positions that exceed the gross national products of many smaller nation-states. Some commentators are less impressed by notions of transnationalism, however, as Castells illustrates in writing that:

> as the process of globalization progresses, organizational forms evolve from *multi-national enterprises* to *international networks,* actually bypassing the so-called "transnationals" that belong more to the world of mythical representation (or self-serving image-making by management consultants) than to the institutionally bounded realities of the world economy (1996:192; italics in original).

Hirst and Thompson (1996:2), who contend that empirical evidence of the existence of transnational corporations is minimal at best, air similar doubts about the legitimacy of the 'transnational' concept. As they see it, the vast majority of large contemporary corporations continue to favour the incorporation of a headquarters located within a particular nation, meaning that only the trading is transnational, not the company itself. The views of both Castells (1996) and Hirst and Thompson (1996) offer considerable support to a pro nation-state argument that has suffered considerably in recent times on account of 'economic globalisation' incursions into the broader nationalism debate.

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however, in that it is pioneering the cause of cosmopolitan nationalism (1998:142).

Economic perspectives have their place within this debate, but they nevertheless lack the potential to gauge the depth of feeling and impact that cultural influences, ethnicity in particular, have on volatile nationalist agendas:

> Nations are not monolithic entities, but are split into factions, ranging from extremists and terrorists to state-allied 'unionists'. Only rarely does a nationalist movement achieve majority support in its own nation for a particular course of action, and the state is thus able to manipulate the factions of the ethnic nation to its ends (Kellas, 1998:75).

The ability of the state to construct a single acceptable form of nationalism under which to govern is rendered a practical impossibility by the presence of competing ethnicities within its jurisdiction. This is especially true of states whose historical development has resulted in the creation of a society characterised by 'internal colonisation', wherein one ethnic group has become the officially sanctioned nationality type at the expense of smaller subordinated ones (Kellas, 1998:71). It is also only slightly less problematic for states such as the USA that have no officially sanctioned ethnic characteristics (Greenfeld, 1993:13; Hobsbawm, 1990:63) as all of the ethnic groups residing there are keen to ensure that their counterparts do not capture the socio-political high ground at their expense. Ethnicity is perhaps the most exclusive of all nationalist qualifiers as it serves to deny membership to those who lack a common line of descent from that which is considered the norm (Kellas, 1998:65; Hobsbawm, 1990:63). To be denied access to this line of descent by accidents of birth can have grave ramifications for individuals who are effectively relegated to the hidden fringes of the state. This is also true for those whose descent lines are favourable, but whose political leanings deviate markedly from those that the state in question deems acceptable.

Cyberspatial media vehicles allow aggrieved individuals to access and lobby state apparatuses even when they are consigned by fate to the territorial fringes of the nation. As some citizens choose to tell it, however, one does not necessarily have to reside on the territorial fringes of a state

to be adversely treated by its government. Giddens illustrates this point perfectly in alluding to a 1994 American study which showed that a mere 25% of respondents trusted the United States government to do the right thing by its constituents (1998:51).[107] This figure is very much in keeping with white nationalist interpretations of government policy and the feeling, among white priders, that the White House is placing external interests before those of the American people. In real terms, far-right movements (white nationalists included) have precious little presence and influence over political power, but they remain viable for their ability to thrust issues onto conventional political agendas (Giddens, 1998:52).

CMC not only provides white nationalists with an environment in which they can coordinate activities aimed at eroding state control over *patriot* interests, but it also allows them to filter their ideologies into the cyberspatial mainstream. It is in this setting that nationalism becomes less preoccupied with elements of politics, culture and economy, and more concerned with prevailing over the opposition in a war over perceptions of historical truth:

> According to Identity Christians, the truth is getting out because of the ingenuity of God's people. Circumventing the monopoly of the Jewish-controlled media, ZOG [Zionist Occupationist Government] censors and FCC [Federal Communications Commission] restrictions, the message of white Israel is being disseminated via Internet and e-mail [and assorted] alternate routes that the media censors cannot control (Bushart et al. 1998:227).

And yet this freedom from censor control grows ever more fragile, as world governments begin to reassess the sanctity that cyberspace has long held as the ultimate vessel of 'free speech'. It will be absorbing to watch the ways in which such groups respond to governmental attempts to close them out of the rapidly surging online loop. It will be equally engrossing to gauge the likely repercussions for other political lobby groups if the capacity for them to lobby state bodies is duly compromised by the same

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[107] Equally as fascinating are the results of a poll held at a similar time in which 90% of American respondents approved of "democratically organised government" as implemented by the United States government (Giddens, 1998:72).

initiatives aimed at silencing the virtual voices of far-right activists. Cyberspace may not prove to be the last bastion of modern nationalist imperatives, but it certainly promises to be a fertile platform for the contestation of global versus local concerns in the short to medium-term future.

In closing

The underlying *raison d'être* for this chapter was to lay the foundations for a broad explication of the sociological concept of nationalism as it has developed historically. The direction of this explication has been necessarily abbreviated, owing to the overwhelmingly vast ideological terrain that the concept covers. In keeping with the format of previous chapters (2 and 4), the strands of thought highlighted in this explication have been chosen for their capacity to inform and shape discussion in the ensuing chapter.

The definition of nationalism that is employed here will endeavour to highlight the centrality of the individual to the concept, which differs markedly from conventional definitions that position micro-level aspects in clear subservience to macro-level objectives. This approach to definition will also be congruous to the individual-orientated theme of the thesis, along with the implicit human agency tone set out in Giddens' theory of structuration. It also relates neatly to the consistent efforts of this chapter to maintain focus on the ways in which nationalist sentiment depends on, and is reinforced by, its success in drawing empathy from the everyday citizens within states. With this in mind, the operating definition of nationalism made use of in Chapter Seven will be — *The underlying assumptions and influences that motivate and give meaning to an individual's perceptions of his/her place in the broader political, ideological, cultural and economic machinations of imagined communities of state.* The individual may not be so prominent in investigations of nationalism, as compared with self-identity and community, but the willingness of persons to openly oppose state implemented policy and infrastructure is indicative of the hidden impact that nationalist machinations can have at the micro-level of society.

As was the case with the definition of community formulated in Chapter Four, this explanation of nationalism recognises the role of geography in the concept's formation, but also reasserts an individual's right to indulge in nationalist sentiment that is independent of geographic restraints. In the same way that contemporary citizens can feel part of a community despite being physically distanced from it, so too can individuals espouse support for a form of nationalism regardless of whether they are internally or externally based in relation to the country for which this nationalism is endowed.

Unlike Chapters Three and Five, the following chapter does not devote explicit page space to predefined variables, although it operates similarly in the sense that it explores specific themes that best position contemporary nationalist initiatives within the broader sphere of cyberspace. The first of these themes centres upon the degree of commitment that netizens display toward the physical nation in which they reside. In the course of our everyday lives it has become almost commonplace for each of us to categorise ourselves in accordance with the country that we live in. For the most part, this process is enacted out of learned habit and, as such, scarcely registers as an action of import in the mind of the individual concerned. The action itself is also often unconsciously removed from deep individual consideration in that it is commonly requested on bureaucratic paperwork administered by governmental agencies.[108]

The somewhat blasé approach to nationalism by many Westerners (Calhoun, 1997:1) is further reified in real-life scenarios by the realisation that one is almost constantly in the presence of like others. This is to say that in the general course of the everyday, an American citizen (in the United States) will negotiate their activities secure in the knowledge that they are surrounded by fellow citizens, 99% of whom are also American. This is indicative of 'imagined community' most simply expressed, wherein the individual proceeds with unstated confidence that their general

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[108] It is exceedingly rare for governmental forms not to include a category that asks the individual concerned for their nationality. The answer to this question is all too rarely

worldview is shared by those in their immediate surrounds. For netizens, however, it is often impossible to be certain as to the nationality of the person with whom you are interacting, and the particular (culturally generated) worldviews that they may uphold. The netizen is unsure of who they may find themselves interacting with online; apprehensive about who else may be silently watching these interactions unannounced; and nervous as to where the information that they are espousing may be finishing up in the seemingly limitless arcane world of wires. Because of this, some netizens seek to withhold or distort their nationalities as a means of protecting their identities and activities online. This is particularly true of many white nationalist Internet users, and the analysis of this theme attempts to reach an understanding of how netizens choose to portray (or withhold) their national identities from the rest of the online world.

This theme also touches upon aspects of globalisation and deals with the future significance that netizens are likely to attribute to their national identities. As explained above, the tendency for citizens to endow themselves with real-life nationalist qualifiers in a seemingly blasé fashion stems directly from the way that cultural institutions have routinised the use and acceptance of such qualifiers. It is possible then, that being exposed to an environment in which such routine acceptance of qualifiers is significantly downgraded, may lead to netizens becoming equally indifferent about not identifying themselves with particular nationalities. Conversely, it may be that online fora become central vehicles for the combating of global forces, leading instead to individuals identifying even more acutely with elements of nation.

The second theme of interest here, is one that expounds upon the notions of inclusivity and exclusivity as they apply to nationalist memberships. The writings on community provided a firm sense of the ways in which meso-level groups are made open to some whilst, at the same time, closed to others. This is no different at the macro-level and it is worthwhile attempting to glean a sense of the ways in which doors are

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pertinent to the integral reason why the form is being completed in the first place, hence

opened and closed to netizens as they endeavour to build a viable forms of national identity for themselves online. What are the qualities and characteristics by which people will be assessed here, and who will be charged with the responsibility of deciding who is in and who is out? This theme is especially intriguing when addressed in relation to the white nationalist focus group around which the empirical aspects of this study have been based.

Religion and ethnicity are two other key thematic areas that are seldom too far removed from broader discussions on the concept of nationalism. The steady erosion of religious practices in Western societies during the twentieth century, accompanied by an increased distancing of state policy from theocratic doctrine has also played a part in the rise of stateless nationalism, along with revitalised expressions of ethnic nationalism. Religion is both a driving force and dividing agent for the white pride movement as it works toward the unlikely realisation of a 'White Israel' utopia. Its capacity for enabling and constraining individual thought and group action are touched upon here, along with the movement's ongoing problems with ethnic matters.

One of the biggest hurdles that white nationalism faces in its search for internal cohesion and political legitimacy, is the ultra divisive issue of ethnicity. This is an inevitable consequence of the movement having set its 'membership' guidelines too broadly, whilst simultaneously constructing a policy platform that is almost untenably restrictive in its dimensions. The overriding aim of the movement (in general) appears geared toward uniting the white masses against the unspeakable *others* that, deliberately or otherwise, have sought to diminish the standing and living circumstances of white persons on a global scale. There are many flaws apparent in this standpoint, not the least of which is that white persons are not, and never have been, a united global grouping. In essence, white pride idealism blindly overlooks the harsh reality that Caucasians are as deeply divided by uncommon experiences of history, culture, religion and political process as any other classification of human. This truism was

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nationality is thus reduced to a state of innocuousness in the mind of the individual.

made lucid during my empirical observation of the Stormfront.org participants and is elaborated upon further in Chapter Seven.

CHAPTER

7

Net Nationalism: CMC and the pursuit of nationalist agendas online

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Nationalism in the information age

> If there could be such a fantastic display of publicity about 1992 as being five hundred years after the conquest of (aboriginal) America by Europeans, it is probably because 1993 was Year One of the reconquest of the world by virtual capitalism (Kroker, 1996:178).

In the introduction chapter of this thesis, primary emphasis was afforded to the contemporary political contestation of cyberspace and the differing levels of success that various global states have had in attempting to colonise the virtual realm. For most countries, the need to expand domestic economic opportunities, along with their overall global political presence "is the *superordinate aim and justificatory condition* for the state policy-making apparatus" (Kroker, 1996:173, italics in original). The wide scope and reach of CMC media has made cyberspace the political vehicle of choice for achieving this objective, resulting in marked changes to the political and economic hierarchies of many contemporary states (Brown, 1997:13). For these nations there is much to be gained and much to be lost from their cyberspatial endeavours, a stressful task that is made all the more burdensome by the catch-22 situation that they find themselves placed in. Technology and affluence have, it would seem, become mutually correlative factors. This means that while it is

necessary for modern countries to have technological prowess and access in order to prosper, they must first have the economic means to construct a viable technological platform from which to build upon (Mariou et al. 2001). With this in mind, it is hardly surprising that so many countries should find themselves struggling below the technological development line.[109]

While the main thrust of the introductory chapter was to provide the reader with a preliminary snapshot of the current cyberspace terrain, it was nevertheless also helpful in evidencing the (predominantly) economic imperatives that preoccupy nation-states at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The seemingly privileged place of economic factors in the broader machinations of state is not a new phenomenon, hence the decision to detail the developing forms of nationalist ideology in the previous chapter. There were two points to arise from Chapter Six that I would particularly like to reiterate and reinforce at this time. Firstly, the virtual realm is an especially intriguing sphere for fresh investigations of the nationalism concept. On the one hand, cyberspace is the newest arena in which nation-states have staked their respective claims for power and respect in the contemporary world. It is at once a battleground site for constantly evolving global disputes, and a site that is coveted in and of itself for the potential prestige and rewards that come with being at the forefront of cyberspatial development. On the other hand, cyberspace is also a threat to conventional economy-driven modes of nationalism in that it diminishes the capacity of states to confidently maintain centralised modes of governance (Jordan, 1999:162).

