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**Mediating Identity, 'Mobile-ising' Culture: The social impact of MXit
in the relational lives of teens.**

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research is hereby acknowledged. Opinions expressed and conclusions arrived at, are
those of the author and are not attributable to the NRF.**

COMPULSORY DECLARATION

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

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Abstract

The primary aim of the study was to examine the mediating role that MXit plays in the identity formation of 16-18 year old adolescents. Little is known about the social impact of MXit on adolescents' identities when this usage is so deeply embedded in the relational exchanges of teens' everyday experiences. Nine focus groups, four group interviews and two one on one interviews were employed across six schools located in four socioeconomically divergent Cape Town suburbs demarcated using middle to upper-income (Milnerton and Newlands) and lower-income (Khayelitsha and Cloeteville) operational definitions. This was to examine the contextual ways in which adolescent identity *and* the mobile youth culture postulated by Castells, et al (2007) manifest in the consumption practices of youth living in a society of deep-seated structural division. The study employed a qualitative-interpretive approach supplemented by social constructivist and cultural studies paradigms, while Erikson's theory of identity crisis framed adolescents' need for social media, and Goffman, McLuhan and Meyrowitz contextualised the differential performances of identity in online and offline settings. The study presents significant findings in assessing the behavioural change that mobile media effects in the lives of its most avid users, and the intimate relationship between offline norms and online practices. This local usage bears striking intonations to international trends, where youth perceive mobile media to be their distinct territory, ushering in generational identities symbolised by notions of inclusion and exclusion. However, discourses of age, race, class and gender are constituted in the disembodied relationships of MXit, exacerbating South Africa's polarised social relations, while simultaneously allowing the individual to be emancipated from these discourses.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

MXit¹ has been championed by South African teens as the social network of choice in an inherently expensive national telecommunications landscape. Yet, cost efficiency cannot account for the resonance that MXit has shown in its adolescent user base. There are underlying themes embodied in this usage arising from social, developmental and relational needs that are central to adolescents' construction and expression of identities (Berk, 2003). The cellphone mediates these needs by expanding teens' social networks and shifting their intimate relations from parents to peers (boyd, 2010). MXit embodies these trends, yet magnifies them in the hyper-communicative space of instant messaging (Barnes, 2009). A core aim of the thesis is, therefore, to illustrate how MXit mediates the construction, expression and performance of teens' personal and collective identities in a freely interactive online space that is fundamentally fun, yet largely grounded in social relations.

Despite its popularity, MXit is feared for encouraging mobile addiction, communication with strangers, a decline in school performance, and the disappearance of childhood (Chigona, Chigona, Ngqokelela, & Mpofu, 2009; Bosch, 2008). A central argument in our analysis is that youth, in exercising agency over the constraints they experience as teenagers, appropriate the cellphone for expression, experimentation, recreation and escapism in a way that is augmented by routine interaction with their peers. For the purposes of the study, youth are defined not by their homogeneity of age, but as a conceptual category characterised by an active appropriation of mobile technologies in the context of the

¹ MXit is a low-cost mobile instant messaging platform based in Stellenbosch, South Africa. It allows text messages of up to 1000 characters to be sent between users who have the MXit client downloaded onto their cellphones. MXit can be downloaded onto any phone with GPRS/3G and java support, and has been embraced by teens who do not need possess smart phones (Butgereit, 2007; Bosch, 2008). As of March 2011, MyBroadband.co.za indicated that MXit, whose slogan is *Join the Revolution*, currently has 10 million local subscribers (Muller, 2011).

network society (Green & Singleton, 2007; boyd & Ellison, 2007; Ito, et al, 2010b; Castells, Fernández-Ardèvol, Qiu, & Araba, 2007). These findings are qualitatively drawn from the accounts of users themselves, allowing us to understand the social impact of a phenomenon that has been either distorted by media coverage – or horribly under-represented in academia. The result is a study that addresses the need for agency in youth, whose voices have not been heard, and whose central leisure activity is currently the subject of a moral panic (Chigona & Chigona, 2008).

As identity is an ongoing process of construction (Erikson, 1968), the thesis will illustrate how adolescents' identities are being continually constructed in partnership with their ritualised usage of MXit. The cellphone addresses and *creates* a need for social networking that is grounded in adolescence, defined by peer-to-peer communication, and exclusive to youth (boyd, 2010). Additionally, the thesis will argue towards the formation of the mobile youth culture identified by Castells, et al (2007), which is embedded in the discourses of age, geography, gender, race and class that constitute South African social relations (Jaynes, 2007).

South African teenagers are at the forefront of the negative perceptions surrounding MXit, and it is for this reason that the study has focused on the 16-18 year old school-going proportion of MXit's target market (MXit International Expansion: Case Study, 2009). They are experiencing the psychosocial developmental period of Erikson's (1968) theory of a 'crisis of youth', which now extends into the online space of mediated interaction. However, there are culturally inscribed differences in the use of MXit that are rooted in a history of segregation wrought by Apartheid. These differences come to the fore in adolescents' intimate relationships, so it is for this reason that Parts 4 and 5 will focus on the relational uses of MXit. These relationships mark the symbolic shifting of ties from parents to romantic attachment figures via the cellphone (Jin & Peña, 2008), while providing the portal to

interpret the performance of discourses. In this respect, we will argue that adolescent identity is bolstered as much by psychosocial, developmental logic as by surrounding discourses and social forces (Butler, 1990; Goldman, Booker, & McDermott, 2008; Staltdt, 2008; Buckingham, 2008).

The study locates its research methodologies firmly in the qualitative-interpretive tradition, which allows the biologically-situated researcher to interpret the everyday, lived experiences of people in their natural environments (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005b; Silverman, 2010). Social constructivism provides a paradigmatic cornerstone of the study, for the thesis advocates that reality is constructed through discourses that are rooted in the subjective experiences of the individual and society (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). To a limited extent, the study has employed the humanistic arm of cultural studies as a supplementary paradigm, which investigates the meaning that individuals attach to everyday cultural objects like the cellphone (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005b; Goggin, 2006).

Qualitative sampling has been used in order to address the multifaceted contexts in which youth use mobile media. As a starting point, Rogers' (2003) diffusion of innovations has been used to interpret the reasons for MXit's adoption by South African teens. Silverstone and Hirsch's (1992a) domestication model of media consumption is used to analyse the domestic embeddedness of mobile telephony, while the core tenets of social network theory distilled by Kadushin (2004) contextualise the intergroup relations that constitute MXit's mobile networks. However, as a key focus of the study is the cellphone's mediation of interpersonal relationships, the study conflates the arguments of Meyrowitz (1986) and McLuhan (1964) order to examine the role of MXit in shaping new types of social behaviour that transcend physical settings. In this respect, the study is premised on an amalgamation of Meyrowitz's (1986) medium theory and McLuhan's (1964) famous maxim; *the medium is the message*.

Insofar as we posit that the medium is the message, we will also argue that teenagers individually tailor the content of these messages in ways that provide a unique snapshot of their identities. There are social and biological forces at work in the construction of identity, from class and geography to race, gender and age, so identity is held to be malleable and contingent upon these discourses (Buckingham, 2008). The seminal works of Erikson (1968) and Goffman (1971) will contextualise the ways in which identity is constructed as part of adolescents' psychosocial moratoriums, while being performed on the public 'stage' of cyberspace (respectively). The study employs 6 research questions deemed crucial to understanding the relationship between users' offline conditions, their subjective experience of cyberspace, and the role of the application in mediating a sense of identity:

- How are South African teens using MXit?
- What role does MXit play in the identity formation of adolescents?
- What role does MXit play in the expression of personal and collective identities?
- How are intimate relationships manifested on MXit, and do they reflect relational norms found offline?
- Are these mobile practices common to all research samples, and does this indicate a common mobile youth culture among South African teens?
- Does this local mobile youth culture share any resemblance to the global mobile youth culture enshrined by Castells, et al (2007)?

In order to approach these questions, the study employed focus groups as the primary fieldwork method, supplemented by small group interviews and several one on one interviews. Unstructured focus groups allowed the researcher to gain a perspective on the opinions of learners and the interactions between their peers, where discourses are performed amidst the dynamics of the classroom environment (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005; Bishop, 2005; Smith & Hodkinson, 2005). Finally, the interviews further extrapolated the themes that

emerged in the focus groups. It was assumed that the historical homogeneity of racial groups across different geographical areas in Cape Town and Stellenbosch would roughly parallel the economic wellbeing of these samples. Apartheid has left a legacy of socio-spatial segregation in Cape Town that parallels racial and economic divides (Spinks, 2001), while South African schools continue to embody this socioeconomic polarisation (Soudien, 2007). The samples were of mixed gender composition and were sourced from schools in Khayelitsha, Cloeteville (a small township in the Stellenbosch municipality), Newlands and Milnerton.

Despite Stellenbosch having its own municipality, the sample will be collectively referred to as Cape Town, for Stellenbosch is a town that is geographically adjoined to the greater metropolitan area of the City of Cape Town. Furthermore, the study did not attempt to establish a correlation of behaviour across the boundaries of the city per se, but rather across a socioeconomically representative population of youth within the context of global norms of mobile appropriation. From the outset, the researcher posited the cellphone as a cultural artefact whose usage may differ, however slightly, across these areas due to the varying socioeconomic conditions that learners face. Differences in usage owing to locally-inscribed patterns of economic hardship have been observed by Horst and Miller (2006), Molony (2008), and Brinkman, de Bruijn, and Bilal (2009), especially in the perception of the device as an object of social status. Thus, by gauging the status of the cellphone, the researcher was granted insight into the social capital ascribed to the device, and the differential discourses peppering learners' descriptions.

Throughout the dissertation, we will examine the ways in which MXit is used in the context of everyday life as a teenager. This usage is segmented by themes that indicate a transition towards adulthood characterised by the fostering of social status (Part 1), mobility, autonomy and privacy (Part 2), connectivity to peer bases (Part 3), and romantic relationships

(Parts 4-6). The structural conditions in adolescents' lives (Soudien, 2007) are responsible for the sociocultural variations of this usage, but do not detract from the overall uniformity in the mobile practices that adolescents worldwide evince. As such, the thesis argues towards the realisation of Castells, et al's (2007) central hypothesis, namely that youth "find in mobile communication an adequate form of expression and reinforcement" (127). The digital consumption habits of 16-18 year olds are particularly pertinent to an understanding of the changes that MXit has brought about since its induction in May 2005, as they are one of the last generations to grow up with a memory of life *before* social media.

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CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review provides an overview of the current literature on the social implications of mobile telephony in the lives of youth. The seminal works surveyed in this review [namely, Castells, et al (2007); Ito, et al (2010a); Ito, Okabe, & Matsuda (2005); Katz (2008); Ling (2004); & Buckingham (2008)] have youth as their foci and stress the relationship between today's adolescents and their consumption of the mobile phone. The bodies of work that have been used as overarching theoretical perspectives in the Research Findings [namely, Meyrowitz (1986) and McLuhan's (1964) investigations into technology's influence on social behaviour] have not been surveyed as part of this literature review, as the review is primarily concerned with surveying the current literature on the social and relational uses of *mobile media* – and not electronic media. From this perspective, the focus on *youth* usage of mobiles has been guided as much by the current aims of the study as by the pre-existent field of literature on mobile communication. The chapter is divided into two broad themes entitled Social Networking and Identity that overlap due to the relationship between the socialisation and identity formation of adolescents, which is a chief focus of the thesis as a whole and the literature that anchors it. In this respect, Donner (2007) identifies two dimensions to this literature, namely;

[...] one that distinguishes studies of the determinants of mobile adoption from those that assess the impacts of mobile use, and from those focused on the interrelationships between mobile technologies and users. A secondary dimension identifies a sub-set of studies with a strong economic development perspective (2).

The literature review focuses on the second subset of Donner's (2007) first dimension: the interrelationship between mobile technology and its users. Earlier accounts of youth usage of cellphones, such as those conducted by Katz and Aakhus (2002), Ling (2004), Horst and Miller (2006), and even to an extent the influential work of Castells, et al (2007), have primarily focused on SMS-based communication, which was a reflection of the predominant mode of mobile interpersonal communication at the time. However, with the advent of smart phones, the Mobile Internet and the convergence of email, IM and photo-sharing (Ito, et al, 2010b; boyd, 2010; Lange & Ito, 2010), cellphones are increasingly examined as multi-dimensional mediators of social networks no longer limited to purely built-in features. In this sense, the mobile is the technological repository through which social networking takes place. It is for this reason that we will examine social networking forms in general as they are covered in the literature, such as IM, social media and email that were once thought to be the domain of desktop Internet usage, but now find themselves converged into the mobile landscape.

The social context and relational ramifications of perpetual connectivity to mobile technology is a key theme in much of this literature and will receive particular attention throughout the literature review, as it indicates a thematic concern in youth research that stresses the importance of communication in adolescents' lives [see Williams & Thurlow (2005) for a cogent analysis of adolescents' communicative practices]. However, as we will illustrate throughout the Research Findings chapters, many of the concerns enshrined below in the international literature are made 'hypersocial'² in the relentless communicative space of a locally-based, low-cost IM platform like MXit. As a result, the global themes that are

² Hypersocial is defined in line with Ito's (2003) original definition, namely; the active consumption and appropriation of multiple strands of media – often in concurrent fashion – by a predominantly young user base who are digitally literate, and whose communication operates in a synchronous environment of textual exchange and production between similarly-networked peers.

characteristic of the mobile youth culture need to be tempered by a consideration of the local ways under which mobile telephony is adopted and appropriated. Minimal research has been conducted in the field of African youths' usage of mobiles. In this respect, the study will attempt to augment this body of work with the research findings, addressing a gap in academic research regarding a technology that has shown unprecedented resonance among young people the world over. Where the research findings do not reinforce the literature (and vice versa, as is customary with the cyclical nature of academic writing), the literature will be acknowledged for its worth, yet will not be given the same level of attention as the studies that focus on the role of the device in mediating adolescent relationships and identities. Therein lies the research kernel of the thesis, for there is a growing trend in academia to examine the intimate nuances of mobile phone use pertaining to youth subculture – a shift in focus that is invariably linked to the rise and popularity of social networking as a phenomenon in and of itself.

Social Networking

Relentless connectivity.

The cellphone's role in maintaining social networks is a common theme alluded to in the international literature on mobile communication and is intrinsically linked to the phenomenon of mediated social networking. The chapter will explore the contemporary literature on social networking through the cellphone in particular, but will also take into account the broader analyses of digital technologies and their resonance in youth culture identified by Ito, et al (2010a), Ito, et al (2005) and Buckingham (2008). Much of this literature identifies youth as the chief adopters and appropriators of digital technology, as they traditionally have been with earlier forms of mobile communication like the pager and SMS (Hjorth, 2009; Okada, 2005; Matsuda, 2005). However, the study posits that these

technologies, though enthusiastically embraced by youth the world over (Castells, et al, 2007), are still limited to predominantly developed world contexts, so it is in this respect that we will examine the nondevelopmental uses of mobile telephony identified by Molony (2008) and de Bruijn, Nyamnjoh, & Brinkman (2009a). There is no way to predict the manner in which adolescents will appropriate a device and its concomitant applications, as the popularity and utility of the technology is determined by the resonance it has in the culture in which it is consumed (Castells, et al, 2007; Goggin, 2006).

