

ABSTRACT



This study aims to understand better the characteristics which are making Computer Mediated Communication the most popular medium amongst young people. Through familiarization of this medium a deeper insight will be acquired on the dynamics which take place between young people through the use of Computer Mediated Communication. This research will also look at Computer Mediated Communication vis-à-vis real life communication by comparing the online and offline persona of the young people. The effectiveness of the study is that both the perspectives of young people and youth workers are presented so that multiple perspectives of the same this phenomenon are identified.

Through an ethnographic approach, questionnaires and online interviews, arguments were provided to challenge or reinforce existent literature. By this multiple approach new insights are backed by evidence obtained through data analysis.

This study will present youth workers and youth leaders with a challenge to over look the stereo typical approach of CMC and mould it as a tool for their youth work practice.

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CHAPTER
ONE

Introduction

INTRODUCTION

	Patch	Are you online?
	Me	yep... alive and kicking!!!
	Patch	lol same here...
	Me	what keeping you awake...?
	Patch	I am not tired I guess...
	Me	Geez I wish I can say that.. but I am running on coffee now
	Patch	lol... caffeine overdose
	Me	so... how are you doing in the task group..?
	Patch	don't know feeling a bit lost... coz yesterday we had a bit of a fight because Sam didn't agree with Deb... and we ended up leaving without concluding anything...
	Me	Sam and Deb...??? Today I spoke with them both but didn't mention anything... they seemed quite ok!!
	Patch	But that is not the reality!!! They are not ok!! Still fighting... Sam sent me his chat logs... and its really heating up...

After disconnecting from this conversation I had with Patch, I felt that I was missing information which I had to acquire by being more present online. I questioned myself with the same question that Patch presented me, Am I online? Am I really in touch with what is happening around me? Am I constantly 'upgrading' myself in order to understand the changes occurring with the social dynamics I live in? This chat was the wakeup call for me as a future Youth Worker and researcher who is interested to learn more about the environment that our young people are growing to be part of.

Patch: Are you online?
Me: yep...

Am I online? This question made me realise that nowadays the concept of reality vis-à-vis the virtual has become ambiguous.. While I was doing an assignment and drinking coffee in my 'offline' world, I was also chatting with Patch in the online world. Both are true, I was really present in both realms and this is the ambiguity of the situation. Are we still separating the digital world from the real life? Is it still possible to do so? Can a person be solely perceived on his/her action when offline?

As a Youth Worker I am interested in becoming familiar with the places and the environment that young people are choosing to spend their time in. The online environment is clearly one of the most popular environments with young people in the western world (Livingstone & Bober, 2005). As a Youth Worker, one of the central roles is to be involved and immersed in the same environment of the young people. Being where the young people are, increases the understanding of their perspective and their line of thought. The best way to do this is by spending as much time as possible with the young people, in their own environment. The more the Youth Worker gets to know them, the more he or she can gain insight and discover relevant information.

Being immersed in the world of young people between the ages of 16 to 19 years, will also give me an insight of how this new environment is moulding the identity of young people. At this stage of their development, adolescents are shaped not only by their peers but also by their environment (Douvan and Adelson, 1966). Through this study I will have the opportunity to discover how the environment is also shaping the way young people are influenced by this medium at a time where their personality is being formed. The time of adolescence is also known as the time where the young person is exploring his/her own identity in

order to form the 'self' (Lehman, 1969). In recent years, with the introduction of CMC and network sites identities can be formed by extremely varied and juxtaposed layers of the enriched self. (Ludvigo, 2001; Sibak, 2007) Due to the flexibility of the CMC young people have more space where they can explore who they are in a more free way (Marcus, Machilek & Schütz 2006). Those individuals who had different identities were part of subcultures and were generally negatively sanctioned by the mainstream society (Becker, 1963). The 'Me', which implies the expectations that society implies on individual and the 'I', the internal wishes and needs of every individual, are more balanced out through the spaces which are created by the online environments (Baldwin, 2009). People now have the opportunity and space to juggle around through many selves which their sum will add up to the individual's personae, there is less distinction between the social identity and the personal one (Hewitt, 1989).

Self identity and self exploration are both very important aspects of what goes on during the adolescent years of each young person (Steinberg, 1996). During this period in life, people are generally given the permission to try new things. This is also the time when things get more complex as the attempt to find their own identity is made through struggle with social interactions and moral issues (Kegan, 1982). Erikson (1962) argues that during the adolescent years, the facilitation of the core self is taking place, thus forming the personal sense of what gives life meaning.

During this stage of the young person's life, as Piaget's (1954) argues, social interaction is the key to development. As they grow older, young people pay increasing attention to how other people think and why they act in particular ways. Cooley also argues that when an individual is looking at himself through others' perspectives, also known as 'looking-glass self', a person gains a more holistic understanding of his/her own identity. In fact as Yeung and Martin (2003) argue, Identity, or self, is the result of the concept in which we learn to see ourselves as others do. George Herbert Mead (1982) described this process as self as taking the role of the other, the premise for which the self is actualized through socializing with others. Through interaction with others, we begin to develop an identity about who we are, as well as empathy for others. In respect to this Cooley said, "The thing that moves us to pride or shame is not the mere mechanical reflection of ourselves, but an imputed sentiment, the imagined effect of this reflection upon another's mind." (Cooley 1964).

Young people become aware of what is expected from them through their interaction with other peers (Freedman, 1993). This kind of interaction has always been an important aspect of the individual efforts to build our identity. Erikson (1962, p52) argues that these kind of social situations, where young people are in interacting with each other are allows space to 'reveal and commit' aspects of ourselves, this will increase the knowledge about oneself. (pg.52). Chatting provides an unparalleled opportunity for such place. Internet has become a significant social laboratory for experimenting with the constructions and reconstructions of self. This is clearly highlighted in Turkle's argument that:

You can be whoever you want to be. You can completely redefine yourself if you want. You don't have to worry about the slots other people put you in as much. It is easier to change the way people perceive you, because all they got is what you are ready to show them.

(Turkle 1995, p. 184)

This in itself will be the core fulcrum of my study. As researcher I am interested to explore:

- Is the distinction between the online and the offline still relevant?
- What is the relation between this new medium and young people?
- What is the role of a youth worker within this new emerging medium?

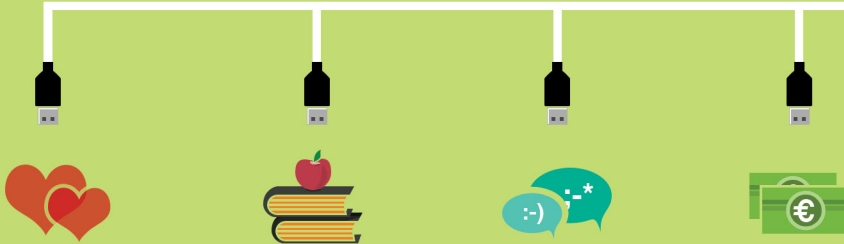
PURPOSE OF THE PROJECT

With the amount of new technologies injected everyday in our daily lives, we are continuously trying to get to grips with the changes brought around by networked communication. Today we are speaking of on-line and off-line worlds, two separate dimensions of the same world. The Internet is a medium with great consequences for social life (Jones, 2002). To some extent it simply does not matter whether one is online or not - one's life will be, in some way, for better or worse, touched by the Internet.

Nowadays we also speak about cyberspace, websites, CMC, MUDs, and many more aspects of global computer network. According to Baudrillard (1988), "we are no longer 'people', but messages on one another's screen". Meeting places are shifting from parks



*ru
online*



and youth centers to chat-rooms and LAN (Local Area Network) Parties. Marshall McLuhan (1962) had accurately predicted the future of electric media. McLuhan suggested that new technologies would create a global village of non-verbal communication that would be accessed all over the world, thus connecting the world's tribes. The internet is playing a central role in this 'retribalization' (Turkle,1995) as the access to information by those all over the world, is becoming the important aspect of this new form of communication.

Today's millennial generation are faced with this aspect of duality of worlds. They need to be present in both worlds equally. It is not a question of option, but one of survival. The on-line world is a continuum of the off-line world. Today we are beginning a conversation off-line and continuing it on-line; you cannot miss out in one or the other.

Fischer (1992) argues that we would not even ask what 'impact' a technology has had on a particular society, for this question implies that the technology is something independent from us which is created out of context, something alien to society. Fisher suggests that we focus our attention on the people who use the technologies. Technologies are created to address a need, the success or failure of technologies is solely dependent on the users of that same technology. I will be focusing on the actual users and how technology is being used within their specific context.

Meyrowitz (1994) argues that media can act as conduits of the transmission of the messages. From this perspective media technologies can be powerful social forces; their power lies in the ways they help organize and allow us to construct the cultural environments. McLuhan coined the term: 'The medium is the message'; he emphasized the nature of the medium itself is more important than the content. Therefore to know best what are the effects of the media and the people using it, one must find how one is shaping the other. Media are embedded in an ongoing social process and as a result, their development and application are neither fixed nor fully predictable (Douglas, 1987).

To better understand the way young people perceive life, we must better understand the way they communicate. Those of us, who work with young people daily, find themselves affianced in a constant dialogue between their ideals and the changing values and attitudes of the emerging digital generation. We must understand them so that we can reach them, to eliminate the risk to remain relegated. We must incorporate ourselves within the new patterns of communication and start using them.

METHODS

A triangulation method of research will be used for this study. The study will be composed of mainly four different phases of data collection. The first phase is where as a researcher I will be learning more about the medium. This phase is important because I will gain the know-how and skills needed to be able to use them in the other phases of the study. Ethnography will be used as a main tool for data collection. I will submerge myself in the online world for 5 weeks and engage myself with young people online, by chatting with them on a regular basis. I will also engage myself with the same young people offline, by attending the youth centre they attend on a weekly basis. This will help me to observe the same people in an online and offline manner thus establishing the relationship between the online and offline personae. The third part of the data collection consists of the unstructured interview which I will be doing with young people through informal dialogue using CMC as the medium of communication. The fourth and last part of the study will be focused on Youth Workers, the aim of this questionnaire is to obtain the perspective of the youth workers on the topic.

LIMITATIONS

The purpose of this research is to understand how online chatting is affecting young people on a micro level. The results will give a deeper insight of the relation there is between the online and the offline worlds. This research is also intended to analyse how the medium can be used for the Youth Workers benefit & thus offer a better service to the young person. This will not be a study in which results will be giving us an insight and a closer look of this current situation.

CONCLUSION

This chapter's main intention was to give a brief background of all the main themes that I will be going through in more detail in the next chapter. The literature review will give the background information on the CMC and also more information about the history of technologies and their impact on society. This will help to understand how society responded to certain inventions and technologies and will give a better insight on what changes will be coming out from the usage of CMC by young people.

CHAPTER
TWO

*Literature
review*

HISTORICAL CONTEXT



A few millennia ago, philosophers such as Plato and social movements such as the Essenes sought alternative forms of social organizations (Kahn, 2004). This search continues today, as we experience a change in social organizations and technological conditions. Plato thought the concept of the community as an ideal model, a highly organized entity. With a hierarchical system every person and class had their own place and the most important thing was the effectiveness of the whole (Seung, 1996). This notion of group-mentality is now being challenged by this emerging culture, the digital generation (Bennett, Maton & Kervin 2008). Nowadays, individuals have the possibility of choosing more easily between the physical space and the psychological space of the intimacy of their network (Fortunati, 2002). This shift from the offline to the online is what triggered me as a researcher to delve and explore more this new emerging communication tool, better known as CMC

MEDIA AND THE COMMUNITY



The differing values of different generations are frequently sources of friction and lack of mutual understanding between generations. Popular discourse finds it convenient to explain this phenomenon in terms of “generation-gaps” and discussions of such nature reveal that members of a particular generation often look at other generations critically and with a blaming attitude (Howe & Strauss, 2000). Social researchers have found it useful to classify people into generational categories. Howe & Strauss (ibid) refer to present-day youth born in the 1980’s and 1990’s as the “Millennial” generation, whereas Barna (2001) prefers to use the term “Mosaics”. These schemata’s identify and describe the traits and characteristics of different generations, in an attempt to provide insight that would facilitate inter-generational understanding and interaction. Parents, teachers and other adults often look down on young people and describe them in terms of “decline” (Taylor, 1992). They complain about young people’s lack of respect towards authority, their lack of commitment and participation, their self-centeredness and self-sufficiency, their obsession with technology and their lack of values (ibid).

The difference between ‘new’ and old’ forms of media are substantial in themselves. As with the introduction of previous technology, all the new forms of communications have often produced a variety of speculation about their social impact and

their effect on society. One critic, representing an extreme view, has argued that innovations in computer networking technology are producing the transformative technological event since the capture of fire, fundamentally changing the way we live (Harper's Magazine, 1995). This illustrates the deterministic view some researchers adopt when researching the effect of a new medium being utilized within society.

Taylor (1991) shows how alongside the developments of contemporary Western culture, people have been experiencing a sense of loss or decline in the sense of the 'self' that is "discussed, bemoaned, challenged and argued against all the time in all sorts of media." (pg 8). He continues by saying that by becoming increasingly more focused on themselves and their personal world, individuals started to lose the broader vision of the purpose of a community.

The dark side of individualism is the centering on the self, which both flattens and narrows our lives, makes them poorer in meaning, and less concerned with others or society.

(Taylor 1991, p. 3)

Media, for the past decades has always been associated with radical change happening within society (Gauntlett, 2005). In McLuhan's words 'such inventions as the horse collar quickly led to the development of the modern world' (McLuhan & Watson 1970, p.121). Technological determinism is also commonly associated with futuristic commentators regarding what they refer to as 'the microelectronic revolution' (Large 1980). For instance, Christopher Evans declared that the computer would transform 'world society at all levels' (Evans 1979, p 24). Historically, every major invention in communication technology has demonstrated a complex interplay with social forces to produce transformative effect in human relationships (Cheseboro, 2000; Cochrane, 1995; Inose & Pierce, 1984; Kedzie, 1997; McQuillen, 2003; Meyrowitz, 1995).

Vibrant, cultural, dynamic and democratic or commercialized, harmful, toxic and time-wasting (Davies and Crantson, 2008), are a myriad of different perspectives on online social networking and CMC's software application available online. Larsen (2007) offers thirty five different perspectives, ranging from those that take online social networking to be a key part of, and a reflection of, 'youth culture' (The Youth perspective) through to those that view online social networking as spaces of surveillance (this surveillance perspective), sexual play ground for shallow self expression and places of significant danger to young people (Davies & Crantson,

2008). Green and Hannon (2007) characterize the debate about technology in a general polarized perspective of 'Moral Panic' and 'Digital Faith'. Different categories of society adapt to different views of technology and the way it is shaping society. As Douglas Adams (2001) argues 'Anything that is in the world when you are born is normal and ordinary and is just a natural part of the way the world works. Anything that is invented between when you are fifteen and thirty five is new and exciting and revolutionary and you can probably get a career in it. Anything invented after you are thirty five is against the natural order of things' (p 32)

YOUNG PEOPLE AND THE MEDIA

Freire & Shor (1987) question whether it is young people's thinking that shapes society or rather whether it is the changing nature of society that generates preoccupation among the young. Certainly, today's young people are influenced by modern society like the rest of us. The EU study on the state of young people in Europe (2001) mentions significant social changes that have impacted on young people's lives. Among these are the changing role of the family, the new roles which educational institutions are expected to play beyond the transmission of basic knowledge and skills, the decline of important agencies such as religious authorities, and the effects of globalization. These changes brought by modern society are often channeled and perceived as being caused or accelerated by the media. Since young persons are amongst the first to adopt new technology, much of the weight of the change caused is channeled towards this sector of the community (Furlong & Cartmel, 1997). Howe & Strauss (2000) point out the incorrectness of the negative impressions that many adults have of young people today dismissing them to be South Park idiots beyond redemption characterized by increased profanity, irresponsible risk-taking, crime and violence.

NATURE OF COMPUTER MEDIATED COMMUNICATION (CMC)

The main characteristic of CMC is that it allows and encourages participation from both the sender and the receiver, unlike other popular mass media (Rogers, 1986). In essence, new media technologies provide the user with the opportunity to own the medium and be the producers themselves of the message they want to convey. Neuman (1991) argues new internet based media allow for more, faster, diverse, two way communications between users who have both more control and choice over the medium. As Kiesler (1992) noted, CMC is a text-based medium where physical and social cues have all but been eliminated. The removal of

these cues may create some interesting problems, and resolve some others. The absence of regulating feedback, such as head nods and tone of voice may create coordination problems to express prior knowledge of a topic, something that can be done with a simple cue in a face-to-face group meeting (ibid.). He continues in saying that the loss of this non-verbal behavior, which is often important in bargaining situations, changes the way in which, and the extent to which, bargaining among group members occurs (ibid). To this end, it has been found that high status people do not dominate the discussion in electronic groups as much as they do in face-to-face groups (ibid). CMC allows meetings to proceed in an egalitarian fashion, creating a situation in which all members may equally participate.