Kroker illustrated this point well in writing that "the state that cannot plan in the interests of its own social economy, and that cannot act on behalf of its own political economy, is also the disappearing state"

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[109] The 'development line' sets expected levels for viable economic, social and political growth by nations in relation to the cyberspatial sphere. Countries that are operating on figures that fall above this line are seen as technologically developing nations, those operating at subpar levels are, by way of contrast, seen to be in regression. Not unexpectedly, Scandinavian, North American and Western European countries are mostly performing well here, with Middle Eastern, Central European, Eastern European, South American, Asian, and African countries almost invariably dwelling in regression (Norris, 2001:chapter 3).

(1996:173). There is much merit in this statement although, were it to be applied uncritically to the world of today, it could be argued that most contemporary nation-states are of the 'disappearing' variety. There is little doubt that all of the nations residing on the wrong side of the technological development line are struggling to maintain the viability of their political economies, but even those countries performing well in this regard face problems. This is because it is practically impossible to make rapid and pronounced advancements with one's political economy without causing damage and disruption to the social economy in the process. It is here that the modern state faces its humanistic crisis, with the nationalist ideal of 'rule for all' failing to reconcile with the harsh reality that many citizens cannot participate in, or benefit from, state economic initiatives at the highest level.

This is not to suggest that human actors themselves are simply disinterested 'consumers' of nationalist ideology, however, with the residents of certain countries proving quite adept at propagating nationalist sentiment. The Trinidadians studied by Miller and Slater in their ethnographic research into the Internet clearly exemplify this point:

> At the same time, then, that the Internet opens the gates to a potential cosmopolitanism it also exposes a global parochialism that makes them feel insecure as to whether their own nationality constitutes a recognized place in the world at large... The highlighting of nationalism in their representation of themselves to others went with a tendency to engage with others as members of national cultures and to engage with them through popular [specifically North American] cultures... Trinidadians would often aggressively assert their knowledge of this common popular culture to their correspondent in order to combat any suggestion that they are an unsophisticated 'third world' country (2000:99-100).

Perhaps these Trinidadians can be seen as the prototypical purveyors of nationalism for the information age, wherein knowledge is seen as an all important commodity and the Internet looms as the choice vehicle for obtaining and expressing this knowledge. On another level, the actions of the Trinidadians show us that nationalism should never be carelessly limited to discussions of state politics and contested markets. For, at the

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elementary level, it also finds favour with everyday citizens who need to feel (at the very least) equal to the unknown *others* that they see on their television screens and encounter on their computer monitors.

In spite of this, most commentators still prefer to address nationalism from the state angle. Postmodern rhetoric would have us believe that the nation-state is a fading relic and it is possible that the preference for exploring nationalism in state terms is a reaction against this view by scholars of modernity. This is to be expected, although it is likely that the pressing reason behind contemporary state attempts to revert to traditional forms of nationalist ideology lies in the rise of competing strands of neo-nationalism. A sturdy, all-encompassing information and communication infrastructure is essential for any contemporary nation desiring administrative control over its population (Robins & Webster, 1999:134). Cyberspace certainly provides the platform for this potentiality, but it also complicates matters by allowing the opponents of conventional nationalist formats significant scope to oppose the *status quo.* The proliferation of global media has thus put extra pressure on nation-states by simultaneously illuminating their functions and processes, whilst also limiting their capacity to stifle (forcefully or otherwise) dissent from sectors of the domestic population.

This leads us neatly to the thoughts of Hakken (1999) who has spent more than twenty years investigating the social aspects inherent in computing and the Internet, with much of this research centering on the twin spheres of work and industry. Foremost among Hakken's findings is the assertion that national and cultural differences are integral to the continuing construction of cyberspace. History suggests that affairs of the state are never far removed from matters of technological innovation, as evidenced by the state-driven development of computerised technology in the Nordic region. Heavy state overtures have also been apparent in largely unsuccessful North American attempts to streamline computerised technology development in a manner that would best complement its nationalist agenda (Hakken, 1999:133-149). Whilst these nationalist endeavours may have failed the Americans on a domestic level, it could be argued that the country is more than making-up for this on a global

scale wherein initiatives such as the 'Global Information Infrastructure act' (GII) cloak American cultural and economic pursuits beneath a slender guise of well-meaning philanthropy (Loader, 1997:6, O'Connor, 1996:271).

Other writers, such as Barwell & Bowles (2000) willingly concede that the structural origins of the Internet ensured that the medium was always at risk of becoming a powerful tool in the continuing American fight for economic and cultural expansionism. In spite of this, they are loath to write-off cyberspace as a realm that is helping to diminish nationalist developments in favour of monolithic expressions of Americanisation. Instead, they hasten to recognise "the potential of the Internet for violating the priorities and privileges of non-US national authorities in the control of sensitive information, without necessarily acting in the interests of the US Government". Accordingly, Barwell & Bowles contend that colonisation and governance of cyberspace remains contested and unclarified, with sufficient scope existing for non-American countries to create a virtual space for their own cultural objectives and transmissions (2000:703-705).

The American creation and dominance of the Internet, and the responses of other nations to this dominance, is a significant aspect of the nationalism debate as it relates to cyberspace. It should not, however, be seen as the be all and end all of the debate. It is for this reason that I have decided to break this discussion up into three parts so as to most effectively and thoroughly present the nationalism concept in its online guise. In the first instance, I focused on the political/economic elements of Internet nationalism, which will take into account the efforts undertaken by contemporary states and regions to establish a prominent place for themselves in the broader cyberspatial infrastructure [refer Introduction]. In the second instance, I will shift discussion to a brief exploration of ethnicity online, and the manner in which assorted diaspora are utilising cyberspace as an open gateway to otherwise closed avenues to "home" and family. Finally, I will close with an investigation into 'online patriotism' and the opportunities that cyberspace presents to individuals and organisations whose political ideologies and objectives run counter to those espoused by mainstream political parties and state institutions.

Ethnicity and race online

In Chapter Three of this thesis, considerable time was devoted to the exploration of a variety of aspects that are considered problematic to the developmental processes of individual identities. Foremost among these were the concepts of gender and ethnicity, although it should be noted that only gender appeared in significant detail during that chapter. The decision to hold discussion of ethnicity and race over to this chapter was a carefully considered one, given that there can be little doubt that an individual's ethnicity contributes substantially to the way in which they locate themselves within their particular social world. The same is equally true of gender, but whereas a person's gender only impacts upon their impressions of nationhood in a relatively minor sense, a person's race is necessarily at the forefront of such considerations.

In turning to the virtual realm, indications are that female netizens are constructing a solid presence for themselves online, regardless of the levels of male-opposition that may or may not be in place. The place of race in cyberspace is not quite as well established, however, with most online spaces existing devoid of racial determinants (Kolko, 2000:214). Just as the universal language of the Internet is seen to be English, so too is the default race of cyberspace perceived to be white, in line with Western hegemony over the CMC sphere (Kolko, 2000:216). This contributes to the perpetuation of an 'us versus them' mentality between Western and non-Western Internet users, with Caucasians (in general) seeing Asians (and other coloured peoples) as the 'other' and Asians, in return, seeing "the white race as just monolithic" (Tsang, 1994:434). With most users being Caucasian to begin with [refer Table 9] and some non-Caucasian users being unprepared to divulge their ethnicity online, it is all too easy for racial factors to be conveniently elided in virtual environments.

As is the case with gender, however, debate exists as to the existence of an 'ethnic divide' in cyberspace. The findings published from a recent Stanford study into Internet usage contend that "the most

Table 9. Top 15 countries for Internet usage as at December 2002[110]

Nation	Number of Users (#K)	Share %
1. USA	160, 700	24.13
2. Japan	64,800	9.73
3. China	54,500	8.18
4. Germany	30,350	4.56
5. United Kingdom	27,150	4.08
6. South Korea	26,900	4.04
7. Italy	20,850	3.13
8. Canada	17,830	2.68
9. France	16,650	2.50
10. India	16,580	2.49
11. Brazil	15,840	2.38
12. Russia	13,500	2.03
13. Australia	10,450	1.57
14. Spain	10,390	1.56
15. Taiwan	9,510	1.43
TOP 15 TOTAL	496,000	74.48
GLOBAL TOTAL	665,910	100.00

important factors facilitating or inhibiting Internet access are education and age", not income or race/ethnicity which account for minimal changes in overall rates of Internet participation (Nie & Erbring, 2000). Technological initiatives are also helping to break down the long-term Western dominance of cyberspatial media:

> the Net is now growing fastest in developing countries
> (and) Web browsers are being adapted for an increasing
> number of languages and character sets. Thus, while
> Internet users around the world still must use English for

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[110] Almost a quarter of all Internet users are residents of the United States of America and over half of all global users represented in the top 15 hale from countries that have a higher concentration of Caucasians among their populations than other races. It should be acknowledged, however, that the USA is in decline in terms of per capita Internet usage and it is also envisaged that the number of Chinese users will overtake the Japanese figure by the year 2005.

global communication, today they are increasingly turning
to their own language to reach websites or join
discussions in their own country or region (Warschauer,
2000: 157).

Ethnicity carries considerable import to the concept of self-identity on
account of the manner in which it helps to build an individual's sense of
self around cultural conventions, as expressed through community ties
and strongly held nationalist leanings. With specific regard to cyberspace,
we can see the prominence of the ethnicity/self relationship in the plentiful
instances of ethnic diasporic groups employing CMC vehicles as a means
of maintaining intellectual and psychological links to their culture of origin.

Prominent among such groups are the Jews, widely considered to be
among the most nomadic of all diaspora, and arguably the most well
organised ethnic group to inhabit the virtual terrain. This long history of
population dispersal has helped condition Jewish people to the
widespread usage of varied and ever changing communication vehicles,
as Goldlust explains in writing that:

Another significant characteristic of the Jewish diasporic
experience has been the importance placed on
continuous communication between these geographically
dispersed 'communities'. Such links were maintained
through a constant stream of Jewish travellers including,
among others, traders, rabbis, religious teachers,
students, musicians and entertainers who passed from
one community to another, bringing news, gossip, and
occasional correspondence (2001:15).

In recent times, Jewish groups—perhaps as a consequence of their high
access rates to education, finance and technology—have rapidly forged a
strong presence (10,000+ sites) in cyberspace (Goldlust, 2001:18-19).
Historically speaking, the Jewish utilisation of evolving communication
media has been primarily concerned with the preservation of culture,
although another key stimulus has also come into play over the past fifty
years. The official recognition of the State of Israel in 1948 provided
Jewish people with a physical and spiritual homeland around which they
could actively promote and nurture a defining sense of nationhood

(Goldlust, 2001:17; Poster, 1998:205). The momentousness of this decision to create a nation for a population so long deprived of one has, not surprisingly, reshaped the nature of Jewish Diaspora. For the most part, the extensive employment of assorted communication media by Jews has been necessarily aimed at the integration of Jewish people (Poster, 1998:206). It is noteworthy that such a process has long been more readily pursued by ethnic groups with a shared sense of nationhood behind them, and the ever-present possibility of a return to this nation ahead of them. Prior to 1948, the Jewish people could only hope to perpetuate isolated forms of Jewish community, whereas now the Diaspora incorporate the added function of contributing to, and monitoring the development of, the Jewish state.

While the Jewish experience of modern nationhood may not be a particularly lengthy one, they have clearly been the pacesetters in other areas of ethnic settlement. This is reflected in the contemporary circumstances of many diasporic communities, wherein immigrants now commonly settle into generalised society settings rather than moving to small enclaves composed predominantly of fellow migrants from the mother country (Mitra, 1997:57). This mirrors previous movements of Jewish migrants, particularly in the United States, who have preferred to intersperse themselves throughout the wider society, rather than set themselves physically and symbolically apart from it. Cyberspace affords extra fascination to current explorations of ethnicity on account of the way it serves to reverse this newly favoured emigration trend. For all the computopian talk of a world united through cyberspace, it is all too clearly apparent that much of the WWW is organised into exclusive cyber realms that are primarily culturally dependent and mediated (Mitra, 1997:62).

A striking feature of the colonisation of cyberspace by non-Western ethnic groups is the tendency for such colonisation to be formulated on pre-existing foundations of ethnic association found in fleshspace settings (Goldlust, 2001:21; Gomes, 2001:59). It is common for ethnic groups to take an insular approach to matters of association, as much for reasons of necessity as desire, wherein ethnic peoples find comfort and confidence in the creation of social and political networks with like-minded others who

share a common ancestry and racial background. Contemporary innovations like the Internet afford fresh impetus and direction to this associative process, but do not serve to fundamentally alter the organic nature of the process itself.