The common thread in much of the modern literature on mobile communication is that youth ascribe a firm degree of value to the device for its facilitation of the social networks that are so important for friendship (boyd, 2010; Campbell, 2008; Bosch, 2008) and intimate relations (Jin & Peña, 2008; Jacobson, 2008). These networks grow in prominence as adolescents are socialised away from parents towards their peers (Chen, 2009; Levinson, 2004; Ling & Ytirri, 2002). The mediation of social networks is explored by Castells, et al (2007), Ling and Pedersen (2005) and Katz (2008) with specific reference to the mobile phone, while Ito, et al (2010a), boyd (2010) and Alemán and Wartman (2009) provide a more nuanced suppository of research on social networking pertaining to digital technologies and Facebook (respectively). These are a few of the key authors in this field, the former of whom provide the global texts dealing with the social impact of mobile media, while the latter explore the social and relational uses of social networking among adolescents in the United States specifically. The key focus of these texts is the resonance – and use – of mediated social networking in youth subculture. More specifically, much of this literature focuses on the use of the cellphone for mediating the interpersonal relationships that are so central to the lives of twenty-first century adolescents. This is evidenced by boyd (2010) and boyd and Ellison's (2007) investigations into the participatory practices of friendship on social networking sites, Bosch's (2008) inquiry into the mediation of adolescent relationships via

MXit, and Madianou and Miller's (2011) examination of the mediation of transnational familial relationships via the Internet and mobile telephony.

Jin & Peña (2008) and Blackman (2010) have examined the importance of the cellphone for facilitating the healthy functioning of relationships by allowing constant communication between teens, although they have highlighted the potential for relational conflict caused by the intensely frequent, toneless nature of this usage. Miller (2009) has approached the relational role of the cellphone from a material culture paradigm that is reminiscent of Goggin (2006) and du Gay, Hall, Janes, Mackay, & Negus' (2003) cultural studies analyses of the cellphone and Sony Walkman (respectively). Like Hills' (2009) analysis of the convergence of public and private practices via the mobile, Miller (2009) posits the technology as a cultural object that is intertwined with the material conditions of everyday life and its attendant relationships. Miller (2009) emphasises the utilitarian role of the device in teenage relationships, which are mobile only insofar as they are mediated by what is, at its core, a physically portable device.

Mobile phones have been studied for their mediation of sociality and intimacy, and this is none more so evident than in the early foray into mobile communication conducted by Katz and Aakhus (2002). In this seminal text, Fortunati (2002) investigates the potential for intimacy within the inherently public, social usage of the mobile phone. The intimate, the extraneous, the public and the private merge into one as the mobile is used for both 'private talk' and 'public performance':

The mobile phone is the communicative instrument that helps these opposing concepts come closer together by unifying them, and it favors the progressive encroachment of intimacy in the public sphere and of extraneousness in the private sphere [...] This instrument allows us to capture the intimacy of interpersonal relations

while moving from one place to another, that is, in a public dimension, traditionally the place of extraneousness in social relations (49).

Linked to the binary oppositions outlined by Fortunati (2002) is the overlap of boundaries between the private and public identified by Matsuda (2005). Here, Matsuda uses the example of the contentious blurring of private and public etiquette when people – particularly teenagers – engage in telephonic conversations with their peers while in the social space of Japan's public transit system. Concerns over a decline in public manners and an erosion of conventional social relationships are at the core of the moral panic identified by Matsuda (2005) in his discourse analysis of Japanese *keitai*³ appropriation, and are congruous with the examination of the public discourse of MXit conducted by Chigona, et al (2009) and Chigona and Chigona (2008). Central to these local analyses is the perception that cellphones are encouraging detachment from physical social contact, thus providing a medium through which communication with anonymous others can take place. Hills (2009) attributes this phenomenon to the cellphone's mobility in allowing the individual to retreat into their own private social space within the public arena. In this way, desires for privacy visibly increase the perceived barrier of communication between adults and children (Garrett & Williams, 2005; Thurlow & Warwick, 2005).

Yet, as Ito and Okabe illustrate (2005), these online social networks are authentic media through which youth communicate and coordinate their social lives, and in fact encourage an extension of pre-existing social relationships into the networks of choice in cyberspace. This finding parallels boyd (2010) and Pascoe's (2010) analyses, who advocate

³ *Keitai*, roughly translated as 'something you carry with you', is the Japanese term for the cellphone. In urban Japan, cellphones are not defined as external entities introduced from the outside, but rather by their intimate, technosocial embeddedness in users' lives (Ito, 2005a).

the role of friendship and intimacy in providing the cornerstones of the relational practices that manifest in these online communities and teenagers' lives in general. Habuchi (2005) refers to these myriad communities as 'telecocoon', while Matsuda (2005) highlights the selectivity involved in creating intimate communities to the extent that they become communities of choice, primarily composed of relationships that are established in co-present social practices. Matsuda (2005) points to a growing trend in urban Japan to prefer selective interpersonal relationships primarily composed of weak ties over stronger, firmly-entrenched relationships. Suffice to say that *keitai* facilitate this organisation of social relations by virtue of their ability to create networks of choice – as Horst and Miller (2006) have illustrated. The construction of peer-centric social networks identified by Habuchi (2005) and Matsuda (2005) is a defining feature of mediated social networking, and echoes the writing of Donath (2004), who posits that adolescents actively use 'sociable media' to enhance their existing social relations. In these analyses, the user is positioned at the centre of overlapping networks, able to control and regulate their communication with others while forming new ties at the same time.

The maintenance of relationships is, therefore, a defining feature of adolescent usage of the cellphone and is a common theme in the geographically regional or 'national' analyses of Ito, et al (2005), Chigona, et al (2009) and Chigona and Chigona (2008). In this respect, Castells, et al (2007) argue that the mobile phone facilitates constant connectivity to peer-centric networks by virtue of its existence at the epicentre of so many overlapping relationships and routine social practices. Ito and Okabe (2005) refer to this connectivity as 'ambient virtual co-presence', where the perpetual 'openness' of *keitai* communication channels allows users to maintain peripheral awareness of similarly connected peers while still performing their daily routines.

Horst and Miller (2006) and Duck (2007) highlight the use of mobile telephone calls for purposes of connecting to friends through quick, seemingly trivial conversations that symbolically act as a cue to the importance of the corresponding user. Taylor and Harper (2002) and Taylor and Harper (2003), on the other hand, focus specifically on SMSing, hypothesising that the casual exchanges of text messages function as a form of gift-giving that is reserved for a select few, thus providing a level of insight into the relational nature of teenagers' social relationships. Sims' (2010a) analysis is largely analogous to that of Ito and Okabe (2005), boyd (2010) and Pascoe (2010), who find that mobile communication allows teens to transpose their stronger-tied, co-present social networks into the mass of networked others comprising cyberspace. In Sim's (2010) analysis, the limits imposed on rural adolescents' mobility are circumvented via peer-to-peer socializing in the shared social space that is the online social network. These analyses are intrinsically linked to findings by White and White (2008), who explore the use of mobiles by tourists visiting New Zealand, who use SMS for staying in touch with loved ones abroad in an often spontaneous manner to relay interesting events and experiences of the day. From this perspective, texting allows users to stay constantly attuned to the emotional wellbeing of their families, while simultaneously receiving support and sustenance for their own experiences in the unfamiliar territory of a new country.

The cellphone allows users to traverse the limitations imposed by time and space by virtue of its mobility and connectivity, although, as Castells, et al (2007) point out, users have preferentially chosen connectivity over mobility by frequently opting to use the device from fixed and stable locations. A by-product of this connectivity and mobility is the weakening of traditional adherence to time and scheduling of social events, for the mobile allows users to coordinate their lives with others on the move and at any time (Rheingold, 2002; Ling, 2004). In this culture of connectivity, users can fill their free time with mediated interaction,

irrespective of geographical location, as the concepts of time and space, once thought to be inseparable, now operate within the framework of these ubiquitous communication networks.

The erosion of free time via place and distance-spanning communication is the cornerstone of Castells, et al's (2007) 'space of flows and timeless time', while the flexibility of this interaction with respect to 'killing time' is explored by Dobashi (2005), Ito and Bittanti (2010). Text messaging, whether via the SMS form or IM, therefore facilitates communication between intimate and peripheral relations, as it affords the user the constant 'link-up' (Horst & Miller, 2006) required to strengthen the bonds of friendship and romantic relations. It is unobtrusive, can be conducted in private or public, and allows for short, seemingly trivial messages to be exchanged throughout the day in a myriad of social practices. In Ito and Okabe's (2005) analysis, text messaging facilitates the integration of peer networks into both old and new social practices. Despite the presence of so many weak ties (Kadushin, 2004) in these communication networks, Ito and Okabe (2005) on the other hand emphasise that it is the *feeling* of connection to a handful of strong relationships that guides these sporadic bouts of messaging:

Unlike voice calls, which are generally point-to-point and engrossing, messaging can be a way of maintaining ongoing background awareness of others, and of keeping multiple channels of communication open [...] These messages define a social setting that is substantially different from direct interpersonal interaction characteristic of a voice call, text chat, or face-to-face one-on-one interaction. These messages are predicated on the sense of ambient accessibility, a shared virtual space that is generally available between a few friends or with a loved one (264).

Castells, et al (2007) coin the term 'relentless connectivity' in describing the virtual co-presence explored by Ito and Okabe (2005), White and White (2008) and Sims (2010b),

emphasising that the ever-present *possibility* of communication with spatially dispersed peers matters as much as the communication itself. This finding correlates with Duck (2007), who examines the role of mobile voice calls in mediating the relational lives of adults by posing the simple question, *How does new technology affect relational life?* Duck (2007) echoes Jin & Peña's (2008) analysis, emphasising that the cellphone plays a vital role in sustaining romantic relationships because it makes communication with significant others possible on a quasi-perpetual basis:

The importance of the mobile phone is not that it produces constant contact but that it renders such contact possible. The stress on perpetual accessibility is a cue to the importance of the person and the need to be accessible so that others can order their lives satisfactorily (199).

Notwithstanding the above excerpt's similarity to Castells, et al's (2007) key finding, Duck (2007) tends to overlook a popular feature of the cellphone that so frequently dominates the literature on mobile youth cultures, namely; the appropriated nature of *texting*.

Appropriation.

Walton (2009), Barendregt (2008), Bell (2006) and Green and Singleton (2007) have examined the enthusiastic appropriation of texting by youth in South Africa, Indonesia, Asia and Britain (respectively). The development of modern texting has challenged conventional language norms by appropriating language to fit into the limited space constraints imposed by mobile messaging (Crystal, 2008). Duck's (2007) earlier excerpt is illustrative of the common tendency of 'international' or 'Western-centric' literature to undervalue the myriad ways in which mobile phones are appropriated in developing world and minority group contexts. The shortage in case-specific research pertaining to grassroots appropriation of the cellphone can be partly attributed to the focus on the developmental potential of mobile technology. This is

none more so evident than in pilot projects – and indeed even longitudinal studies like that undertaken by Tucker, Blake, Marsden, Pearson and Westerveld (2007) commissioned by nongovernmental organisations and statutory bodies – where the cellphone is championed as a harbinger of economic development and a proviso of health communication [see Shackleton (2007) and Ford and Batchelor (2007) for examples of these projects], spurred on by a genuine desire for personal development in Africa (Burrell, 2009). Though the role of information and communication technologies for development (ICT4D) occupies a different field to the relational uses of mobile media that we are currently investigating; these projects often rest on the assumption that the presence of technology can effect positive social change. However, as the following chapter illustrates, usage by youth in marginal and developing world settings is often unpredictable and focuses on the simple sustenance of everyday relationships more than any concerted attempt at holistic betterment.

The domestic appropriation of mobile telephony, as well as the social impact of this usage, is seldom explored in adequate depth even in published anthologies like Ling and Pedersen (2005), Castells, et al (2007) and Katz (2008). This is despite the staggering demand for mobile services in Africa (and in particular; sub-Saharan Africa) that make the continent the fastest growing wireless market in the world (Donner, 2008; Bosch, 2009 & Burrell, 2009). Castells, et al (2007), Molony (2008) and Donner and Gitau (2009) explore the phenomenon of ‘beeping’ (or ‘missed calling’), which, as a social practice in the high-priced African telecommunications landscape has been appropriated out of financial necessity. Molony’s (2008) qualitative case study of the nondevelopmental uses of mobile communication in Tanzania investigates the inherently local, gender-based power dynamics that govern usage of the device, particularly when it comes to the compensated dates and transactional sex offered in exchange for ownership of the device, which functions as a cogent status symbol in Africa.

The creation of new communicative practices in response to financial or social networking needs recalls Horst and Miller's (2006) ethnographic study of low income Jamaicans' appropriation of the mobile phone [see the development of prepaid phone cards in Castells, et al's analysis (2007) and post-pager SMSing in Matsuda (2005) for more examples of youth-led grassroots appropriation of mobile technologies]. In Horst and Miller's (2006) analysis, Jamaicans initiated brief calls composed of seemingly trivial subject matter in an effort to expand their social networks by 'linking up' with new users. Like text messaging, these calls keep Jamaicans *feeling* connected to their co-present and virtual social relationships in a way that establishes the importance of the act of connecting over the content of the call itself.

The above authors illustrate the ways in which users adapt their usage to local conditions of financial and infrastructural hardship by appropriating the device to their own ends, even if those ends may seem unpalatable to users in the developed world. These exchanges, harmful as they may be, underline the need for connectivity that is so central to adolescents' relational lives (Matsuda, 2005; Habuchi, 2005; Alemán & Wartman, 2009; boyd, 2010). For many adolescents, removal of the device is tantamount to disconnection from their social networks and entails a disruptive effect in their social lives (Castells, et al, 2007; Ling, 2004). Nevertheless, it is perhaps useful for future studies to contextualise the local intricacies of African mobile practices by examining the ways in which this connectivity is established under the fiscal, infrastructural and social constraints that are relevant in the developing world, but especially pertinent in Africa.

Connectivity eclipsing mobility.

'Networked sociability' is the by-product of this increasing selectivity in social coordination, leading to networks that revolve around the focal point of the individual, yet simultaneously operate within the peer groups that structure these networks (Castells, et al,

2007). Closely related to this analysis is the exigent notion of 'networked individualism' that Castells, et al (2007) identify, where the portability and ubiquitous connectivity of mobile telephony erode the spatial boundaries of traditional community, neighbourhood and kinship ties. Like White and White's (2008) analysis, this move toward networks of choice has closely followed the advancement of globalisation and its concomitant spread of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), where contact between strong ties occurs at distance, united by the communication networks that connect these geographically decentralised network members, yet at no point eroding the strength of the bond that holds these relationships together (Miyata, Boase, Wellman, & Ikeda, 2005). In this way, Castells, et al (2007) identify connectivity eclipsing mobility as the cornerstone of this mobile network society. As a result, the definition of the device has changed from one that fosters mobility as a substitute for the fixed-location telephone, to one that now promotes relentless connectivity in addition to mobility.

