

The diagram shows a student research paper with the following text and annotations:

Carrie Ahls  
Mr. Johnson  
English 104  
16 April 2009

The Problems with and Possibilities of  
Online Communities

The emergence of online social networks has raised controversial questions about the meaning of identity and community in cyberspace. For example, to what extent do the identities users craft for online communication match their real identity? And to what extent does a virtual community approximate the traditions and values associated with real face-to-face communities? These questions have prompted many researchers to point to the abuses of online communication. However, other researchers, while acknowledging the potential dangers of online communication, remain enthusiastic about the educational value of social networks and their importance to democracy and citizenship.

A major abuse often encountered in the virtual world is "cyberbullying." According to Phil McKenna, cyberbullying is "sending threatening messages, displaying private messages, and posting embarrassing video or photos online." McKenna explains that by assuming a false identity, a person can enter the supposedly safe world of a chat room and spread all sorts of destructive information about other members of the online community. Because the targets of such cyberbullying have no way to correct the destructive information, they can become extremely depressed. After being continually taunted in her MySpace profile, a 13-year-old girl from suburban St. Louis committed suicide (Malone).

Annotations and formatting rules shown:

- 1" margin (top and bottom)
- 1/2" margin (right)
- Double-space (between lines)
- Indent five spaces or one-half inch (for the title and the first line of the first paragraph)
- Double-space between every line (for the second paragraph)

Quotation:  
Quote from  
government  
document on Web

Quotation:  
Quote from  
online newspaper

Quotation from  
book

Long Quotation:  
Quotation of  
more than four  
lines is set off  
from text and is  
not placed within  
quotation marks.

1, 2"  
 ↑  
 Ahls 2

↑  
1"

A related abuse is "cyberstalking." According to a report from the United States Department of Justice, *1999 Report on Cyberstalking: A New Challenge for Law Enforcement and Industry*, online stalking is similar to offline stalking. Both stalkers engage in repeated and unwelcome threatening sexual behavior. However, online stalkers can explore online communities, such as dating sites, to gain extensive personal information about their victims. The report acknowledges that while online stalking may not involve physical contact, it may serve as a "prelude to more serious behavior, including physical violence." Tom Zeller, Jr. reports a particularly sinister case of cyberstalking: the stalker not only bombarded his victim, an innocent 44-year-old publishing executive in Manhattan, with menacing sexual threats, but he also encouraged others to stalk her by posting her "full name, address and phone number, along with a solicitation to call and drop by her home."

The cause of these online abuses and many other problems associated with online social networks is "Internet Addiction." Like other forms of addiction—drug abuse, alcoholism and gambling—Internet Addiction is a compulsive behavior caused by the need to escape everyday problems. Kimberly S. Young points out some of the signs of Internet Addiction:

—If we feel isolated, we can pour out our repressed feelings and act out hidden aspects of ourselves in meeting rooms and interactive games. If we long for love and affection, but fear rejection or AIDS, we can cruise for cybersex. And if we are bored with our family or cynical about society, we can retreat into a subculture of Internet

Ahls 3

addicts who offer support, encouragement, excitement and intrigue, and maybe even an invitation to come run away from it all. (29-30)

Documentation:  
The parenthetical reference to block quotation follows the final mark of punctuation.

Working with the strategies used to diagnose other compulsive disorders, Young devised a questionnaire that asked Internet users questions such as, "Do you feel restless, moody, depressed or irritable when attempting to cut down or stop Internet use?" (3). Respondents to the questionnaire who Young classified as addicts admitted that they "were investing more and more time online at greater and greater cost to their real lives" (5).

Although the accessibility of online communication provides opportunities for abuse and addiction, many researchers remain convinced that online social networks extend and enrich the way users experience the world. In particular, individuals who are trapped or excluded by disabilities express feelings of liberation as a result of their ability to communicate online. In *Alter Ego: Avatars and Their Creators*, Jason Rowe, a severely handicapped boy from Crosby, Texas, explains how the virtual world has changed his sense of identity and community:

Documentation:  
Cites book title to identify source

Online it doesn't matter what you look like. . . .In the real world, people can be uncomfortable around me before they get to know me and realize that, apart from my outer appearance, I'm just like them. . . .The internet eliminates how you look in real life, so you get to know a person by their mind and personality. Cooper.