Cyberspace then is a fertile environment for maintaining and reshaping agencies of association for ethnic groups, even if it rarely (if ever) serves to build such agencies from the ground up. The role of cyberspace in supporting and shaping the political ambitions and motives of such groups is, however, not nearly as straightforwardly defined. For instance, indigenous American Cherokee see the Internet as being an excellent medium through which to teach and disseminate social and historical aspects of their culture, due to the visual pictographic style of their language and the capacity of the Internet to accommodate this linguistic style (Arnold & Plymire, 2000:187). Other indigenous American groups oppose the employment of cyberspatial vehicles for such purposes, however, contending that the Internet is not a great space for the reinvigoration of indigenous American histories and practices on account of basic native spirituality being so closely tied to physical land structures, from which CMC technologies are so obviously removed (Arnold & Plymire, 2000:189). Indigenous American apprehension toward the Internet is also furnished by the manner in which online material relating to Indigenous Americans is packaged and presented. Much of this material ghettoises native culture and inadvertently propagates 'Vanishing Indian Syndrome', wherein indigenous culture is seen to be so derelict as to be insignificant in comparison to representations of mainstream North American culture (Arnold & Plymire, 2000:189).

For some non-Western nations and peoples then, online political stances are more closely approximated to global public relations exercises than they are to explicit attempts at national advancement. Earlier in this chapter mention was made of online Trinidadians and their pressing concerns with showing the outside world that they are not culturally deprived and ignorant people (Miller & Slater, 2000:99-100). This need finds a mirror in the behaviour of Tongan participants on the Kava Bowl online discussion forum, wherein netizens took a very dim view of other

users presenting bad language and expressions of violence on the site, embarrassed by the image of Tonga that this would portray to the rest of the world (Morton, 1999:245).

The similarities between Tongan and Trinidadian uses of the CMC technology do not end there, however, with Morton providing a succinct explanation of typical Tongan online interactions in writing that:

> participants are using the [Kava Bowl] forum to carefully reassess 'Tongan culture'. This includes critiques of practices such as giving away money beyond a family's means to fulfil family and church obligations, and the demands placed on individuals and families by those considered superior to them in the hierarchy of kinship and rank (1999:248).

In Western societies, ethnicity is commonly employed as a classificatory tool through which one's status in the broader society is clarified and ranked. In this way the place of ethnicity in Western societies is commonly conflated with notions of class, given that Western societies view class largely along economic determinist lines and it is ethnic groups that commonly occupy the lower socio-economic strata of capitalist nations (Eriksen, 1993:6-7). This view serves to obscure the hierarchical structures that almost invariably exist within individual 'ethnic' groups themselves; and online groups such as the Kava Bowl are instructive for the way in which they lay such otherwise concealed aspects of non-Western behaviour bare for all to see.

Family, as Morton has already outlined above, is often a central component in hierarchy construction and maintenance processes for many non-Western cultures. Such processes are generally reinforced by steadfast adherence to endogamous kinship structures, wherein marriages between like others are seen as the best strategy for preserving cultural behaviours that are considered integral to the particular cultural group in question (Eriksen, 1993:32). This goes some way toward explaining the considerable number of web-based initiatives that are devoted to the fostering of relationships between men and women of specific ethnic extractions. This is not to say that WWW vehicles with a

bent toward dating are always required to meet these ends, of course, given that the endogamic nature of many ethnic-based online groups readily encourages the formation of such relationships anyway. These contentions need to be qualified, however, by the understanding that the majority of relationships formed by Western couples are also endogamic, in spite of freely espoused cultural values that decry notions of difference. This last point is underscored by the realisation that global forces have, to some extent, weakened the capacity for non-Western cultural groups to control the instances of exogamy within their communities.

Indeed the reverse is true for many non-Western countries, with family ties and roles being seen as cardinal elements of Trinidadian culture. Trinidad has long been characterised by high instances of emigration, with many Trini choosing to leave the home country for education purposes and a good portion of these expatriates remaining in the new host country upon graduation because of higher job and salary opportunities (Miller & Slater, 2000:36). In past times, this has resulted in considerable anxiety for Trini people who have found themselves physically isolated from their kin and the everyday familial interactions around which their lives have previously revolved. The invention of e-mail has thus proven a godsend for diasporic Trini who can now maintain familial contact and obligations on an intimate and inexpensive daily basis (Miller & Slater, 2000:56). Kinship matters, albeit of a less pressing nature, are also seen to drive the online participation of some non-Tongan mothers of Tongan children who see the Kava Bowl as an avenue through which they can develop and foster the cultural heritage of their geographically displaced child (Morton, 1999:244-245).

While familial concerns may be foremost in the minds of many non-Western online participants; it would be naïve to downplay the political presence that cyberspace affords to countless others. Jewish groups, by way of example, show a strong tendency toward monitoring political activities and developments *via* CMC. This reinforces suggestions that the Internet is a prime space for nation building, even though much of the building takes place outside of the geographical confines of the nation in question (Goldlust, 2001:26). On top of this, it also serves to highlight the

fragility apparent in computopian assurances that the Internet is the 'melting pot' in which cultural differences will be inevitably blended away. The desire to perpetuate and preserve local culture *via* global media is all too evident in the prominent depiction of a symbolic *kumete* (kava bowl) image on the Kava Bowl online discussion forum (Morton, 1999:239). Tonga's sea-faring past has been remodelled to fit with its space-faring future, as the nation refuses to mimic the technological apprehension of other small and underprivileged countries by utilising cyberspace as a means of achieving desired levels of economic prosperity and security (Morton, 1999:235).

The aims of the Tongans appear suitably unifying, but this is not the case for all ethnic groups online. Nationalism has proven decidedly problematic for some Indian-orientated online groups[111], with general Indian Diaspora seeing themselves as 'non-resident Indians' and Trinidadians calling themselves 'people of Indian origins' (Miller & Slater, 2000:176). This appears harmless enough to uninitiated Westerners, but the subtle semantic difference in these terms obfuscates marked ideological disparities, with the latter portraying itself as a politically viable lobby group and mocking the former on account of its perceived dearth of political power and influence. Divisions of a similar nature are also driving a wedge between Goan netizens, with African Goans online asserting their alleged superiority over their Indian and Pakistani counterparts who they see as being culturally and spiritually 'beneath' them (Gomes, 2001:58). Indian expatriates, in particular, find themselves fighting a war of online identification on multiple fronts. Subsequently, Indian diaspora need to be able to assess themselves against fellow Indian peoples, rival immigrant cultures and perceptions of them that are held by the dominant ethnie of the host country. Discussion pertaining explicitly to India and Indian-ness invariably divide these diasporic communities, whilst discussions relating to non-Indian others help to unite them (Mitra, 1997:62). This is the crucial distinguishing factor that separates ethnic culture as espoused by some diaspora, from the national identities commonly negotiated by their

erstwhile compatriots back in the 'home' country (Mallapragada, 2000:182).

Two of the three major strands of online nationalism have now been elaborated upon in this chapter. The first strand focused implicitly on the across the board push by numerous nation-states for a greater political and economic presence in cyberspace and access to the subsequent increase in power and prosperity that success in the virtual realm is predicted to bring. This form of nationalism is unashamedly driven by fiscal motivations and is essentially indistinguishable from the broader free market objectives that have underscored Western tenets of nationalism for the better part of two centuries, most specifically since the end of World War Two. Ostensibly, cyberspace is an extension of the vast media terrain that has preoccupied governments and corporations for decades, with one telling difference. In the past it has often been enough for governments to control these various media forms at the domestic level, but with cyberspace, as several Asian states have discovered, overt control at the domestic level often results in untenable restrictions at the global level. This is the challenge of online nationalism for contemporary nation-states as they struggle to reconcile domestic needs for market expansion, whilst simultaneously protecting the national security and political *status quo* from the unprecedented threat of free and openly critical information flow.

This is nationalism at the most profoundly macro-level, where input from human actors at the widespread micro-level is neither implicitly desired nor expressly required. By way of contrast, the second form of online nationalism presented here was instructive of the place of nationalism at the meso-level, wherein groups of individuals (communities) cling to tenets of national culture and tradition as a means of informing and supporting the everyday machinations and future directions of the group. The final form of online nationalism to be written of here is stateless nationalism, which changes the conceptual focus again by privileging nationalism as a micro-level initiative in which human actors can, and will,

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[111] In this instance, I am referring to expatriats of India itself and NOT natives of North

have some influence on the broader national agenda developing around them.

Stateless nationalism

This discussion on stateless nationalism will be heavily influenced by the views of first-hand Internet patriots themselves, with much of the material for this section being drawn from the lurking and interviewing phases of the thesis methodology. If it is true that cyberspace and assorted global media are serving to diminish the import and sovereignty of nation-states, then it should stand to reason that netizens, in general, are exemplifying this erosion of nationhood through declining support for the concept. Theoretically, at least, this scenario should only be further heightened for white nationalists online, given that a unifying tenet in the broad sweep of competing ideology that swamps the movement is the idea of privileging the white race before and above all else, nation included. If the comments made by white pride devotees themselves are anything to go by, however, it would appear that there is still plenty of life left in the nation-state yet.

> **Will your current nationality retain any future significance for you if the promise of a white utopia is realised?**
>
> **Yes: 11   No: 9   Unsure: 1**

> **Nordic Fury:** It will only be significant in the sense of being true about my past. Race extends beyond culture and nation. The new definition of nation should be a more concrete one, as it has been traditionally, that of race.
>
> **Madame Blavatsky:** My current nationality? I will always adhere to the Constitution of the United States of America. If others choose to nullify it, and I have to oppose them, then so be it. It's still my Constitution.
>
> **Redshift:** Yes. Nationality is the cornerstone of identity. Since my nation [Germany] has evolved

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America and Canada.

over 40,000 years it is unique from other nations and should therefore be preserved and cherished, as should other nations. The white race is not just one homogenous mass, but consists of distinct ethnic subgroupings which should be preserved in their racial purity.

Njord: I don't believe in white utopia... or in a multi-ethnical white state. A Germanic Union with freedom of movement, free trade, a common currency and a common military — including all Germanic states & Finland & Estland & Letvia & Lithuania (maybe) — would be the most desirable political solution.

Alex: Yes I think that Russian people will be in a head of [the] new world.

Mad as Hell Cow: Nationality... as much as it hurts to say... no, only the race is important now.

Abel: First and foremost I'm an Irishman and a Socialist and in a 'Socialist' utopia my nationhood would still be an issue, though not a great one; so I could still see nationality being important for White Nationalists. And remember the ethos of many of these groups is nationalist to the point of hating others. German nationalists hate British nationalists and vice-versa.

Emperor CS: There will never be a utopia and my nationality already means nothing to me... if you studied my interests on the ICQ interest page you could possibly see that... I am a business administration student, we deal internationally now.

There are several key points of interest to arise out of the above quotations. Firstly, it is clear that for many white nationalists, white skin colour alone will not be a sufficient criterion for the creation of a bold, new future society. This is hardly surprising, given that the notion of a white utopia stems largely from the fundamental Christian sectors of the white nationalist movement. For Seedline Christian Identity Movement (CIM) white nationalists, non-white persons are not merely lesser quality human beings (as they are for mainstream white priders), but rather they are innately evil beings spurned by God:

It is the intention of this evil Prince of the World [Satan] to destroy the white race — the Adamites who are descended from the first white man — to make wars upon

> them and to wipe them from the face of the earth...
> Seedline Identity holds that just as there is a people of
> God, there is also a direct lineage of Satan, and these two
> lineages are set against each other now and forever. For
> Seedline Identity Christians, Jews are the children of
> Satan (Bushart et al. 1998: 45).[112]

This view aids in the prefacing of white nationalism as a form of divine quest for the construction and development of a white utopia, which will unite the true (white) Israelites in a prophesised 'Kingdom of Israel' — commonly thought to exist in Northern America (Barkun, 1997:7). Seedline Identity is not the dominant player in white nationalist circles, but it is the simplest to comprehend in terms of what does and does not constitute "membership" of the movement. Essentially, if you look white you are white, and you will be granted acceptance on that basis, provided you also share a belief in the central tenets of Identity ideology.

It is the issue of "membership" that most tellingly divides the overall white nationalist movement today, and Internet patriots are not proving any more adept at negotiating this hurdle than their offline counterparts have been in the past. The difficulties apparent in finding common ground with fellow white nationalist devotees online are elucidated in the following responses to the question — do you have a problem with the differing viewpoints (among white nationalists) on the Stormfront.org website?