The critique of popular claims over the cellphone's mobility has been documented even prior to the design and marketing of smart phones (the latter of which foster the connectivity advocated by the above authors). Fortunati (2002) explores several definitions of mobility, most noteworthy of which is the traditional classification of the cellphone "as an instrument that accompanies human movement" (44). However, in terms of its practical usage, most respondents in Fortunati's (2002) study reported having seldom used the device while their bodies were in transit, instead opting for fixed locations (such as the home), and situations where the body is comparatively stationary inside a mobile environment (such as a train). Connectivity is the pivotal quality of this usage, with the cellphone providing the platform to communicate with others in the space that is beyond the user's immediate physical environment.

Mobility, it would seem, is relatively tangential when compared to young people's overwhelming use of mobile phones (and by extension; social networking *writ large*) for the simple pleasures of staying in touch, making arrangements and engaging in mediated social communication (Alemán & Wartman, 2009; boyd, 2010). In these analyses, teens utilise social networking for its simple 'fun' factor as much as they employ the device for the deliberate coordination of social activities. This is the focal point upon which Ito, et al (2010b) hypothesise that social media have been so embraced by teens because they facilitate the simple pleasures of 'hanging out, messing around and geeking out'. Indeed, this analysis recalls that of Fujimoto (2005), who highlights the playful nature of the device as reason enough to garner its popularity in Japanese society:

Keitai are less like books, which tend to be decontextualized, de-localized, and escapist media, and more like *shikohin*, as objects of recontextualization, relocalization, and actual media objects (91).

Fujimoto (2005) views *keitai* as a rival *shikohin* to the more traditional *shikohin* of chewing gum, tobacco, tea and watches, occupying a position of status in Japanese society that is ingrained in the consumption of cultural objects prized for their stimulatory, yet non-nutritional qualities (Takada, 2008). The mobile phone has, as Fujimoto (2005) illustrates, been reinvented by Japanese youth to accommodate the pre-existing needs for play and socialising. However, there is further need to address the question initially posed by Goggin (2006), namely whether this mediated sociality merely exacerbates pre-existing needs for communication, or creates new ones. The study will attempt to address this question with reference to the consumption habits and relational practices of South African teens and MXit, for it is through the constant availability of communication with similarly-connected romantic partners that usage is most frequent (Jin & Peña, 2008).

Mobility, therefore, can no longer be considered the defining feature of mobile media, as the device is increasingly lauded by peers, industry analysts and academics for its penchant for social networking, of which connectivity is its chief facilitator:

Mobility, used as it is in our lexicon, is a noun, because in the minds of many it defines (incorrectly) an application [...] It is a technology option, no more and no less. Ubiquity, on the other hand, is used as an adjectival modifier to qualify the nature of an individual's access to the network. Ubiquitous access implies the delivery of something that is superior because it is – everywhere (Shepard, 2005:2).

Both Fortunati's (2002) findings and Shepard's (2005) observations tap into Castells, et al's (2007) broad compendium of mobile communication. Here, the authors recognise the growth of the mobile Internet, lowering costs of smart phones, expansion of online social networks and wholesale integration of the cellphone into everyday social practices as underlining the growing stature of connectivity in this usage.

Domestication.

Largely absent from Castells, et al's (2007) analysis is a consideration of the myriad ways in which cellphones are actively domesticated into routine social practices by users themselves. Castells, et al (2007) focus on the macro diffusion of mobile media throughout the globe, yet do not take into account the 'domestication' approach pioneered by Silverstone, Hirsch and Morley (1992). Domestication theory analyses the appropriation, objectification, incorporation and conversion of household technologies – from the microwave oven to the television – as consumers engage in a reciprocal relationship with the technology, adapting its uses while changing their own patterns of behaviour in response to the technology itself (Jensen, Thrane, & Nilsen, 2005; Silverstone & Hirsch, 1992b). Hijazi-Omari and Ribak (2008) and Lemish and Cohen (2005) investigate the domestic uses of

mobile telephony by Israeli teens who, like many teens around the world, lack mobility and are dependent on their parents. Hijazi-Omari and Ribak (2008) illustrate how the mobile phone provides the means to extend teenage girls' relational autonomy by chatting in private with illicit boyfriends, unbeknownst to their parents. Similarly, Lemish and Cohen (2005) illustrate the use of the mobile in coping with teens' current circumstances. Here, the authors point to the increasing domestication (traditionally constructed as the one bastion of femininity) and *feminisation* of the mobile as it is increasingly used for facilitating conversation by both males and females alike. Hjorth (2008) parallels the Israeli-centric studies provided above, defining domestication as an ongoing process. Here, boundaries between 'private talk and public performance' (Katz & Aakhus, 2002) are blurred in the consumption of what is, despite its mobility, a technology that is still predominantly used in the home environment.

The cellphone is popularly used in the overlapping contexts of domestic social practices, from watching television in a public viewing area like the lounge to SMSing in the private space of the bedroom, where the technology in turn feeds and sustains the existing power geometries of the household (Katz & Sugiyama, 2005; Jensen, et al, 2005; Fortunati, 2005). The key thread in this analysis is the role of the technology in mediating the relationships between members of the domestic household and the greater public. However, Jensen, et al (2005) offer a critique of Silverstone, Hirsch and Morley's (1992a) domestication model, citing the mobility of the cellphone as reason enough to circumvent the intra-household basis of this theory. Yet, as with most analyses of digital technology, research cannot, in many instances, keep up with developments in the industry itself. The growth of mobile social networking in the years subsequent to Ling and Pedersen's (2005) compilation of mobile communication studies is testament to the pace at which technology eclipses the speed at which academia manages to interpret it.

The growing appreciation of social networking as a signature component of young people's everyday relational practices is reflected in the recent turn towards more ethnographic studies of mobile communication [see Ito, et al (2010a) for a US-centric analysis of this usage; Horst and Miller (2006); and Ito, et al (2005) for quintessentially 'regional' studies of the appropriation of the cellphone]. Contemporary literature has illustrated that the mobile phone – and its associated applications – enables adolescents to remain connected to the social networks that ordinarily dominate their offline social practices. As many of these social practices are taking place in fixed locations where the body is relatively immobile (such as the peer-centric bedroom) [Horst, 2010], it would seem that any critique of domestication would presumably be levelled against earlier interpretations of the mobile phenomenon, when mobility was the catchphrase and social networking of the sort we see today was still in its embryonic stages.

Identity

There are several overlapping themes in the literature on mobile communication that revolve around the notion of identity, both of which are inextricably linked. However, for the sake of clarity they will initially be examined as separable entities. The first centres on the expression of identity and status via the aesthetic design and display of the device as evinced by the writing of Campbell (2008), Goggin (2006), Shade (2007) and Lemish and Cohen (2005). The second focuses on the expression of identity through the myriad conversations, practices and relationships that are performed over the medium, as illustrated by Green and Singleton (2007), Bosch (2008) and Habuchi (2005). However, there are several authors who make a distinction between personal and collective identity in mediated interactive spaces, many of whom, like Buckingham (2008), Staltdt (2008), Goldman, et al (2008) and Byrne (2008) examine the expression of identity via digital technologies in their entirety. Despite

the latter authors' contributions, there is still a dearth of research when it comes to assessing the role of digital technology in *constructing* identity, which the current study attempts to address. At present, however, the predominant themes in the existing literature will be examined, with particular attention being paid to the social status of the device and the concomitant expression of identity vis-à-vis this display, as well as the mediated conversations within the mobile sphere.

Social status.

In terms of public usage, Goggin (2006), Castells, et al (2007), Green and Singleton (2007), Shade (2007) and Bosch (2008) draw attention to the conspicuous display of the device as being not dissimilar to “a piece of jewellery” (Ling and Haddon, 2008:139). In these readings, the cellphone is posited as a status symbol by virtue of its ability to *convey* a sense of style and ‘coolness’ in the technologically capacious lives of the generation who are growing up in a media-saturated era of social networking sites (Srivastava, 2008; Green & Singleton, 2007; Alemán & Wartman, 2009). From this perspective, the cellphone is a commodity that allows the individual to construct a sense of self (Lemish & Cohen, 2005) that is invariably linked to the culture of conspicuous consumption defined by American popular culture (Bosch, 2008; Grainger, 2009). However, what is problematic with, for example, Ling (2004), Katz (2006), and Katz and Aakhus’ (2002) analyses, is that the cellphone is primarily examined from a Western, developed world framework to the chagrin of the local processes of appropriation that shape the media into cultural artefacts at a different pace to that witnessed in the developed world, as Brinkman, et al (2009), Horst and Miller (2006) and Castells, et al (2007) have illustrated.

Green and Singleton (2007) provide a cogent analysis of British minority youths’ use of mobile media, and hint at the varying levels of status ascribed to the object that are dependent on teens’ social contexts:

Style says something about social identity and status, with peers sharing similar tastes in phones, which is also linked to their financial capability. Although the mobile does not have the same social status that it had in the early 1990s [...], our research discovered that ownership of different models and capabilities earned young people different levels of social, cultural and sociotechnical status and capital, depending on context (519).

The emblematic role of the cellphone as status symbol is identified by Bosch (2008) in her qualitative inquiry into adolescent girls' cellphone practices in Cape Town, South Africa. Globally, the cellphone is represented in academic literature as a potent marker of social status [see Goggin (2006) for a Euro-centric analysis of the commodification of the cellphone; Horst and Miller (2006) for an examination of the role of the cellphone in bequeathing status to low-income Jamaicans; and Grainger (2009) for an assessment of the use of the device in the identity formation of South African students]. On a global scale, Hills (2009) describes the device as a “culturally and ontologically loaded object, made to ontologically secure and carry presentations of self-identity” (116). From this perspective, one can understand the iconic status of the cellphone in Japan, where *keitai* function as embodiments of identity whose social status is symbolically expressed via the adorning and display of aesthetically-tailored straps (Fujimoto, 2005). Such emphasis on spectacle and personal expression is not, however, limited to mobile-saturated Japan, as Ling (2004) has illustrated with regard to users pretending to have telephonic conversations in the US in order to be seen to be actively using the device (Ling, 2004).

Despite the alarming growth of mobile telephony in Africa that saw one in three Africans having access to the device as of 2008 (de Bruijn, et al, 2009b), possession is still limited to a select few, with the sharing of devices being commonplace [Shackleton (2007);

Castells, et al (2007); and Kreutzer (2008)]. Molony (2008) illustrates how the cellphone is a desired communicative possession in Africa that is heavily laden with social status, which to a degree contextualises the practices of ‘transactional sex’ undertaken in exchange for ownership of the device. This practice of sexual solicitation (or prostitution, as it can just as easily be defined) is not new to mobile communication when one takes into account the Japanese practice of *enjo kousai* identified by Matsuda (2005), Habuchi (2005) and Tomita (2005). The relative harmony of these practices across divergent socio-geographical strata and national settings is testimony to the considerable value of the technology in adolescents’ lives and the lengths to which teens will go to attain possession of the status-bearing technology.

The issue of social status is evident in these practices and is the basis upon which Ling (2004) defines social capital, for the device is frequently posited in these analyses as the primary way in which youth communicate with peers outside their physically-defined social settings:

Social capital describes the web of trust and reciprocity that, in effect, binds the individual to society. Social capital is, on the whole, positive, since our ability to trust other social actors facilitates the functioning of society (177-178).

Although he acknowledges the ‘dark side’ of social capital pertaining to the development of cliques and gangs, Ling’s (2004) assertion is situated within a fundamentally Euro-centric context and does not take into account the *extent* to which adolescent identity is tied to the status of the cellphone in Africa. This can be evinced by the anecdotal tale of Lilly Loveless’ conversations with a shopkeeper in de Bruijn, et al’s *Mobile Phones: The New Talking Drums of Everyday Africa* (2009a). Here, the shopkeeper indicts the conspicuous use and display of the device in public, where students purportedly rush to their bags to retrieve

their phones largely because they want to be *seen* talking on it, even in designated silent zones like the Church (Nyamnjoh, 2009).

In light of these seemingly peculiar local conditions, it becomes clear that there is a need to address the distinctively African conditions of adoption that see a heightened value ascribed to the technology in the context of the technological late adopters of Africa (Rogers, 2003; Castells, et al, 2007). Ling's study (2004) was published 5 years prior to de Bruijn, et al's (2009a), but this temporal lapse tends to underscore the enormous differences in global diffusion and possession of the device, and as a result; the level of social status ascribed to it. In light of this, early analyses examining the cellphone's impact on society often have as their focal point the United States' telecommunications landscape and are thus viewed from a developed world, Western paradigm [examples include Katz and Aakhus' *Perpetual Contact* (2002), Ling's *The Mobile Connection* (2004) and Katz' *Magic in the Air* (2006)].

The study attempts to address the need for local research into the social implications of mobile media by examining the social context upon which Mxit has been adopted and used by local teens. It is in this context that the offline discourses constituting users' identities are inscribed onto their online practices (Buckingham, 2008; Staltdt, 2008). The local origins, reasons and manifestations of Castells, et al's mobile youth culture (2007) will be examined within the theoretical framework that examines the interaction between users and digital technology pioneered by Meyrowitz (1986). This approach emphasises the role of the medium itself in dictating change in social behaviour due to its frequent consumption, and will be used to indicate the social change that the domestically- embedded mobile has wrought.

In the broad-spanning global literature on mobile communication, it would seem that the social status of the mobile phone is to a large degree universal. However, there is a greater need to examine these facets of mobile communication within the burgeoning markets

of Africa. It is in Africa that the stark difference between the haves and the have-nots exacerbates the practices already evident in the developed world – practices that are undertaken in a quest to attain ownership of the device, thus reflecting the user’s social status, and by extension; their individualism and identity as well (Brinkman, et al, 2009; Pfaff, 2009).

Performance of identity.

In her examination of social networking sites in the friendship-driven relational practices of American teens, boyd (2010) identifies status as being intrinsically linked to adolescents’ definitions of popularity. boyd (2010) takes the status-laden display of the device advocated by Ling and Haddon (2008) further by advocating that adolescent status is invariably linked to the perception of ‘coolness’ in relation to one’s peers, and thus the identity that teens form in relation to others. Since the mobile embodies the latest trends as an iconic symbol of style and fashion, thus playing host to the power-based relations between peers, the device plays an active role in the negotiation of status and popularity among its young users. From this perspective, locating oneself in the *mise-en-scène* of peer relations is of enormous importance to teens’ sense of personal and social identity and is primarily why social networking sites have been so embraced by the youth populace. Once again, however, there are far fewer mobiles in Africa, so there is a dire need to establish the ways in which local adolescents attribute their status to the sought-after technology – and the lengths they will go to attain this status.

boyd’s (2010) analysis draws some parallels to Castells, et al (2007), and Ling and Haddon’s (2008) findings on the pre-established need for relationship-building in adolescents’ relational lives. However, boyd’s (2010) analysis comes at a time when the cellphone as an ontological object cannot be examined outside the framework of social networking sites in their entirety, for it is through the mobile that social networking is being

increasingly mediated by teens. Indeed, boyd and Ellison's (2007) earlier – though no less seminal – examination of the then-current milieu of social networking sites is somewhat nostalgic in that Facebook – and indeed; mobile Facebook usage – was in no way comparable to the hegemony that it holds today. In boyd's (2010) later analysis, these online interactions facilitate the crafting of identities that are fundamentally similar to those that manifest in tangible social relationships, yet offer new potential for mirroring and magnification in the online social space of social networking. Although boyd (2010) argues that these online identities are extensions of those found offline, her analysis hints at the emancipatory qualities of the Internet identified by Lister, Dovey, Giddings, Grant, & Kelly (2009) in their discussion of the gendered experimentation of users' identities in chatrooms, and Haddon (2003) in her examination of the role of texting in circumventing the domestic boundaries imposed by adults.