All this is replacing in some way or another “normal” socialization process. Bearing this in mind, today’s young people are spending more time on-line, therefore this will change the way that they communicate with each other. By the use of CMC’s the way we communicate is changing, the way that we speak through CMC is changing, thus also the way we think changes. These shifts in the way we communicate will also affect the way identity is formed, especially during the adolescence years (Kegan, 1982). These new forms of social interactions allow reconsidering the meanings of terms such as ‘community’ and ‘identity’. The broad impact of the Internet on the expression and perception of social identities is relatively clear. The users can present themselves to others with almost no restrictions (Turkle, 1995). Significantly, the individual has much more control over the expression of their identity than in face-to-face interaction (Rheingold, 2000). Users can impart as much or as little information about themselves as they like, and can even remain anonymous, or create a new identity on the Net (Turkle, 1995).

The new media takes us so far from natural world that our sense of time changes as we become increasingly committed to the instantaneous nature of CMC (Croteau & Hoynes, 2000). In this High-tech age, where data seem virtually limitless, our ways of thinking are in the process of changing (Birkerts, 1994). No longer do we value deliberation; decisiveness rules the day. We do not need to know about the world; instead we need to know how to access the data that will tell us about the world. Newer, faster, space-altering media will squeeze out prior cultural forms, including reading and rigorous thinking (Croteau & Hoynes, 2000). Freedom is being defined as freedom from the constraints of the physical world, which we will seek to accomplish by an even deeper commitment to mediated experience (Birkerts, 1994). Bill Gates contends that ‘the information highway will transform our culture as dramatically as Gutenberg’s press did the Middle Ages’ (Quoted in Harper magazine, 1998). George Gilder argues



that new, computer-based technologies, ‘will be a major force for freedom and individuality, culture, and morality’ (ibid). Marshall McLuhan (1964, p19), wrote that with the rise of electronic media “we have extended our central nervous system itself in Global embrace”,

CMC AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Every emerging media throughout the history of media has been associated with young people. Adolescents have always been early adopters of technologies (Rainie & Horrigan, 2005). Scholars have begun to demonstrate the ways in which Internet usage can have a profound impact on adolescent development, including social effects such as identity construction and political socialization, and cognitive effects such as on learning skills or attention (Calvert, Jordan, & Cocking, 2002).

The internet has the capacity to give young people the access to a social arena to make their voices heard and by doing this they also pave the way and compensate for their marginalized position in the physical world. Montgomery (1996) writes that the new digital media are suggested to have more impact on how the young person’s grow and learn, what it is they value, and ultimately who they become, than any other medium before. She argues that even if the experience of children and young people growing up in the media environment today is vastly different from that of adults, they are still in need of adults’ company and advice until they master the art of critical thinking. Tapscott (1998) argues that the internet has created a free zone for young people; there, they not only have control over their computers but of their social communication. Through the use of internet, today’s young people would get accustomed to empowerment, open discussion and immediacy challenging the beaurocratic governance processes of today (ibid).

Adolescents may be especially drawn to online relationships because of their intense interest in forming relationships, and because the expansiveness of cyberspace frees them from some of the constraints of adolescence by giving them easy access to a world beyond that of their families, schools and communities (Wolak et.al 2002). Internet is universally interesting to young people (Tapscott, 1998). Forming relationships might be one of the most generally appealing aspects of the Internet, given that forming relationships is a developmental imperative of adolescence (Wolak et.al 2002).

Online social networking spaces act as sites for identity formation. 'Whether constructing their profiles in Myspace, creating a video and posting it on YouTube, or talking in chatrooms, teens are constantly creating, recreating, and honing their identities- a primary goal of adolescence development.' (Greenfield et al. 2007). Stern (2008) studied non-social network based personal pages created by young people – and finds that they act as spaces for young people 'to engage with their culture and to practice ways of being within it', and notes that whilst the construction of self- identity that profiles and home pages allow 'is not unique to online self presentation, but it is also a continuum of the offline persona as well'.

The idea of experimenting with identity through online social networking does not equate to falsification of identity or creating a false persona. In fact, Stern (2008) and Larsen (2007) found that young people strive for authenticity in their online self-presentation- often suggesting that their online profiles are a snapshot of their ideal self. Through encouraging peers to contribute to their profiles, and through soliciting feedback from members of their networks, young people are explicitly involving their friendship networks in constructing and contributing to their identity formation (ibid.) Erikson (1962) argues that during successful early adolescence, the young person acquires self-certainty as opposed to self-consciousness and self-doubt. The young person comes to experiment with different, usually constructive roles. The adolescent seeks leadership, someone to inspire him and gradually develops a set of ideals. They do not yet have to be permanent traits in the young person's character, but can experiment, trying various roles and thus hopefully find the one most suitable for them. (ibid)

IRC enables people to deconstruct aspects of their own identity, and of their cultural classification, and to challenge and obscure the boundaries between some of our most deeply felt cultural significances.

(Elizabeth Reid, 1991)

Another important aspect deriving from the medium of CMC is that, research suggests that those who are lonely or socially anxious are particularly likely to use CMC's (Patterson & Gojdydz, 2000). Rideout et al. (2005) argues that those young people who spend the most of the time using internet are also those whose lives are also the most who are likely to be full with activities with family, friends, sports, and other interests. Walther (1996) continues to argue that nature of CMC empowers and facilitates the individuals to develop intimate relationships. McKenna et al. (2002) also found that Internet relationships tend to develop closeness and intimacy more quickly than do real-life relationships. On the other hand Peris et.al (2002) notes that it is stereotypically presumed

‘that people who enter cyberspace to form interpersonal relationships generally show greater difficulties in social Face-to-Face situations. They are considered shy and anxious people who have to hide behind a computer screen to be able to interact socially’ (ibid)

ONLINE YOUTH WORK

For those who work with teenagers understanding the world of the young person is indispensable.

To gain trust and respect of teens, and to have an impact upon them, effective youth workers make a concerted effort to inhabit the world of the teenager. Often, youth workers who mean well but have limited influence are disabled in their work by expecting teens to abandon what comes naturally in favour of entering the adult world.

(Barna 2001, p. 150).

Alanen (1988) argues that if we began from where young person stands and act as subjects in their everyday live, we might be able to achieve an account of society from a young person’s point of view. The enormous interest and eagerness from youngster’s side to use the web communities might also be interpreted as a response to the fact that youngster’s time and space are increasingly organized by adults, at home and at school. The question to bear in mind is whether adults provide today’s youth with enough time for peer communication and other leisure activities. Youth Workers must understand that the reality of today’s young people no longer lies within the offline realm, but the virtual and the real are one the same intersecting each other. Research on young people and their use of internet has pointed out that it would be a mistake to regard youth’s online activity as separate from their real life (Livingstone and Bovill, 2001). The preponderance of other simple survey research seems to indicate the net effect of the internet and CMC technologies is, for the majority of users, to expand and enhance relationship networks, specific relational bonds, and, in many cases, the quality of relational interaction. In a separate study Kraut et al. (2002) argues that the increasing use of the internet correlated positively with indicators of social network size and familial involvement.

The shift brought with industrial revolution, thus the shift from the mechanical to the organic type of society (Tonnies 1987), also

changed the needs for society. This change in the structure of society and its values, from the traditional more communalist form to the more competitive and individualistic society created a vacuum, thus a need for a change in the dynamics of society itself. Rheingold (1992) suggested that this vacuum created a hunger for community, to be part of something, a larger society. Reality does not always allow this due to a more individualistic culture, thus people are finding it easier to find this space virtually through CMC's (ibid).

People in virtual communities do just about everything people do in real life, but we leave our bodies behind.
(Rheingold 1992, p.3)

Although supporting Rheingold conclusion that virtual realities are in some way replacing the lack of reality itself, the Youth Worker cannot underestimate the potential effect this can have on the development of young person thus agreeing more with McClellan (1994) in saying that:

Just as TV produces couch potatoes, so on-line culture creates mouse potatoes, people who hide from real life and spend their whole life goofing off in cyberspace.
(McCellan 1994, p.10)

Youth Work is based upon key principles, including: the voluntary participation of young people, a method that 'starts from where young people are starting' and seeks to 'go beyond where young people start'; a focus on young people as individuals located within peer communities and wider communities and cultural networks; and a recognition of young people as young people – rather than working with young people on the basis of adult-imposed labels (Davies, 2005). The key factor in Youth Work is often identified as being in a 'relationship'. That is, the relationship of 'trust and mutual respect' between the adult Youth Worker and young person 'through which young people receive the support needed to acquire the three R's: resourcefulness, resilience and resolve'. (Merton 2007).

Cranston and Davies (2008) point out this new reality of internet socialization, brought also with it a change in the role of Youth Worker. For the Youth Work role it is eminently important to be present in the virtual world (ibid). It is important that as a Youth Worker, one should question what are the key activities done by young people while spending time online. Young persons are predominantly interested in communicating with existing friendships, which in most of the time are an extension from offline settings (Mediappro, 2007). Larsen and Tynes (2007) have focused on the role of CMC as contributing to the young people's identity formation process and as spaces for young people to reflect upon their own identity development (Stern, 2008). The Pew and American Life Project finds that CMC are hubs of teen content creating activity (Lenhart and Madden, 2007) – encouraging creative expression and outlet for young people's creative efforts. All these activities also illustrate that through this virtual world youngsters are being provided with myriad of learning possibilities. The work by Green and Hannon (2007) identified a wide range of digital skills young people can acquire through general online informal learning including: social and personal skills; cognitive and physical skills; and technical skills. Contrary to what was expected various researchers found that the role of online spaces act as venues for civic engagement and political action, which often also result in the expression of the young person's perspective in the political realm (Rhiengold, 2008, Levine, 2008, Loader et al 2007, Byron 2008, Howland and Bethel, 2002).

INTERNATIONAL FINDINGS

One hundred and four respondents in a research commissioned by The Estonian National Youth Agency and Practical Participation provided one or more suggestions for opportunities presented by online interaction. Just under 50% identified the role online interaction has in helping young people to keep contact with their peers, with a number of respondents noting the particular relevance of this for excluded groups, young people suffering illness and isolated young people. 85% believe that Youth Workers have a crucial role supporting young people to make the most out of the opportunities created in an online environment. It was interesting to note that 10% of the respondents explicitly mentioned opportunities for online communication tools to be used to make young people aware of, and to deliver, Youth Work interventions and services.

An astonishing fact emerged from this study was that 90 % believe that Youth Work has a crucial role in supporting young people to navigate the risks of online networking. Some types of bullying identified were, disclosure of personal information, addiction

and sexual exposure on minors (Davies and Cranston (2008). When the researchers asked the Youth Workers if they were prepared to handle and deliver youth work through online tools, only 35 % felt equipped to support young people to make the most out of the opportunities presented by online communication.

LOCAL CONTEXT

The National Statistics Office of Malta conducted a survey on ICT usage by households and individuals in 2008 using a random sample of 1500 people to represent the whole population. The findings of the survey are a clear indication that the internet is becoming a more integral part in the today's society, especially with young people. 62.6 % of the population has access to a computer; out of this percentage 59 % has also access to internet from their own household. When comparing the different strata of the population it is easily perceived that the most computer and internet users are in the category of individuals aged between 16 – 24. From this category 91 % responded that they used a PC and internet in the last three months. Another interesting fact was that there is a direct relationship between the income and education vis-à-vis the access and usage of internet. Another finding was that 60.2 % of unemployed and inactive people and 100% of the students used the internet during the last three months.

Participants were also asked what kind of internet activities they are most likely to engage with when they are online. Some of the results derived from the category of 16-24 year olds were : 92.1% Sending and receiving e-mails; 54 % educational purposes; 43.4 % Using instant messaging; 69.8% use Skype and other similar software.

CONCLUSION

It is important for Youth Workers to really understand the fabric of this new medium. It is also important to get familiar with it in order to engage better with the young people. Understanding the historic context of media and the how it effect communities and young people is an important perspective to have in order for the profession of Youth Work to evolve in the right direction. Another important element is that Youth Workers should be aware what is going on in these online environments. This is of importance mainly due to the fact that young people are spending more and more time online. To know young people more time should with them, be it online or offline.

It begins from where young people are in terms of their values, attitudes, issues and ambitions and is concerned with their personal and social development.

Allbeson (1985)

CHAPTER
THREE

Methodology

INTRODUCTION

Digital natives and millennium learners are new terms which refer to all young people below the age of twenty five years (Bennett, Maton & Kervin, 2008). Older generations, those over the age of twenty five, can be considered to be immigrants, reason being that this sector needed to get acquainted to all the changes occurring around them. As a researcher, since I am not a native to this IT driven society, I had to immerse myself in the native's world, see with their own eyes and speak with the same language, in order for me to really understand this electronic media culture. The real and the virtual are so intertwined with each other, it is difficult to define and differ between what is real and what is virtual (Clegg and Smith 2004, Mann and Steward, 2000, Vayreda et al. 2002, Whitty 2002). To research better this new phenomenon I had to immerse myself in both the 'online' and the 'offline' realities to obtain a good a detailed picture of this 'IT' driven generation. Since this field of interest is relatively new, and locally there are no relevant studies about this specific area, I had to gain all my knowledge through direct experience, by being online with young persons. The lack of available literature about this specific subject had a positive effect on my research since it gave me a hands on experience, gaining important insights which were the key elements that brought me closer to the native's experience. The nearer I became to the native, the more I adopted their way of doing and their language. Being so close to the native gave me better access to the young people online since they were not intimidated by me as a researcher since I used the same jargon as they did.

My objective was to establish what a stranger would have to know in order to understand what is going on in here or, more challenging still, what a stranger would have to know in order to be able to participate in a meaningful way.

(Walcott,1996 p125)

WHY QUALITATIVE STUDY?

FB (Facebook), HI5 (high five), MSN, brb (be right back), tyt (take your time), btw (by the way), bbl (be back later), ppl (people), lol (laugh out loud), tlc (tender loving care), tagged, and many other abbreviations and terminologies were all new to me as a Youth Worker. These same abbreviations were the inspiration on which I structured my methodology. Since I wanted to gain the insight and familiarize myself with the CMC, I used tools which suited the purpose of this study. As a researcher interested in the dynamics taking place in the young person's environment I had to spend many hours observing the activities taking place in the online and offline spheres alike.

To simplify the procedure of collecting and analyzing the data, I focused on three main research questions. The first objective was to see as a researcher the meaning of these abbreviations and terminologies. I also wanted to research what the change in the way young people are communicating meant within their specific context. The second aim was to gain a more in-depth insight of the dynamics taking place in these 'virtual' environments vis-à-vis real life. The final objective was to explore how other Youth Workers felt about this issue and how they are dealing with it or if they are dealing with it at all.

As a researcher I will be engaged with young people when they are offline and also online, attempting to make sense of their everyday life experiences from their own perspective (Denzin et al., 1994). This research method helped me to understand the dynamics and skills involved to be able to communicate through this medium. I also managed to establish a few significant relationships through online youth work which were very meaningful for this study. By collecting the first set data, I was able to analyze the findings and also guide myself to collect more data and refine my interpretation, thus involve myself in a dialectic process. (Agar, 1980)

By reflecting on my personal experience alone, I was already starting to grasp better the 'why?' of the increasing popularity of this medium. This experience gave me an opportunity not only to look at this new phenomenon from the young person's perspective but also from the researcher point of view.

My starting point was to explore the possible relationship between the online and the offline world. This journey took me from where I was with the idea that the offline and the online worlds were the polarization of reality, to where I am now, studying one reality with integrated dimensions: the online and the offline. Therefore I also shifted my perspective in looking at this new form of reality. Throughout the literature review and the process of data collection I realized that the shift from the 'real' to the 'virtual' was becoming very indistinct, these worlds being increasingly intertwined with each other the border is diminishing and becoming less evident. Today through Wi-Fi Technology, which is a system which allows you to connect to internet wherever you are through wireless technology, young people are all the time connected, whether it is from the pub, during lectures or any other social activity they might be engaged in.

The fact that young people are increasingly using CMC as one of the main mediums to communicate with their peers, brought me to also to question if Youth Workers are adapting to this new reality to communicate better with young people. I will also investigate and obtain the views of other Youth Workers on this topic. Their reactions would indicate the importance of this topic and the necessity to provide more information about this area of study.

Through my research I managed to find only one study that is directly related to this issue. Tim Davies (2008) together with the Estonian Youth National Agency held a conference on online youth work, where some of the issues which are of my concern were discussed. Locally there is a lack of information about this specific topic. All the data found was all related to internet vis-à-vis addiction and safety.