> **Viking:** Yeah, sometimes. There are a lot of Christians. I'm a heathen nationalist.
>
> **British Dave:** Sometimes I have a problem with certain American views on the scummy IRA!!!
>
> **Alex:** I said [to Western white priders] "You must know your place fulish bastards!" Because all troubles with Western nationalists is [that they think] "All Russians are communists" and "Hitler fight with Russians, [therefore] they are not Aryan".
>
> **Emperor CS:** Yes, most of the members were uneducated and confused. They could not define

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[112] It should be stressed here that Bushart et al. are describing Seedline Identity thought as gleaned from their research, not openly promoting it.

> what was white and what was not. Therefore because of the sheer void of educational value, I left.
>
> **Vamp88:** Sometimes. To put it out there, I do not think that religion belongs in the same realm as politics, they are separate viewpoints, but so many organisations fight mostly over the religious issue when they should be FOCUSING on racial and political issues.
>
> **Lycia:** I do have a major problem with infighting and provocateurs. The worst are the flame wars over religion and "Who Is Really White" threads. We need to remain united if we are to be successful in reclaiming our ancestral lands.

For the Internet patriots on Stormfront.org, the points of difference are many and varied, but most commonly they relate back to one of four main bones of contention — indicators of whiteness, the role of religion, the legitimacy of online activists, and the clarification of controversial political issues.

In the dominant Western countries (the USA in particular) it is common for Caucasian citizens to adopt a decidedly unproblematic perspective on their "whiteness". These citizens are so prominent in number, and so conspicuous in positions of cultural influence and power that it is difficult for many of them to consciously perceive of themselves as representing a particular cultural ethnie. In America, as is also the case for Britain and Australia, whiteness of skin, in conjunction with maleness and heterosexuality, has come to unambiguously represent "cultural authority" (Sudan, 2000:70). Such cultural authority is also invariably linked to side elements, such as a predisposition toward capitalism; English language; and membership of a Christian religious denomination (in one of its various guises). Most white persons would adhere to at least two of these three elements, ensuring that it is difficult for Caucasians, in a general sense, to look upon other Caucasians as being representative of *others* from whom they are significantly different.

The situation does become somewhat clouded, however, when political and religious ideology is heavily emphasised in regular interactions occurring between whites. At such a time, it is made all too

clear that a single white race only exists in an idealised and imagined sense and that the white race is no less affected by ethnic divisions (on a global level) as are other races. The term 'white race', it should be noted, is presented here in the manner in which it is commonly articulated in white nationalist discourse and should not be taken as a sign that I accept such a categorisation as fact.   As a direct consequence of this misguided interpretation of race, any firmly held white pride ambitions relating to the potential creation of a white utopia (White Israel) are necessarily diminished by ongoing disputes over the clarity and quality of a person's whiteness:

Anonymous: As a proud white aryan Hispanic/Latino, I just want to let everyone know that we do exist and that we wish to take part in your movement. Spain, Portugal, France and Italy are just as white as any other European country.

LMcLoughlin: Portugese are not white. Don't try to change the definition of the word. Portugese are part black. Yes, I am "intolerant", but why should I be offended, I have already been called this. As I said many times here; white is white and you are not.

t_hay: I take it that you have never been to Argentina have you? Before you start deciding who is white and who is not, take your little Irish ass on a field trip why don't you.The portugese are indeed white and who the hell are you to say that they are not. Are you a Jew? Argentina is a whiter country than the US will ever be.

Wlliam Forrest: Please teach us more. And please spread the word about Stormfront to your Aryan relatives. Even Hitler made [an] alliance with the Japanese, so how can we not look with kindness upon our White Brothers and Sisters from the Spanish and Portugese speaking parts of the Aryan World?

WP: sure lets open the doors to everyone... maybe we can [get] some affirmative action going in here too... yea! sounds like a good idea dont it, call all your spic reletives and tell them stormfront wants to diversify...LOL

Don Black: (t)he "Nordic supremacist" theory is held by many sincere White Nationalists, even though

Nordic types are, from my observation, the **least** likely to be racially conscious and have any sense of self-preservation. Though there are obvious differences between White subraces, these fade to insignificance when compared to our differences with other races. We must overcome these short-sighted views if we are to become more than [just] an ineffectual cult.

Anonymous: Don't let anyone tell you that you have to have blue eyes and blond hair to be white. That is laughable. I have known bi-racial people (black/white) who have had blue eyes and blond hair. That is just a crock. If you are of 100% European descent, you are white period. White Europeans should unite if our movement is ever going to succeed. By bickering with ourselves over trivial matters such as this we will gain nothing.

Bryn: Anonymous is right, the word "Hispanic" does not necessarily indicate someone of non-white lineage. The term, I suppose, has come to represent someone of wholly Indian, non-white blood. This is not an accurate assumption as it is not faithful to the literal meaning of "Hispanic".

LMcLoughlin: Hello Johann... If you identify with the Japanese, form a Japanese enclave... In the old days when tribes began mixing, those mixed-race folks broke off into their own tribes, or the culture and race fell into oblivion. We are trying to prevent that and hold the line. We may have few pure Celts, etc.. but what is wrong with trying to preserve the Northern European tribe? Maybe you could form a new tribe? The new Ainu's? An assimilated white minority enclave of like-minded folk? We will be sure to form diplomatic and military alliances with your people.

pure_race: I'll make it blatantly simple for everyone, and stick with the 15/16 [Caucasian blood] criteria for the moment, as that's what I've been doing for the last several months. Anyone would be hard-pressed to find someone that was 15/16 and had really dark skin, or non-white features. I'm sure David Lane took that into account when he stated it... 15/16 white is the cut-off, period.

The colour issue clearly shows that white nationalism cannot feasibly be removed from traditional nationalist frameworks. The above quotations

highlighted the way in which support for white nationalism is predicated upon understandings (and misunderstandings) of ethnic lineages and nation-state histories. It is not unusual for ethnic groups to construct their particular belief systems around common ancestry (Eriksen, 1993:35), although it is atypical for an ethnie to be characterised by such a wide range of competing histories and cultural identifiers.

The online white pride cause can also be seen to suffer from the overt number of American-based devotees within the movement. Stormfront.org is a prime example of this [refer Table 10] with upwards of half of the entire forum's participants hailing from the United States of America.[113] In accordance with this, it is exceedingly rare for main board message postings to the site not to be concerned with North American issues and developments in some shape or form. As a consequence of this, the broader white nationalist ideal of a unified global white nation is all too easily compromised by the regular and blatant privileging of American views and demands. This largely unconscious championing of American hegemony within the movement only leads to further tension when American–based white power adherents unwittingly patronise and/or trivialise political developments in Europe.

Essentially, white nationalism is an ideology that desperately requires increased levels of support and broad intra-organisational unity in the face of substantial worldwide opposition. It is a predominantly Western movement that struggles to adequately combat the residue of countless centuries of hostility and competition between fellow Western nation-states. The angst over notions of colour within the movement is further intensified by uncertainty (among members) as to how the military and technological developments of previous "white" states can be reconciled with contemporary white pride calls for racial unification. Alex's comments concerning his frustration over American assertions that Russians are anti-Aryan (for having fought the Nazis in World War Two); and t_hay's

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[113] The exact figure cannot be arrived at here, given the exorbitant number of participants (over half) that did not nominate a country when submitting their details to the site. This table does, however, provide an unmistakable sense of the American dominance of the site, and it is highly likely that a solid number of those failing to nominate a nationality (9981 in all) would have been North American.

Table 10. Stormfront.org membership growth by nationality 2000.
[SOURCE: data manually mined by author from
Stormfront.org throughout 2000]

COUNTRY	JANUARY	NOVEMBER	INCREASE (%)
ARGENTINA	6	21	**15** *(250)*
AUSTRALIA	98	234	**136** *(138.8)*
BRAZIL	8	23	**15** *(187.5)*
CANADA	228	508	**280** *(122.8)*
CHINA	0	1	**1** *(-)*
DENMARK	26	64	**38** *(146.1)*
ENGLAND	71	189	**118** *(166.2)*
FRANCE	16	61	**46** *(281.3)*
GERMANY	144	496	**352** *(244.5)*
INDIA	1	11	**10** *(1000)*
INDONESIA	2	3	**1** *(50)*
IRELAND	16	48	**32** *(200)*
ITALY	11	33	**22** *(200)*
JAPAN	3	3	**0** *(0)*
MEXICO	8	13	**5** *(62.5)*
NETHERLANDS	81	216	**53** *(189.3)*
NEW ZEALAND	7	45	**38** *(542.9)*
PORTUGAL	3	15	**12** *(400)*
RUSSIA	41	97	**56** *(136.6)*
SCOTLAND	9	25	**16** *(177.8)*
SOUTH AFRICA	27	65	**38** *(140.7)*
SPAIN	21	56	**35** *(166.7)*
SWEDEN	105	216	**111** *(105.7)*
SWITZERLAND	2	9	**7** *(350)*
TURKEY	2	11	**9** *(450)*
USA	2285	5621	**3336** *(146)*
VIETNAM	1	1	**0** *(0)*
WALES	0	1	**1** *(-)*
YUGOSLAVIA	3	7	**4** *(133.3)*

ZIMBABWE	3	5	**2** *(66.7)*
OTHERS	3947	9981	**6034** *(152.9)*
TOTAL	7122	18,079	**10957** *(153.9)*

aggressive contention that Argentinian and Portuguese persons are white peoples are very instructive of this intra-movement division.

Unsettled by the allegedly precarious state of the white race in the present day, white nationalists invariably retreat into history to take solace in the glorious achievements of "unsoiled" white nations such as Britain, Spain, France and Germany (Kemp, 1999). As white nationalists see it, great nations such as these have only experienced social decay and military weakening through having been internally destabilised by the steady increase of "mongrel races" emigrating to their shores (Ferber, 1997). The downside to this argument is all too easily identified, however, with white revisionists failing to adequately explain the regular instances of aggression and hostility that occurred between these 'white' nations prior to their infiltration by the so-called 'mongrel hordes'.

The revisionist arm of the white pride movement has also had little success in its attempts to restore credibility to the organisation *via* extensive rationalisation of Adolf Hitler's true place in history. Considerable time and effort has gone into justifying and downplaying the Nazi leader's much publicised war atrocities, yet the movement remains torn between fervent support for his ideological stance and unyielding revulsion for his part in killing countless numbers of white Caucasians. Adolf Hitler encompasses one of four regular and prominent points of discussion (the others being — who is white and who is not, the superior intellects of whites as "proven" by IQ tests, and the disproportionate instances of crimes committed by non-whites in comparison to whites) on the Stormfront.org discussion fora.

The white-pride movement also endures considerable internal disjuncture on account of its privileging of technological innovation and symbolism from past white nations. It is standard practice for members of Stormfront.org to espouse the superiority of white civilizations over others

on account of their greater proficiency at introducing and developing new forms of technology:

> **GMAN:** History shows us that negroes are incapable of sustaining any decent civilization and if they were we would be buying cars, computers, electronics of all kinds from them, but that has not happened at any time in history.
>
> **Armin7:** Why is Africa currently in the Stone Age while the Western European and North American countries are the most advanced civilizations ever????? [and] Why is it that modern day Caucasians fly to outer space and navigate the seas while you Africans have yet to develop any form of transportation besides your feet???
>
> **RacSknHd:** We are the Race, of Beethoven, Wagner, Robert E. Lee, and George Washington. Our people have created Automobiles, Airplanes, not to mention other small things such as Space Travel and the light bulb, and yes, even the car stereos you listen to your nigger music on. Not to mention modern freedom, and civilization.

Online white nationalists are acutely aware of the import attributed to computerised technology on a global scale and, as such, are happy to emphasise their competence with cyberspatial navigation and the (sometimes) extensive amounts of time that they spend online. This is indicative of the often under-appreciated relationship that exists between the self and the machine, as Broughton explains thus:

> Since technology is already a crystallization of selfhood—
> of the constitutive, transcendental framework of subjectivity itself—identification with it is not just a discovery, but a rediscovery (1996:148).

It is probable then, that white-priders are reshaping their perceptions of self in accordance with their growing use of, and competence with, CMC media vehicles. This, in turn, reinforces the link between the individual and the nation-state, wherein the former needs to champion and protect the latter as it defines, supports, and legitimates his/her particular mode of being.

The 'masters of technology' argument also links neatly to broader Western approaches to nationalism that promote high technology as the driving force behind desired improvements to national economies, living standards, knowledge bases, and security vehicles for those countries fortunate enough to be at the forefront of technological development. It is also one of the rare arguments to find favour across the widely disparate ideological terrain that is white nationalism; with technological prowess and progress forming central planks in the doctrinal platforms of both the CIM and the prominent skinhead "faith" known as 'Creativity'[114] (Bushart et al., 1998:56; Legions, n.d.).