The increased levels of confidence associated with textual conversations is a common theme in these analyses, and is examined by Horst and Miller (2006) with reference to the breakups initiated by female users over the SMS form, and Jacobson (2008) and Waskul and Vannini (2008) in their examination of online dating with anonymous partners. However, as Walton (2009), Tomita (2005), and Lister, et al (2009) illustrate, this experimentation with identity – whether via MXit pseudonyms or fictitious avatars – is promoted by the anonymity of unknown contacts:

In our communication with intimate strangers, we present our pluralistic and flexible selves. It is a method for relaying our honest feelings. These multiple cyberspace identities are all the “real me”. We used to sit in front of the computer connected to the Internet to enjoy our online personas in chats and e-mail. Now such online

personas can be carried with us wherever we go with Internet-enabled *keitai* (Tomita, 2005:198).

Horst, Herr-Stephenson, & Robinson (2010), Buckingham (2008), and Alemán and Wartman (2009), echo Tomita's (2005) assertion by describing these online identities as fluid, multiple and transitory extensions of the self, crafted out of the myriad identities performed in offline conditions and selectively mobilised depending on the context of the conversation and the relational nature of the recipient.

As Horst (2010), boyd (2010) and Kang (2008) emphasise, the identities that youth perform in their online social practices need not mimic those found offline, as a key tenet of virtual communication is the blurring of online and offline behaviour in a perpetual space of hypersocial exchange (Ito, 2003). To illustrate this extension of identity, Horst (2010) uses the example of a popular teen at the centre of many social circles at school who can just as easily find an outlet for expression in an online gaming community that would ordinarily be shunned in offline contexts for being 'uncool'. These communities are characterised by shared norms and practices that are, in the case of social networking, distinctive of a clearly demarcated youth culture (Bosch, 2008; Kang, 2008; Horst, et al, 2010). Moreover, as several authors attest, the display and expression of identity enshrined at the start of this chapter involve the interlinked *performance* of identity, and thus, the *formation* of identity around an age-specific youth culture that is characterised by its own norms, language and social practices (Castells, et al, 2007; Ling and Haddon, 2008; Campbell, 2006; boyd, 2010).

Kang (2008) defines the core characteristics of online communities as:

1. members sharing goals, interests or activities that provide the primary reason for belonging to the community;

2. members engage in repeated, active participation and there are often intense interactions, strong emotional ties, and shared activities occurring among participants;
3. reciprocity of information, support, and services among members; and
4. there is a shared context of social conventions, language, and protocols (419).

Kang (2008) examines the supplementary role of the modern mobile phone for blogging, noting the dialectical relationship between online and offline communities that converge in online social spaces. Here, social interaction is fostered between people who are already members of pre-existing, co-present relationships, as the mobile phone conflates both communities. In this respect, Kang's (2008) study draws similar parallels to Green and Singleton's (2007) analysis of the role of mobile communication in mediating the gendered and ethnic identities of minority populations in contemporary Britain. The identities of these young Pakistani-British Muslim women and men are reflexively performed in the seemingly mundane 'chitchat' between peers. As with Kang's (2008) study, these practices are not endemic to adolescents *per se*, but are prevalent in the conceptual subcategory of youth, who actively use the mobile to construct a sense of self that is positioned vis-à-vis adults and non-users (Green & Singleton, 2008; Castells, et al, 2007; Staltdt, 2008; Wilska, 2003). Like Bosch's (2008) analysis of South African adolescent girls' use of MXit, and Campbell's (2006) examination of the fantasy of advertising and the lived reality of North American adolescent girls, these textual conversations are the terrain upon which communities of practice and identities are formed – and performed.

Green and Singleton (2007) stress that the inherently personal nature of the cellphone – and by extension, the conversations therein – allow these young women to resist and subscribe to the dominant discourses imposed on them by a myriad of outside forces, from advertising and media representations of femininity to the restrictions imposed by parental

authority, lack of mobility and disposable income; from perceptions of crime and safety to the cultural norms in which their lives are interminably intertwined; and the personal and collective identities they are assumed to hold. A relative level of freedom is made permissible by the perceived safety, privacy and autonomy facilitated by the device, which is, as Green and Singleton (2007) state, a key prop “in the production of young people’s identity projects” (523). From these readings it becomes clear that the notion of identity is a highly malleable, contestable *process* in mediated conversations. Identification with ‘similar others’ may govern the choice of contacts, but does not hold sway over the development of identity itself in the communities of practice that are constituted in the mobile sphere (Castells, et al, 2007; Horst, et al, 2010; boyd & Ellison, 2007).

The importance of culture for further research.

The broad field of literature on mobile communication is fraught with overlapping discussions ordinarily rooted in studies of Computer Mediated Communication (Kang, 2008; Tomita, 2005), social media (boyd, 2010; Pascoe, 2010), voice telephony (Bell, 2006; Gam Nkwi, 2009; Horst & Miller, 2006), photo-sharing (Martínez, 2010; Kato, Okabe, Ito, & Uemoto, 2005; Bosch, 2008), email (Miyata, et al, 2005), SMSing (Horst & Miller, 2006; Ling & Haddon, 2008), and IM (boyd, 2010; Bosch, 2008; Chigona & Chigona, 2008; Chigona, et al, 2009; Walton, 2009). However, as these practices have converged into the handheld singularity of modern smart phones, it is fairly common for authors of recent texts to treat these fields as adjunct constituents under the holistic umbrella known as ‘mobile communication’. Central to these texts is the way in which technology is characteristically adopted, embraced and appropriated by youth. This is none more so evident than in SMS texting, which was, globally speaking, a phenomenon whose popularity was almost single-handedly created by teens’ discovery of free messaging (Ling & Haddon, 2008).

A new mode of shorthand language has consequently evolved over time that is centred on the expressive use of slang and emoticons, and is most comprehensively employed by young users (Goggin, 2006; Ling, 2004; Ling & Haddon, 2008). This is, suffice to say, in part due to the financial constraints imposed on teenage communicative practices by limited spending power (Ling & Ytirri, 2002). Yet, Ling and Haddon (2008) and Matsuda (2005) identify the development of shorthand SMS lingo and jargon as a generational boundary between youth and the 'older generation'. This new mode of expression is, according to Walton (2009), particularly notable on South Africa's MXit client, where an exceptional form of abbreviated shorthand has seen the development of 'digital literacies' in order to adapt to the "initially unfamiliar alternative language regime on MXit" (vi). This language regime is interspersed with hybridised colloquialisms amalgamated from several of South Africa's languages, and is, like *keitai* communication in Japan, a distinctly authentic cultural artefact woven out of the multitudinous contexts of the respective society. Language is, as Castells, et al (2007) illustrate, intimately linked to the formation of culture, as it the "systematic production and communication of meaning" (184). As a result, Castells, et al (2007) emphasise that language and culture itself are evolving due to the continual production of meaning in the textual practices of this mobile youth culture (2007). Whether SMS or IM, the appropriation of existing language practices is at the heart of mobile texting, where youth are the chief instigators in this cultural production (Goggin, 2006).

Unlike Japan, the United States or Western Europe, which form the focal points of most global analyses of mobile proliferation, South Africa is a country with historically deep racial and classist dimensions that are exacerbated by the absence of a unified national identity (Boshoff & Strelitz, 2008). It is for this reason that further research is needed to adequately address the contexts upon which mobile media are appropriated in socially and economically exigent settings. In the small body of literature written thus far on teenage

consumption of MXit; Bosch (2008) and Walton (2009) have found that race is still a fairly stable predictor of corresponding contacts on MXit. However, this is further complicated by the classist dimensions of South African society (Seekings, 2008), where shared education can act as a mitigating factor in alleviating the dependence of race as a primary determinant of interaction. Online social spaces are not, as Byrne (2008) and Daniels (2008) illustrate, governed by unbridled freedom of communication, as the racial discourses of offline relations filter into mediated interactions. These locally-specific manifestations of identity will be explored in Part 6, which deals with the racial and classist dimensions of mobile relationships, but for now it is important to underline the inherent complexity of unravelling a phenomenon that is largely interpreted from within a Western paradigm in the international literature.

Goggin (2006) illustrates that Western concepts of modernity have been used to interpret the resonance of cellphones in youth markets around the world, yet cultural consumption practices are informed by a host of factors that are fundamentally local in their origins. The existing interpretive framework is, therefore, culturally-specific. The social context and social shaping of technology is the key point in this argument and is illustrated respectively by Haddon (2003) and Johnsen (2008) in their analyses of the domestic commonality of mobile telephony, and Okada (2005) and Castells, et al (2007) with reference to consumers' subversion of the intended uses of technology. Here, the device is personalised by its users to the extent that multinational companies struggle to construct products that fulfil the functional needs of local cultures and identities, as technology is frequently appropriated by the unpredictable market segment of youth (Goggin, 2006).

The existing framework used to interpret the social impact of mobile phones is, therefore, to a large degree culturally-specific, while the *practices* of appropriation are culturally-grounded. Furthermore, the relative similarity of these practices – as evinced by the

seminal work of Castells, et al (2007) used throughout this literature review – hint at the possibility of a mobile culture that is both global and local in its origins. However, there is a dearth of research pertaining to the local manifestations of this mobile youth culture in the context of Africa. Bosch (2008) has conducted the most pertinent South African study when it comes to assessing the mediating role of IM in adolescents’ identity formation and intimate relationships. Her study, though micro in scale, will be used as a platform from which to explore the mediating role of MXit in adolescents’ lives, as the author’s findings resonate with the current study and draw parallels to the observations made by Castells, et al (2007), Ito, et al (2010a), Ito, et al (2005) and Buckingham (2008), who provide the most comprehensive analyses of youth usage of digital media.

With the exception of the MXit-centric writing of Walton (2009), Parker, Makhubele, Ntlabati and Connolly (2007), Kreutzer (2008), Chigona and Chigona, and Chigona, et al (2009), most literature on the African reception of the mobile phone predominantly focuses on the role of the technology as an educational and developmental tool. Nonetheless, Kreutzer’s analysis (2008) is pertinent in that it examines the use of mobiles by lower-income African youth. Aside from the long-term ethnographic study conducted by Horst and Miller (2006), an analysis of this nature is almost wholly absent from the international literature on mobile communication, which predominantly focuses on the appropriation of the technology by teens who are already immersed in social media. As a result, there is a need to explore the contextual conditions upon which South African youth adopt and appropriate mobile technology, particularly low-cost mobile IM platforms like MXit, which are popularly used in the development of the cultural practices and identity projects of young users. We will commence this analysis by laying the foundations of the methodological and theoretical frameworks used in the research process. It is from this starting point that the existing literature surveyed above – insufficient as it may be at articulating the social impact of

cellphones among South African youth – can be tested in order to bear out the strengths and weakness of this fragmented body of work.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

The methodology chapter is lengthy in order to accommodate the various challenges posed by the diverse milieu of online and offline South African social relations. For the purposes of the study, ‘social’ is defined as a distinctly human experience – whether tangible or disembodied by virtual interaction – through which individuals and groups interact, communicate, behave, and exchange information (Meyrowitz, 1986). The study has employed a qualitative-interpretive method of inquiry, anchored by a range of theories made possible by qualitative sampling. Nine focus groups, four small group interviews (composed of the researcher and two to three participants) and two one on one interviews were conducted across a socioeconomically diverse cross-section of high schools in Khayelitsha, Cloetesville, Milnerton and Newlands. The aim was to codify the behavioural themes in participants’ responses into manageable chapters in the Research Findings, most of which illustrate some manifestation of adolescents’ identity construction and expression vis-à-vis mobile technology.

From the outset, 16-18 year olds were deemed to be avid appropriators of the application, particularly when one considers adolescents’ enthusiastic appropriation of mobile media identified in Chapter 2. Ascertaining the nature of this appropriation within the context of Erikson’s (1968) theory of the ‘crisis of youth’ was a chief concern in establishing the role of the device in adolescents’ identity constructions. This project was granted added urgency due to MXit’s representation in the media and the current crisis of identity among South African youth (Mathoho & Ranchod, 2006). The study has as a secondary focus the *expression* of identity, which is predicated on the assumption that identity is constituted through discourse in social interactions (Buckingham, 2008). The aim was to ascertain whether these discourses were performed in cyberspace, and the relationship they had to

users' offline identities. As youth have been denied agency in the public discourse surrounding MXit, respondents were treated as research participants and not as research subjects in an attempt to recognise the perceived exclusivity of the device to young people (Castells, et al, 2007). Thus, the final aim of the study was to understand the local manifestations of the mobile youth culture that Castells, et al (2007) have postulated.

The Biologically-Situated Researcher

In order to assess the nature of this usage, qualitative research is the sole approach used in the study. The qualitative tradition is, as Denzin and Lincoln (2005b) illustrate, characterised by the subjective role of the researcher in the research process:

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible [...]

Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials [...] that describe routine and problematic moments and meaning in individuals' lives (3-4).

As the key function of a qualitative study is the recording, representation and textual interpretation of social phenomena, our understanding is invariably constructed through the act of interpretation itself (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005b). Furthermore, the qualitative-interpretive tradition is geared towards the representation and interpretation of cultural practices in their everyday, subjective experiences (Silverman, 2010), of which the ritualised usage of mobile media is classified as a cultural practice (Goggin, 2006). Furthermore, an interpretive paradigm allowed the researcher to constantly reflect on his own role in the process of knowledge construction. Like the respondents, he too is a member of an interpretive community upon entering the research process that invariably impacts the

epistemological meaning he ascribes to the ontological phenomena under scrutiny (Spicer, 2008):

Behind these terms stands the personal biography of the researcher, who speaks from a particular class, gender, racial, cultural, and ethnic community perspective [...]

Every researcher speaks from within a distinct interpretive community that configures, in its special way, gendered components of the research act (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005b:21).

The researcher is not a neutrally-detached observer, but an outsider whose own norms and practices may be radically alien to the research participants (Griffin & Bengry-Howell, 2008). This was particularly pronounced in the visits to the Khayelitsha schools, where respondents highlighted trends in concurrent relationships that were markedly different to the Western-centric cultural framework he had been socialised into (where the practice of concurrent relationships is not as common as it is among isiXhosa-speaking, black South African males as discussed in Part 5).