METHODS

I chose to use multiple sources of information to collect the data and to improve the quality of data and the accuracy of the findings (Fetterman, 1989). The research's main aim is to achieve a better insight of today's young people environment and to find ways to better use this medium to our (Youth Workers') advantage. The most important requirement for me as a researcher was to obtain the 'native's point of view' (Spindler & Spindler, 1987) and to be systematic in recording this information using note taking techniques and data interpretation. The phases of this research are:

1. Getting familiar with the medium through ethnographic observation
2. Participating and observing in an offline and online manner with a youth group in a local youth center
3. Unstructured Interviews with twelve young people conducted online
4. Questionnaires received from twenty-two Youth Workers

ETHNOGRAPHY – ONLINE AND OFFLINE

The distinction between online and offline worlds is increasingly becoming less useful as activities in these realms become increasingly merged in our society and as the two spaces interact with and transform each other (Bakardjieva 2005; Haythornthwaite & Kazmer 2002; Suoranta & Lehtimäki 2004; Salaff 2002; Carter 2004). Most of the literature I read about ethnography was mainly based offline. As a researcher to effectively carry out the ethnographic research I had to incorporate the internet and CMC to adequately understand this type of socialization in this contemporary society. Therefore I had to see how the CMC affects the world of the young person. While some argue that the 'virtual' world is a different 'social place' (Fetscherin and Lattemann, 2008; Conway, 2007), others argue that there is one social world which contains both traditional and technologically advance modes of communication and sites of social activities (Ruhleder, 2000, Lyman & Wakeford, 1999). 'Virtual reality' is not a reality separate from the other aspects of human action and experience, but rather a part of it. Therefore, as an ethnographer I will be defining the field and setting of the research on the basis of my topic (Hampton & Wellman 2001, Campbell 2006, 277). The type of ethnography I am opting for extends the notions of the field. Ethnographic observation forms the exclusive study of face to face



daniel

He connects to msn as soon as he arrives from work around four pm. The majority of the chats I had with Daniel all evolve around gaming, hacking, upgrading, new software and other computer related discussions.

interaction, to focus on mediated and distributed ones (Hine, 2005). The field site for the observation shifts between a localized space to a network interlinked mediated settings (Newman, 1998)

The major motivation for adopting the ethnographic approach was the assurance that only through the direct experience with the natives in their own environment could I, as a researcher, really understand that culture and way they are communicating. Ethnography has often been presented as a methodology of last resort - used primarily for obtaining information about groups and culture, usually deviant cultures, that are difficult or impossible to investigate in other ways. Perhaps the key virtue of ethnography is its capacity to make evident the real world sociality of a setting. As a mode of social research it is concerned to produce detailed descriptions of the everyday activities of social actors within specific contexts (Hughes et al 1992).

A stance which emphasized seeing things from the perspective of those studied before stepping back to make a more detached assessment. mindful of the Native American adage that one should 'never criticise a man until you have walked a mile in his moccasins'

(Fielding 1994, p.156)

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE – GAINING ACCESS AND SUBMERSION INTO THE YOUTH CULTURE

The period I spent at the youth center was very important for me as a researcher because I managed to equip myself with the necessary skills I needed to cope when doing the ethnography experience with the young people. I had to be immersed in their culture and learn their language in order for me to be more effective and really gain the authentic insight of this medium. To do this I spent three months communicating with a group of young people using CMC as the main medium. The period was from April 2009 to July 2009, during this period I observed the interaction taking place between a group of individuals in the real and the virtual world simultaneously. The group was still in the first phases of its formation, therefore I could also observe the dynamics taking place and real relationships forming in the real world as a result of what was happening online as well (Jones, 1995). I had to learn to read and write in the online world as one would have to learn to talk and listen in the offline world. After a while I started

to discern what kind of conversation I was engaged in, which clues to pick on, when it was time to leave, when the other person was having another conversation at the same time and other cues which helped a lot to understand why CMC was becoming more and more important. (Schaap 2002). Through this online ethnography I was able to gather a 'thick description' (Geertz 1973), by paying attention to the perspective of the actors themselves (Ward, 1999; Salter, 2002).

At first it was very difficult to maintain a conversation with one or more individuals. There are a number of issues which were very different from the regular offline conversation I was familiar with. During these six months I was learning what type of chatting style should I use with different kinds of persons. Some individuals were more talkative than others. Some were very descriptive and others gave the bare minimum details in what they shared. I noted that some characteristics were common in almost all online conversations, humour, grammatically incorrect words, emotions and smileys are all blended together in almost every online chat. After this six month period I was able to assert whether the young person I was chatting with was in a good mood or not, just by the selection of words they chose to use. All this was the preparation phase for the other phases to come. It was vital for me to understand the underlying fabric which CMC is made of and why this kind of communication is becoming more popular with young people.

SAMPLING



I opted for a purposive sample to become better acquainted with this new emerging medium. Therefore I opted to create a network with my friends. The aim of the network was to communicate with each other for the organization of an event which we were planning together. This also prevented me to be in direct contact with young people without me being familiar with CMC's. Knowing the drawbacks and what to avoid was an important element which contributed to rest of the study.

ACCESS



The access for this first part of the research was quite easy and straight forward. I created a 'Gmail' account which was the medium which I was going to use for my ethnographic observations. Since I was going to use my circle of acquaintances for this phase of the study, I didn't go through any elaborate process of access. What was interesting to note was that as we went along communicating with each other, the time we spent on 'gtalk' was constantly increasing. Another important observation was that more people were joining in the 'gtalk' network. It was important to note that some relationships began online whilst others began in an offline manner. Therefore the access was not only in an online manner but also offline. This was happening because certain activities, like discussion, organization of events, began online and continued offline.

Baym suggests that, "Rather than focusing on building predictive models of CMC, more naturalistic, ethnographic, and micro-analytic research should be done to refine our understanding of both influences and outcomes." (Baym, 1996 p161). Geertz (1973) suggested that correspondingly ethnographic and quasi-ethnographic research methods are able to develop "a 'thick description' of the lived experience of individuals".

DATA COLLECTION



'In the ethnographic setting it is all data, though there is no sense to having all the data.' (Hughes and Sharrock 2002). Although all chats during this three month period were saved in separate files, I selected a specific two week period. The criteria for this selection was that during those two weeks an important activity was taking place therefore a lot of information was exchanged, capturing the most important key elements. Five persons were chosen for this stage using purposive sampling. The five individuals being three females and two males aged between 17 and 20 years were selected from different backgrounds and strata of society to increase the representation of this study. Another reason for the selection was that the amount generated from a single chat was large; therefore it would have been impossible to analyze and go through all the chats if more than five individuals were chosen. Notes were also taken and key activities were highlighted. A filing system was used to log and classify all these chats according to their particular meaning. This system was also going to help me to analyze the data at a later stage.

ANALYSIS

All the chats accumulated during my data collection period were saved and categorized according to the subject of the chat..

During the data analysis, I realized that all the information could be categorised under four main categories:

1. Information – this consisted of exchange about activities which were about to happen, time, place, duration and other practical information which had to do with youth centre or personal activities.
2. Relationships – This consisted mainly of discussion of previous relationship problems happening within the group.
3. Philosophical concepts – This consisted of discussion about life in general and some other issues which members wanted to get more deeply involved in.
4. Personal disclosure – this consisted mainly of information about the person which was private and sensitive.

After categorizing the data, all sections were given codes so I could easily access the analyzed data at a later stage. All the data in this phase will be presented in a narrative way. This will help the reader to really capture the essence of what the activity is and how it affects the person in the real life as well. By giving the context of what is happening, a deeper insight is seen in the way young people deal with the information they are receiving. Through the narrative style I will manage to capture and describe a typical day in the life of a young person (Creswell, 1998).

YOUTH CENTRE – ONLINE VS. OFFLINE

To obtain a clear picture of what was happening I had to be present in both ‘online’ and ‘offline’ sphere simultaneously, I was observing the young person’s at the local youth centre, while chatting with them online concurrently. Therefore I was observing what was happening in an ‘offline’ manner, by being present in the regular open hours of the youth centre and also attending all activities which were being held. I was also at the same time participating as a Youth Worker in all the activities happening in the

‘online’ realm. I was observing the way young people behave in the ‘offline’, after having a fight or an argument ‘online’. I was observing how a young person reacted to me after disclosing some information about his current situation. I was observing how relationships were developing, how activities were being organized, how a person reacted to something which was mentioned online. At the same time I was also participating in the online realm by being the ‘experiencer’ (Walstrom, 2004). I was not just observing but had an active role; I had to obtain the personal experience of the same phenomenon I was studying. For me to observe was not enough, I had to fully participate in order for me to collect all the information needed to have a better insight into CMC’s.

DATA COLLECTION

A fact in ethnography is that, given access, you can very quickly collect far more data than you can ever possibly use: a day’s work can generate several hours of audio or video tape recording. In the ethnographic setting it is all data, though there is no sense to having all the data (Hughes and Sharrock, 2002) therefore I had to be very selective in what I recorded.

OFFLINE DATA COLLECTION

I opted to collect all the data in a journal which I was compiling specifically for the offline observations. Although I was overtly observing the members of this group, I did not want to affect their behavior by taking notes during my time there. The method I used was to write a short but descriptive summary of what had happened on that day at the youth centre after the activity. All the data collected from this offline observation was also classified according to the nature of the data. Categories varied from a simple observation like a young person involving himself more in the activities after an online chat, to another like a young person acting very different from what he/she projected herself in an online manner.

ONLINE DATA COLLECTION



As with the first phase of my research, all chat logs were saved and stored for a later stage to be then classified and analyzed. To be more practical I also chose to follow closely five young persons, three male and two females aged between 16 and 20 years. These five young persons were all coming from different backgrounds, with different education level and upbringing, this was made to ensure that all the data generated would not represent only one type of person, but a more broad perspective will be obtained. The reason for this purposive selection was due to time restriction. To go through and categorize one chat it is very time consuming therefore it was not practical to categorize all the chats.

DATA ANALYSES – OFFLINE AND ONLINE



After reading the chat logs and the notes gathered from the offline observations, I started to notice some patterns and thus I began to list them down (Spradley, 1979). After listing down the patterns I started to classify them according to their respective main theme and sub theme. Themes were formed according to chat topic, meanings, feelings, humor, type of information and any other relevant material (Taylor & Bogdon, 1989). All the data gathered from both online and offline methods will be pieced together to form a comprehensive picture of their collective experience. In the end I will have a detailed description of five different individuals. This description will include observations taken from the online realm through an analysis of chats and details from the observation and data gathered from the offline through the analysis made from the journals.

ONLINE INTERVIEWS



For the online interviews I opted for a one hour semi structured interview with a guide to keep in line with the topic (Flick, 1998 p. 94). It was important for me to keep the interview as casual and informal as possible. One of the reasons was that the medium itself doesn't allow much formality, and the other reason was not to create unnecessary distance between me, being the researcher, and the young person as the respondent. The interview took the form of a conversation rather than 'question and answer' format. This type of format was more accessible for young people chatting with because it felt more natural and less

formal. In the pilot study I did, I felt that when I kept in line with the 'question and the answer' style, it felt synthetic and I received answers which were most of the time short and to the point therefore not descriptive at all. This was because young people are not used to being formal when using this type of communication. I chose to speak their own language and just use guidelines to make sure that all the themes would be tackled.

TARGET PARTICIPANTS AND SAMPLING

For this part of my research I interviewed twelve young people, aged between 16 and 20. Out of the twelve young persons, seven were female and five were male. For this particular tool I choose a snow ball effect sampling procedure (Goodman 1961). After finishing the interview with the young person I asked them to refer me to friends that they had engaged with online in the last week. The only criteria was that the young person should be between the age of 16 and 20 and that they had been engaged online using CMC during the last week. I had to make sure that the participants are indeed familiar with the CMC's and are not using it solely for the interview. This will also ensure that the young persons that I interview are all using CMC on a daily basis and as one of there main modes of communication, therefore an insight on how young people perceive CMC could be analysed.

ACCESS

A letter to the director and the guardians of the youth centre concerned was sent. All the members whose consent letter was signed by their guardians were eligible to participate in my research. Another type of access was gained through my first phase of the study, where I understood and delved into the medium of CMC and learnt the pattern in which the young person communicates. This gave me the access to young people because they felt comfortable chatting with me and also disclosed more information which was relevant to the research.

QUESTIONNAIRES FOR YOUTH WORKERS

For this research I was also interested to know the view of the Youth Workers. Was there a need for the Youth Workers to be online? Do Youth Workers feel the need to equip themselves to be able to communicate better when being online? As a researcher I opted to use a questionnaire for various reasons. The main motivation to use questionnaires was to reduce any influence that I could have over the other Youth Workers (Leung, 2001). Another reason for choosing questionnaire was not to be intrusive on respondents (Benson, Booman, and Clark, 1951; Gough and Hall, 1977) by leaving the Youth Workers to reply in their own time. Since in all my previous methods I used ethnography and interviews as my tools to gather the data, which are very time consuming to gather the data and analyze, questionnaires are easier to analyse due to the type of questions asked.

For the questionnaire I used a mixture of open and close ended question. The main reason for this mixture in style is to give the opportunity to the respondent to add or comment on the question and not just tick next to the best answer. By giving the respondent space for additional comments I reduced the possibility of leading the respondent to answer in a certain way. I also opted to go for a fewer question to focus more on the quality of the replies since this was the only data which I was going to gather from the Youth Workers side.

SAMPLING

For this part of the study convenient sampling was used for the selection of the respondents. The method used the department of Youth and Community Studies at the University of Malta as a sampling frame. After selecting fifty individuals out of all the enrolled students of this department, I sent an email with the questionnaire to be filled in and sent back to me.

VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

The aim of the research is to investigate and learn more about the effect of CMC on the daily lives of young people (Kirk and Miller, 1986). As a researcher I am not set out to test a pre-conceived hypothesis, but observing the field of study, both as a participant observer and as a reviewer of academic literature. From the fabrication of these sources a research agenda emerges that can be pursued, again, by a mixture of observation and theoretical work (Wainwright,. 1997). As Janet Ward-Schofield has suggested:

..at the heart of the qualitative approach is the assumption that a piece of qualitative research is very much influenced by the researcher's individual attributes and perspectives. The goal is not to produce a standardized set of results that any other careful researcher in the same situation or studying the same issues would have produced. Rather it is to produce a coherent and illuminating description of and perspective on a situation that is based on and consistent with detailed study of the situation.

(Ward-Schofield, 1993 p 174)

The study is geared towards synchronic reliability (Kirk and Miller,1986). Synchronic reliability refers to the similarity of observation within the same time period. Synchronic reliability rarely involves identical observations, but rather observations that are consistent with respect to the particular features of interest to the observer. Synchronic reliability of data, concepts, and theory are achieved by the ethnographer through the constant comparative method characteristic of all the parts of ethnographic scientific inquiry (ibid). The research's aim is to compare the two dimensions, the real and virtual. The most important validity aspect for me as a researcher is that the results produced from the research are of quality with appropriate research tools. (Davies & Dodd, 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Mishler, 2000; Seale, 1999; Stenbacka, 2001).

ETHICAL ISSUES – ONLINE AND OFFLINE

All members of the group are renamed to protect their anonymity. The subject in itself is not a sensitive issue, thus no personal harm can be done to members. Another consideration taken is that no raw data would be published, all data must be processed prior the publication. All the participants will be given a copy of the thesis and a small presentation prior to publication to ensure that anonymity is guaranteed.

Although all the participants were notified with the nature of the research and that they can be observed, the selected participants were not advised when they were being observed in order 'to reduce the danger of distorting the data gathered' (Kerr& Hiltz). All members of the participants who took part in this study had to pre-sign a consent form. For all those under the age of 18, the consent form was signed by their legal guardian.

All participants were informed about the scope of the study, although not all information will be disclosed. All information collected from the log books will not be published. Only processed data will be accessible to the readers.

LIMITATIONS

The main limitation of this research is that it is contextualized; therefore the results and outcomes coming out of this study cannot be generalized (Geertz, 2005). This purpose of this study was not to gain a general picture of what is happening in today's society with the increase use of CMC (Patton, 2002). This research is mainly focused to obtain the perspective and the motives behind the increase in the usage of this medium. This study must be seen as an introspective perspective into the new reality that the young people and Youth Workers are going through.

Since this research cannot be generalized due to its specificity, one cannot generalize the findings of this study. The centrality of this study is the CMC and young people (Kirby, 2004). The findings will also shed light on the way Youth Workers are dealing with the situation. Another byproduct would be recommendations to Youth Workers from the experience gained during my time observing how young people are communicating.

Since I was concerned mainly with the online environment vis-à-vis the offline world, all those individuals who for some reason or another do not have any access to internet are completely not represented in this study. Nonetheless all the changes reported in the study will also affect the future of these non represented young people due to the fact that the majority of the young people are engaged online.

CONCLUSION

The main aim for this methodology is to really capture the essence of the nature of the CMC (Creswell, 2004). The different tools used to obtain the data served to obtain the different actors which are involved in this research. Young people, Youth Workers and CMC are the main actors in the study and all the tools used were specifically designed to obtain information from all the sources. Another important aspect of this study was the direct involvement of me as a researcher with the medium and the young people at the same time (Keesing 1981). Through these methods enough data was obtained to really understand the dynamics which takes place when young people are engaged in chatting with their peers. The centrality of this research relies on the perspective of the young person. During the analysis of the data a detailed description of what is happening in the daily lives of the young person will be delivered.

CHAPTER
FOUR

Data analysis

INTRODUCTION

This chapter will be describing what was found during the research phase of this study. Different tools were used for the data collection, which enabled me as a researcher to obtain multiple perspectives of the same medium. Young people between the age of 16 and 20, together with active Youth Workers, were the primary source of data collection. To collect all the data necessary for this research, different tools were required for the four phases of the study.

For the first and second phase I used ethnography. For the first phase, as a researcher I immersed myself in the world of chatting to familiarize myself with the CMC (Baym, 2000; Kendall, 1998; Orgod, 2002; Reid, 1995). The second phase of the study was concerned with young people and their relationship with CMC. To be able to observe this relationship I chose to actively participate in overt ethnography and be engaged with young people in an online and offline manner (Humphreys, 1995). Eight young people were selected to be observed and analysed in this phase. All the selected young people were members of the same local youth centre; therefore it was easier for me to compare the online and offline persona.