Long Quotation:  
Quote from book with no page numbers

In addition to liberation, researchers report that users of social networks feel enriched by their ability to communicate with and understand people all over the world. William C. Diehl and Esther Prins

Short Quotation:  
Quote worked  
into writer's own  
sentence

Documentation:  
Author and page  
number enclosed  
in parentheses

Short Quotation:  
Quote from  
online newspaper.  
Author's name  
enclosed within  
parentheses

Documentation:  
Author's name  
used to introduce  
quote

Page numbers  
enclosed within  
parentheses

Ahls 4

report that "participation in 'SL' [Second Life] enhanced participants' intercultural literacy." Their research revealed that "SL" participants gained a "greater awareness of insider cultural perspectives and openness toward new viewpoints."

Many researchers argue that the most promising prospect for on-line social networks is their ability to "revitalize citizen based democracy" (Rheingold xxix). A compelling example of how such networks can reconnect alienated citizens to the political process is the election of Barack Obama. Throughout his campaign, Obama's staff used the Internet to form a community of supporters who communicated with each other about the major issues being debated in the campaign. Once he became President, Obama held the first Internet town hall forum where citizens from across the country contributed over 100,000 questions and then watched their president answer a wide range of thoughtful questions about the economy. He also answered a question about "whether legalizing marijuana might stimulate the economy by allowing the government to regulate and tax the drug" (Stolberg).

The "marijuana question" suggests the possibilities and problems in the virtual world may be no different than the possibilities and problems in the real world. Both worlds enable you to find ideas, share information, connect with other people and contribute to your community. Both worlds also enable you to disguise your identity, abuse other people, escape into fantasies and ask silly questions. How you participate in both worlds is up to you. Esther Dyson argues that what you do online could or should change your offline life "by making you less willing to accept things the way they are and more sure of your ability to build a life to suit yourself and your family" (280).

1/2"  
↑  
Arls B  
↓

1"  
↑  
↓

Works Cited

Cooper, Robbie. *Alter Ego: Avatars and Their Creators*. London: Chais  
Boot, 2007: N.Page. Print. ← Double-space

Diehl, William C., and Esther Prins. "Unintended Consequences in 'SL':  
Intercultural Literacy and Cultural Identity in a Virtual World."  
*Language and Intercultural Communication* 8.2 (May 2008):  
101-18. ERIC. Web. 16 Feb. 2009. ← Indent five spaces.

Dyson, Esther. *Release 2.0: A Design for Living in the Digital Age*. ← Sample entry:  
New York: Broadway, 1997. Print. A book by one author

Malone, Roy. "Online Harassment—A Hoax, a Suicide—a Journalistic  
Dilemma." *St Louis Journalism Review* Dec. 2007. BNET. Web. 15  
Feb. 2009. ← Medium of publication

McKenna, Phil. "The Rise of Cyberbullying." *New Scientist* 19 July  
2007: 26-7. Academic Search Premier. Web. 16 Feb. 2009. ← Sample entry:  
Medium of publication

Rheingold, Howard. *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the  
Electronic Frontier*. Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2000. Print.

Stolberg, Sheryl Gay. "Obama Makes History in Live Internet Video  
Chat." *New York Times* 26 Mar. 2009. Web. 26 Mar. 2009. ← Sample entry:  
Date of access

United States. Dept. of Justice. Attorney General. *1999 Report on  
Cyberstalking: A New Challenge for Law Enforcement and Industry*.  
Aug. 1999. Web. 20 Feb. 2009.

Young, Kimberly S. *Caught in the Net: How to Recognize the Signs  
of Internet Addiction—and a Winning Strategy for Recovery*  
New York: Wiley, 1998. Print. ← Sample entry:  
Title of book  
presented in  
italics

Zeller, Tom, Jr. "A Sinister Web Entraps Victims of Cyberstalking."  
*New York Times* 17 Apr. 2006. Web. 18 Feb. 2009.

1"  
↑  
↓