In the eyes of the teenage respondents, the researcher is a young, white, educated male studying at the University of Cape Town (UCT), residing in the Southern Suburbs, and a member of a minority racial grouping that still maintains a state of affluence in post-Apartheid Cape Town (Standing, 2003). The researcher was entering into the school environment itself; the everyday social space where adolescents socialise with their peers (boyd, 2010). However, in some cases, like Iqhayiya Secondary, respondents seemed to revere the fact that the researcher was on MXit himself. This encouraged a heightened enthusiasm towards the researcher's questions, perhaps due to the shared membership of a communicative platform that the Khayelitsha learners viewed as a popular thing to have. This observation is reflective of the identification enabled by the 'insider knowledge' that

Hollands (2003) shared with his young participants due to their mutual sensibilities in music. In this case, having a MXit account positively eroded the authority of the researcher in the current project to a limited degree.

Moore (2003) has emphasised the importance of familiarisation, particularly when research is undertaken by researchers who are young themselves. Although Moore (2003) was referring to the act of familiarisation with the geographical environ in which the fieldwork takes place, theorists like Meyrowitz (1986) have increasingly illustrated that electronic media entail mediated, albeit intangible, spaces of interaction, blurring the geographical logic of physical and mediated social spaces. In this sense, the researcher needed to establish some level of familiarity with the features of MXit that he did not ordinarily use, such as chatrooms, which function as social spaces in their own right (Lister, et al, 2009). Reflexivity, then, was essential in acknowledging the power differentials *and* familiarity of cultural objects between the biologically-situated researcher and the younger participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005b). However, as Emond (2003) cautions;

The danger in undertaking research with young people is that researchers believe that they have a pre-existing level of understanding because they were young themselves once. Even more concerning is that researchers believe they are still young and have to therefore make little effort to be the 'stranger'. Social proximity can be as much of a hindrance as a help and is not necessarily a short cut to establishing research relationships (108).

The researcher's own enthusiasm regarding MXit may have given some respondents the impression that he is not attuned to more recent trends in young people's cultural practices, with the result being the impression of himself as 'behind the times'. This is especially so when one considers the response of learners at SACS, who seemed to have

grown bored of MXit, which is just one of the many social media that they engage with on a daily basis. As a result, the indignation they expressed at MXit being ‘behind the times’ in comparison to mobile Facebook may explain the lack of ‘coolness’ they saw in the researcher.

Questioning Identity

The researcher focused on the everyday, mundane uses of MXit, for, as Mosco (2004) postulates, it is only when technology begins “withdrawing as a presence” (21) into the everyday experiences of our lives that it can affect any real social change. This is a notable feature of Silverstone and Hirsch’s (1992a) domestication model of media consumption, which posits that technologies are culturally constructed by the power relations of the domestic environment, which in turn reconfigure the power differentials that constitute these familial relations. The domestic uses of mobile technology, such as the practice of MXiting in the family lounge while in the presence of parents, were deemed to yield the greatest insight into learners’ relationships with their parents and peers. The researcher deliberately posed questions that were thought to ignite their frustrations, and provided a unique insight into the use of the device vis-à-vis adolescents’ socialisation from parents to peers (Hijazi-Omari & Ribak, 2008).

By starting with a topical concern – namely; the intrinsic values that adolescents ascribe to mobile media at this transitional stage in their lives – the researcher decoded the discourses in respondents’ descriptive accounts and aggregated them into behavioural and organisational themes (Stake, 2005). These themes were then framed by the broader literature on mobile communication and located in the context of adolescents’ identity projects. They were dictated by the fieldwork, and were clustered around normative ideals of adolescents’ identities that are generally-accepted to be representative of a healthy development of the

‘self’⁴: privacy, mobility, autonomy, peer-to-peer friendship and the development of romantic relationships (Berk, 2003).

Theoretical Applications

In addition to the overarching qualitative-interpretive approach and social constructivist paradigm, the study has utilised the humanistic arm of cultural studies as a supplementary paradigm. Cultural studies analyses the discourses that shape our subjective experiences of everyday cultural products like the cellphone (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005b). The study calls on a potent characteristic of the cultural studies tradition, namely; the agency of the individual in resisting deterministic social structures (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005b; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005). As we will illustrate with regards to the focus group format, all it took was a platform of similarly-aged peers to trigger a wave of expression that resisted parents’ negative perceptions and marked the cellphone as a device that is distinctively the domain of youth. A cultural studies paradigm therefore influenced the *interpretation* of the qualitative data more than the methodology employed, as it enabled the researcher to be cognisant of the complex contestations of power in cultural products – especially personal technologies like mobile media (du Gay, 2003; Goggin, 2006).

From the outset, it was deemed that the learners would engage with MXit in a way that allowed them to negotiate – and even emancipate themselves from – the pressures that society imposes on them. This has been the case with studies conducted by Lemish and Cohen (2005), Green and Singleton (2007) and Hjorth (2008), while Lister, et al (2009) have pointed to the escapist qualities of cyberspace. Thus, by understanding the domestic embeddedness of cellphones evinced by the above authors, framed within Silverstone and

⁴ For the purposes of the study, the ‘self’ is sometimes used in place of the word ‘identity’. This is in keeping with Erikson’s (1968) seminal study of adolescents’ identity formation, who uses both terms interchangeably. In Erikson’s analysis, the ‘self’ refers to the individual’s primary *ego* or self-identity, which is in a perpetual state of transition, around which personal identity (the idiosyncrasies separating the individual from others) and social or cultural identity (the social roles that people perform) are adjoined.

Hirsch's (1992a) domestication theory, the researcher gauged the power relations that impact on teens' consumption of mobile media. A conflation of cultural studies and domestication theory allowed the researcher to be cognisant of the ways in which these structures can be actively resisted through the act of appropriation itself.

As the study dealt with so many facets of human experience, from technological diffusion and the consumption of cultural artefacts to interpersonal relations, social networking, identity performance and identity formation; the researcher employed qualitative sampling to utilise a variety of theoretical approaches. These theories were contextually dependent and contextually *utilised* when appropriate to inform the interpretation of the phenomena under scrutiny (Abrams, 2010). In this way, theorists like McLuhan (1964) and Meyrowitz (1986), whose writings embody the key tenets of medium theory, have been used as dominant perspectives throughout the thesis, particularly for their applicability to assessing the impact of digital media on social behaviour. Meyrowitz's (1986) medium theory has been used as a guiding principle to interpret the often unexpected research findings related to sexting and photo-sharing⁵, which seemed to indicate that adolescents see in these mediated spaces of interaction safer forums for displays 'the self' that are different to what they perform in co-present social spaces.

Furthermore, we posit Erikson's (1968) 'crisis of youth' as the contextual backbone upon which teens' tumultuous relational practices have found a medium on MXit. This is particularly so when one considers Erikson's (1968) notion of the psychosocial moratorium, which we apply to the way in which adolescents experiment with digital media at this stage

⁵ The practices of sexting and photo-sharing frequently overlap in the relational practices of South African teenagers. In the case of MXit, sexting refers to the exchange of text messages between users for the purpose of eliciting sexual gratification via sexual innuendos, flirting and more overt forms of 'MXit sex'. Photo-sharing is characterised by the act of sending photographs over MXit that generally reveal the user's naked or scantily clad body in a sexually suggestive position. Both practices overlapped, with boys generally regarding the receipt of photographs as the primary objective in these exchanges, while girls more frequently alluded to the gratification they received from flirting, which in many cases acted as an antecedent to sexting.

of their identity construction (Buckingham, 2008). However, as respondents' personal and social identities were performed in different ways depending on whether they were online or offline, Goffman's (1971) notion of 'stage behaviour' has been used to describe the situational performance of these identities. Once again, the role of the medium itself cannot be so carefully removed from the act of consumption. For this reason, Goggin (2006) and du Gay, et al's (2003) cultural studies approaches to the cellphone and walkman, and McLuhan's (1964) classic 'the medium is the message' maxim, have been used to interpret the emancipatory, yet fundamentally discourse-laden qualities of MXit use embodied in the research findings.

Focus Groups

The focus groups were unstructured in order to facilitate group discussion that was as natural as possible within the confines of the study. The researcher was not concerned with establishing a statistical correlation in usage patterns across the samples, as the aim was to understand the behaviour of youth in their usage of MXit and cellphones *writ large*. The researcher frequently injected open-ended questions into the groups to be debated amongst the learners to produce responses that diverted from the original question, but opened up new questions in themselves. In this way, the research facilitator utilised one of the strengths of focus groups by 'setting off' oppositional voices against each other (Babbie, 2010). This approach was actively employed during the focus groups in order to explore the underpinning discourses influencing participant responses, for these discourses were deemed to hold the key to understanding the way in which adolescents' identities are (per)formed in relation to digital media.

A pertinent example that encapsulates the points raised in the above paragraph was a question posed to a Milnerton High focus group, asking how respondents felt about expressing romanticisms via MXit. This question was improvised after respondents

themselves brought relational breakups to the researchers' attention. The question visibly incited two of the learners, who lambasted these mediated breakups, advocating co-present discussions of relationship matters. The researcher had suspected that this would happen based on the visible frustration of these respondents during the previous discussion, and deliberately posed the question in order to 'spike' heated discussion. The researcher knowingly positioned oppositional voices against each other, which in this case saw two young women orient themselves against the chief advocate of mediated breakups, who was a male respondent. Morgan (1997) identifies this as a key tenet of the focus group process, with conflict allowing the researcher to gauge the differences of opinions in the group, while stimulating participants' emotions on poignant topics. Suffice to say, in response to their indignation, the boy responded in equal temperament, with a short, albeit interesting argument taking place that hinted at the differential power relations inherent in mediated interactions.

Focus groups allowed the researcher to collectively interview a large cross-section of individuals and provided the broadest cover of topics available (Morgan, 1997). The first group provided an informal pilot study upon which the next set of questions could be more realistically framed for the subsequent group, and so forth. In this way, the researcher adapted the questions to accommodate participant responses, like the above, that he did not initially suspect. Space does not permit us to examine the research process of these samples in their entirety, so attention will predominantly be paid only to those samples that generated particularly pertinent research problems or successes, irrespective of whether they were interviews, group interviews or focus groups. Suffice to say that overall, practical considerations, more than theoretical applications, guided the choice of sample sites (Abrams, 2010).

The Research Samples

Three focus groups were conducted at Milnerton High School with a mixed race group of learners, two at Manyano High with black learners, one apiece at Masiyile Secondary School and Iqhayiya Secondary (both of which were with black learners), one at South African College School (SACS) with mixed race learners, and one with a group of coloured learners sourced from Cloeteville High School in Cloeteville. The Khayelitsha and Cloeteville schools are defined as township schools in this study due to their location in quintessential South African ‘townships’: densely-populated areas on the outskirts of the central business district (CBD) that were historically segregated for the residence of blacks and coloureds (respectively) by the Apartheid government (Gervais-Lambony, 2006; Bekker & Leilde, 2006b; Khayelitsha Transformation Research Project, 2005; Stellenbosch Transformation Research Project, 2005). The researcher chose to conduct these groups across a broad sample of respondents, believing that the schools themselves would roughly correlate with the economic wellbeing of the four areas in which the sample populations were located. This was in aid of establishing if there exists a common mobile youth culture across these diverse samples that may, by extension, reflect the usage patterns evident in the local and global literature on mobile consumption.

In order to reach a conclusion of this nature, the researcher had to gain a broad perspective of the city’s schools, contextualised by the unique socioeconomic and geographical contexts in which they are embedded. In other words, he needed to establish from the outset the macro economic conditions of the suburbs in which these schools were located. The researcher did not seek to establish the net incomes of respondents’ own households due to time constraints and the qualitative nature of the study. Thus, the researcher chose to provide a broad indication of the overall economic status of these suburbs

by using the household economic indicators of the last South African Census held in 2001.

This indicated that the average annual income of households per suburb were:

- Milnerton Central: R 126, 142.01 - R 197, 786.00
- Newlands: R90, 813.48 - R150 467.58
- Cloeteville: R 60, 438.36 - R 156, 446.81
- Khayelitsha: R0.00 - R25 490.03⁶

A natural limitation of this approach is that there is no guarantee that participants' households were based in the same areas in which their schools were located, nor that learners who attend these schools even come from the same socioeconomic backgrounds as their peers. However, additional questions were used to gain a broad perspective of the differential ownership of the cellphone and access to applications like MXit. The cellphone, as a household good, was posited as a marker of domestic comfort in a study of the demographic and socio-economic trends conducted by the City of Cape Town (Strategic State of Cape Town 2008, 2009). On a more social level, the cellphone is revered by teens for its ability to confer social status (Goggin, 2006; boyd, 2010; Molony, 2008; Brinkman, et al, 2009).

The researcher believed that teens who came from economically disadvantaged backgrounds would value the technology as an indispensable communicative and social aid, necessitating heightened usage in the context of the low average household incomes, lack of mobility, unemployment, absence of recreational facilities, poverty and high crime rates of Khayelitsha and Cloeteville (Gervais-Lambony, 2006; Bekker & Leilde, 2006b; Khayelitsha Transformation Research Project, 2005; Stellenbosch Transformation Research Project,

⁶ Figures sourced from Stats SA, Census 2001 and the Strategic Information Dept., City of Cape Town via the Unit for Religion and Development Research, University of Stellenbosch in partnership with Transformation Africa's Cape/Milnerton/Blouberg; Southern Suburbs; Stellenbosch; and Khayelitsha Transformation Research Projects (2005).

2005). The teens from Milnerton and Newlands, whose household incomes are significantly in excess of their Khayelitsha and Cloeteville peers, were believed to share broadly similar mobile practices to the lower-income⁷ teens owing to their shared membership of youth.

From the outset of the study, the researcher had to make a crucial assumption regarding the socioeconomic composition of the samples; namely that Cape Town's historical homogeneity between race and geography would coextend the economic status of these communities. However, Apartheid has left a legacy of socio-spatial segregation in Cape Town that parallels racial and economic divides (Spinks, 2001), while South African schools continue to embody these structural divides (Soudien, 2007). As the Research Findings will testify, usage across these samples was remarkably similar, which recalls the core hypothesis of the study, which for the purpose of clarity will be directly quoted from Castells, et al's (2007) seminal study of mobile communication:

There is a youth culture that finds in mobile communication an adequate form of expression and reinforcement (127).

As cultural norms centring on sexual relationships emerged in conjunction with the socioeconomic status of these communities, 'culture' became an equally important prism through which to analyse the discourses that informed participants' accounts of their online behaviour.

⁷For the purpose of the study, respondents are classified into lower-income (Khayelitsha and Cloeteville) and middle to upper-income (Milnerton high and SACS) samples. It must be emphasised that these categories are not in keeping with pre-existing definitions of income brackets, but rather for the purpose of creating two broad – and in some ways binary – operational definitions between disadvantaged and advantaged teens. These operational definitions have been chosen due to the socioeconomic disparities between the middle to upper-income and lower-income samples in terms of average household incomes, percentage of adults over the age of 20 who have received no schooling, percentage of informal dwellings, and unemployment in the respective areas where the sample schools are located. This data is provided in the Unit for Religion and Development Research, University of Stellenbosch in partnership with Transformation Africa's respective Transformation Research Projects (2005)

The average sample size of the focus groups was 10 learners, taken from a variety of classrooms regardless of educational achievement, while the respondents were comprised of both boys and girls. The researcher primarily made use of convenience sampling in constructing these samples. In the case of the Cloetesville sample, this was due to the personal rapport that he already shared with Doctor Don Pinnock, who was at the time of research in 2009 the chairperson of Usiko Stellenbosch, the organisation that facilitated the focus group with the Cloetesville youth, and the editor of *Getaway Magazine* for which the researcher worked. In addition, the researcher's supervisor, Doctor Tanja Bosch, put the researcher in contact with an acquaintance of hers at the university's Student Health and Wellness Centres Organisation (SHAWCO), who allowed him to join the organisation on several of their meetings with the Khayelitsha schools' principals, whereupon he proposed the research needs to them.