This pandering to technology is hardly surprising given that most major technological innovation has occurred in Western countries and the vast majority of white nationalists also hail from these regions. It also enables the movement to put forward technology as a prize for non-white persons in Third World countries to covet, and for white persons in First World countries to necessarily protect. It is an argument that also runs lean, however, when talk inevitably turns to revered past white nations such as ancient Ireland and Scotland, neither of which were noted for being technologically prolific. It could also be said that the technology card runs the risk of alienating white nationalists from outside the computer affluent North American and Western European regions. This is especially true of those residing in Britain, where the impetus for technological growth appears to be aimed at positioning England within (what some British subjects see as being) the restrictive boundaries of the burgeoning European Union. The angst is no less noticeable among some German white nationalists who, despite their pride of place within the movement, are threatened by American endeavours to seize the moral and symbolic high ground. For the Germans, American pride in

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[114] 'Creativity' is an unusual faith that exists almost as a secular form of religion. Creativity devotees despise conventional Christianity because of its preference for exhorting people to "love their enemies". Followers of Creativity put enormous faith in science and the cause of technological innovation, which they see as being crucial to future human progress and well-being. Unlike conventional Christians, they preach a mantra of hating and destroying their enemies and those who would stand between them and their goal of an all-white, technologically advanced world.

technological innovation is always expressed as entailing a natural extension of the nation's pioneering origins; with the patriot heroes of this pioneering era (Washington, Jackson and the like) coming to replace Adolf Hitler as the symbolic figureheads for the broader white pride movement.[115]

It is clear that the Internet has much to offer the white pride movement, permitting its members extensive fora for interaction and event planning that they could scarcely have even dreamed of in the pre-cyberspace era. The WWW affords white nationalists access to a relatively cheap and readily available technology that is not only efficient and easy to use but, as an added bonus, also carries the considerable weight of being a flagship for their ideological dogma pertaining to the white race's alleged mastery of technological means. At the top end of the movement the message is made patently clear for all, as shown by the following statement from prominent political activist, David Duke:

> If you are not on the Internet, get on board. If you are somewhat unfamiliar with computers, most computer shops will set up your new computer and Internet connection at your home or office for a nominal fee. Using your eyes, your brain, and your fingers — you can participate in the Internet revolution that will awaken our people and pave the way for the survival of our heritage and way of life (1998:4).

And yet, for all this bravado and confidence, the white-pride movement is still struggling to maintain organisational unity and depth of presence in the virtual realm. In the first instance, the countless years of physical isolation from one another have led to deep ideological divides among the movement's many political splinter groups, with online interaction serving to highlight these disparities rather than diminish them. In the second instance, the ability to organise online in greater numbers also has a downside for the movement in that it also leaves it open to unprecedented exposure, scrutiny and abuse (Chaudhry, 2000:1). Following on from this,

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[115] The North American people have long lionised the 'masters of technology' standpoint, believing firmly that to master technology (on such a grand scale) is to master the world — Broughton (1996:149).

many devout white-priders would prefer to recruit and interact in person, as they feel that the anonymity of the Internet attracts 'armchair' activists and reduces the prospect of real action taking place (Whine, 1999:10). This view found a mirror among many of the respondents to my online interviews and questionnaires, with most believing that a mere 5% of Stormfront.org participants could be classified as genuine white pride activists.

There is considerable irony in the inability of the white nationalist movement to maximise the potential available to them online, when the Zapatistas of Mexico have gathered extensive Internet support for their operations largely by accident. The Zapatistas are spoken of as the world's first informational guerilla movement on account of their astonishing success at internationalising a local struggle, whilst at the same time utilising information communications media to focus global attention on the misdemeanors of their enemies in the Mexican government (Castells, 1997:72-83). What makes this scenario all the more remarkable is that the Central American region in which the Zapatistas choose to hide is essentially devoid of telephone and Internet connections, meaning that few (if any) Zapatista guerillas themselves would be aware of the Internet's existence, much less have surfed its boundless spaces (Burbach, 2001:141; Castells, 1997:80; Elison, 2000:2-3; Froehling, 1997:8; Walch, 1999:136-138).

The Zapatistas use of the Internet differs markedly from that of white nationalists in very discernible ways. The white-pride movement, whether it be in its online or fleshspace guise, adheres unswervingly to the notion of 'leaderless resistance' wherein no set chain of command exists, nobody openly fills the role of organisational figurehead and, in instances when movement members are accused or convicted of a hate crime, it becomes a practical impossibility to trace back to those responsible for organising and ordering the crime (Bushart et al. 1998:243-257). By way of contrast, the Zapatistas have employed the Internet as a form of political theatre with their charismatic leader, Subcomandante Marcos, playing out the starring title role (Rich & De Los Reyes, 1997; Ross, 2000:18).

The Zapatista approach is more in keeping with conventional forms of leadership, although it is easier for them to correspond to this model. This is due to the simplified, grassroots nature of their ideological struggle, which is built around practical concerns, such as "housing, land, health care, work, bread, education, information, culture, independence, democracy, justice, liberty and peace" (Burbach, 2001:124-125; Froehling, 1997:4; Ross, 2000:38). These were social areas around which other groups, governments, and organisations were fundamentally prone to support, prompting a large groundswell of foreign assistance for the Zapatistas' plight, and the placement of significant pressure on the Mexican government to take a softer line on the rebels and their demands (Esteva, 1999). Conversely, the white nationalist movement has been less lucid in outlining the central planks in its overall ideological platform and finds most of its attempts to broach political initiatives in mainstream society disregarded primarily as a response to the organisation's violent history. This is why the Zapatistas proved successful in mobilising widespread unaffiliated online support for their cause whilst white nationalists have only been able to muster considerable online opposition against their cause.

As such, we can see from this example that a political movement's potential success online can not be guaranteed by its privileged access to communications media, nor by its capacity to flood the global media with dogma and propaganda explicit to its particular form of ideology. Moreover, the startling cyberspace prominence achieved by the Mexican Zapatistas is enough to suggest that online patriots will thrive or perish in accordance with their ability to strike a chord with unaffiliated, yet decidedly sympathetic, political groups in the seemingly limitless cyberspatial arena. As is the case with all political initiatives, the ability to spread the message is only half of the battle, whereas winning the war lies implicitly in the message finding broad acceptance on the multiple battlefronts on which it is received.

Closing thoughts

This chapter addressed a number of key points that can be summarised here as follows. Firstly, the concept of nationalism cannot be seen to be either extinct, nor in dramatic decline, for so long as the economic implications of cyberspace propel nations to outbid one another for the bulk of its market rewards. In real terms, the virtual world exists as the latest in a long line of economic challenges for peripheral nations to contemplate and first world powers to conquer. The heavy current (and future) emphasis on information and communication technology development in Western countries reinforces nationalist sentiment by holding up successful IT corporations and innovations as loci for immense public pride in national achievement. For as long as capitalism remains the driving global focus it is practically impossible for nationalism to fade into premature extinction. There will always be countries who have ample access to finances and technology and countries that do not; with the former constantly striving to increase their surplus, while the latter strive relentlessly to bridge the disparate divide.

Secondly, it is important that future researchers do not fall into the trap of conflating nationalism with capitalism, given that national sentiment operates on several different levels, not all of which relate back to fiscal concerns. This point was perfectly exemplified by the various online diaspora discussed in the middle-section of this chapter. The idea of declining nationalism is one that is easily refuted by ongoing historical developments, which these multifarious diasporic communities have long played a key role in. Australian history alone is enough to illustrate the unyielding potency of nationalist sentiment, with many decades of 'white Australia' and 'assimilation' policies clearly failing to deter immigrant ethnic groups from preserving and celebrating central aspects of their "home" cultures. The Internet has thus become a boon for nationalist pursuits that run along these distinct meso-level lines. Assimilation tendencies would still appear to be surreptitiously driving the political machinations of many ethnically diverse nations and popular public sentiment will always privilege the cultural preferences of the host country above all else. In spite of this, it is nonetheless difficult to suppress elements of ethnic culture when you can not see them transpiring before your very eyes.

Finally, the notions of inclusivity and exclusivity that have long characterised nationalist thought and practice in Western states are no less pronounced in displays of stateless nationalism online. This contention would be strongly debated by computopians such as Barlow, given his almost evangelical assertion that:

> We [netizens] are creating a world that all may enter without privilege or prejudice accorded by race, economic power, military force, or station of birth. We are creating a world where anyone, anywhere may express his or her beliefs, no matter how singular, without fear of being coerced into silence or conformity (1996).

Barlow's declaration preaches inclusiveness but, as was the case with the 'American Declaration of Independence', on which this later document was unmistakably based, elides the reality that many citizens will be excluded purely by virtue of not having the necessary equipment to enter the virtual realm (Lockard, 2000:181). Nationalism must therefore necessarily be exclusive in tone, as the driving purpose behind its very existence is to protect the viewpoints and interests of specific groups of people from the potentially disruptive and destructive agendas of *others.* Cyberspace, far from reducing the cause of nationalism, effectively increases the crucialness of the nation-state as more and more individuals find themselves happening across more and more unlike *others* whilst online.

Cyberspace is not play space, it is real world space. The inordinate number of politically orientated chat and discussion sites on the WWW are testimony to the seriousness with which many netizens choose to conduct their interactions online. There may be a freshness to this activism in terms of the relative freedom with which ideas are being forwarded and exchanged, but the content of these interactions itself is not essentially new and original. Hill and Hughes (1998:179) brought this point to the fore in arguing that "political groups are not suddenly transformed in their thinking and practices" when they gather online. Indeed, their findings from broad spectrum investigations into citizen activism on the Internet revealed that much political activity online mirrored the conservative approach to political issues that was prominent in bricks and mortar

environs. The concept of stateless nationalism also reflects the tendency of CMC vehicles to recreate fleshspace initiatives and debates, rather than invent original ones. On the surface, the efforts of netizens to propagate forms of ideology that run contrary to established state standpoints gives the impression of a fresh development. In reality, however, the only thing new here is that individuals finally have the chance to broadly express and exchange nationalist views with others, having been denied open participation in state-development by state governing bodies for centuries.

Conclusion

Recapping the line of argumentation

For some years now it has been common for cyberspace scholars to write of the realm in a manner that, deliberately or otherwise, isolates it from the everyday spaces that social actors generally interpret as being representative of real world place. This approach has also been readily disseminated outside of academia, with governments and large corporations trumpeting CMC technology as both a panacea for current global woes and the primary vehicle for intensive future social and economic development. As a consequence, cyberspace exists in the minds of many as a bold new frontier of humanity; a mythical, arcane place that is viewed with equal parts fervor and disdain depending on the level of technological knowledge endowed in the viewer. This thesis argues heavily against the notion of cyberspace as 'unreal' space, calling upon the social concepts of self-identity, community, and nationalism in order to highlight the ways in which virtual space has assumed a legitimate place within everyday Western society.

In argumentation terms, this central theme of the thesis is supported throughout the body of work by three secondary contentions that link explicitly to the key concept spheres outlined above. The first such contention disputes the alleged prominence of multiple identity expression in virtual environments, claiming instead that netizens are more openly predisposed toward adopting singular expressions of identity whilst interacting online. In Chapter Two I provided an outline for self-identity construction that neatly fused the key strands of thought from three theorists — Erik Erikson, Erving Goffman and Anthony Giddens. Erikson saw identity formation as a process that began in childhood, with early socialisation and bonding experiences (with parents and close acquaintances) aiding the individual in obtaining ego synthesis and a comforting sense of inner solidarity. Goffman, continuing along these

lines, also thought that it was important for an individual to have inner solidarity, as having a firm understanding of one's self and the expectations that others placed on you was crucial to the successful realisation of ontological awareness. Ontological awareness, the individual's inherent comprehension of the world they inhabit and their unique place in it, is also a key plank in the overall platform of Giddens' structuration theory. Giddens builds upon the human agency ideas of Goffman, emphasising the symbiotic relationships that tie human actors to institutional structures, with the latter serving to both simultaneously constrain human actor egos (for the good of society) and enable individual opportunity and growth.

These three theorists can be read together and the sum of their key ideas provide a sound working model for explorations into self-identity development in both fleshspace and online terms. The common denominator that runs through each theorist's writings is the notion that strong expressions of the self are implicitly reliant on elements of sameness and continuity that underscore an individual's stable comprehension of their particular life circumstances. In order to confidently transact with those around them, it is essential for an individual to draw on their ontological awareness to ensure that their actions attune to the expectations of them that are held by others, and vice-versa. To act outside of set interaction conventions would be to run the risk of censure, rejection and/or alienation from acquaintances and could, in extreme cases, result in the individual concerned falling foul of the constraining measures that moderate individual participation in the greater society.