In the third phase of the study I used unstructured interviews, which were conducted online. Ten young people between the age of 16 and 20 were chosen for a one hour interview, which consisted of informal chatting. The aim was to acquire the insight of the young person towards the CMC. For the final phase a questionnaire was used. Twenty five questionnaires were distributed to Youth Workers and their aim was to obtain the Youth Workers' perspective on the CMC. The questionnaire also evaluated the online activity of the Youth Workers in question.

Each phase of the data analysis will be addressing the main research questions;

- Is the distinction between the online and the offline still relevant?
- What is the relation between this new medium and young people?
- What is the role of a Youth Worker within this new emerging medium?

The first phase of the data analysis will be addressing the first research question, is the distinction between the offline and the offline still relevant? This stage of the analysis is important not only because it gives an insight of what goes on in a typical chat, but also to see how the online and offline are all the time intersecting between each other. This phase will give a clear idea of what is like to be connected and in continuous communication with peers by means of CMC.

PHASE ONE – FAMILIARISING MYSELF WITH THE MEDIUM

To get familiarized with CMC and its limitations and strengths I chose a time period of 6 months. During this period I managed to collect an immense amount of data, mainly due the fact that I was engaged in online conversations everyday. To be practical in my data analysis I chose five chat logs accounts to analyse into further detail. The chat logs were chosen because they were the most active during the 6 month period. To simplify the analysis I chose to analyse the activities taking place online on a particular day, meaning all the accounts will be summarized and analysed as if all the five logs were saved on one particular day. To give as much details as possible in the first phase of the analysis, I will be giving a descriptive account of an actual day, to explain the characteristics of this medium. The analysis of the data will be part of the description itself. This narrative form of presenting the data will give a better description of what really goes on when a person is engaged in an online chat and how it influences the offline world as well (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Howard, 1991; Rommon & Keenan, 1989) .

SCENARIO ONE

I walk into the office everyday at 7:30AM, prepare a coffee, read the headlines of the news paper, sit down and press the ‘on’ button situated in the middle of my PC tower. Whilst waiting for Windows to start, I sip more of my coffee, which will give me the right amount of alertness needed for a full day ahead. The clock reads 7:55 AM, Windows is up and running and I am ready to start. First I open my mail. While waiting for the application to open I also start another application - ‘Gtalk’. Although ‘Gtalk’ is filtered by the management, it is still widely used by all members of staff. Outlook has uploaded and I have 46 new e-mails. Gmail has also uploaded and I have 16 new e-mails.

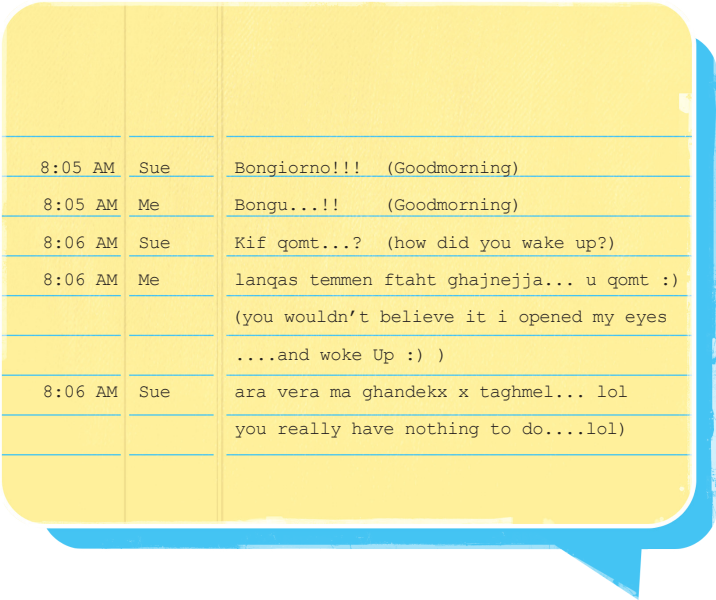
1



PHASE
ONE

*Familiarising myself
with the medium*

As I start to read the first mail from the outlook account, a small box appears on the bottom right of the screen with the following message:



8:05 AM	Sue	Bongiorno!!! (Goodmorning)
8:05 AM	Me	Bongu...!! (Goodmorning)
8:06 AM	Sue	Kif qomt...? (how did you wake up?)
8:06 AM	Me	lanqas temmen ftaht ghajnejja... u qomt :)
		(you wouldn't believe it i opened my eyes
	and woke Up :))
8:06 AM	Sue	ara vera ma ghandekx x taghmel... lol
		you really have nothing to do....lol)

The office phone rings and my colleague tells me that it is for me, someone needs to ask some information. While I am on the phone trying to explain some rules to a beneficiary and also searching for a link to get more information, another box appears on the bottom right of the screen.

8:14 AM	Mark	Aaaaaww... yesterday it was great!
8:14 AM	Mark	We should do it again...

I don't answer Mark's comment, I just continue giving more information to the beneficiary on the phone. I close the dialogue boxes and also reduce the sound of my PC because every time someone sends a message through 'Gtalk' an alert tone sounds through the speakers.

While concluding my telephone call, I also look at the clock and the time reads 8:24am, in the background I can still hear the alert tones of the messages which come in. I open the 'Gtalk' and I now have three dialogue boxes open, Sue and Mark which were already active and a new one from Angel. The messages read:

8:16 AM	Angel	Bongu (Goodmorning)
8:24 AM	Angel	Mela ma tridtx kliem illum???
		(You don't want to speak to
		me today???)
8:18 AM	Sue	still there??
8:21 AM	Mark	mela ghadek rieqed?
		(You're still asleep?)

After managing to reply to my emails in outlook, I also read all my received chats and reply. The alert tones and the fact that I knew that someone is waiting for my reply is enough to switch to 'Gtalk' and reply to all the pending messages.

ANALYSIS OF SCENARIO ONE

The above account is a real picture of what happened daily during my 6 month period. Although the names are fictitious, the text is untouched. I did not edit any chat logs as to highlight all elements. The first thing which is important to highlight in this first account is the immediacy of the medium (Gilbert & Dabbagh, 2005). One of the most distinctive characteristics of CMC is that like a verbal conversation, it is expected from you to be there, to reply to what is being said instantly (Jones & Schieffelin, 2009). Another interesting aspect is that to this date any written communication had a 'delay' feature (Chandler, 1995). Communication was more linear, a person encodes a message through a medium, the receiver decodes the message and reply if necessary, always applying the same linear type of communication (Berlo, 1960). Although CMC can also be considered as a writing communication tool, the same principles do not apply. The medium itself allows more space to give immediate feedback to the person you are communicating with. CMC's are also setting the receiver and the sender free from the physical limitations; one can be engaged in more than one conversation at the same time (Vrasidas & Mclsaac, 2000). As in the above account I had three active windows open, having three different conversations which were totally independent from each other. Something which is also very important to note at this stage is that the writing is very informal; grammar and spelling rules are not always followed. Therefore the structure in the way we speak is changing; this can be also a start to change in the way we think. (Sanders, 2004).

SCENARIO TWO

08:31AM	Me	Hi angel... its just that i am a bit busy... as usual
08:31AM	Me	Yes sue, i am still here... where do you want me to go
08:32 AM	Me	Aw mark..Bongu keiku tajjeb..sew kieku ghadni riegged... (Hi Mark...Morning... would be good if i was still sleeping...)
08:33 Am	Me	iva yesterday was fun... never thought that ball paint shooting was that fun... buzz ta vera ha nghidlek (yes yesterday was fun...never thought that ball paint shooting was that fun.. let me tell you,.it was a real knock out)

After replying to all the active dialogue boxes I turn my attention once again to the outlook mail box, this time determined to reply to the first email that I opened. Apart from reading once again the email, I was also talking to my colleagues about the paint ball game that I took part in the evening before. Managing to finish reading my mail I press on the ‘reply’ button.

Paying attention that I wrote the correct name, I start to write my reply, as soon as I write the first three words, I hear the 'ping' noise alerting me that I have a new chat message, I minimize the outlook and open the Gtalk window.

8:37AM	Mark	Isma... next time we can invite more people to join.the more the merrier...xtahseb? (Listen....next time we can invite more people to join. The more the merrier... what do you think?)
8:37 AM	Me	Iva ta, nahseb ahjar... I was to easy for me yesterday :P (Yes, i think its better... it was too easy for me yesterday :P)
8:38 AM	Mark	iiiiiiiiiffffffffffff lol.... bil mod... Rambo pffff (iiiiiffffff lol....easy....rambo pffff)
8:38 AM	Me	aaaww just joking... more the merrier... Re for next Saturday is the movie night still on?
8:38 AM	Mark	ma hadtx ghalik hux??? X int touchy... (You didn't get offended did you?? You're real touchy....)
8:39 AM	Me	Le le...x hadt ghalija... :) niehu ghalik?? (No no...im not offended...:) offended by you??)

As soon as I finish my chat with Mark, a notification from the outlook pops up reminding me that I have a meeting in 15 minutes. I have quarter of an hour to prepare for a one and half hour meeting. I minimize Gmail window, despite of the continuous alert chat messages. I start to read the related documents for the meeting while looking for the company's driver so that he can take me to the meeting. While I am in the car on my way to the meeting place, I receive an SMS on my mobile. It was from Sue, she asks me if everything is fine with me, because she keeps on sending me chat messages and I was not replying. Then I realise that I forgot to log out from Gmail, therefore I was still visible for other users as available, with a green dot near my user name. Not to alarm Sue, I call her back explaining that I had to rush out from the office because I have a meeting.

ANALYSIS OF SCENARIO TWO

In this second scenario, it is very noticeable the amount of inner frustration felt when I was trying to cope with all the information that was flowing towards me. I was communicating with my colleagues, reading an email and also chatting with three different individuals on totally different subjects. With all the information provided in the same time it was difficult to process all the information (Woolley, 1998). The brain can take information in, but to process it and to respond to the same information is a much slower process. Pashler (1994) argues that if the action requires both tasks of selecting and producing action, interference will take place thus concentration will decrease. When I tried to do too many things at the same time, it felt frustrating because I wanted to accomplish more at the same time. Having too many choices simultaneously is something which I am not familiar with. Having to deal with a large amount of information all the time is a skill which I feel that I did not inherit or acquire from my education. Theorists often comment on the evolution of multitasking abilities of the younger emerging generations. In a study done in 2009 it was found that young people in today's world exhibit high levels of multitasking (Jennifer et al, 2009). Therefore the main difference is that the younger generations are more skilled to select the information and deal with it one thing at a time, quicker than older generation does. In other words a young person is more resilient and manages to concentrate quicker when switching from one task to the next.

Another important feature which can be noted from the chat logs illustrated above is the proximity that the medium allows between the receiver and the sender. CMC users also imitate what happens offline and project it into an online format. Non verbal

feedback is practically impossible in a chat (Daft & Lengel, 1986), so abbreviations like, 'LOL' (loughing out loud), '...' (pause) ':P' (mischievous smile), 'pfff' (come on!!) are used. All these abbreviations are replacing some of the non-verbal feedback that we give while we are engaged in a normal conversation (Crystal, 2001). By replacing some of the non verbal cues by symbols and abbreviations, individuals engaged in CMC can also communicate more than just text, but also feelings (Constantin, Kalyanaraman, Stavrositu, & Wagoner, 2002).

The distinction between the online and offline is becoming less diverse (Turkle, 1995). When I was online but not replying to the messages I was receiving, automatically that meant that something was wrong with me. Sue sent me a text message because she thought that something happened to me therefore that was the reason I was not replying to her messages. In reality what really happened was very simple; I was just in a hurry and I forgot to log out or at least advise them that I was going for a meeting. The fact that I was online but not actually available created a bit of a concern. This incident highlights the need for a person to be present online and offline simultaneously (Jones, 2000). It is interesting to see the shift in these two realms intersecting all the time. Although the offline still carries more credibility in itself, the online is gaining ground and becoming more real in time (An & Frick, 2006). This interesting shift can also be seen in the evolution of the CMC software themselves. One of the first applications was MIRC, where chat rooms were public places where you could meet other people and engage in an online conversation with them. Questions commonly asked were, 'asl?' (age, sex, location), Name? Single? After the MIRC, IM messenger, MSN and yahoo messenger became more popular. These were more personal, you had to send an invite and be accepted by the other person to be able to chat with them. The nick names also changed with these programmes, while MIRC had nicks which were very impersonal, MSN, IM and all the modern CMC software due to a more personal space and controlled environments, real names were beginning to appear. The shift from something virtual, thus not real, to a more realistic approach illustrates the change in the perspective of the uses as well. CMC is perceived by the users as a substitute for an offline conversation where many of the rules which apply for the offline conversation can also be applied to chatting.

SCENARIO THREE

After a fruitful but exhausting two hour meeting I was back at the office. It was clearly time for another cup of coffee. I go to my desk, sit down and type my password. The time now reads 12:05PM, I open my outlook and continue replying to the first email of the day. Before I press the ‘send’ icon, I do a spell check, which always marks the Maltese surnames as a mistake. I ignore them as usual and press ‘send’. I then click on the minimized window ‘Gtalk’, which marks five unread messages, all flashing as if something very serious happened. In the background I can hear my colleagues laughing. When the amount of noise level in the office increases, it’s a clear indication that the break time is close by.

08:45AM	Sue	jien naf daqs kemm tigri :) so how is your day.... (i don't know you run around so much :) so how is your day....)
09:52AM	Sue	Hope you will enjoy the meeting... I am off to Uni.... Talk laterz
08:40AM	Mark	l aqwa li ma hadtx ghalik...;p (as long as you didn't get offended :p)
08:52AM	Mark	isma ilbierah inkazzat rachele, ghax mill jidher Sue sparat f wicca on purpose... dan nisa kollha inkwiet (listen yesterday rachele got upset because by the looks of it Sue shot in her face on purposethese woman are all problems!!)

09:38 AM	Mark	<p>Copy and paste of what she told me...</p> <p>Rachelle says 'i think that Sue didn't on purpose remember when we fought about the fliers... nahseb she is still angry... imma tac cajt ta... Mark says 'u le... jien pruvat tisparali min metru boghod and she missed... jien nahseb kumbinazzjoni... mela hsibtha William chetcuti (famous maltese Olympic shooter)</p> <p>(Copy and paste of what she told me... Rachelle says 'i think that Sue didn't on purpose remember when we fought about the fliers....i think she is still angry...but its stupid...Mark Says 'nah... she tried to shoot me from a meter away and she missed...i think its just a coincidence.... did you think she was William Chetcuti??')</p>
10:05 AM	Mark	<p>Ha nhallik ha nkompli...xorta qed nitkellem wahdi... ilejla jkollok aptit imorru zmerg</p> <p>(im going to continue now...i am speaking by myself anyway....tonight if you want we go to zmerg bar)</p>

08:55AM	Angel	Me off... shopping...yey!!!
11:54AM	Chris	Is the game still on?
11:59AM	Chris	u there?
11:56AM	Janet	Re yesterday conversation is not finished yet... i am still not very convinced... look at this link...although its a comedy but true... http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MeSSwKffj9o
11:58AM	Janet	Bongu btw (goodmorning btw)

I close the chat windows of Sue, Mark and Angel as they were all offline. I decide to send a common message to both Janet and Chris, I need some fresh air. I ask my colleagues to go for a small walk around the block since it is a beautiful day and they all agree. To play it safe this time, I send a message to Chris and Janet that I will be back later because I am off for break.

12:28PM	Me	bbl...break
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I get my jacket and check if I have small change to buy something to eat. Before locking my PC, two new messages appear from Janet and Chris...

12:29PM	Janet	Enjoy... talk later
12:30PM	Chris	Tahqrek il-hajja!!! (life doesn't treat you bad, does it??)

After reading the messages I just log off from Gmail account and lock my PC. I then leave the office for my 30 minute break.

ANALYSIS OF SCENARIO THREE

Analysing carefully this third scenario, one of the most important elements of chatting emerged. The medium itself, although it most of the time follows the rules of an offline conversation, differs in one core and fundamental element (McQuail, 2005). A normal conversation is not permanent. The spoken word fades into time and space, in a normal conversation; it is not likely that one person records what the other said just in case he needs to quote the other person (Berko at al, 1960). When engaged in an online conversation, automatically, all that you are saying is recoded instantly. Therefore people can copy and paste what the other person said. This element makes chatting and any written communication more permanent than in an offline conversation (Chandler, 1995). Although all written communication methods carry this property, usually more time is allocated to the writer to produce an elaborate account. With chatting, there is no time allocated to think thoroughly what one should write. Therefore

chat fits exactly between the spoken and the other written communications, as it has the permanency of the writing but the spontaneity of the oral communication.

Another element which is found in almost all the chat logs I analysed is humour. The medium itself allows a lot of space where a person can express himself using humour as a way to convey his message. Emoticons and the space allocated to text are all contributing to this fact. On the other hand when trying to have a serious conversation or giving an instruction, CMC is not the best tool to use. It lacks space and time for elaborate information to be sent. Although technically you can send all the information you like, the chances are that there will be many writing interpretations. CMC is a medium that is best utilised when short and continuous messages are sent and constant feedback is received to ensure that both the receiver and the sender are on the same wavelength.