In both cases, social networking allowed the researcher to assemble pre-established groups of learners in a quick, affordable manner. However, as is customary with convenience sampling, absolute representation of the entire population is not possible due to the bias inherent in such a loosely constructed sample (Abrams, 2010; Babbie, 2010). The race and socioeconomic groups sampled as part of the study do not truly represent the greater demographics of the Cape Town and Stellenbosch municipalities. However, the researcher wished to investigate the myriad perceptions of MXit evinced by youth in general. Thus, in order to counter the dominance of black and coloured, low-income samples (chosen because of convenience), the researcher employed purposive sampling by approaching schools like Milnerton High and SACS to represent more white, middle to upper-income youth (Abrams, 2010).

The notion of race provided a rudimentary observation into the group identities that inform teens' subjective realities (Buckingham, 2008). In this way, the researcher could

assess the extent to which these identities were emancipated *from* - or formed in accordance *with* – the discourses of division that continue to exist in South Africa, as well as the extent to which these discourses extend into cyberspace. Seekings (2008) has illustrated the binary relationship between race, culture and class that exists in South Africa. On the one hand, racial ideals are giving way to class-based dichotomies as the urban black middle class remove themselves from the socioeconomic conditions shared by the predominantly low-income black African populace. However, on the other hand, racial identities remain firmly rooted in class, which still governs the everyday lived realities of most South Africans. In this way, Seekings (2008) has emphasised the inseparable relationship between race and culturally-inscribed ideals in influencing social behaviour.

In this sense, choosing such a diverse sample of teens, segmented by homogeneities of race (Khayelitsha and Cloetesville), class (SACS and Milnerton High), and the cultural ideals that inform users' consumption of mobile media (Goggin, 2006) was deemed to offer several benefits. Firstly, it enabled the researcher to assess the commonality of responses across a diverse sample that intersected various discourses that are 'activated' in different contexts (Buckingham, 2008). Secondly, it allowed the researcher to examine the extent to which class is an increasingly pervasive identity in post-Apartheid South Africa (Seekings, 2008; Boshoff & Strelitz, 2008). This is especially so when one considers the multiracial composition of the SACS and Milnerton High samples, who were assumed to live similar socioeconomic lifestyles, despite their obvious racial affiliations. Thirdly, it allowed the researcher to observe the continued salience of race (Seekings, 2008) as a discourse that is contextually activated when racially homogenous and racially heterogeneous teens were observed in the same setting. Finally, and most importantly, researching a large population of teens that were purposively and conveniently sampled enabled the researcher to observe the myriad ways in which youth use MXit, and the multiple discourses, inscribed by cultural

ideals, that inform this usage in relation to their formation of fluid, mobile identities (Staltdt, 2008).

At first appearance, it appears crude to assume that schools from historically homogenous ethnic areas boast learners from similar economic households, but in South Africa, a country traditionally characterised by segregation in its purest form, this is generally the case. The National Party's "manipulation of space as an essential tool of control" (Gervais-Lambony, 2006:56) ran concurrent with the view that racial groups should be allocated to their own separate territories. Economic development and racial integration within these communities is occurring, but Cape Town, Stellenbosch and South African cities in general are still recovering from the sociocultural and socioeconomic effects of apartheid's social and geographical engineering (van der Merwe & Davids, 2006). Despite their definitional shortcomings, it is possible to draw a rudimentary distinction between race and class in the city of Cape Town, given the geographic dispersal of economic resources and racial groups outlined by the above argument.

The Unexpected Nature of Fieldwork in Low-Income Settings

SHAWCO had close ties to all three of the Khayelitsha schools, where they would conduct extracurricular, life orientation meetings with learners whom the schools had identified as having the potential to receive a tertiary education. They were the most academically astute, English-proficient learners and were predominantly composed of females. The researcher had the advantage of meeting all three samples of SHAWCO learners during these initial visits, where he suggested the idea of the focus groups to them, later arranging the groups with the schools' respective principals. Affiliation with SHAWCO was not deemed to be a prerequisite for participation, but it did provide a reliable way of gauging participant age, English proficiency and gender beforehand, which anecdotal memories of the researcher's initial meeting with the learners would attest. Prior interaction with the learners

was deemed to be beneficial in establishing clarity as to the requirements for participation, which were, for all participants, membership of MXit, a willingness to participate in a single focus group, and membership of the 16-18 year old age group. Meeting the learners beforehand was also deemed to be beneficial in establishing a level of trust with the soon-to-be participants (Emond, 2003).

However, with the exception of the Iqhayiya focus group, the researcher was surprised to find that the previously identified learners at Manyano High and Masiyile Secondary had taken it upon themselves to invite their peers who were not affiliated to SHAWCO. Due to the ease at which learners could walk into the classrooms in which the focus groups were held, large groups of teens arrived in their droves to be a part of the research along with their friends. As a result, respondents from the same groups of friends arrived to take part in what appeared to be a novel experience in the context of their ordinary, mundane lunch periods. Kadushin (2004) has highlighted the formation of cliques of friends along homophilous lines based on shared personality attributes, so the chances of this occurring in the current project were heightened. In this way, it does represent a shortfall of the focus group process, with the end result being a possible homogeneity of *responses* that paralleled the homogeneity of *respondents*.

The resulting process was one where the researcher had to sort through the learners to identify familiar faces, diluting the large mass into smaller, manageable groups comprised of on average 12 learners each. This did not yield an entirely positive result, as the researcher soon realised that most of the SHAWCO learners did not even arrive at the prearranged classroom meeting points at Manyano High or Masiyile Secondary. The sheer volume of enthusiastic participants at Manyano High did, however, provide the researcher with the opportunity to interview two groups of peers in consecutive sequence. This succeeded in facilitating a higher level of generalisation to the extent that any atypical response from a

single group may have, in theory, been mitigated by the larger range of learners. As an anecdotal aside, there seemed to be little collective ethos at Masiyile Secondary and Manyano High when compared to Iqhayiya Secondary. Judging by the conspicuous display of musical awards in the foyer of Iqhayiya, one gets the feeling that Iqhayiya Secondary is a proud school, lauding its achievements in the face of economic hardship and underfunding that is characteristic of post-apartheid township schools (Standing, 2003). Thus, given the dull design, overgrown fields and visible shortage of recreational facilities at Masiyile Secondary and Manyano High, the enthusiastic response of these learners is not surprising, as the focus groups seemed to offer them a novel experience that they would not ordinarily experience.

The focus groups at Iqhayiya Secondary, Cloeteville, Milnerton High and SACS were constructed largely without the researcher's aid. Here, the respective principals hauled batches of learners *en masse* from pre-established classroom environments to participate in the research. Once again, a limitation of this approach is the possibility of friends being allotted together, based on the likelihood that similar peers are more likely to coalesce in the same environment. However, this was deemed to be a negligible outcome of the study. Group interviewing well-acquainted learners paves the way for a relatively gelled, free-flowing research environment, free of time-consuming icebreaker exercises and the feelings of trepidation that are often characteristic of first-time interactions between strangers (Emond, 2003). More importantly, focus groups were valued in the context of this study because they demonstrate the practical manifestation of intergroup dynamics through the recording and observation of "the kinds of everyday speech that are part and parcel of unmarked social life – conversations, group discussions, negotiations, and the like" (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005:887).

Gendered Relations

Of the 7 mixed-gender groups surveyed, girls were in the vast majority, comprising 49/74 respondents. While the researcher waited for the groups to be assembled, he managed to observe the break-time interactions of learners at Masiyile and Iqhaya Secondary. Some or another form of gender-based dominance was quite pronounced, since there was a high degree of what the researcher deemed to be either extremely rough play, or boy-on-girl, low level violence. It is difficult to establish whether this behaviour reflected the gender relations of the community *writ large*, as these practices are not contextualised by a prolonged period of observational ethnography (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005b). However, it was enough to assume that male learners would hold sway in the focus groups based on the relationship between male hegemony and gender inequality in playground exchanges (Pattman, 2007). The Khayelitsha samples were largely composed of females situated on the Cape Flats, where power relations are traditionally skewed towards masculinity (Hearn, 2007). These actions, which occurred away from the centrally-located staff block, were sufficient grounds for the researcher to believe that the gendered discourses he sought to interpret in the online practices of adolescents were already present in their everyday experiences of school. Nevertheless, despite the researcher's observations, female voices were surprisingly dominant in these groups.

In this way, the very format of the focus group supports what Barbour (2007) describes as “‘feminized’ patterns of interaction and exchange” (21), while Castells, et al (2007) have highlighted the natural enjoyment that women feel towards social interaction and chatting. However, girls' voices may have been dominant simply because they were in the majority. This is despite the apparently patriarchal nature of the schools' intergroup relations, which perhaps indicates that participants find confidence in being part of a gender-based majority (Morgan, 1997). When there were as few as three males present, the gender

dynamics shifted, and the female respondents withdrew in their level of openness. However, on a cross-sample basis, girls were generally hesitant to reveal any participation in sexting and photo-sharing. Girls may have been self-conscious to open up about matters of sexual import due to the mixed gender composition of the groups, facilitated by an older researcher, on an issue of sexual freedom that has spurred the negative perceptions of MXit (Chigona, et al, 2009; Chigona & Chigona, 2008). Thus, any insight on photo-sharing seemed to be dependent on the gender composition of the group and the gender homogeneity between respondents and researcher.

The Language Barrier

In a qualitative study conducted in second language English communities, access is difficult to establish, as there are differences in pronunciation and language proficiency between researcher and subjects. This was particularly prevalent at Manyano High, where the word 'access' seemed to be the operative upon which respondents' entire understanding of the question rested. Eventually, this misapprehension was eased by the most English-proficient of the group, a boy who had assumed the leadership role early on in the discussion, who began conversing with his peer sitting next to him in their isiXhosa mother tongue, finally reaching a conclusion as to what the researcher had meant, and translating the question for the rest of the class to hear. Yet, despite this progress, the Manyano High and Masiyile Secondary groups were on the whole ineffective at gauging participant attitudes due to the severity of this language barrier. Unlike the respondents at Iqhayiya Secondary, these were not the same learners who the researcher had previously acquainted himself with. This was a shortcoming in the researcher's own planning, and underlines the need for interpreters in unpredictable research scenarios where respondents are more confident in their native tongue.

As is customary with group-based research, there was the usual share of silence among respondents, as well as an adjustment of behaviour the moment the researcher walked into the class (Griffin & Bengry-Howell, 2008). This silence constitutes a discourse in itself (Cammack & Phillips, 2002) that can be attributed to the age gap, perceived status, social standing and level of formality that the researcher exhibits towards the younger participants (Emond, 2003). The silence experienced in the Khayelitsha schools was prominent among first language isiXhosa speakers, ushering in what was, on appearance, a seemingly disinterested group. According to Barbour (2007), one way to counter the lackadaisical approach of specific individuals is to invite them to join the discussion by directing questions at them, even if it is to merely agree to what the majority of participants have said. This intervention proved to be largely successful in all of the fieldwork settings, but was sometimes followed by head-nodding acquiescence among the quieter respondents in the Khayelitsha and Cloeteville schools. Nonetheless, this approach did serve the purpose of 'breaking the ice' by encouraging participants to feel comfortable enough to contribute in any way possible.

Direct participation by the researcher was deemed to be productive in drawing out the most responses from the research environment by encouraging all participants to speak, but this depended on a reciprocal relationship of exchange under the existing power relations between researcher and respondents. Strategically directing questions at dissident or shy individuals was not enough, as the researcher hoped to encourage participants to *want* to participate (Bishop, 2003). This was precisely the reason why the researcher purchased a few packets of novelty sweets from a vendor outside Manyano High to disseminate among the participants. Emond (2003) has shown the difference that material rewards make in improving subject attitudes by encouraging an informal, relaxed research environment, and

there was a visible display of relaxation once these gifts had been disseminated throughout the group.

A limitation of these groups was, however, a trend of ‘following the leader’, which was far more pronounced in those schools where English faculty was privy to only a select few. This small minority of opinion leaders (Rogers, 2003), who appeared to be popular among their peers, took it upon themselves to answer most questions directed at the group, while their peers either displayed visual cues of apparent agreement or began to lose interest. The impact that speaking in a second language had on accurate responses limited the depth and range of participants’ responses, and presumably their confidence levels as well. A suggestion for further study is to include an interpreter when dealing with learners whose second language is English, as was the case with the focus group held in Cloeteville.

Reflexivity Among Hard to Reach Youth

These challenges are customary to research that involves youth, where unpredictability in youth attitudes and an oft unwillingness to participate are commonplace (Babbie, 2010; Cieslik, 2003; Emond, 2003). This is particularly so among ‘hard to reach youth’, who are often transient and at risk of the various dangers of life on the street (Abrams, 2010). This was the case of the learners at Cloeteville, who are directly at risk of joining gangs due to the absence of strong family bonds in their communities (Usiko Stellenbosch Youth Project, 2008). Thus, a consideration of the contextual variations in adolescents’ lives has been factored into the framing of research questions and the interpretation of the answers therein. It may seem a trite observation, but judging by the ostensibly old, torn clothing and holes in their shoes, these learners were not financially equipped in any comparable way to their Milnerton High and SACS counterparts. The researcher aimed to secure the responses of these participants, who seemed to display relatively advanced cellphones, while sustaining the interest of the group by asking them

questions that were hoped to generate enthusiastic responses. An example would be the question, 'If you could have one type of phone, what would it be?'. This question provided insight into the cellphone features that teens prized, while allowing respondents to enthuse over a technology that has resonance in their otherwise materially disadvantaged lives.

Peer pressure and majority-enforced conformity play an active role in influencing the behaviour of teenagers (Pasquier, 2008), and nowhere is this more evident than in focus groups, where the presence of a dominant peer can influence the responses of participants. The same can be said for the researcher, as the presence of an older authority figure can impact the honesty of participant responses (Babbie, 2010). Reflexivity allowed the physically embedded researcher (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005b) to reflect on his role in influencing participant feedback on the subjective social realities under analysis (Ali, Campbell, Branley, & James, 2008), for reflexivity acknowledges that knowledge in the first place is transitory, fleeting and inherently subjective:

[...] such an approach allows one to document and make transparent the complexities of the research process, particularly when negotiating the different interests of participants [...] trust is central to the successful management of fieldwork relations. A reflexive approach allowed the various interests and perspectives of participants to be accommodated and documented in the processes avoiding some of the problems of misrepresentation usually associated with unequal power relationships in research (Cieslik, 2003:5).