The conventional nature of the theoretical discussion presented in this thesis may have been somewhat disappointing to some, but it was nevertheless in keeping with the central hypothesis that I chose to pursue throughout the study. I have made much of the fact that cyberspace is not sufficiently removed from the everyday machinations of contemporary Western culture to be seen as encompassing a distinct world unto itself. With this in mind, it should be unsurprising that cyberspace similarly lacks the structural distinctiveness required to provide the necessary material for the developing of social theories that go beyond the familiar scope of

contemporary (and, in some cases, classical) social commentary. It is possible that fresh theories will evolve with time, but this will be largely dependent on the diligence of social science researchers in mining the cyber terrain to the point where sufficient ethnographic studies exist to make deeper theoretical incursions viable.

Contrary to popular perception, cyberspace is in most instances not a lawless, anarchic environment, with webmasters and netizens alike placing significant stock in steady and conformist modes of behaviour. Consistency is thus a prized quality for participants to have on sites such as Stormfront.org, with displays of respect, warmth and support most commonly reserved for the familiar and long serving members of the group dynamic. This reality is further evidenced by the nickname typologies [refer Table 7] apparent on the Stormfront.org site, with 70% of all handles on the fora relating implicitly to 'real life' names. Extending out from this, research subjects from the questionnaire/interview stage of the methodology overwhelmingly stated their tendency for reserving a particular nickname for regular use on the Stormfront.org site.

It is true that these same subjects also indicated that they used more than one nickname for their overall participation in the virtual realm. In most cases, however, this is less a sign of identity multiplicity and play as it is a reflection of the restrictive elements at work in moderated and regulated web environments. In conventional 'real life' settings it is perfectly possible for several 'Kevins' to interact within the same social space at the same time, but in carefully regulated web environments it is often only possible for one participant to interact under the handle 'Kevin'. Consequently, any newcomers to these sites wanting to use the handle 'Kevin' would have to modify the name or find a new one in order to participate on them.

This is not to suggest that nicknames are entirely representative of an online user's self-identity, but they are nevertheless a good pointer as to an individual's self-image and defining characteristics. To this end they are not to be surrendered or altered readily and, as evidenced by the research subjects of this thesis, are customarily infused with considerable emotional and personal meaning and attachment on the part of the user.

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It need also be said that MUVES are only representative of a small section of the contemporary cyberspatial landscape, and yet much of the impetus for the 'multiple identity' approach to online interactions has stemmed directly from early research into these phenomena. MUVES are markedly different CMC vehicles to newsgroups and discussion boards, and subsequently engender different behavioural needs and objectives in participants. Rampant identity play is clearly a counter productive pursuit in these latter environments and more research into identity development in newsgroups and discussion boards is needed in order to restore balance and credibility to the broader online identity debate.

In Chapter Five I devoted significant energy to contesting the computropian assertion that virtual communities are essentially inferior to bricks and mortar communities. Cyberspace is all too readily dismissed by some social commentators purely on account of their perception of the realm as being unsubstantial 'non-space'. This ideological standpoint is seldom more acutely intimated as it is when discussion turns to the notion of virtual community. The long engrained links that bind perceptions of community to physically-bound and reified geographical locations are not helpful here, nor are the misguided assumptions that carelessly disregard the WWW as a sphere in which the individual is allowed complete autonomy over matters of personal behaviour and expression.

Established norms for conduct and behaviour are essential for the efficient and effective running of any given community. In line with this, the existence of such guidelines in most online chatrooms and discussion fora offer firm support to the much debated contention that virtual communities are *real* communities. This line of thought presents as the second subsidiary theme of the thesis and helps to counter the view that cyberspace lacks the legitimacy and viability that is automatically accorded to 'real world' spaces.

In past times, notions of community were almost obligatorily expressed in terms of the geographical place inhabited by the community members. The reasoning behind this was sound enough, community (prior to sophisticated developments in travel and communications) was almost necessarily dependent on the bonds formed and experiences

shared between group members physically proximate to one another on a regular basis. In spite of this, it was these shared bonds and experiences and not the physical boundedness that principally defined the community in question; yet perspectives on the concept have continued to privilege geographical notions of community. There are obvious political reasons for this, as outlined in Chapters Four and Five, but it is encouraging to see that association models of community are becoming increasingly prominent in contemporary social science studies.

The association model of community, as outlined in this study, is not only more in keeping with discussions pertaining to cyberspace, but also it stands as a strand of the community concept that has been revitalised by cyberspatial exploration. To a large degree, the concept of community had been academically dormant for the best part of two decades until burgeoning interest in virtual groupings led to a recent upsurge in scholarly interest relating to community studies.[116] In essence, the Internet encapsulated a back to the future emphasis on community, returning the concept to its bygone communication origins and away from the locale-centred aspects of the term that are largely redundant in the present day.

This thesis has argued the case for virtual communities being accepted as *real* communities. There are several elements at play in online interaction that support this contention and they can be summarised here as follows. Firstly, cyberspace can transcend the long restrictive tyrannies of time and space even at a time when established spatial and physical borders are breaking down. This is significant to the formation of community ties in that individuals are able to maintain relationships and interactions with others from (practically) anywhere and at anytime. In previous times, community ties would invariably have been strained by the act of moving away from the physical site at which other group members resided. Nowadays people can freely move from place to place without losing access to the regular and affordable contact on which community ties are implicitly dependent.

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[116] Obviously other social and political aspects (notably the onset of communitarian ideas and new right policies) also played a part in the 'renaissance' of community, but there is

Secondly, not everybody can be a part of an Internet community, just as not everyone can be part of certain real life communities. There is a feeling among some social commentators that virtual communities are impoverished forms of community primarily because they are too easy to join and too easy to discard. It is true that most online groups will allow entry to practically anyone, but gaining entry to a virtual domain and finding acceptance within it are two very different things. The latter eventuality is generally premised on the new participant conforming to the norms and netiquette set down by the rest of the group members. It is understood that it is commonly left to webmasters and/or moderators to oversee these rules and regulations, but they will only remain in place if the vast majority of group participants agree to abide by them. Accordingly, the fate of the community in question rides on its set guidelines reflecting the common values incorporated by the overall group dynamic. It is also common for group newcomers to be judged over an unspecified time period as to the depth and sincerity of their participation in the group. Acceptance is thus a two-way process here, as netizens keen to be part of the broader group dynamic will show particular devotion to the group, and the group—in turn—will want the newcomer to remain involved. This is not greatly removed from fleshspace occurrences where an individual's standing within the community is directly proportionate to their investment and participation in it.

To this end, communities become important to individuals because they fill an express need that supports and/or enriches their everyday lives. If, for whatever reason that need diminishes, the individual concerned will more than likely move on to form new community ties in an alternative group dynamic that better suit their circumstances. This is not always a conscious process, for it is common for people to gradually drift apart. As such, it is quite normal for human actors to participate in an inordinate number of communities throughout the course of their life cycle. This suggests that the tendency for netizens to move from virtual community to virtual community is not so much an indicator of group

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little doubt that the colour and intrigue inherent in 'virtual communities' was also of

impoverishment, but rather it is evidence of cyberspace offering up a greater number of alternatives and the individuals concerned having greater control over their choice of community participation.

One of the most resounding aspects of my empirical research into the Stormfront.org site pertained to the research subjects' perception of their own place in the virtual community. Many of those interviewed openly railed against the suggestion that they were "members" of the Stormfront.org site, which initially appeared to cast doubt over the validity of Stormfront.org's claim to community status. On reflection, however, the heavy and lengthy Stormfront.org participation rates attributable to these netizens are clearly indicative of community-type spirit. It is also worth noting here that participation in fleshspace communities has never really been predicated on formally outlined terms and offers of membership. In fact, it is quite possible that some social commentators have trouble accepting the legitimacy of the community concept (in general) on account of the limited instances in which individuals seem willing to openly articulate their 'membership' of a particular community(s). This hesitancy to commit to group membership is less damning than it appears on the surface though, given that association models of community are, by their very nature, loosely defined and highly personal in scope. To express this another way, individuals will generally participate in the community environment because they find comfort, appreciation and acceptance in it, and not due to having their presence in the community openly requested. The idea of 'membership' is thus anathema to association models of community, wherein the largely subconscious act of belonging is an unspoken, inalienable and unproblematic issue for the individual concerned.

Cyberspace is also very much in keeping with Benedict Anderson's seminal idea of imagined community. The lack of face-to-face contact inherent in online interaction ensures that virtual communities are necessarily imagined in that netizens can mostly only imagine the faceless others with whom they are interacting. In another way, however,

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importance in this regard.

cyberspace also serves to decrease the imagined nature of community in that it confirms (for uncertain individuals) the existence of other persons who share their particular values and/or worldview. Prior to the Internet, these uncertain individuals could only presume that other individuals existed in this fashion, hence Anderson's employment of the term 'imagined' community.

The imagined community thesis has resonance in debates relating to nationalism and national identity. Micro-level perceptions on what it has meant to be American, Australian, British and so on have by necessity been formulated upon idealised notions of nationhood. Ostensibly, this entailed common experiences of images of what other Americans, Australians and Britons were like, accompanied by shared impressions of foreigners. The growing proliferation of information and communication media has helped to remove some of the uncertainty and misconception from this imagining process.

This is not to suggest that conventional modes of nationalism are disappearing, as contemporary nations still strive to maintain levels of power and prosperity that are expressly derived from outperforming rival nations in the global marketplace. The big difference is that such nations are finding it ever more difficult to keep their operations secret from their citizenry, as cyberspatial technologies continue to bring transparency to government actions *via* ever increasing information and communication exchanges. It is now an onerous task for some governmental bodies to quietly extinguish domestic political movements that run contrary to the status quo. Consequently, government agencies that once watched over human actors in a 'big brother' fashion now find themselves open to considered scrutiny from wide sections of the general public.

Such scrutiny has simultaneously been influenced by and resulted in the rise of new expressions of 'stateless' nationalism. Stateless nationalism is the last of the major subsidiary themes to be addressed in this body of work. In basic terms, stateless nationalism is a form of patriotism that enables individuals to contribute to nationalist debates and developments, despite being ignored by conventional economy-centred state nationalist typologies. Matters of economy aside, stateless forms of

nationalism also facilitate new perceptions of, approaches to, and reactions against, multicultural policies and expressions of race and ethnicity more generally.

Stateless nationalism is thus a prominent ideological leaning among white pride devotees, as exemplified by the Stormfront.org adherents focused upon in this thesis. The Stormfront.org users are predisposed toward stateless nationalism for the following three reasons. Firstly, the predilection for multicultural policy that is common to contemporary Western societies and the state-driven initiatives that facilitate multicultural practice run directly contrary to the unashamedly WASP-orientated tenets of traditional white nationalist dogma. Nationalism, by its very nature, relies on the existence of external *others* against whom a nation can construct and regularly reassess its own privileged form of cultural uniqueness and difference. As a consequence, state nationalism becomes untenable for white pride devotees on account of its inclusive approach to cultural groupings that the white pride movement has dimly viewed as hostile *others.* Ethnic perceptions of *otherness* no longer have a sanctioned place within macro-level expressions of Western state nationalism, making it necessary for disillusioned individuals to reinstitute race-based strands of *otherness via* alternative means.

Secondly, the white pride movement imbues a deep across-the-board mistrust of economically driven state initiatives, desiring instead to return to localised and theocratic expressions of government. This is a scenario that can only be realised through the erosion of centralised government; a protracted exercise that necessarily requires the implementation of decentralised systems of political opposition. It is highly probable that this line of thinking was foremost in the minds of Internet patriots like Don Black when they sought to move the white pride movement into the virtual realm the best part of a decade ago. The movement has built a solid online presence for itself since then, although the intensity with which Western governments (the United States, in particular) have sought to diminish this presence in recent years has come as a surprise to some. White pride organisations may appear mere minnows when assessed against opponents such as the United States

government, but it is nevertheless clear that Western state bodies concur with the McLuhanesque notion of the media as internal enemy number one.[117]

Finally, consistent findings across the contemporary terrain of globalisation research maintain that expressions of nationality are retaining their significance in the face of allegedly eroding state borders. This view is reinforced by the comments of white priders themselves, with most respondents to my questionnaires and interviews strongly asserting their love of country, in spite of their contrary loathing for what (they believe) their country has become. For netizens such as these, love of nation is very much a romanticised and idealised notion, and it is usually expressed by invoking the words and ideas of long dead national patriots. In this way, the pursuit of 'White Israel' becomes the ultimate expression of imagined community and the Internet the most obvious (temporary) site for an imagined state. Future cyberspatial researchers would be well advised to take note of this point; for what stateless nationalism (in its Internet guise) lacks in official political sanction, it more than compensates for in depth, diversity and discussion.