SCENARIO FOUR

|||||

We all enter the office with more energy than when we left. I think the sun really increased our energy level. The official break time is 30 minutes but we always manage to extend it to 40 minutes. There I was again in front of my computer. I press the 'control', 'alt', 'delete' buttons simultaneously and I enter my password. I find a green sticky note attached to my monitor. Green always means that it is urgent. The note reads, 'Please can you prepare a report for last year's activities'. This means that I have at least two hours of work to prepare the report. I launch the report application and begin working on it.

Time reads 15:24PM, I just finished the report. I have approximately 45 minutes left to finish my work day. Since not much time is left I decide I will spend the last few minutes chatting with anyone who might be online. It is too late for me to start something, so I leave everything for the day after. I double click on 'Gtalk', enter my password, and find that almost all my friends list appear busy, with a 'one way' sign near their names. Only Mark and Janet are green, therefore available. I open the previous chatting logs I had with them earlier on to refresh my memory and also to continue the conversation where we left it. While reading the chats I remember about the link that Janet sent me. I click on it and after few seconds I realise that I have already seen this clip on youtube.

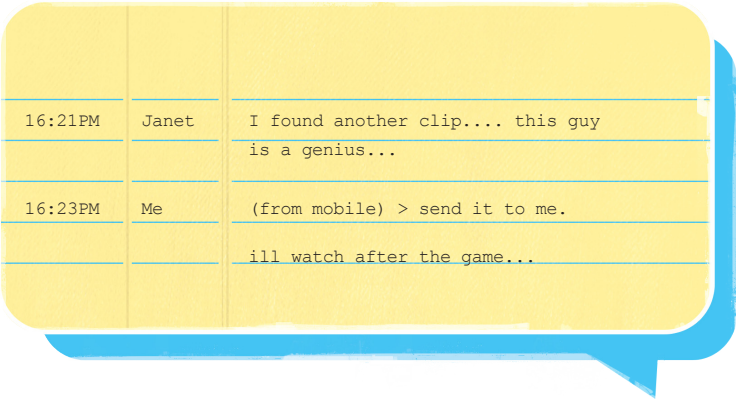
15:33PM	Me	sorry for the delay... hehehe That was George Carlin...good one. You kept on thinking about what we said...yesterday. He really managed to grasp lot of true facts about religion, and i really like his Marxist view as well.
15:36PM	Janet	Mela qomt... istra l break int..... (you're awake....wow you're break is long...)
15:36PM	Me	Le ghax meta dhalt sibt kanna... (no, because when i came in from break i found a job to do....)
15:37PM	Janet	yes, I kept thinking about what we said, fis sens ghalkemm xorta nghid li religjon important... qatt ma kont...kif taqbad tghid harist min dik il lenti (yes i kept thinking what we said, in the sense that although i still think religion is important...i never looked at it in that way)
15:40PM	Me	yep, it is challenging imma important li xi xultant you requestion certain things... sakemm imbgahd issib dak li vera tahseb int... (yes its is challenging but important that sometimes you requisition certain things... until you find what you really think...)
15:41PM	Me	George Carlin ghadnu aktar clip..there is a good one on...Global warming...its hilarious... he says that we don't manage to save our ownselves let alone the planet...heheheheh... http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eScDfYzMEEw&feature=related (George Carlin has more clips...there is a good one on Global warming.... its hilarious...etc...)

15:43PM	Janet	ill watch :) thanks for the link
15:34PM	Me	aw mark... yes the game for tonight it's still on... but we
15:36PM	Mark	need to find three more ppl to attend because so far only seven confirmed. i think you'll need 4... because Pat is giving me a hard time, ilbierah paint ball...illum football .its not fair... hadiditli mohhi (i think you'll need 4...because Pat is giving me a hard time, yesterday paint ball....today football...its not fair...she's giving me a headache) kapixx... jew ghidilha tigi maghna... (understood...or tell her to come with us)
15:39PM	Me	
15:39PM	Mark	Int bis serjeta... le ghax tehodha drawwa.. ma tafx kif inhi... fil kas ilejla ill skip it.. (are you serious...no because she'll make it a habit...you know how she is...in anycase today ill skip it....) int taf... fil kas issa nistaqsi lill xi had mix xol... (you know...now ill ask someone from work...) imma aparti ilejla...int kollox sewwa...? (but apart from tonight...is everything ok?) ifhem... dejjem b xi haga...qatt ma nkun sewwa... wahdek ahjar sewwa jghidu... (well...there's always something...i'm never ok...being alone is better they say)
15:41PM	Me	
15:43PM	Me	
15:45PM	Mark	
15:48PM	Me	true... dejjem jara x jinqala... int ghadek tibghatlek l ohra... ? (true...something always crops up...does the other girl still message you?)
15:49PM	Mark	le ta... waqfet...kont kellimta sew... u fhemet... is ha nghidlek ma ghedtx li li ser tehodha hekk (no..she stopped...i spoke to her properly and she understood...i didn't think she'd take it that way)

15:52PM	Me	l aqwa li issa oki... isma me is off ta... ha nibda naghlaq ghax illum Ghandi hike ghal karozza. (as long as everything is ok... listen im off...im going to start closing because today i have a hike to get to my car)
15:49PM	Mark	caw...ghada is soltu... sellili ghal ohrajn ilejla.. (Bye...tomorrow the usual...say hi to the others tonight)..
15:52PM	Me	Sellili ghal pat...hu hsieb bro... (say Hi to Pat...take care bro....)
15:55PM	Me	Jan... i am off ha nzarma... tc (Jan i am off going to close up...tc)
15:56PM	Janet	Still watching the clip... its really good... thanks sharing and tc

I log off from 'Gtalk'. Before closing the outlook program, I just look at how many new messages I have to be psychologically prepared for the day after. Thirteen new messages, it was not so bad. I then close the application, take my mug to the kitchenette, collect my wallet, jacket, car key and my sun glasses and finally click on the shut down icon on my bottom left of the screen. "It now safe to turn off your computer" message is on my screen. I press the off button on my tower and leave the office. As I am walking

to my car, I feel a slight vibration and an alert tone from my mobile. It is Janet, she sent me another chat. My mobile turns the chat on automatically when I log off from my PC. I click on the closed envelope, and the message reads:



16:21PM	Janet	I found another clip.... this guy is a genius...
16:23PM	Me	(from mobile) > send it to me.
		ill watch after the game...

ANALYSIS OF SCENARIO FOUR

In the last scenario there is an important element which is very unique to CMC. During the six month period of the ethnographic study, it was very common for individuals to, argue on philosophical level on various issues, speak about their intimate relationships, and disclose information about themselves which is very private and sometimes delicate. This shows that CMC is perceived to be very secure and private, and also gives space to individuals to open up more and disclose certain information. Walther and Burgoon (1992) showed that groups using computer-mediated communication increased the quality of the relationship when compared to those who solely use face-to-face communication. Haider (2002) found that a positive relationship between self-disclosure and intimacy has been found in chat rooms. Walther (2002) also found that CMC interactants produced significantly higher proportions of self-disclosure. Johnson (2001) had shown that significantly higher levels of spontaneous self-disclosure were found in CMC compared to face-to-face meetings.

After I analysed all the five selected chats into detail, I could classify three major factors motivating young people to engage online. The three reasons are: the need to form and sustain interpersonal relationships, entertainment, and information. 'Eryica' (2007), a study commissioned by Youthnet, found that relationships and information are amongst the most popular subjects amongst young people. In most of the chat logs that I analysed there was always the three motivations interlinked with each other in a blend which became the flow of the chat itself. When you are engaged in a chat the people involved are both socialising with each other and sharing information with another. This part of the chatting can be classified under interpersonal relationships. Sharing links, videos, ideas and other type of information provide entertainment and information to the young people involved in a chat. Although these are three separate reasons why people engage online, they are all interlinked and no clear distinction can be made between one motivation and another.

A SNAPSHOT OF COMPUTER MEDIATED COMMUNICATION

The narrative account shows clearly the way CMC is affecting the way that we live and the way we communicate with each other. Although all the chat logs which have been illustrated are all true it was impossible for me to include all the chat logs produced in one day of chatting. The chat logs selected for this analysis were 1,234 lines of chat. The first chat was recorded at 7:55AM as per the above account. The last chats of the day ended at 1:40 AM of the following day, therefore to be practical I focused more on the characteristics that were important to point out. What was important for me to capture, was not only the online aspect of it but also the offline counter effect. By analysing solely the text as per chat, the offline element would have been lost or not clearly identified. The frustration, the need to be online, the way of life and all the other components described in the account are as important as the online ones. Both the medium and the environment are important for an accurate analyses and real understanding of the social dynamics which come into play (Hines 2000, Markham 1998). The important element was that all the important characteristics which were vital for me to understand are all captured in the above accounts.

PHASE TWO – MERGING THE VIRTUAL AND THE REAL

In this phase of this research the main focus was to observe the activity taking place within a group of young people attending a local youth centre. I was not interested only in the activity taking place socially; I was also interested in observing and analysing the activity taking place online (Hine, 2000). As a medium I chose to focus on CMC. Chatting was again my main focus for this phase. Blogs, Social Network sites and other tools were used but the most common CMC's used were MSN and Gtalk.

There were eighty-seven active members at the youth centre. They met every Friday for their weekly session and on Saturday's they usually organized a social activity. As a sample I chose to closely observe five of the members for a period of five weeks. During this five week period an important yearly event was going to take place therefore there was more activity taking place online and offline. All the notes collected from the offline observation are in the form of a journal. The main motivation behind this was that although they were aware that I was conducting a study, I didn't want to affect their behaviour by taking notes in front of them (Agar, 1996). All the five participants, three males and two females, were between the ages of sixteen and nineteen and came from different backgrounds in terms of education and economic situation. This mixture will give a better picture of the real usage vis-à-vis the young person's background.

For this section a brief description of offline and online observations will be given of the five selected participants. Concrete examples and abstracts from actual chats and journal comments will be included in the discussion part of this section. Since an observation for each young person was done offline as well as online, a brief description will be given on each young person. In this way it is easier to compare and contrast the online and the offline persona of each young person. An online and offline analysis presented in order to give a complete picture of my observation made during my five week period.



PHASE
TWO

Merging the virtual and the real

Rebecca is 17 years old; she attends Junior college and is studying sciences. She is adopted by a middle class family. Her adoptive father is Italian and her mother is Maltese.

Offline

Rebecca rarely misses the weekly formation building sessions. When not coming to a meeting or a social event she always advises that she will not be coming or that she will be coming a bit late. She never sits in the front row and never is the first one to speak out, but Rebecca is always attentive to what others have to say. When Becky, as known by her peers, decides to share something with the rest of the group, everyone stops to listen. She reflects a lot before she speaks and every time she does she always manages to keep to the point, focused and very clear in what she says.

During the social activities Becky always keeps her distance from other members who are not part of her inner circle of friends. At first she never used to talk to me, she always used to speak only when in the company of others. Every time I asked her something she always seemed to feel uncomfortable to speak and share information with me. She is very sensitive to what others around her feel. Almost all of our discussions evolve around the youth centre and how to make the members feel more 'at home'. During my time of observation she never disclosed any personal information regarding her private life. The most intimate sharing of information I have logged is that she disclosed is that she finds it very difficult to trust someone she is not familiar with.

Online

Becky is a regular user of MSN. She uses MSN in her breaks; she allocates one hour of study then she chats for fifteen minutes before starting another one hour of study. She writes perfect English in her chats. When writing in Maltese she also manages to spell perfectly, which is something very uncommon in the chatting world. Becky keeps her distance and when online she pays attention to what she writes, always keeping in mind that I am a Youth Worker.

I was only engaged in an online conversation with Becky four times and the duration was that of one hour in total. When compared with others, this is a really short time. On the last saved chat log I recorded she disclosed very intimate information. She told me that she was adopted and is all the time afraid of the feeling of being rejected. She also mentioned that that is why she is all the time concerned with making the youth centre a homely place so members will not feel rejected. Although she disclosed this information she still remained detached emotionally and selected the words very carefully before sending the message.

During one of our chats she also mentioned the need to know why her biological mother rejected her. Although she was giving out information which was highly personal, she never discussed anything or left room for reflection. She just spoke with me as if she had the need to say this to someone. Becky never spoke to me offline about this matter.

DANIEL



Daniel is eighteen years old. He works with his father by helping him in the daily running of a small business. He has a younger brother and is passionate for Gaming. He aspires to continue his studies in the IT department of Malta's college of arts, science and technology (MCAST).

Offline

I never heard Daniel's voice. He smiles at me without looking at me directly. During our session he never speaks, but his non-verbal's indicate that he is following the discussion. Every time I approached Daniel he always looked nervous and on the edge. It is clear that he feels uncomfortable when someone asks a direct question to him. He is always in the shadow of his younger brother. When someone asks a question to Daniel, generally his brother is the one who answers for him. Although Daniel is not very talkative, he manages to communicate with his brother's circle and from the reaction of others it seems that he is very good at cracking jokes. Daniel attends the youth centre regularly and never missed a social activity.

Online

Daniel is the most active person online. He connects to MSN as soon as he arrives from work around four pm. The majority of the chats I had with Daniel all evolve around gaming, hacking, upgrading, new software and other computer related discussions. He is very assertive when he is online. The way he chats indicates a person who is really confident in what he does. In the online world, he is also considered a guru in the gaming scene. Daniel is known as the 'console freak'. He spends lot of his time gaming and developing new software for websites. Due to his expertise in this area he was invited in an international gaming conference held in Helsinki because he won a famous Multi user dimension game. He couldn't attend this conference because his family couldn't afford the second flight ticket for his brother to go with him.

Members from the youth centre also ask him questions about any computer related problem and he resolves them through remote access programmes¹. This enables Daniel to enter in another person's PC system and diagnose the problem. He also told me that IT students at university level consult with him and ask questions about certain programmes. He communicates regularly with the leaders committee because he is responsible to maintain the website of the youth centre.

During one of the chats I had with Daniel he disclosed with me that he is a school dropout. He also told me that he suffers from autism. Although he was diagnosed with this condition at an early age he still did not receive and assistance and was considered to be a 'retarded' in school. He explains the frustration he used to feel when being forced to do something he was not able to do and being ignored as a result. On the other hand he also disclosed with me the anger he used to feel when trying to do something he knew he was capable of but was not given the space and opportunity because it was not in the school curriculum. In the last week of my observation, Daniel also mentioned to me his desire to continue his studies in IT and that he would like to attend one of the courses offered at Malta's college for arts, science and technology (MCAST) but he couldn't due to the fact that he have no 'O' levels.

1 - Remote Access programmes are when a programmer access your PC through a network. This is widely used by young people to install programme on one another PC's.

Jess is sixteen years old. She attends a secondary government schools and is currently doing her fifth and last year. She aspires to go to university and continue specialising in Drama. Her family are a lower middle class family and she has two older brothers.

Offline

Jess is the extrovert type. She is the first voice you will hear when entering the youth centre and the last one when going out. The best word to describe her is vivacious. She is always in the centre of attention. She is friends with almost all the members of the youth centre. She is very popular with boys; therefore the other girls look up to her as a role model, especially the younger ones. Her character is very strong and she has very good natural leadership skills. Although she is very popular, she doesn't have close friends, Jess always runs from one group of friends to another.

During the session she is very talkative, generally she is the first one to comment on anything that will be going on. She also enjoys arguing a lot about anything, but without much thought. The most important thing for her would be that others are listening to what she has to say, even if sometimes it has nothing to do with the discussion at hand. She is also well known for the strong opinionated fascist view about the illegal immigrants, without an evident justifying reason. Others in the youth centre perceive Jess as an entertainer, whatever she says is taken with a pinch of salt. Due to this perception Jess sometime plays along with this role and does some things just for the sake to entertain others around her. She always projects a smile and avoids direct questions about her personal life. Although she is one of the most popular girls in the youth centre, no one really knows her well

Online

Jess is always logged on. Although she always puts her status as busy, she replies to her received messages instantly. Jess is one of those youth who is thirsty to know more and always comes up with a philosophical argument almost about anything. Jess is very different when she is online. She is more calm and in touch with her inner feelings. Sometimes she continues arguing on what was discussed during the session at the youth centre. She likes to go deep into things and always asks me to give her more material so that she can continue reading on the subject.

Jess sometimes questions her role at the youth centre. She is always concerned that she can do more, but she needs more space and opportunities. She asks for a lot of feedback, even for the comments she said during the weekly sessions. Unlike the offline persona, Jess is always insecure and double questions everything she does. She is very reflective and articulated when chatting.

Another aspect of Jess's online persona is that she likes to speak a lot about her personal life especially her family with and her relationship with her father. She also mentioned that her father works with illegal immigrants and was once injured during a protest that the illegal immigrants were doing. She is constantly aware and afraid that her father might get injured again because of this situation.

JULIAN



Julian is nineteen years old and he is one of the eldest attending the youth centre. He is the most dedicated member and invests most time to organise activities. He is the contact person for all the activities. He is aspiring to read for a youth and community study degree and is currently studying Sociology on his own. He comes from a working class family and is the youngest amongst three brothers and one sister.