A reflexive approach aided the researcher in his visit to Cloetesville by facilitating a level of introspection as a clearly-demarcated outsider, whose life and future prospects are vastly different to those of the research participants. Cloetesville is a small, low-income township situated just outside Stellenbosch composed almost entirely of the coloured ethnic

group (Oelofse, et al, 2002). Respondents had been identified by their schools and local authorities as being 'at risk' youth, and had been referred to the non-profit organisation Usiko Stellenbosch in an attempt to divert them away from gangsterism and drug abuse. The extracurricular classes and cultural rites of passage projects, which are facilitated by older mentors, many of whom were former drug addicts themselves, aim to generate the confidence, self-belief and leadership qualities that are often absent from the peer groups and homes that these youth are socialised into (Usiko Rites of Passage Website, 2011; Usiko Stellenbosch Youth Project, 2008). In the case of the Cloetesville rehabilitation programme, the researcher was entering into a circle of youth who were marginalised from the lifestyle and ideals that he was ordinarily accustomed to. This granted a social constructivist approach a level of theoretical credence owing to its acknowledgement that concepts of right and wrong, normal and abnormal, are themselves socially constructed and contextually relative (Heaven & Tubridy, 2005).

The focus group in question was composed of young coloured males taken from various Grade 10 and 11 classes at Cloetesville High School. Like all of the fieldwork scenarios, the researcher used a digital voice recorder to record the proceedings. This added an unobtrusive element to the recording process, which allowed the researcher to join the discussion by minimising the symbolic barrier to interaction represented by the voice recorder (Emond, 2003). Prior to the Cloetesville focus group, advance thoughts deemed pertinent to the objectives of the group were jotted down in the researcher's notepad. These were comprised of spontaneous observations that the researcher had made during the proceedings at the previous schools, such as a disagreement between respondents, an abrupt change of topic, or a failure to understand a particular question. Note-taking augmented the data capturing by allowing the researcher to jog his memory of his own role in the research

process. In this way, he could recall the visual cues, power displays and subtle nuances of tone that govern the non-verbal side of group interaction (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005).

The Cloetesville group was by far the most intimate out of the focus groups, yielding the frankest responses despite several of the learners' poor proficiency at English. It is for this reason that we have focused on Cloetesville far more than any of the other groups, as this group represents the pinnacle of the focus group form's strengths. One reason attributable to this success is that trust between respondents and mentors had already been established, which encouraged respondents to be open about their feelings (Morgan, 1997). Respondents clearly saw in the mentors a source of advice, sometimes turning to them when they were unclear or unwilling to answer a question that the researcher had posed to them. This is probably due to the mentors' fluency in Afrikaans, which again highlights the limitations the researcher may have experienced if these older mentors were not present. It is, however, in the researcher's opinion that the relaxed nature of the class – conducted after school hours in the outdoors outside a community hall where the researcher, mentors and participants sat on the floor, uninterrupted by break bells, peers or the researcher's recorder – provided the impetus for this group's cohesion.

The Third Person Effect

The schools allocated limited periods of time to the focus groups and interviews, which in hindsight suited the researcher, as forty minute to one hour time frames (conducted during breaks and pre-exam periods) seemed to extend the attention threshold of participants. The conversational interplay between learners was key here, with well-acquainted peers reinforcing each other when gathered in the same setting. This was deemed to be important from the outset, as peer commentary on fellow participants' MXit habits added a layer of interpretative depth to the phenomenon that the third person effect could possibly mask. The third person effect (Davison, 1983) was pervasive in the study, as it was in Chigona, et al

(2009), Chigona and Chigona (2008), and Bosch's (2008) studies, with respondents attributing negative behaviour to 'others' and seldom themselves. Morgan (1997) has illustrated the risk of controversial topics in coercing participants into withdrawing from the discussion. In order to minimise this risk, a successive series of interviews were employed to exercise a greater degree of control over the research scenario, which will be discussed in the subsequent chapter. Still, there is no guarantee that the behaviour that participants purport to engage in mirrors their actual online behaviour (Morgan, 1997). In this respect, the researcher had to be cognisant of the fact that respondents may simply have been telling him what they thought he wanted to hear.

In typical qualitative fashion, the researcher observed the research subjects in their naturalistic environments (Abrams, 2010). However, as MXit transcends the spatial boundaries of the classroom, participants' accounts cannot replicate the act of engaging with the platform itself, which occurs out of the researcher's sight in environments that he does not have access to. The behaviour that focus group participants present to the world has therefore been viewed within the prism of Goffman's (1971) stage layout. Their presentation of this behaviour is, essentially, only the 'front stage' of their sense of self. Interviews, then, were deemed to offer a heightened degree of insight into participants' 'back stage' performances. However, focus groups were chosen as primary fieldwork methods, as their attention to the discourses of group dynamics permitted the researcher broad insight into the "staged conversations" (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005:904) through which Goffman's (1971) presentation of self can occur. The third person effect was, therefore, largely beneficial in illustrating these discourses and their interplay between respondents.

Friendship as a Precursor to Successful Group Interviews

The researcher negated these impediments to participant honesty by employing interviews after the focus groups. In this way, the researcher continued to build on the rapport

he had developed with the interviewees, who were by now well acquainted with the general topic of study. Prior to the one-on-one interviews, the researcher employed a seemingly unusual technique of interviewing two to three learners simultaneously. These interviews were conducted with learners who were participants of the focus groups in order to conflate the themes common to the groups into a more synthesised whole, thus permitting a greater level of generalisation from the results. Like the focus groups, these interviews were unstructured and informal, but served the purpose of triangulating the themes that the researcher had noticed in his earlier visits to the schools (Fontana & Frey, 2005). These small interviews were successful insofar as they relied on the pre-established friendship between interviewees.

Four of these small group interviews were conducted in total; one at SACS with two males, one at Milnerton High with two females, and two at Iqhayiya Secondary, one with two females and the other with three males. Friendship notably augmented participants' self-confidence, and succeeded in facilitating the type of free flowing discussion that sometimes remained underutilised in the focus groups. Furthermore, the security of an accompanying peer helped to alleviate the power imbalance between the perception of an authoritative researcher and an acquiescent research subject (Emond, 2003). Finally, once a level of rapport had been established with the learners who had volunteered to participate in these group interviews, the researcher then invited each of them to participate in a final one-on-one interview, of which two of the learners were available and willing.

The Intimacy of the One-On-One Interview

The final duo of one-on-one interviews provided the researcher with the opportunity to triangulate the recurring themes that were evident in the focus groups and group interviews. Furthermore, they allowed participants to recall their assertions made in the previous meetings, allowing them to elaborate in a more intimate, personal space (Fontana &

Frey, 2005). Once again, the researcher made frugal use of his journal to jot down pertinent notes at selective intervals during the digital recording. These notes were centred on any indication of MXit in constructing or expressing adolescents' identities. Respondents' frustrations with a lack of autonomy associated with their dependency on parents, concerns over coolness and status, desires for romantic relationships and friendship, and anger at their parents' disapproval of MXit attracted the researcher's attention, as these were the starting points upon which the mediation of adolescents' identities could be grounded by grassroots usage of mobile media.

Unlike the focus groups, the researcher had by now been in the presence of the interviewees on at least three occasions, so the need to maintain the levels of impartiality employed in the focus groups was deemed to be less pertinent at this stage of the research relationship. This served an important function in the interview with a SACS learner, who the researcher treated to a cold-drink on a Saturday morning at Deanos, a local cafe nearby his house in Newlands. His responses had previously been forthright and unhindered by the presence of peers, but his frankness seemed to reach new heights in the newfound relaxed environment. The researcher wished to convey to the respondent that his opinion was extremely valued without stating this outright. Thus, by disbanding his journal and allowing the learner to do the majority of the talking, his accounts were allocated preferential treatment over any rigid adherence to questions that the researcher had diarised.

Navigating the Sexual Sensitivities of Adolescence

The strengths of the SACS interview can be juxtaposed to its corollary at Iqhayiya Secondary School. The Iqhayiya interview was conducted at the school itself with one of the more vocal members of the initial focus group. The environment in which the interview was conducted was seemingly not conducive to intimacy, as it was held in the staff foyer during lunch period, and was conducted amidst much noise and movement from passing peers.

However, the success of the interview in yielding detailed responses can perhaps be attributed to the normality of the surrounding clamour in the learner's everyday experience of school.

Previously, the girl had participated in a dual interview, where the researcher gradually became aware that the respondent was attempting to flirt with him in a bid to obtain or 'swap' his list of MXit contacts with hers. This scenario highlighted some of the sexual and relational practices that the researcher was unaware of prior to undertaking the project, which consequently guided his questions in subsequent groups.

These practices, many of which revolved around the performance of sexual identity, forced the researcher to reflect on his own perceptions of gender norms, as well as the level of formality (or lack thereof) he exhibited towards the interviewee (Olesen, 2005). Although none of the respondents displayed the same degree of flirtatiousness, her apparent sexual suggestiveness underlined the "heightened emotional and sexual sensitivities of adolescence" (Cohen, 2003:31) that the researcher needed to navigate *and* explore in the process of knowledge construction (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005b). Nonetheless, the two interviewees' (one male and one female) frank admissions indicates that the interviews succeeded at unlocking the 'interpersonal dramas' (Fontana & Fey, 2005) that were absent in the focus groups.

The Perception of Exclusivity

Tangkuampien (2009) has emphasised the importance of centring research on a technology that teens are familiar with puts them at ease. However, to adapt Tangkuampien's (2009) observation to the current project; if respondents are made to feel alien to their possession, they can interpret their ownership of the medium as being challenged. The researcher had to respect the perception of MXit as the distinct possession of the youth (Castells, et al, 2007). He may have a MXit profile himself, but his usage is inexorably different to the participants under analysis. As a result, the researcher conveyed to the

learners that he too was a user who was completely familiar with MXit, even though he was sometimes unfamiliar with the advanced features that respondents used. In other words, he did not stop the flow of conversation to ask respondents to elaborate on these technical specifications, as this would have forced them to reflect on the minute details of usage that they may take for granted. As the study attempted to assess the mundane, domestic uses of the device, questioning users on these technical features was deemed to alienate the rapport he had already established with them. This ran the risk of anchoring teens' perceptions that the researcher was a 'generation behind them', instead of harmonising both researcher and subjects under their shared experience of youth and mobile media.

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CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Part One

The Contextual Conditions Of Adoption

MXit's rate of adoption has been rapid, with adolescents being the early adopters in the technology's diffusion, as they traditionally have been with cellular innovations (Rogers, 2003; Goggin, 2006; Castells, et al, 2007). Considering their financial dependence on parents, it is not surprising that the limited financial freedom of the sample population played a key role in adopting what was, at the time of research in 2009, South Africa's cheapest and most popular Mobile Instant Messaging (MIM) application (MXit International Expansion: Case Study, 2009). MXit's rate of adoption is illustrative of similar trends in Finland and Japan, where adolescents have been quick to adopt mobile technologies once prices have lowered to accommodate their low earning power (Okada, 2005; Rogers, 2003). The chapter does not attempt to statistically correlate the adoption rates of learners across the different samples, but examines the reasons that teens attribute to their initial adoption of the application.

Circumstance creates the conditions upon which a low-cost communicative platform like MXit diffuses throughout a populace – especially when this diffusion, consumption and appropriation is located within the generational context of youth. In addition to Rogers' (2003) diffusion of innovations theory, the chapter loosely employs uses and gratifications theory as a theoretical paradigm in order to understand the gratifications underpinning MXit's adoption (Grainger, 2009).

Capital.

Several lower-income respondents claimed to spend such extensive periods of time on MXit that their declarations seemed to be exaggerated. This is particularly so for the most popular learners at Iqhayiya Secondary and Cloeteville, who boasted about spending up to 7-

8 hours per day using the application. It must be emphasised that these are brief, self-reported estimations, whose accuracy is affected by the pressure imposed by the surrounding environment of peers (Cohen, 2003) and the difficulty of separating MXit from the myriad of other media that youth engage in. Participants are, after all, provided with few tools for measurement other than their own perceptions, but it became clear that their perceptions of status among their peers were perhaps guiding these exaggerations.

The boasting evinced by the learners from the lower-income schools can perhaps be attributed to the comparative shortage of cultural and social capital they possess when compared to their wealthier counterparts at SACS and Milnerton High. In these schools, learners who were not on MXit were either slow to bring this to the researcher's attention, or hid this information altogether by misleading the researcher into believing that they were users of the application. Furthermore, the minority of Khayelitsha learners in physical possession of a cellphone during the focus groups frequently displayed their cellphones in full view of the researcher. The conspicuous display of such a "culturally and ontologically loaded object" (Hills, 2009:116) in environments where access to such technology was visibly low among their peers hearkens back to Bourdieu's (1986) definition of cultural capital, namely; the objectified capital embodied in the physical objects of cultural goods. In this way, the cellphone symbolises a mark of status that is contextually dependent on its perception in the culture in which it is embedded.

In her comparison of the peer-to-peer online production projects of upper and lower-income youth, Ito (2010) emphasises the additional value that poorer teens ascribe to online peer-to-peer practices. Unlike wealthier teens who often view the Internet as nothing more than a hobby, poorer teens see in these activities avenues of production that can increase the reception of their work among their peers. Additionally, Horst and Miller (2006) have noted the cellphone's ability to confer a degree of social capital to its low-income owners by

expanding their existing social networks. In the current project, exaggerating about the amount of time spent on MXit may be seen as a mark of establishing popularity among the digital have-nots that populated the classroom.

Popularity, as Bourdieu (1986) illustrates, is largely indicative of the possession of substantial social capital, for popular individuals can draw from large social networks that are abundant with resources. The aggregate of these resources and their availability to the individual is a sign of social capital, which can perhaps be seen in respondents' boasting. Furthermore, as Matsuda (2005) illustrates, popular teens tend to spend more time using the cellphone than their less popular peers, as they frequently use the device to maintain the communication with their friends that is necessary to sustain their vibrant social lives. In this sense, friendship is perhaps viewed by users as a resource in itself, and is something their peers who are without MXit are limited to pursuing only in co-present settings. For these lower-income teens – and perhaps for them alone – these lengthy periods of time spent on MXit correlate with the *perception* of increased popularity among their peers, and perhaps a perception of overall betterment in their lives.

Horst and Miller (2006), and Ito and Okabe (2005) have illustrated the synchronous multitasking that SMS and *keitai* email conversations entail. This may explain the difficulty at distinguishing texting from the simultaneous social practices in which the mobile is embedded, especially when boundaries between online and offline blur as new media occupy an increasing share in our daily communicative practices (Lister, et al, 2009; Osgersby, 2004). However, when one considers the hesitation that SACS and Milnerton High respondents displayed when estimating their daily time spent using MXit, one could argue that MXit may no longer hold the same hegemony over wealthier respondents' communicative practices as it used to. That is not to suggest that it is not a dominant platform for their mediated interactions, but rather that time spent on the platform has been diluted by

the growing presence of other social media and built-in IM services like BBM (Blackberry Messenger). The mass diffusion of Facebook in 2009 (Kazeniak, 2009) may explain why the youth of SACS and Milnerton High often made mention of Facebook over MXit. Like their earlier adoption of MXit, several learners stressed that their time spent on Facebook was in excess of 3 hours per day, which indicates that they had already begun spending significant periods of time on the platform. These assertions indicate that MXit was a passing fashion prized for its worth at a certain period in their lives, but was gradually being eclipsed by Facebook.