It would be remiss of me to close out discussion on the key lines of inquiry and major findings to stem from this study without mentioning the main limitations apparent in the empirical research framework. The implicit qualitative nature of the study has proven successful insomuch as it has generated data that is conducive to the pursuit of broader discussions pertaining to cyberspatial interactions (in general) and the white pride movement (in particular). In spite of this, the minimal number of research subjects involved has made it impossible to express many of the study's findings in concrete terms. This being said, it need be noted by the reader that the aim of this thesis was always more intimately predisposed toward the exploration and explication of obfuscated themes, given that concrete assertions—assuming that they are at all achievable in the field of social sciences— cannot be made on the strength of a single

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[117] Marshal McLuhan once wrote that media forms were inherently more dangerous than tyrants of the ilk of Stalin and Hitler, principally because they were capable of damaging and diminishing societies gradually, silently and without express warning (1994:26).

study such as this. This is another reason why social scientists need to journey into cyberspace in greater numbers, as sound quantitative assessments of the realm will only become plausible when a suitably broad foundation of qualitative ethnographies of the realm are in place to guide them.

I have already made mention of the difficulties associated with obtaining access to white pride devotees for questionnaire/interview purposes and this is by no means a problem that is applicable only to the online realm. Ezekiel (1995) was the first academic to make serious inroads into the white pride movement when he bravely attended white pride rallies and sought out members of the organisation for face-to-face interviews and informal question and answer sessions. Ezekiel's work is commendable for the depth in which he probed key figures for information, but it is true that much of the study revolves heavily around the thoughts and actions of the same dozen or so activists. The same can be said of Bushart et al. (1998) who conducted a similar study and even Blee's (2002) seminal investigation of women within the hate movement was 'limited' to the views of thirty-four respondents.[118] This stanza is not intended to disparage any of these studies in anyway, but rather it is included here as a means of highlighting the reserved nature of white pride followers and their unwavering disdain for participating in research projects.

At the time of writing, the most large scale fleshspace investigation of the white pride movement was conducted by Dobratz and Shanks-Meile (2000). This award winning study[119] incorporated 125+ interviews with white separatists—a number well above that associated with most qualitative projects— and while this is indeed impressive in scale, it still

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[118] I do not use the term 'seminal' loosely here, as negotiating access to female members of the white pride movement is especially problematic for two reasons. Firstly, men within the movement are commonly seen as the strong action figures and are generally deemed the appropriate gender to act in a 'spokesperson' capacity for the organisation. Secondly, women within the movement almost invariably perceive of themselves as subservient to the males and would be loathe to comment on matters when their sense of protocol would suggest that such comment should be preserved for the men.

begs the question of how many research subjects are needed before the study is seen as a credible one? This is not a question that I am interested in ruminating upon, as it is essentially surplus to the point that I am trying to convey here. This point being that white nationalism in cyberspace is a study field that is as equally bereft of broad spectrum information as its fleshspace counterpart.

Matters of numbers aside, any debates over qualitative and quantitative methodologies need also take into account the nature of the issue(s) that are being placed under examination. Topic areas like community and nationalism are not easy to assess in pure quantitative terms, due to the difficulty that researchers have in getting research subjects to comprehend the terms in similar ways. The different meanings with which individuals choose to associate with the concepts of community and nationalism are all too clearly exemplified in this thesis. With the benefit of hindsight, it is possible that I failed to frame interview questions relating to these concepts in a manner that best supported my research subjects in reaching decisions about them. Future researchers of the online white pride movement, of which there will hopefully be many, may be advised to pay greater care to the framing of their inquiries in light of this.

Recommendations for future research

In Chapter One of this thesis I briefly touched upon the theme of future directions for cyberspatial research and speculated on the possibility of a new academic discipline arising to cater for it. Cyberology may or may not eventually become a reality (there are some people who already refer to themselves as cyberologists), but such a creation could prove to be a double-edged sword. On the one hand, the locating of broad spectrum cyberspace research under a single disciplinary umbrella would most likely lead to a rise in the number of investigators exploring the field, along with an increase in group projects that exploit the specialised

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[119] Winner of the Scholarly Achievement Award of the North Central Sociological Association and selected by Choice Magazine as an Outstanding Academic Book of the Year.

skills of scholars schooled in diversified subject spheres. On the other hand, any moves to position cyberspatial research under its own banner would only further the unwanted impression that cyberspace is at best removed from real world space and, at worst, somehow inferior to it.

With this in mind, it may be better for CMC research to continue on as a sub-discipline of the established academic disciplines. In this capacity it still has much to offer for new researchers and established ones seeking a fresh angle on worn ideas. This is especially true for scholars in the social sciences who, as was outlined in Chapter One, have been worryingly reticent to delve into explorations of a sphere to which they have so much to contribute. Of the cyberspatial treatises that I have perused so far, the most captivating and exciting have almost invariably adopted anthropological stances toward the topic.

In past times, non-Western cultures held a seemingly other worldly place in the wider Western imagination even though they were as much a part of the real world as the Westernised cultures with which Westerners were deeply familiar. It was the task of the anthropologist to explain and demystify these cultures, and anthropologists now have a similar opportunity to clarify human understandings of online life. The ethnographic tradition, so long ensconced in the fabric of anthropological study is the perfect vehicle for the in-depth analyses of online behaviours and interactions. With the pressures on academic researchers mounting[120], cyberspace affords considerable scope to investigators who would otherwise find difficulty in restricting the demands inherent in the fieldwork to the time frame permitted by the study. CMC will not be sufficient for all modes of anthropological inquiry, but a flexible student stance on subject group and methodological dimension will be rewarded with rich, efficiently compiled data that is simple to store and convenient to analyse.

There will also be many openings for sociologists looking to elaborate on fresh developments arising out of the online realm. With

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[120] In Australia, the time allowed for students to complete doctorates without incurring financially-based penalties has shrunk from 7 years during the late seventies and early eighties, to 4 years at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

regard to notions of the self, a good place to start may be with Nie & Erbring's (2000) assertion that education and age, not race/ethnicity or gender, are the most significant aspects enabling or hindering online participation. Education is an intriguing variable in so far as cyberspace is concerned. This is primarily because it is difficult to accurately gauge whether people with higher education levels are more openly predisposed toward Internet usage, or merely register higher instances of online participation due to their inhabitation of technology dense workspaces.

Education is not, by any means, an under-researched topical area in the overall field of CMC inquiry. A surfeit of studies pertaining to online teaching and learning have been released in recent years, almost all of which have arisen out of the education discipline. This is fine, but limitations can be seen here, mainly because the focus for such studies has been centered on the costs, structures and pedagogical shortcomings apparent in e-learning; with minimal attention devoted to the non-curricular facets that underscore and accompany its implementation. It has yet to be clarified if humankind is truly entering into a new *knowledge* age. At any rate, the common Western presumption (influenced in no small part by the exhortations of corporations such as Microsoft) that humankind is indeed doing so has helped ensure a renewed upsurge in demand for tertiary education places as the new century begins to unfold. Perhaps then, we are at the point where we need to go beyond the almost routinely stated premise that face-to-face learning is preferable to online learning. Rural living, inflexible work commitments and insufficient on-campus university places highlight the overwhelming social need for CMC-based tuition, and sociologists should embrace the chance to elucidate the qualitative human experiences that flow from it.

The age factor is also worthy of further explication, both in terms of its affect on identity assuredness and its impact on future instances of community development. Age is a sensitive issue for Western societies to address, with age-based employment redundancies likely to increase, fueled further by the pervading perception that to be over the age of fifty is to be an incurable technological illiterate. Community bodies appear to have identified this as a growing social dilemma, with recent telecentre

initiatives (in Australia, at least) targeting older persons as sought after participants in subsidised, beginner-level Internet and computer awareness courses. At the other end of the spectrum, similarly organised 'Bean Bag Internet centres' have been catering for underprivileged teenagers in a bid to (however small) lessen the ever widening cyberspace divide. These endeavours are well meaning and full of promise, but providing the basis for cyberspatial learning and exploration does not ensure that such endeavours will be effectively implemented, confidently negotiated, or lead to skills and competencies that are put to broader use at a later stage.

This brings us back to matters of gender, and while it is almost certainly true that the online 'gender divide' has been all but bridged, there are other facets to the concept that require sociological attention. It has now been eight long years since Dale Spender (1994) produced the first in-depth investigation into the idiosyncratic nature of male and female interactions and communications online. To this point, gender remains a neglected and largely inconclusive research sphere in online terms, although Lori Kendall's (2002) treatise on representations of masculinity online may bring much needed insight into what is a markedly under researched phenomena. On a less general note, the paradoxical nature of female white pride participation online would warrant extra research in and of itself.

Gender issues, with particular regard to how they arise in online environments, are seldom too far removed from communication identifiers. In Chapter One I made mention of the heavy input that scholars from the communication studies discipline have had into the burgeoning field of cyberspace research. With this in mind, it is perplexing that gender matters online have not been afforded greater prominence by these researchers than has been the case to date. Social scientists would indeed make much of this astonishingly unturned study terrain and could do worse than to utilise the still extant ideas of Erving Goffman as a backing framework for such explorations. Charles Lemert (1997:xv) has written that "one of the most remarkable events in the history of social and humanistic study in the last generation is its famous linguistic turn."

Goffman was arguably the most seminal of all writers on the subject of the linguistic turn and would surely have viewed the Internet as an ideal sphere for the furthering of his groundbreaking treatises on the subject.

Conversely, further research projects could break new ground for discourses on nationalism by expanding out from my initial foray into the theme of online patriotism. The discussion presented here was restricted (empirically, at least) to the white pride movement in general, and the Stormfront.org online discussion fora more specifically. This was fine in so much as it illuminated one particular body of online patriotism, but the needs and objectives of white nationalists online differ from those pursued by the Zapatistas, who themselves differ markedly in tone and tenor to alternative activists like those involved with the ongoing opposition to state rule in China. Accordingly, a rounded understanding of online patriotism will only be realised (assuming that it can be realised) by way of comparative studies that seek to address the issue holistically and with a more prominent quantitative framework from which to work from.

Studies of this type, as is the case with most cyberspace research, should require profound researcher sensitivity to ethical concerns. Up until now, it has been considered acceptable for cyber researchers (myself included) to proceed with lurking and message post gathering methods purely on the basis that online communications are public domain property. This is indeed convenient insomuch as it absolves the researcher from consultation with the individual(s) responsible for creating the data, prior to employing it in the study. If cyberspace is to be fully accepted as real world space, however, then research practices such as this need to be carefully reconsidered. As a general rule, social science research projects employed in fleshspace settings almost invariably require the researcher(s) involved to make the subject(s) of their study aware that they are part of a study project. At the very least, it is decorum to inform subjects that writings or comments attributable to them are likely to appear in the finished piece of work.

Barbara Sharf (1999:252-255) has constructed a five-step process aimed at bringing cyber researchers into synch with real world ethical practices. Sharf's steps are a promising starting point for concerned

scholars wanting to heighten the professional image of cyberspace investigators. In keeping with this objective, such scholars would be well advised to ignore Sharf's afterthought suggestion, which infers that some online subject groups (child pornographers and racists, by way of example) should be automatically exempted from ethical conventions. I can understand the sentiment behind this view, but without wishing to defend either of the aforementioned groups, I would nonetheless express concern at any ad hoc approaches to deciding who is worthy of ethical consideration and who is not.

It is expected that, wherever possible, a conscientious researcher will adopt a pragmatic and objective approach to his/her study. Such an approach should also carry over to the research subjects focused upon for the study. If you are willing to ask an individual to take part in your study then that person must be accorded the same respect and rights that other participants receive. Research subjects can be difficult to recruit at the best of times and good researchers, aside from constructing quality research projects, are duty bound to ensure that the available subject pool is not further depleted by inconsistent and overtly subjective research practices.

As a final point, it would be refreshing to see a gradual uplift in the number of cyberspace related texts that deal with singular research projects and interest topics. An inordinate number of cyberspatial texts are edited works containing dispersed chapters written by multiple authors. This assertion is not intended to disparage these works, nor to suggest that such works should not be attempted in future. It is probable, however, that a closer ratio between single author books and works that exist in compendium essay form would be of considerable benefit to cyber research, enabling an amplification of large, comparative and/or comprehensive research projects within the sphere. It would be all the better still were a considerable portion of these extensive studies to be written from scholars in the social sciences, but time alone will be the judge of sociology's capacity to meet this worthwhile challenge.

Closing thoughts

The tendency for social commentators to refer to cyberspace as a metaphorical 'frontier' may have been perfectly appropriate in the 1990s, but such an allusion is no longer applicable. With each passing year the number of Westerners utilising cyberspatial technology dramatically increases and the instances of non-Western nations embracing CMC vehicles rises accordingly. The computropians would contend that the global proliferation of cyberspace is merely an obvious by-product of intensified efforts (on the part of states and corporations) to privilege information and communication technology development throughout Westernised nations. There is some truth in this, but technological and economic determinist accounts of CMC growth show a notable disregard for the capacity of human actors to adapt new technologies so as to meet the specified demands and requirements of their everyday life.