Offline

Julian is considered to be one of the founders of the youth centre. He is respected by all. He is very reserved and does not like to express himself within the group. He prefers to speak one on one rather than address the whole group. He has strong leadership qualities and also strong character-traits. He influences others a lot with his charismatic character. Every time he enters in the youth centre you can easily see that his is respected and also has a certain amount of authority inside the youth centre.

During the weekly session, he mostly comments towards the last part of the session. When occasionally he is opposed by another member he turns a bit aggressive and defensive. He does not bother much what others think of him, he wears lot of sportswear and his philosophy is that he only wears comfortable clothes. He likes to talk a lot with me about all the issues and activities which concern the youth centre. He also disclosed a lot with me and shared his private life and concerns. He is very conscious about the

financial situation of the youth centre and always coming up with new ideas of how to organise more fund raising activities.

Online

Julian only uses chatting solely for chatting with other members. Most of the time he sends an email then reminds the concerned members through MSN to read the email he sent. During the five week observation Julian only chatted with me twice and both times it was to ask a specific question about the time of the activity which was going to take place.

CHRIS



Chris is nineteen years old. He worked for two years in small shop. Currently he is unemployed. He comes from a single parent family, his dad died when he was three years old. He has two step brothers younger than him.

Offline

Chris is very mature for his age. He likes to have long conversations with people who are older than him. He also disclosed a lot of information about himself freely, even when in a group. He always participates in discussions and social activities. Chris does not like to be in the centre of attention, he prefers to go unnoticed. He works a lot behind the scenes, always signing up for the preparation team of the event and never for the event itself. He is a very skilled in manual work; all the members refer to him when they need some advice, especially when planning a stage or any structure.

We also had discussions about the loss of his father. He speaks with ease about the subject and wants others to know his story. He always repeats the same phrase, 'nothing is impossible'. Chris is a nervous person, he has low tolerance towards ignorance and people who according to him are not informed and don't have a mind of their own.

Online

Chris is the person who takes care of the blogs. These blogs were created mainly to continue the discussion even after the session has ended. The blog allows someone to share the information they did not have time to share during the session by posting a comment on the blog. Chris is also the one who starts a thread of comments by putting a contradictory comment on the blog, leading other members to contribute by giving their comments. Sometimes Chris tends to be aggressive in the way he replies back to the comments left by others. He takes the comment personally and defends his opinion at all costs.

We had nine one on one chats with the total time of two hours and twenty-three minutes. Since he was currently looking for a job he was being asked to present a CV. He was asking me what type of information should be included in the CV, how to write a covering letter and other things associated with job hunting.

ANALYSIS OF PHASE TWO – ONLINE PERSONAL SPACE

Chats are as unique as the people who are creating them. Apart from their uniqueness there was one underlying factor which was found in four out of the five of the chat logs I analyzed. Rebecca, Jess, Chris and Daniel mentioned that they all feel in some way or another restricted in what they can do offline. Rebecca on several occasions mentioned that: ‘my parents don’t like when I go out all the time’. Jess who liked to be around and socializing also commented that: ‘ommi, il hin kollu teqred li mjien namel xejn allura ahjar noqghod haw ittaparsi nahdem imam inkun chatting... lol’. (‘my mum is always nagging I do nothing, so I stay online pretending to work...when in reality I am chatting!’) Chris also mentioned that his parents always pressure him to settle down, to find a girlfriend and follow their own steps. He once told me that: ‘ahjar noqghod hawn...kull meta nohrog u nigi lura elf mistoqsija u priedki, hallini mill hbieb ahjar insib tfajla, allura ahjar nintefa hawn ghax hemm ma jkunux jafu x qieghed naghmel. (‘it’s better I stay online since every time I go out, when I come back my mother asks me a million questions and comments that I should find a girlfriend instead of going out with my friends. This leads me to stay online so they don’t know what I am doing’).

Daniel continuously mentioned how irritating it is for him to find everything planned for him. During one of the chats with Daniel he disclosed with me that: ‘ommi anke il hwejjeg tlestieli, iccempel ghall kull haga li andi bzonn, ifhem relax ta ghax hekk jein ma

naghmel xejn imma xi kultant wisq...' ('my mother does everything for me. She even prepares my clothes and calls for anything I may need. It's comfortable for me but sometimes it gets too much...')

Another common underlying feature was the fact that time is increasingly being structured by parents and adults, with the result that very little time is left for the young person to do whatever they like. This fact is clearly stated in Jess's description of a typical day. 'At 7am I wake up, go to school till 3 pm...then I go to physics tuition, after that singing classes till 7pm. Then I study till 8pm, eat, watch TV, chat, etc ... I sleep around 10pm'...so story goes on like that for all the week days. Daniel also expresses almost the same identical feeling when he wrote that: 'ifhem issa drajt it tnejn ghand in nanna, it tleita TV il familja kollha inkella missierei jiehu ghalih, l erba immur speech therapist.... Routina tas soltu'. ('well, now I am used to the routine, Monday I go to my grandmothers, on Tuesday I must stay home with the family watching TV, Wednesday I go to the speech therapist....same old routine') . Rebecca on a different note said that 'I appreciate my parents therefore I don't like to let my mother down, although I don't like playing clarinet, I go because my mother used to play and she really would like to me to have her same passions...'

This first part of the analysis can be seen that young people are finding space which parents cannot control. This clearly highlights the important role of the internet with an emphasis on CMC and its central role in the life of today's young person (Turkle, 1995). CMC is clearly responding to a need created by society itself (Rhiengold, 2000). Since time is being structured by the adults, being parents, guardians, teachers and Youth Workers, young people are finding it hard to find space where they can do what they want and not what is expected from them. Young people are denied control and often even influence over most of the decisions that affect their bodies, their space, and their possessions. This tokenistic approach towards young people is motivating them to spend more time online chatting and surfing on the net rather than go to the village square or the youth centre to meet with their peers. 'isma ghada MSN at 6 is soltu...' ('Tomorrow we meet on MSN at 6pm...') is what Chris always says before leaving the youth centre. An interesting fact which was widely used by all the members of the youth centre is that they use the phrase 'meet in moiville in 30 mins'. When online the members leave the messages like 'Back in Moiville in 20 mins', 'eating bbl', 'Off to buy shoes...for tomorrow..yey' and others which signifies that although they are online, they still feel the need to advise others that they are away at the moment and when they will be back.

Offline this is also used especially when young people are going home from an activity or the youth centre, they advise each other and plan to meet in 'moiville' before physically leaving the place. This clearly illustrates that online and offline are imitating each other and both carry characteristics from each other, making them more interconnected (Rheingold, 2000).

The principles of today's society, with the increased stress for individual achievement even from an early age, are creating the space and the need for 'third places' (Steinkuehler, & Williams, 2006). The first place is your home, the second place is where you usually are when you are not at home; be it work, school or youth centers. The third place is any place where people can socialize, but not necessary in physical proximity (ibid.). 'Moiville' is a perfect example of a third place. Although the young person's lives are becoming more hectic, the need for socialization is still important, therefore a shift from offline to online socializing is taking place.

RELATIONSHIPS

Sharing of resources, disclosure, flirting, socializing, jokes and many other social aspects take place in these places. Bonding also takes place in 'Moiville': 'Istra hawn vera mhux kwiet ta Roger, ilbierah kellimtu online u vera qbilna... issa illum morna sal belt u vera hadt gost... hehehe' ('Roger is really nice! Yesterday I spoke to him online and we really got along. Today we went to Valletta and had a great time...hehehe'.) This description of Julian is a clear indication of the degree of bonding that can take place. 'I prefer to talk to you in Moiville, it doesn't feel that you are much older J not that your that old....'. In this situation, Rebecca was explaining to me that it was easier for her to speak with me when online, mainly because in the online environment the main activity is conversation and any physical differences do not play a central role. 'Lill philip qatt ma nkellmu ic centru imma online gieli nittantah xi wahda... vera kwiet imma' ('I don't speak to Phillip at the youth center, but I do pick on him a bit online...he is really quiet!'). Jess was also noticing that this medium creates more opportunity for young people to talk, because when people are online they are there available to talk, the main activity is conversation.

Another characteristic of Moiville is that there is no opening and closing times, young people meet there when they have the time and they feel like it (Gooltz, 2007). This in itself creates the feeling of a safe and welcoming environment (ibid). Julian rightly observed that 'I just read all the comments posted by the members and got more feedback than a year of sessions'. The reason

being is that there more equalitarian, safer and accessible environment. The third place is remarkably similar to a good home in the psychological comfort kind of setting and support that it extends (ibid). The third place is that place in which young people are choosing to meet to share thoughts, feelings, anything which is on their mind. Participation of young people is being highly influences by adults, but participation in the third places is purely voluntary and generally not influenced by an adult. Therefore this is the key differences between ‘Moiville’ and any other offline place. In these third places young people can speak to whom they want on which ever topic they want without having the physical and cognitive restriction like shyness, self consciousness and most importantly, they are participating out of their own free will.

DISCLOSURE

‘Sometimes I really feel out of place, maybe left out or perplexed’ Jess highlighted when we were discussing her role in the youth centre. Daniel often discussed with me what it feels to be autistic, ‘jien kollox inkun qed nifhem, pero ma jirnxxiliex nirijektja bhal ohrajn, inkun ninxtieq imma ma nistax, ghalija dak li hi normali ghal kulhadd ghalija mhux. ‘(I understand everything but I just don’t manage to react like the others, I want to but I can’t, that which is normal to others isn’t to me’). ‘There are a lot of things I manage to live by, the fact that I don’t know my biological mother, that I don’t have the true picture of where I am coming from, but I still question the reason why?’ Becky was describing and explaining her constant fear towards rejection. ‘Istra ir rabja li jqabbadni kbira, il hin kollu jmaqdar, I ghar ghax ommi istra biex ma taqlax inkwiet izomm mieghu jew I ghar ma tikkumentax...tahraqni.’ (‘the anger within me is so big....he’s always critisizing ...and my mother is worse because she sides with him to avoid problems! It really gets on my nerves’). Chris had frequent clashes with his father; he felt that he was constantly expected to perform better whatever he done. Julian on the other hand, although he did not disclose anything in particular while chatting, he recognized the fact that he is getting to know about young people’s needs through chatting and by just reading the tag lines which they post day by day. Therefore in Julian’s case, although he is not using chatting as a communication medium, he is using other young people’s chatting for his benefits. It is easier for him to know the pulse of the members of the youth centre by reading the tags of the online activity made by the members themselves.

On another level of disclosure, Chris, Jess, Becky and Daniel all shared and asked information about topics which were never or very rarely mentioned in real life. The majority of the young people do tend to ask more sensitive question online rather than offline (Eryika, 2009). The four participants on various occasions brought up topics like sex issues, philosophical questions, educational guidance, personal feedback and relationship advices when engaged with me in an online manner. Julian who was more conservative on the other hand preferred to tackle all the issues in a face-to-face manner. 'Isma ha nistaqsik xi haga...allura jekk jkollok x taqsam am tfajla bil fors ittaqala? ('If you are physically active with a girl...what is the risk of her getting pregnant?'). This was a question asked by Chris, this conversation evolved into more and more questions like 'to get an infection you really have to play around I think....', or 'kemm hin average li ragel jdum biex jlesti...hehehe' ('what the average time it takes a man to reach sexual climax? Hehehe'). These question were all being asked while chatting. The online environment offered Chris enough security and comfort to ask certain questions, which he was not finding space to ask offline. This in itself led me to more questions like, where are the young people getting information from? What are the services offered to the young person which are accessible whenever needed? The online environment is also providing an arena where the young person can seek information regardless of time and space. This is a very important aspect of the online world which is also being recognized by international bodies. The European Commission Support Structures are being set up solely to reinforce and train people to work more online environments and be more accessible online to the young person. Agencies like ERYIKA (European Youth Information and Consultation Agency), TALE (Training for Active Learning in Europe) and SALTO (Support Advanced Learning Training Opportunities) are all recognizing the importance of being present in the online environment.

IDENTITY EXPLORATION

'Xi kultant ma nafx... imma illum fis session li ghamilna dwar faqar u hekk, allura alla ma jaghmel xejn...? Fis sens xi kultant xejn ma jaghmel sens u nahseb li meta konna zgħar bellawlna ir ross mill labra...' ('Sometimes I wonder...today in the session we circled around poverty...so God doesn't do anything about it? Sometimes nothing makes sense. When we were younger I think everyone was just making fun of us by teaching us certain things!'). Jess came up with this argument and there are two things which are important to note in it. The nature of the argument itself was never discussed in the offline environment, and Jess was more reflective when chatting online. Daniel, be it that CMC is his main method to communicate with the outside world, used to ask

lot of feedback questions to know more about himself and how others perceive him: 'Nahseb xi kultant jahsbuni tifel zghir... vera hemm min jkellimni b mod stramb', 'gieli smajt xi haga fuqi? Fis sens li stramb gieli smajtha jien stess' ('I think sometimes people think I'm still a baby, some people really talk to me in a weird manner. Have you ever heard anything about me? I heard them saying once that was strange'). Other questions of this type were very frequently asked by Daniel. Since this was his main method to communicate with others, it was also his main way to learn more about himself and how others perceive him. Becky on the other hand, used to chat with me after each session to give me feedback on how it all went, and suggestions of how we can work for future sessions: 'I think that the last part was a bit too sentimental, you had to explain the importance of a leader... but the video clip was a bit soppy hehehe :P', 'younger ones where a bit lost... next time when divided into groups it is better if the younger ones are together...'. Becky online was the critic, she criticized anything which went on during the session and expected the same treatment in return when she took part in a session. She always used to ask many questions about her performance and the way she planned the session as she used to use this as a self reflection and another way to learn more about herself.

All the above chat logs clearly show that young people are using CMC not just for recreational activities as sometimes perceived by adults. This space is also used for learning and asking question which are normally avoided offline. CMC's are also providing a space for young people. The knowledge acquired from the online will be of benefit in the offline world as well, and this highlights the intersection between the two worlds, where one is feeding on the other and both are affecting each other in a symbiotic way (Markus et al, 2006). Translating an aspect of one's identity from one realm to another, very often it also strengthens it. It offers an opportunity to test, refine, the self presentation in a new environment (Cameron, 2006). So if it's beneficial to bring online behaviors offline, then it's also beneficial to bring offline behaviors online so this works both ways (Turkle, 1995). If a person suppresses his aggression in life but expresses it online, both behaviors reflect important aspects of his personality that surface under different conditions. If an individual is shy in-person but outgoing online, neither self-presentation is truer than the other. Both are dimensions of who they are, each revealed within a different situational context. Cyberspace gives the young person the opportunity to try out his usual face-to-face behaviors and methods of self expression in new situations, with new people (Ainley, 1991; Mims, 1998).

Cyberspace can be described as a place where one can try new things before actually shifting them to the offline world (Oldenburg, 1995). Young people like Rebecca, Daniel, Jess and Chris, all tried and tested some new things online and to see how others reacted to them. Very often Jess did taglines like ‘kissed the women’s cherry lips’ (a popular song), and also added some of her comments after the tagline like: ‘what if...’. Although in itself it could mean nothing because she was just putting the chorus lead line of a popular song, she might also be testing how the others would react if she was gay. Daniel on the other hand is using CMC to get to know himself and how can he understand the way others perceive him. His chats clearly show that he is very open to others for feedback. He encourages a lot of feedback online, especially about the development of the site.. ‘Do you like the new interface of the site, because no one told me anything last Friday during the session, I thought it wasn’t liked, we can change it....’, this was Daniel’s concern about something he did and did not receive any feedback about it. Rebecca’s fear of rejection was never tackled or discussed in an offline manner. Online she commented: ‘I am just afraid to let go and open myself to anyone, I feel belonged to someone than I am giving him the power to hurt me’, which evolved in a long discussion of self exploration.

All the five observed participants are not living in cyberspace, or escaping from the face-to-face conversation, they are just discovering different aspects of their identity through online means of communication (Rheingold, 2000). In fact, a single disinhibited “online self” does not exist at all, but rather a collection of slightly different constellations of emotion, memory, and thinking that surface in and interact with different types of environments online being one of the environments (Turkle, 1995’ Jones, 2000; Suler, 2002). Different communication modalities enable different expressions of oneself. The online environment allows more space to experiment and see the different perspectives of that complex thing we call “identity.” (Sukler, 2002). All the participants I observed are using the online environment to discover areas in their life that are more restricted in the offline world.

The online environment is presenting new opportunities which allow more self exploration and thus discover and learn new things which otherwise would have remained suppressed and unexplored. This new way to discover and explore different aspects of the identity is enriching the lives of the young people due to the fact that they have more means to acquire knowledge about themselves and others who they are in relationships with. One can also argue that through the engagement of the online environment, young people can experiment more and thus have a better understanding of their own core self.

IS THE MEDIUM THE MESSAGE?

The medium in which we convey our messages shapes an integral part of the meaning of what we are trying to communicate, 'the medium is the message', (McLuhan, 1964). With the Television boom, people were more used to the hypodermic model of communication where the term 'mass audience' was more used, and when the audience had little control on what they were to see. Another different element is that television did not allow any kind of feedback; communication flow was being sent from one sending source and received by another with very little interaction. Internet revolutionized this model of communication and reversed it to a more natural way to communicate. CMC is very democratic in nature. Therefore if the medium is the message (McLuhan 1964), the basic and underlying characteristic is that most of the individuals feel more part and equal when in conversation with other individual when engaged in an online manner.

Jess and Chris are quite opposite to each other. Offline, Jess tends to dominate the session, while Chris prefers to stay quieter and participate only when asked. Online it's the exact opposite, Jess tends to be quieter and Chris is more active. I observed this several times, even when they chose to chat in a group, so more than two persons are engaged in a conversation, Jess and Chris are on the same level of participation. Daniel, because of his disability, never participates in a session. He described the situation as 'inhossni bhal PC minghajr operation system, trid tkun taf il basic biex tifhem' ('I feel like a computer without an operating system, you have to know the basics to understand'). What he meant was that he feels that he is not understood when he expresses himself offline, therefore he prefers to express himself online. Rebecca, feels uncomfortable to talk with me offline, during the activities or session, but feels rather at ease in an online manner, 'It very easy to talk to you here, I forgot that you are the leader...I think I give you a headache J', is what she stated when I asked her why she prefers to talk to me when online and avoids certain kinds of subjects offline.

It is interesting to see that young people are using the CMC for their benefit. They are exploiting this medium to their advantage (Hawkins at al, 1987; Schneider, Schwarz & Fast, 1995; Sproul & Kiesler, 1991). Although Julian is not using this medium to communicate like the majority of the members attending the youth centre, he is also observing that some people who rarely participate in an offline activity are very much active in an online manner when discussions are taking place. During an offline

conversation I had with Julian he stated that ‘I read some blogs of people who don’t participate during the session or the social activities, at least I can now see what they have to say’. Julian being one of the leaders of the youth centre found it important to receive feedback from the members. He was receiving his feedback from the online conversations and tags which the members were posting online.

CMC AND EQUALITY

Kiesler (1984), a social psychologist who studied how CMC’s changed the nature of communication in organizations, was one of the first to observe groups systematically and study the impact of CMC on the organizations. Kiesler (ibid) confirmed and legitimated what CMC pioneers had known from personal experience when she noted in Harvard Business Review that “computer-mediated communications can break down hierarchical and other barriers, standard operating procedures, and organizational norms.” (ibid) This was also seen in my observation in the youth centre. Young people, who often dominate conversations face-to-face, because of popularity or educational background, are no more visible in the online world than those who would remain silent or say little in a face-to-face meeting. This in itself is a revolutionary evolution. Individuals who for various reasons are left relegated or excluded from the mainstream society now are finding space to express themselves equally in online environments (Rheingold, 2000; Turkle, 1995). Research on CMC shows that individuals behave differently when they communicate via computer (Suler, 2002). It shows that people who often dominate conversations face to face are less visible in an online situation, while users who would contribute little in a face to face meeting tend to say more in computer mediated communication (Sproull and Kiesler, 1995).

ONLINE AND OFFLINE AS ONE REALITY

Another point is that online feeds on offline and vice versa, so what happened online is affecting what is going on offline, therefore change is eminent and it is controlled or initiated by everyone not by the few who own the medium (Rheingold, 2000). Daniel, although he is not very integrated in an offline manner, is very influential online and what he does online is affecting what is happening in the youth centre. This effect mirrors representative democracy by increasing the ability of those of lower status to

influence matters of national importance. People whose physical limitations make it difficult for them to communicate offline find that virtual communities treat them as they always wanted to be treated, 'as thinkers and transmitters of ideas and feeling beings, not carnal vessels with a certain appearance and way of walking and talking' (Gaffin, 1994).

PHASE THREE – ACQUIRING THE YOUNG PERSON'S PERSPECTIVE



The main aim of these twelve one hour semi structured online interviews is to acquire the perspective of the young people on the CMC. The first part of the interview asks questions to explore the online activity of the young persons from their own perspective. The second part asks questions about the nature of the activity and also questions the feasibility of developing online Youth Work in Malta. The twelve respondents are all coming from different backgrounds. Since the main aim of this research is to understand better how CMC effects young people in their daily lives, the analysis will not give figures of statistics but a deeper insight of the young persons' perspectives and the daily use of the medium. As a guideline, the semi-structured interview consisted of fifteen key questions.

TIME SPENT ONLINE



The first question asked the participants was how much time they are spending online. On average the respondents spent 3.5 hours every day online as shown in Figure 1.

In the Continental Research Internet Report 1999/2000, it was found that young people are spending less time doing traditional leisure activities to spend more time surfing the net. Many argue that CMC is 'sucking people into cyberspace and drawing them away from the 'proper' relationship' in the real world' (Goldberg, 1995, p145). Others argue that this is the 'digital native' way of life, it is how they live their everyday life (Walther & Reid, 2000). Almost all local literature and seminars which are organized on this subject always perceive internet and CMC as an addiction and fails to see the potential benefits of the CMC. If young people are choosing to spend their time online it is better to start coming to grips with these changes instead to oppose them and see them as something negative to the development of the young person. If a young person is choosing the virtual space, Youth Workers should go to these settings as well.

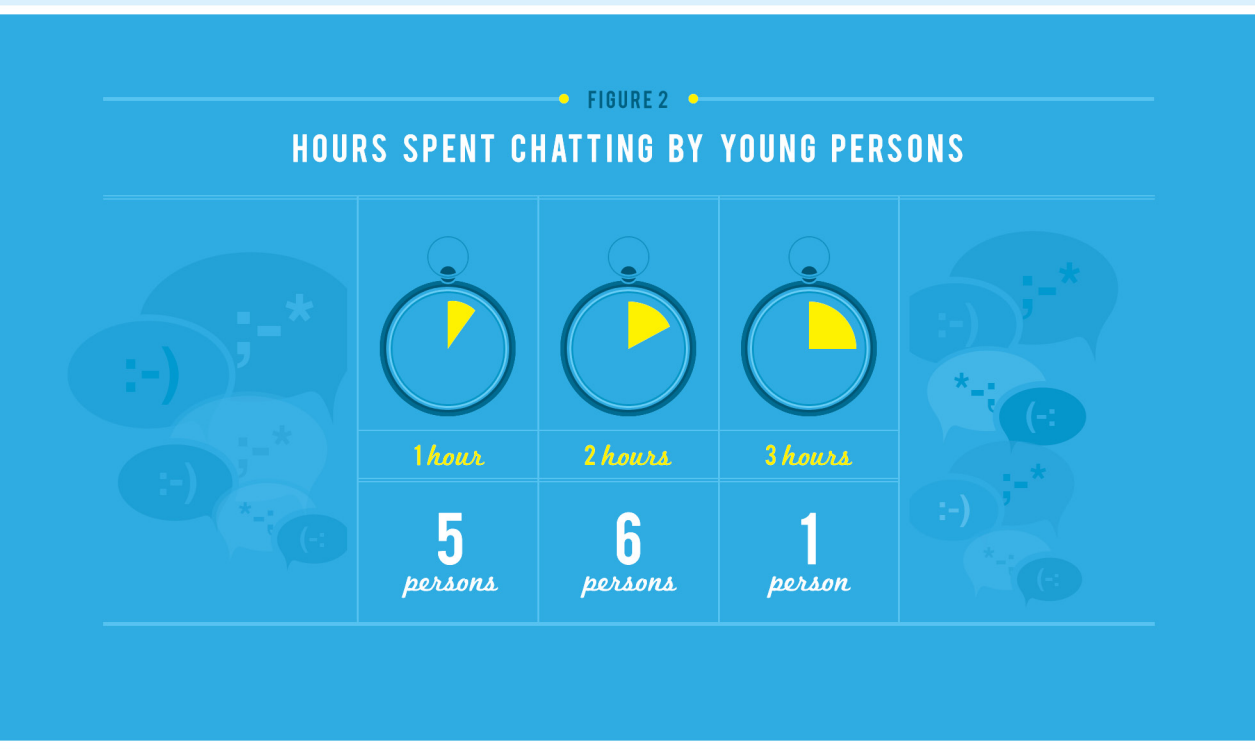
• FIGURE 1 •

TIME SPENT ONLINE BY YOUNG PERSONS



ONLINE ACTIVITIES

The following question was to enquire about their activities online. The replies to this question were very similar to one another. All participants mentioned that their main activity is surfing the net for research or any interest that they might have. They also log in to chat or check their emails and social networks sites. It was interesting to note that all the participants once again replied similarly, most time online is dedicated to chatting with the exception of one participant who uses CMC in case of emergency only or when out of Mobile phone credit. Figure 2 illustrates the hours young people spend chatting daily.



All participants said that they are most of the time engaged in a chats with their friends that they meet regularly in real life. I asked if they do engage in anonymous chatting conversation and eleven out of twelve replied that they never speak to someone who is totally unknown to them. When asked which are the topics they chat about the answers were various but they all mentioned that it's like a normal offline conversation; everything which is spoken about in offline is also spoken about online.

From the answers attained from the respondents it is clear that CMC is not used solely for self enjoyment and to chat with random people that they might meet online (Dreyfus, 1999). It is clear that the activity that the young people engage with online is more than just another form of leisure (Turkle, 1995). CMC is being used by young people to socialize to get to know other and themselves more. Kate and Rice (2002) argue that CMC actually facilitates social involvement and generates social capital. Through CMC young people are being more in the space that they choose to be active in. CMC is offering young people an experience where they can discover things about themselves.

MORE REAL THAN REAL?

When asked if there was a subject which is preferred to be tackled online rather than offline, there was a mixture of replies. Eight of the participants replied that they use CMC to say something which is very difficult to say face-to-face. Breaking up with a partner, giving bad news, asking about sexual information and asking for guidance for relationships were mentioned by all the eight participants. The other three replied that they prefer to tackle the issue face-to-face rather than offline to avoid misinterpretations.

In light of the fact that CMC can become more personal over time, it is interesting to note that personal disclosure might start online and turn out to be more personal than face-to-face interaction. Young people are less concerned about the impression they are making because of the inherent anonymity of the medium, and they are not as worried about proper turn taking or other formalities. Therefore, in its initial stages, CMC can be more intimate than face-to-face communication (Walther & Burgoon 1992, p.60). CMC may even initiate discussion on sensitive and personal topics that might never have begun if they required a face-to-face meeting. For instance, it is more likely that a young person would approach a Youth Worker with a question over e-mail or some other form of CMC than to call him or her on the phone or arrange an appointment (Kiesler, Siegel, & McGuire, 1984).

Another reason that CMC can foster more positive communication than face-to-face is that it allows space for selective presentation of certain features of a participant's identity. Also when encoding a message more time is allowed to plan a response that shows his or her better side (Walther & Burgoon, 1990). The anonymity encouraged by CMC can eliminate a person's anxiety over how he or she will be judged based on his or her opinions, and it leads to a medium in which people feel more free to express themselves and to stand up for their rights (Spears & Lea, 1994).

YOUTH WORK ONLINE



The other questions were more related in exploring the role of the online Youth Worker from the perspective of the young people. The participants were asked: 'Do you think that you will use the service of an online Youth Worker?' Nine participants out of eleven said that there are certain issues that they would find it easier to discuss online rather than offline. Another reason which was also highlighted was that if Youth Workers are online they would be easier to reach. Six out of the nine participants also added that online is good for the first contact than if further information needed that it can be followed by an offline meeting to go into detail. The three respondents that said that they would not use the service of an online Youth Worker and said they prefer to talk face-to-face when it comes to personal issues.

According to a study conducted by Davies and Cranston (2008) it was found that through CMC young people experience many things which can be reinforced if Youth Workers are present online as well. Young people experience an increase in their insight of how they perceive themselves, because they are more connected to others around them. It is also providing space which creates new opportunities for young people to have a 'public voice', to engage in self expression and share their creative works. More value could be generated and instilled if Youth Workers are online and encourage more young people to experience these positive attributes to the full. As Youth Workers, making sense of the experiences of youth, and being able to work with young people within their context should be one of their primary role (Jefferies, 2001), to create tools and spaces which can encourage and enable young people's civic and political participation (Rheingold, 2008; Levine, 2008; Loader et. al, 2007; Byron, 2008; Howland and Bethel, 2002).

PHASE FOUR – ACQUIRING THE YOUTH WORKER'S PERSPECTIVE

In this phase of the research I used a questionnaire to acquire the insight of the Youth Workers on CMC and young people. The questionnaire was composed of mainly two sections. The first section was concerned with the knowledge and familiarity of the Youth Workers with the medium. This was important to note what type of communication is being used by the Youth Workers. The second part of the questionnaire was more focused on young people and online environments. This perspective is also very important as results of the questionnaire will give an indication of the level of online engagement Youth Workers currently have. A total number of fifty questionnaires were sent to students reading for a degree or masters in youth in community studies. Out of the fifty sent questionnaires, twenty-two were sent back to me via e-mail. Out of the twenty-two there were fourteen female and eight male respondents with an average age of thirty-four years.

YOUTH WORKERS AND CMC

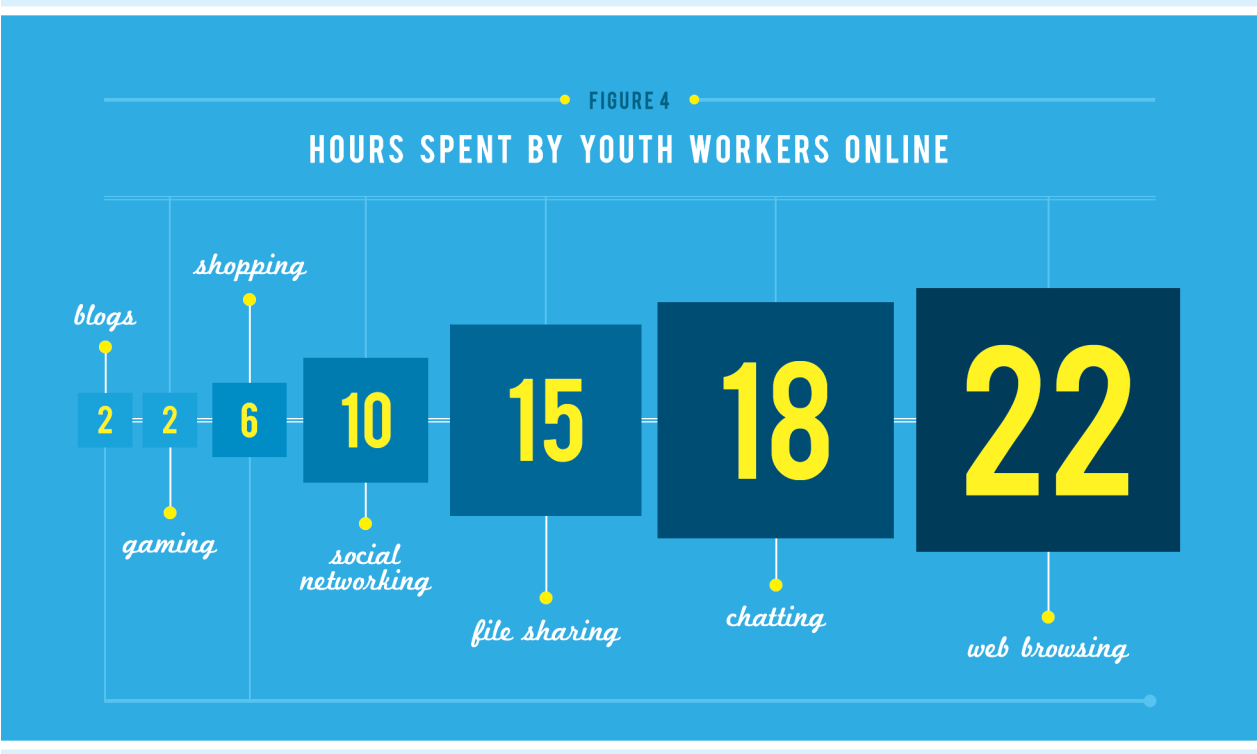
In the first part of the questionnaire, information about the type of the involvement of the Youth Workers was requested. Twenty one respondents answered that they are engaged in an organizational based Youth Work, meaning that they all work within an institution or organization in which the young person attends in person for the meeting and activities organized. There was one respondent who replied that he is currently not involved in any Youth Work practice. All the respondents use the internet at least once a week. Figure 3 below shows the number of hours the Youth Workers spend online per week.