Cyberspace is therefore not an entity that should be condescendingly dismissed as unreal or 'play' space. Online participation is clearly altering the scope available for micro-level human actors to broaden and modify the control they have over the direction of their everyday lives. Netizens are no less likely to convey stable expressions of self (rather than multiple identity signifiers) while online because they desire understanding and acceptance from others, just as they do in fleshspace. Nor are netizens likely to find greater value in bricks and mortar communities as distinct from virtual alternatives (or vice-versa), as community at the micro-level is prefaced only on the level of commitment and depth of feeling that an individual sees fit to attribute to it. With regard to nationalism, it is possible to envisage future scholars looking back to the early years of the Internet and lionising it for breaking down the hierarchical barriers that had for so long denied micro-level individuals a fair say in the way that their state(s) was governed. It is still too early to talk of nation-states as being egalitarian entities, but—at the very least—it would seem that the processes are in place for an unprecedented upsurge in people power from the lower levels of society upwards.

Appendix A:
Ethics clearance

Human Research Ethics Committee

Outcome of Meeting No   99/EM01   **Held on**   Thursday, February 04, 1999

Ethics clearance for the recently submitted application is as follows:

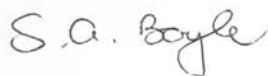|	
Project No	**354**
Project Type	RP - Category B: Research Project
Title	Cyberspace and community
Principal Researcher(s)	K Thompson
Associate Researcher(s)	
School	Behavioural & Social Sciences & Humanities

HREC Decision	**Approved**
HREC Comment	Approved with the following comments: * Questions were raised concerning the ethics of "lurking". * The implication (Section 7) that the researcher will be able to ascertain participant stress levels via the Internet seems quite problematic. After further consultation the project has been approved.
Project Start	2/1/99
Project End	11/30/99

Yours Sincerely

S. a. Boyle

SALLY BOYLE
Executive Officer
Human Research Ethics Committee

Appendix B:

Interview/questionnaire running list

- **IS THERE SUFFICIENT EVIDENCE TO SUGGEST THAT *STORMFRONT.ORG* IS FACILITATING AND ENCOURAGING COMMUNITY TIES VIA THE VIRTUAL REALM?**

1. How much time do you spend online each week?

2. Do you maintain online interests that are removed from white nationalism?

3. How long have you been a member of *Stormfront.org?*

4. How often do you access the *Stormfront.org* site?

5. Are you a regular poster on the site?

6. Do you keep in contact with other *Stormfront.org* members on a regular basis?

7. Have you mixed socially with other *Stormfront.org* members in a RL setting?

8. Do you regularly access alternative White Pride sites to *Stormfront.org*?

9. How did you come to be a member of *Stormfront.org*?

10. Is it too easy for people to participate on the *Stormfront.org* site?

11. If you were in charge of the *Stormfront.org* site, would you change anything about it?

12. Do you have a problem with differing viewpoints (among white nationalists) on the site?

13. When you're participating on *Stormfront.org* do you feel as if you are part of a community?

14. Give the Internet a rating on how well it meets your needs as a citizen.

Very Poor   Poor   Okay   Good   Very Good

- **ARE ONLINE IDENTITIES CRUCIALLY SIGNIFICANT TO AN INDIVIDUAL'S INHERENT SENSE OF SELF, OR ARE THEY JUST A COLOURFUL AND ELABORATE MEANS OF PROTECTING PRIVACY?**

15. How many different nicknames (handles) do you use online?

16. What is the reasoning behind your choice of nickname(s)?

17. How comfortable would you be with having to change your handle in order to continue participation on the *Stormfront.org* site?

18. Do you use your *Stormfront.org* nickname outside of the site itself? If yes, in what context?

19. If you had to use your real name to participate on the *Stormfront.org* forum, would you be willing to do so? Why or why not?

20. When speaking with others online, do you generally refer to them by their real names or by their nicknames?

21. Give a rating as to how important your nickname is in relation to your everyday use of the Internet.

    Very Unimportant   Unimportant   Indifferent   Important
                        Very Important

- **HOW DEEP DO SITES LIKE *STORMFRONT.ORG* GO IN NURTURING AND MAINTAINING ELEMENTS OF NATIONALIST SENTIMENT? ARE THEY AIDING OR IMPEDING THE WHITE NATIONALIST CAUSE?**

22. Which came first for you, the white nationalist cause or the *Stormfront.org* site?

23. As a white nationalist, how effective do you think *Stormfront.org* has been in advancing the white pride cause?

24. As a white nationalist, what aspects of *Stormfront.org* impress you most?

25. Do you think that —by and large— *Stormfront.org* participants are serious about pushing white nationalism in RL settings?

26. The Internet -- rightly or wrongly -- is perceived as being the great new frontier in social, political and economic terms. With this in mind, how well positioned is the white nationalist movement to take advantage of this; in terms of political organisation, economic advantage & social interaction?

27. How well organised is your opposition (Hatewatch etc) in online terms?

28. Give a rating on how well *Stormfront.org* is meeting your needs as a nationalist?

> Very Poor   Poor   Okay   Good   Very Good

- **DOES THE STATE OF ONE'S NATION REMAIN PROMINENT IN AN INDIVIDUAL'S THOUGHTS AMID THE CONTESTED MILIEU OF THE NOUVEAU VIRTUAL WORLD AND THE IDEALISED UTOPIA OF 'WHITE ISRAEL'?**

29. When you joined *Stormfront.org*, did you give details of the nation in which you are living?

30. Will your current nationality retain any future significance for you if the promise of a white utopia is realised?

31. How do you feel your country of residence is performing on the world stage?

32. Are the forces of globalisation likely to erode established national borders?

33. Are the costs associated with online participation restricting or impeding your white pride pursuits online?

34. Give your country of residence a rating on how well it satisfies your needs as a citizen.

> Very Poor   Poor   Okay   Good   Very Good

- **IS ONLINE INTERVIEWING VIA ICQ A VIABLE PROCESS IN TERMS OF HOW IT IS RECEIVED AND UTILISED BY THE INTERVIEWEES THEMSELVES?**

35. Have you had any experience in the past of completing interviews or questionnaires?

36. What were you most concerned about prior to undertaking the interview?

37. Did the interview allow you to adequately get your points across?

38. Would you be willing to undergo an online interview again in the future?

39. Which research method would you prefer to endure: an online interview, a face to face interview, or an e-mail questionnaire?

40. Give a rating as to how well you think the online interview process works as a research method

Very Poor   Poor   Okay   Good   Very Good

Glossary

Abbreviations:

Also referred to by some writers as 'acronyms'. Abbreviated terms and/or clever 'play on words' that are used by some netizens as a means of hastening the writing of, and adding humour to, their online letters, discussions and postings. For example, LOL equates to 'lots of laughs' or 'laugh out loud'.

AIT:

Advanced Information Technology.

ARPAnet:

Advanced Research Projects Agency Network.

Avatar:

A symbol or icon that is used by a netizen in conjunction with their nickname so as to provide a visual sense of how the netizen sees themselves, or how they would like others to perceive of them.

BBS:

Bulletin Board Systems. Operate similarly to newsgroups, but are generally found attached to websites and are accessible via the WWW.

Chatservers:

(Also known as chatrooms) Synchronous CMC vehicles that allow netizens to interact with fellow Internet users in realtime regardless of where they are positioned globally.

CMC:

Computer-mediated communication.

Community:

> The regular interacting of like-minded individuals for the express purpose of sharing similar interests and/or pursuing common objectives; and the structures and processes through which this interaction is formalised and mediated.

Computopians:

> Writers, theorists and social commentators who adopt an ultra-positive attitude toward computer technology, largely on account of its perceived capacity for improving the quality of human life.

Computropians:

> Writers, theorists and social commentators who adopt an overtly negative stance toward computer technology, primarily due to its perceived role in widening the societal gap that exists between the 'haves' and the 'have nots'.

CPU:

> Central processing unit.

Cyberspace:

> The sphere of information and communication exchange that does not involve face-to-face interaction. Is commonly thought of in terms of the Internet and WWW, but also entails telephones, fax machines, various radio formats, and virtual reality equipment.

Cyberspace Divide:

> The social chasm dividing those with access to cyberspatial media (and possessing the necessary skills to use them gainfully) from those who are deprived of online skills and participation. Can also be expressed in terms of those nations that are technology rich and those that are technology poor.

Emoticons:

> Small signifiers that are constructed by joining together keyboard letters and symbols (for example,

:, -,) when put together produce ☺, which means the person posting or writing the material is happy). These signifiers are used to compensate for the lack of available visual cues in online interactions.

Fleshspace:

The sphere of information and communication exchange that *does* involve face-to-face modes of interaction. Fleshspace is also seen as the physical representation of 'real world' space, which specifically includes the physical structures, institutions and machinations that are seen to encompass conventional elements of everyday life.

GII:

The 'Global Information Infrastructure'. An American initiative aimed at ensuring that all global nations have a viable presence in cyberspace.

Hacktivism:

The term 'Hacktivism' refers to the politically motivated hacking and cracking of websites. It should not be confused with the act of 'Hacking' *per se*, as this is usually performed by individuals solely for their own benefit (just for the thrill of breaking into someone else's computer account and *causing ad hoc* mischief). Hacktivism, by way of contrast, has a background goal of hurting, embarrassing and/or inconveniencing an organisation against which the hacker holds some sort of enmity or disapproval.

High Style:

A writing style employed by some netizens, which privileges the use of good grammar, perfect punctuation, and solid syntax. Users of high style will commonly berate other netizens for employing a lax approach to grammar and writing conventions. Conversely, users of high style can find themselves being criticised for adopting a supercillious and elitist manner in what is, for many people, an informal environment.

ICQ:

An online chatserver used by millions of netizens worldwide. Takes its name from a play on words — 'I Seek You' for a chat.

IRC:

Internet Relay Chat.

IT:

Information Technology

Kava Bowl:

A Tonga-orientated Internet discussion forum.

Listservers:

Similar to newsgroups except that listservers bring the messages to the netizen, as opposed to the netizen going to a particular site on which all the messages are presented. With listservers, a person will email a message to a subscribed list of users and these users can reply to messages that capture their interest.

Lurking:

Observing an online domain without expressly contributing to the domain, or notifying other participants of your presence.

MOOs:

Multi-object orientated MUDs. Similar to MUDs [see below], but these environments usually contain a range of prescribed objects around which netizens negotiate their participation on the site (for example, the virtual pool tables and beanbags of a MOO bar). It is also common for netizens to adopt iconic avatars when participating on MOOs.

MUDs:

Multi-user dimensions, domains, or dungeons. Operate in a similar fashion to chatservers, but usually incorporate architectural, structural, and/or fantasial elements into the interactive environment.

MUVES:

Multi-user virtual environments. A collective term for MUDs and MOOs.

Nationalism (conventional):

The policy of asserting the interests of a nation, viewed as separate from the interests of other nationsor the common interests all nations.

Nationalism (stateless):

The underlying assumptions and influences that motivate and give meaning to an individual's perceptions of their place in the broader political, ideological, cultural and economic machinations of imagined communities of state.

Netiquette:

The norms, rules and operating guidelines that netizens are expected to adhere to when participating in a virtual group or community.

Netizen:

An online user, particularly one who participates in assorted discussion fora and/or chatrooms.

Net Savvy:

The term applied to a netizen who is experienced in online matters and competent at using and recognising forms of emoticon, abbreviation and netiquette when online.

Newbie(s):

Participant(s) in an online environment who are new to the virtual realm and are unfamiliar with other participants and the established behavioural conventions that the group in question adheres to.

Newsgroups:

Asynchronous online discussion fora that are organised around specific topic and interest areas. Newsgroups are commonly linked to email servers and are mainly accessible via telnet and ftp moreso than the WWW.

Real world space:

Space(s) in which the machinations and interactions common to everyday human life take place. Real world space is comprised of elements of fleshspace and aspects of cyberspace.

Register:

The different types of language that are used for the purpose of writing and speaking.

Self-identity:

The continual process of internally comprehending and externally expressing culturally mediated forms of belief, emotion, desire and knowledge that are ontologically fundamental to an individual's everyday state of being.

Spamming:

The posting of email messages to an online newsgroup or discussion forum that are irrelevant to the interest areas being pursued by the group or forum.

Topophilia:

Love of, or a fond attachment to, a particular region or place.

Topophobia:

Loathing of, or a particular disdain toward, a particular region or place.

Trolling:

The posting of sarcastic and/or provocative messages to newsgroups, chatrooms or online discussion fora. This can be done in order to agitate or besmirch the reputation of an online user(s), but is commonly performed purely as a means of bringing humour to an online environment.

Virtual Cities:

Online sites that represent and/or are influenced by bricks and mortar cities.

WWW:

World Wide Web.

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[Please note, "o.l." is used in this list to refer to page numbers that are applicable to online sources. This was considered necessary, particularly with regard to EBSCOhost articles wherein the page numbers from the original journal articles do not correspond with those that appear online].

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