• FIGURE 3 •

HOURS SPENT BY YOUTH WORKERS ONLINE

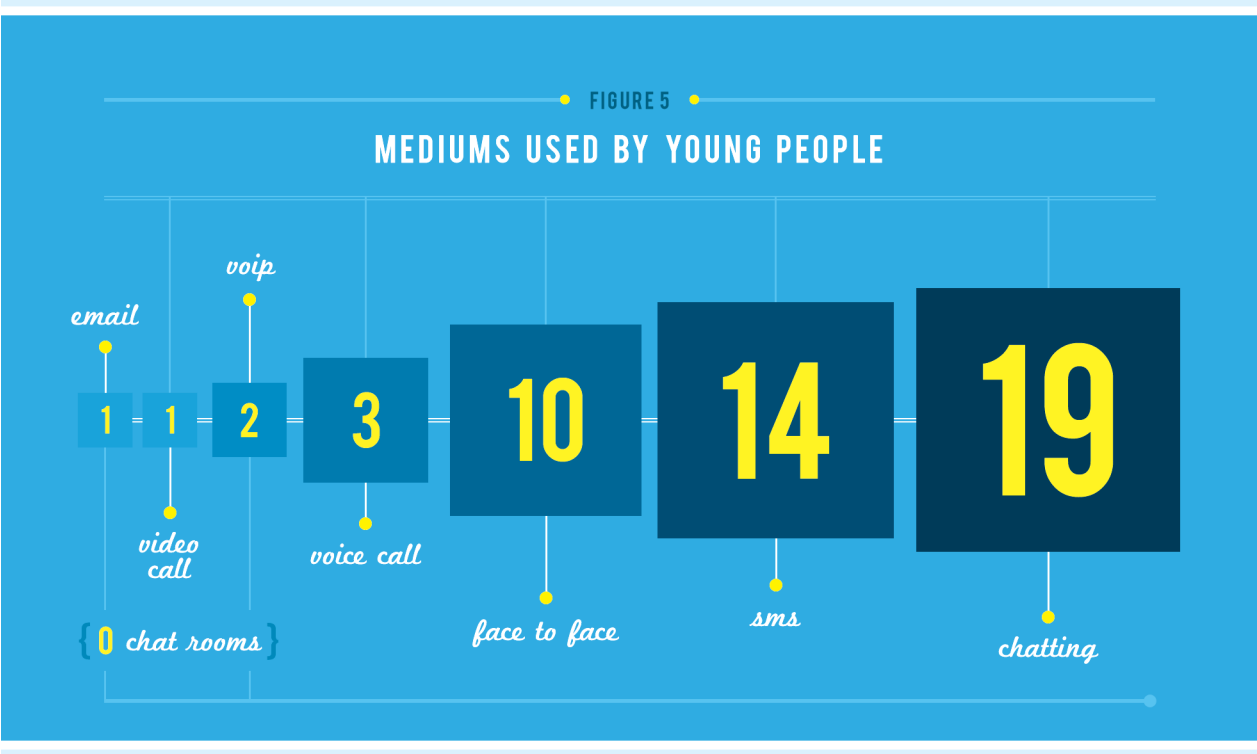


The next few questions circled around the activity which the Youth Workers are engaged with when online. A detailed picture of the data collected is found in Figure.4



It is clear that almost all Youth Workers are engaged in some online activity. All Youth Workers replied that they use internet most for browsing. The next most popular online activities are, respectively, chatting, file sharing and social networking.

In the second part of the questionnaire the questions were more concerned with the perception of the Youth Workers vis-à-vis Internet and young people. The next question asked what the Youth Workers think the most popular communication medium is for young people. There were eight choices from which they could choose from (see fig. 5)



It is clearly illustrated that Youth Workers are aware of the popularity of chatting and other CMC's. It was also interesting to observe that certain impersonal chatting room programmes like ICQ and Mirc are not popular anymore. There is a shift to more personal types of communication where the young people are chatting more with the people they know rather than anyone random who is surfing on the net.

Although Youth Workers are aware of the situation, that young people are spending more time online, Youth Workers are still strongly emphasizing in offline participation of young people. With a strong tradition of organizational youth work in the Maltese island it is difficult to change the culture of how youth work is perceived. In order for a Youth Worker to be effective it must be understood that youths are their own entity with their own culture that must be recognized and validated but not changed according to what Youth Workers believe (Whittaker, 2001).

Knowing that the young people are spending more time online, as resulted also in the questionnaire, the next question was concerned with the amount of time the Youth Workers are spending online chatting with young people. Only five Youth Workers replied that they engage through chatting with young people on a daily basis. The majority of the Youth Workers replied that they perceive that chatting with young people is unethical and they prefer face to face communication when communicating with young people. They only use chatting is to remind members of their organization on upcoming events and to coordinate certain things. One of the respondents does not use chatting at all as she perceives it as 'a waste of time'. The general feeling gathered from the open questions was that the majority of Youth Workers are cynical when it comes to technology and the new form of communication. The older the Youth Worker, the more resistance there is towards the medium:

'I am not convinced that I should engage with young people in such an impersonal manner. I am always available for them, if they need to talk to me I prefer to meet Face to face. These methods of communication are more suited to people of similar ages.'

Sam, age 54

The younger respondents are more open to these new mediums and are more using them to reach young people in their organizations.

'We usually talk about lot of things, discussion that was started during a session, friendships, personal issues, anything really...'

Robert, age 28

The final question queried the respondents to see whether or not they consider online Youth Work as a needed tool to reach more young people. Once again there was a different array for replies. Thirteen out of the twenty-two respondents consider online youth work as tool for Youth Workers. All of them mentioned that ideally online conversations can be followed by offline conversations and vice versa.

'I think that services like Help line should be available for the young people, these can tackle sensitive issues such as, drug abuse, STI's, and other issues.'

Pat, age 35

The other nine respondents do not consider online tools as an alternative option to youth work, they also argued that face to face communication must be the main tool of communication between the Youth Worker and the young person. One respondent argued that:

'How can you protect young people from being manipulated by someone pretending to be an authentic youth workers.'

Sue, age 26

This questionnaire revealed the main different kinds of approaches which are taken by the Youth Workers who are involved and active in the youth field. It also revealed that the Youth Workers are aware of this shift in the communication style of young people. The different kind of responses received from this questionnaire gave a better insight of the perception of the Youth Workers vis-a-vis young people and CMC.

Youth workers speak a lot about empowerment, active participation and other words which basically imply giving right of choice to young people. In this case, Youth Workers are very reluctant to adopt new styles and methods to engage with young people. Jenkinson (2000) argues that Youth Work is about encouraging real participation, liberation and empowerment of young people. It is important that a shift from organizational view of Youth Work to a broader perspective is adopted by Youth Workers in order to remain valid and adjourned. It was also evident that Youth Workers are adopting the role of the 'parental figure' which knows best for his/her own young people. Weah, Cornelia-Simmons, & Hall (2000) argue that although Youth Workers' intention is to guide the young person, the environment and background of the young person is not always respected.

CONCLUSION

In all the four phases of this research, the main focus was to attain a deeper understanding on how the young people are using CMC and how it is affecting their lives. To understand this as a researcher I had to understand the medium itself. The objective of research was to provide the reader with a glimpse of the world of today's young person. After reading this, the reader will know better why today's young people are spending more time online and how are they dealing with it.

This analysis was also a journey for me. The first step was getting to know the medium and how it worked and influenced what I thought and felt when I was engaged online. The second part of the phase was engaging with the young people online; using CMC, and offline at the same time. In this phase it was important to see the differences and similarities which exist between the offline and online persona. The third phase revolved around twelve young people and how they are using their time online. This was a vital phase where I managed to acquire a deeper understating of the way young people look at the internet with an emphasis on CMC. The last stage focused on the objective to acquire the perspective of Youth Workers on the issue of young people and their online activity. I was also interested to acquire their perspective on how Youth Workers are dealing with this change in the way we communicate. When all the phases were put together, a clear picture was presented of the online reality: the medium, the Youth Worker and at the centre of it all, the young person.

When I understand an object, rather than memorizing the profile of the concept of the object, I know that object, I produce the knowledge of that object. When the reader critically achieves an understanding of the object that the author talks about, the reader knows the meaning of the text and becomes co-author of that meaning.

(Freire 1998 p. 31)

CHAPTER
FIVE

*Recommendations
and conclusions*

INTRODUCTION

The conclusions and recommendations will give an insight on what is likely to be the reality of a young person today living in this highway of information. Another important feature is to see how CMC is shaping young people's intra and interpersonal relationships. The last objective was to also attain the perspective of the Youth Workers on this issue. Recommendations and conclusions were drawn from the data derived from the different phases of the research. All the perspectives gathered from the actors contributed to the attainment of a more holistic picture of this new reality.

ONLINE AND OFFLINE

Although many think of the cyberspace or virtual as insignificant, as escape or meaningless diversion from reality, from my research it can be easily concluded that the online and the offline are not two separate realities that a person chooses to live in either of them. Today's reality consists of two factors which are contributing to the person's life. The online and the offline are part of one reality, and they both are interdependent and interlinked with each other becoming more indistinct in time.

Research on CMC has commonly focused on users' on-line activities, ignoring the way that these activities remain embedded within the context of the off-line spaces and the social relations of everyday life (Holloway & Valentine, 2003). More and more evidence shows that, rather than being independent of the offline world, online interactions and relationships are indeed deeply embedded in and shaped by offline situations and social relationships (Brook and Boal 1995 ; Burkhalter 1999; Carter 2005; Correll 1995; Dietrich 1997; Ebo 1998; Kolko et al. 2000; Morton 1999 2002; O'Brien 1999; Wellman and Gulia 1999; Wheeler 2001). These studies support social constructivism, which holds that technologies are embedded in, rather than separate from, the larger social context and thus are shaped by various social factors (Bijker et al. 1987; MacKenzie & Wajcman 1985).

An important part of this research was that the perspective of the young person was also obtained, thus all the above should be understood in the light of how the young person perceives CMC and how it is affecting his/her life. From the interviews it resulted that young people do not distinguish between the online and the offline because they just see it as a natural continuation of one

thing to the other. Another finding which was very important for this research was that the young persons use the characteristics of the online chatting for the benefit of their self. Through online they experiment and test different selves which in return affect their true identity (Turtle, 1995).

IDENTITY



In the first phase of the study, when I was getting familiar with CMC, I noticed that although I was chatting online I was being influenced all the time by what was happening around me in the office. If something happened and affected my mood, this was automatically reflected in the way I was chatting. Emotions do not switch on or off according to whether one is offline or online. On the other hand the same can be said for the online. When I was engaged in a chat which made me nervous or tense, this reflected in the offline environment. Therefore one can argue that a person is continuously being influenced by what is happening in both dimension of this same reality.

Young people are spending an average of 3.5 hours per day online. Adolescents are during a phase of their life where they are still trying to make sense of what everything around them means to them as individuals. This quest of the young people to achieve their own individuality is obtained from the relationships with their peers. The majority of the young people I interviewed are also trying to find who they are through online chatting. This is directly affecting the way they see themselves through the eyes of others. Therefore online can be perceived as a space where the young person is also socializing and thus forming his/her identity (Hamburger & Artzi, 1998).

MOIVILLE



In the offline realm, young people frequent places and venues where they feel comfortable to spend their time in. Examples of these places are youth centres, NGO's, sports venues and other places which are hubs for young people. Due to the time restriction in the young person's life, meeting online is becoming more popular and the majority of the young people in industrial societies are shifting from the village square to the virtual one. These places are as also called by some of the participants in this research

as 'Moiville'. Moiville is offering an alternative place where young people meet to socialize with each other. Reid (1991) argues that CMC essentially is a third place, within its domain people are free to experiment with different forms of communication and self-representation. When online, they do everything they do offline, except they leave their bodies behind. An important characteristic of this third place is that all the people who engage online are there because they really want to and not because someone told them to go. Therefore 'Moiville' offers a place where young people can share their experiences at their own free will and at what time they please. This can be considered as an agora which there is always someone there to talk to.

Many think that what attracts young people online is the degree of anonymity. This is also reflected in the amount of awareness campaigns which evolve around these issues. The most frequently covered issues are on safety and internet addiction. Through the results of my research it is clear that both issues are amplified and are nothing but another way adults use to control the world of young people. The results from the research show that young people most of the time are engaged online with people that they know and who they are well acquainted with. The common argument of anonymity is also on the decline, since CMC's are using chatting software's which are becoming very personal. For a person to be able to chat with another individual, an invitation must be sent which must be accepted by both parties. This shows that young people are not just chatting with random people they find online, but they are building relationships with people they already are engaged with in an offline manner.

DEMOCRATIC ELEMENT

Another interesting confirmation made through this research was that the CMC is a medium of democratic nature. All the young people I was in contact with during my research felt comfortable even though I was a Youth Worker conducting a research. On the other hand the majority of them kept some degree of distance when it came to the offline world. Some commented that they feel more comfortable to chat and disclose some information with me online rather than offline. Another finding was that through CMC the young people were disclosing or discussing issues which are rarely tackled in an offline manner. Sex issues, philosophical arguments, personal insecurities and other personal issues all came up at some point or another in my study. This reflects that the medium itself is personal enough to disclose sensitive information, but also gives you more space to express yourself. CMC and the internet in general offer space which can be controlled by the person. Parents, teachers and adults in general have no or

little control over it. 'What it is, is up to us' (Turtle, 1995). Young people have more control online than offline due to the fact that their offline time and content is highly organized and controlled by schools, work, families, religion and other institution which are contributing to the young person's life.

The online environment offers the young person an opportunity to be really listened and also can participate in a meaningful way. The level of participation online is remarkably important and is also reflected in the amount of data gathered in my observation period. This is also shown in Rheingold (ibid) book Virtual Communities:

let the users tell you what they want to do, because that is what the users of an online communication system will do, no matter how hard you try to structure some other purpose into the tool.

(Rheingold, 2000; p 129)

Another level of democratic value of this medium is the amount of inclusion it allows. Daniel, an autistic person, who also failed to complete his secondary school and found it difficult to interact offline, is a gaming international guru online. Daniel is also managing to socialize with the members of the youth center through chatting, and manages to prove his abilities online. This is affecting the way others perceive him and is allowing him to slowly be integrated in an offline manner. Daniel is learning about himself through others opinions by chatting with them instead of face-to-face conversations. CMC is giving him the space to really develop the skills that are also needed offline. Daniel is a living proof that the online environment offers a more inclusive environment than the offline. Through participating online, Daniel is managing to integrate with others offline. This is of benefit for both Daniel and the young people in the youth centre because if it was not for the CMC, Daniel would have been left excluded.

YOUTH WORKER'S PERSPECTIVE

Youth Workers are aware that young people are increasingly spending more time online. Despite this awareness, the majority of the Youth Workers who responded to the questionnaires are still resisting this change. They still perceive CMC as something they can do without. They still perceive that CMC is something artificial which is detached from the offline life. Although some of the Youth Workers themselves use CMC and internet, in general for their personal use they are still reluctant when it comes to use CMC for their work.

CMC is providing Youth Workers with new social arenas which require specific skills in order to cope with them. Youth Workers should be provided by specific skills and knowledge about this medium. The perception that CMC is not suitable for Youth Work is probably an influence by continuous local campaigns which project the internet as addiction and suppress all the potential positive outcomes which can be derived from using CMC as a tool for Youth Work. Increasing the knowledge and familiarization with CMC will augment the understanding of this medium and also increase the effectiveness of Youth Work. Being where the young person is should be the priority for all Youth Workers. Youth Workers should move away from the idea that Youth Work is solely organization based and start to experiment with online tools. Young people are choosing to be part of the virtual world and for Youth Workers it is the ideal time to start adopting the system which is created by young people themselves. This is a revolutionary concept because the system is now owned by the young person because it is created by them.

The system is the people and it is also made by them. This fact makes the online environment more appealing than real life for young people due to the sole reason that the system is what you, as in young person make out of it.

Rheingold, 2000

The role of the Youth Worker is more to use the space which young people themselves are creating and exploit the opportunities which arise from the specific situations.

THE WAY FORWARD

Cyberspace is an actual, active and eventful place for young people, and should be treated as such. An emphasis is being allocated towards the notion that CMC is something which young people can do without. Instead of investing in these kind of campaigns, more focus should be allocated towards education of young people and training of Youth Workers in this area. Youtube, Facebook, MSN and other sites are a clear indication of what it takes to attract young people. Knowing where the young people are and what is appealing to them is an advantage which is not yet exploited by the profession of Youth Work. Youth Workers should familiarize themselves more with CMC and other internet tools in order to promote their activities, which in return can end up in attracting more young people for the actual event.

ONLINE YOUTH WORK SERVICES

Being accessible and available to the young person is a key element in the development of the young person. Information can be available twenty-four hours a day and the young person can benefit from it without any physical restriction. Young people showed that when using CMC there is the possibility that they will discuss subjects like, health issues, personal issues and other sensitive topics. CMC proves also to be an inclusive tool, especially with those young people that have physical restrictions.

The way forward of Youth Workers after analyzing the data collected in this research is very clear. The service of the Youth Worker should be available to young people online as well as offline. Youth information centers and organization should cater their services not only offline but also in an online manner. Tending Virtual Youth Centre is one of the virtual youth centers in the United Kingdom which offers services to young people and reinforces as well the offline part youth centre by promoting all the activities on the site as well. Some of the services which are offered are career guidance, health virtual clinics, services of counselor, information about training course and activities; it is an extension of what happens offline.

Most importantly CMC and internet should be used by Youth Workers to build and sustain relationships with young people. Only through constant dialogue can young people be guided and motivated to attain their goals. Knowing their language and their way of life will give a deeper understanding of their world and the skills they require or every day life.

Our relationship with the learners demands that we respect them and demands equally that we be aware of the concrete conditions of their world, the conditions that shape them. To try to know the reality that our students live is a task that the educational practice imposes on us: Without this, we have no access ' to the way they think, so only with great difficulty can we perceive what and how they know '

(Freire, 1985: p58)

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