Coming of age in cyberspace.

Horst (2010) has illustrated how teenagers come of age in the networked public cultures of online social networks (Russell, Ito, Richmond, & Tuters, 2008) by actively using sites like Facebook to configure and display their identities. In Horst's (2010) analysis, these sites serve varying roles at different times in adolescents' lives, which parallels the claims of the study's wealthier respondents. Perhaps, then, MXit can be located in the broader landscape of young people's continual negotiations of technology. Social network sites like Facebook occupy an increasing role as interactive spaces where adolescents' identities are photographically displayed for their friends to see and validate (boyd & Ellison, 2007; Ito, 2010). This may explain the growing popularity of Facebook among the study's respondents who had access to the platform, who began using Facebook at a stage of their lives when affirmation and reinforcement from friends was of significant import to their socialisation experiences (Mazzarella, 2005b).

Facebook fulfils these needs by enabling the public display of photographs and their ability to illicit feedback from users, which can offer a positive sense of self-authentication for the photographed user (Rivière, 2005). This is not to suggest that lower-income teens possess a distinct set of needs far removed from their wealthier peers. Most of the

Khayelitsha and Cloetesville respondents simply have not been given the opportunity to use Facebook, so we have little way of gauging the transitional role that MXit plays in relation to their other media consumptive practices. Thus, as the sample population possess such differential access to online social networks, we are perhaps witnessing a varying degree of values ascribed to digital media that roughly reflect the socioeconomic circumstances of its users.

The social context of adoption.

The Khayelitsha and Cloetesville learners who were on MXit were notably opinionated in their anecdotal accounts of the time they spent using the application. This is in line with Rogers' (2003) diffusion of innovations theory, which advocates that innovations gain primacy when they are immersed in the social networks of young adopters – especially when these networks are populated by individuals with strong opinion leadership. These vocal respondents were extremely proficient in the English language and seemed to boast about the amount of time they spent on MXit. This can be viewed within the context of the schools' general intolerance and/or banning of cellphones, which seemed to only encourage learners to challenge these rules. The small minority of opinion leaders displayed their phones to the researcher and peers, some of whom even boasted to the researcher that they were logged onto MXit throughout the focus group proceedings. They seemed to take advantage of the educator-free classroom environment, while challenging the authority of the researcher via the conspicuous display of the banned object.

Resistance to school rules is the defining feature of contemporary school life when the cultural practices of adolescents are marginalised (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005). In this sense, MXit qualifies as a cultural practice as it is embedded in the power relations that extend (but do not reflect) those found in tangible contexts (Goggin, 2006). Power relations are in a continual process of negotiation between adults and children, and extend into

adolescents' use of the technology as a cultural artefact of change and agency (Hijazi-Omari & Rivka Ribak, 2008; Goggin, 2006). Referring to the youth-inspired *coup d'text* that removed Philippines' President Estrada in 2001, Goggin (2008) underscores the role of texting in mobilising groups to contest dominant holds on power.

Erikson (1968) has highlighted the functional value of adolescent rebellion as an antithesis to conformism. Rebellion allows the adolescent to experiment with the boundaries of the social world around them, which can be observed by the respondents' flagrant use of MXit in full view of the researcher. Though often entailing dangerous behavioural practices, it is the process of experimentation with the danger involved in rebellion that commits itself "to the survival of genuine values – one of the primary steering mechanisms of psychosocial evolution" (Erikson, 1968:249). In this way, texting in the presence of the researcher can be interpreted as a subtle act of resistance to the perception of his authoritative adulthood.

In the context of the Khayelitsha schools, where the researcher's broad questions on access determined ownership of cellphones to be low, a digital presence on MXit granted its popular users a level of confidence that increased their social status among their peers. From this perspective, the cellphone can be viewed as an object of conspicuous consumption (Veblen, 1899/1953) that is displayed so flagrantly because of its perceived ability to enhance the cultural capital, social capital and social status of its users. In other words, the device symbolically expresses users' identities as modern, fashion conscious bearers of mobility and social status in the context of the digital divide that permeates their access and ownership of digital media (Brinkman, et al, 2009; Castells, et al, 2007).

Insofar as the presence of influential, popular figures quicken the rate of an innovation's adoption (Rogers, 2003), perhaps the same can be inferred from the popular respondents who inadvertently boasted of their material advantage by displaying their phones so visibly. The device may even have acquired greater status in the Khayelitsha schools due

to the relative deprivation associated with the historical and cultural context of material deficiency that these youth are socialised into (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999; Brinkman, et al, 2009). This deprivation is both exacerbated and exemplified by the conspicuous display of the device in full view of their peers – the majority of whom did not possess a cellphone at Manyano High and Masiyile Secondary.

Enhancing the status of the cellphone is the inimitable role that the device plays in the maintenance of adolescents' social networks. Failure to be a member of a mobile social network entails a degree of disconnection for adolescents (Castells, *et al*, 2007), who are consequently excluded from the planning of social events (boyd, 2010). The potential for exclusion was a common concern in participants' responses, and is illustrated by a Milnerton High girl's anxiety in the following excerpt. Here, her frank admission reflects the tendency towards the formation of social cliques in peer socialising (Berk, 2003) and the ever-present threat of exclusion from these social networks (Sheller, 2004; Kang, 2008):

If all of your friends are on MXit, and you're not, then you are afraid to be out of the loop [...] you're on the outskirts (Focus Group, Milnerton High, 12/06/2009).

The network pressure applied to the individual by the peer group (Clark-Ibáñez & Felmler, 2004) can therefore be seen to coerce users into adopting social media in order to remain connected to their co-present peer groups and friend bases – or face social exclusion should they choose to reject the medium. Respondents frequently stated that they initially opened up MXit accounts because 'Everyone was on MXit', which identifies network pressure (or peer pressure) as a key variable in the mobile's diffusion. In this way, if Rogers' (2003) opinion leaders are seen to be using a technology that already occupies a position of status in low-income settings (Molony, 2008), it may quicken the rate of the technology's diffusion throughout these peer networks. Technological early adopters are respected by their

peers (Rogers, 2003), which grants them a level of social capital and influence that is of higher value than the average node or member of their social networks (Kadushin, 2004). Yet, peer pressure is by no means limited to lower-income youth (Berk, 2003), which illustrates that membership of MXit may have initially put pressure on the surrounding network to adopt it simply because, “Everyone else had it” (Group Interview, SACS, 13/08/2009).

The contextual conditions of appropriation.

Notwithstanding these social pressures, cost factors cannot be discounted from this analysis. For the majority of respondents, MXit’s affordability was a deciding factor in adopting the application, irrespective of socioeconomic background or upbringing. This cost efficiency allowed teens to compress pertinent information into messages that would ordinarily not be permissible under the financial constraints and limited space imposed by SMS. Respondents who commented on the economics of their usage were unwavering in their support of MXit on these grounds, and believed that using the technology for reasons of cost efficiency was simply common sense:

You don’t have to wonder why we’re the target market [...] We’re teenagers, we’re growing up, we don’t have our own money to buy airtime and stuff, we go on MXit because it’s cheap (Focus Group, Milnerton High, 12/06/2009).

Youth’s consumption of mobile media has traditionally been characterised by the appropriation of mobile media in response to the lack of autonomy associated with financial dependency. An early antecedent of the texting embodied in mobile communication originated with the appropriation of the pager by Japanese youth for informal, peer-centric texting (Hjorth, 2009; Okada, 2005). Like the pager and Sony Walkman, the cellphone can be viewed as a cultural artefact, imbued with its own discrete culture that is actively produced

and consumed by its young users (du Gay, et al, 2003). By this we mean that MXit – like the device in its entirety – has been appropriated by a predominantly young target market in ways that manufacturers have not previously envisaged (Goggin, 2008). Castells, et al (2007) point to age as specifying the *type* of use, rather than the use itself. In this way, the development of ‘MXit speak’, ‘MXit chat’ or ‘MXit language’ is the latest product in youth’s historical appropriation of language into an abbreviated form of written communication (Crystal, 2008; Walton, 2009).

In comparison to SMSing and voice calling, the reduced costs and increased space of MXit messages make possible a wider, more poignant display of communication:

Saving money [...] and then I speak everything that I want to speak to her [...] by saving money (Group Interview, Iqhayiya Secondary School, 18/08/2009).

If you know someone in the area and you gonna tell them over MXit you can just tell them, because you’re not gonna call them because of the airtime (Male Respondent, Focus Group, Cloeteville, 9/02/2010).

The relative advantage of MXit.

Telecommunication services in South Africa are generally expensive, with the cost of sending a single character over MXit being one-ten thousandth the cost of sending the same character over SMS (Marsden, 2007). Depending on one’s cellular network, a 160-character SMS cost around 80 cents during peak time in 2009 (Tanguampien, 2009), while the cost of a 1000-character MXit message has now dropped to below the initial 1 cent per message mark (Vecchiatto, 2009). These economic conditions, combined with adolescents’ general low earning power (Thurlow, 2005), make the decision to ‘mix’⁸ fairly straightforward,

⁸ Among the Khayelitsha respondents, ‘mixing’ was a popular term for the act of sending and receiving MXit messages between users.

especially for those respondents living in low-income communities. However, despite their material hardship when compared to the Newlands and Milnerton learners, learners from SACS and Milnerton High also identified cost efficiency as a key reason in adopting the application to the extent that MXit has overshadowed some of the daily social practices that previously occupied their communicative and recreational time. For example, when asked whether they remember a time before MXit, a Milnerton High girl stated that she remembers SMSing, to which her friend quipped, “I remember the outdoors” (Group Interview, Milnerton High, 17/08/2009).

Overall, it is unclear as to whether any of the learners pay for their own airtime, although there is an indication that the Khayelitsha respondents primarily use Cell C. At the time of research in 2009, Cell C was running a 6 month promotion to expand its teenage user base by awarding its subscribers with a portion of free MXit Moola every time they recharged with prepaid airtime (MyBroadband Staff Reporter, 2009). In this way, Cell C have tapped into the low-earning market of South African teens by developing a low-cost promotion to suit an inherently low-cost service. African consumers have embraced inexpensive communication options like prepaid cards and have appropriated the practice of missed calling or ‘beeping’ into their everyday lives, both of which have developed out of financial necessity (Castells, et al, 2007). However, a loyalty system of Cell C’s nature would presumably cover the costs of many messages, but would not discount the presence of airtime altogether. Here, the *perception* that MXit is a free service was omnipotent. Reasons for this perception can perhaps be attributed to the sophisticated pricing system of MXit tariffs, where the cost of sending a single message elicits as much confusion as the cost of using any of MXit’s other services.

As an anecdotal aside, it was common knowledge to the researcher that the cost of sending a single MXit message was one cent at the time of data collection in mid to late

2009, until he was informed by the SACS learners that the built-in data costs were in fact two cents per message. Needless to say, while the fieldwork was being conducted, Vecchiatto (2009) reported that MXit had lowered its data costs to below the traditional one cent mark. As of February 2010, MXit's website marketed its instant messaging feature as a 'free service', which ignores the inevitable data costs involved in sending these messages. Ascertaining these costs may seem like an inconsequential exercise, but the confusion inherent in guessing them has perhaps contributed to MXit's seemingly illimitable use.

Roger's (2003) diffusion of innovations theory is applicable to the current project, as participants' testimonials, unreliable as they may be, indicate that newer forms of social media like Facebook were diffusing more swiftly in middle to upper-income samples like Milnerton High and SACS than to lower-income Khayelitsha and Cloeteville. In terms of infrastructure itself, the traditional hegemony of monopolies like Telkom, shortages of basic computer hardware, high costs of bandwidth and fixed line calling impedes teens from communicating via other media (Baskaran & Muchie, 2006; Roycroft & Anantho, 2003). These conditions provide the preconditions upon which a low-cost IM service can flourish. As a result, MXit's diffusion throughout the 16-25 year old target market has been influenced by its cost efficiency, the falling costs of GPRS and 3G-enabled, java-supported cellphones, the overwhelming provision of pre-paid cellular services, gradual market restructuring away from Telkom's monopoly, and the general culture of high telecommunication costs in South Africa (MXit International Expansion: Case Study, 2009; Marsden, 2007; Gillwald, 2005). Furthermore, cellphones are an increasingly popular daily social practice in South Africa, spurred on by fixed line operators who cannot meet the demand for telephony and desktop Internet access required to sate the diets of an increasingly communication literate (Walton, 2009) and communication *dependent* African marketplace (Castells, et al, 2007).

Whether by choice or by circumstance, the majority of the learners interviewed in this study used MXit as their primary means of mediated communication. For the Khayelitsha and Cloetesville learners, this usage is self-explanatory, as they lack the option of supplementary social media characteristic of the media consumption habits of the more upwardly mobile Milnerton and Newlands learners. For the latter learners, continued usage of MXit hints at a broader need for social networking among youth in general, especially given their continued status as financial dependents. Affordability offers the means to chat for long periods of time, but does not explain the underlying relationships that influence these conversations, and certainly does not trigger such extensive usage in the first place. Users derive gratifications from these conversations that are enabled by the endless expression facilitated by MXit's low-cost pricing, but centre on latent needs for friendship and intimacy, as we will discuss in Parts 3-5. In this way, attributing MXit's popularity only to its cost efficiency runs the risk of ignoring why MXit is being used *so much* by its target market in the first place. The by-product of this pervasive usage is the synchronous ritualisation of mobile consumption into teens' everyday lives (Curran & Liebes, 1998). This is the most striking manifestation of MXit's popularity, but still does not account for the chief attraction that encourages such extensive usage. The transition towards a discrete mobile youth culture will now be explored with reference to the role of the cellphone in facilitating mobility, autonomy and privacy in adolescents' lives – which encourage this extensive usage.

Part Two

Mobility and the Facilitation of Privacy and Autonomy

Mobility is the most visible feature of the cellphone, as it allows privacy of conversation that would ordinarily be untenable through the fixed-line telephone. The chapter will illustrate how the cellphone allows teens to retreat into a personal social space within the household by microcoordinating their social lives in geographical privacy. Privacy is intrinsically related to the need for autonomy so central to adolescence (Garrett & Williams, 2005), and is the foundation upon which teens use MXit to develop a sense of information self-sufficiency and unaccountability to parents (Levinson, 2004).

Mobility.

In this climate of mobility, the cellphone conflates the previously-demarcated cultural arenas of school and domestic life into overlapping social realities that are constantly on the move (Hills, 2009). As Larsen, Urry, and Axhausen (2006) illustrate, mobility has altered the way people communicate, ushering in communicative practices that are dictated more by one's presence in the mobile communication network than by co-present proximity:

Absent others are a call or text message away so people can be in communicative propinquity with significant others even in a sea of strangers [...] Nowhere do people seem more busy calling and texting than when in motion or transit, and modern cities are thus no longer characterised by isolation but by connectivity, by private worlds of perpetual talk at-a-distance (111).

Despite the potential for communication on the move, respondents highlighted the use of the device during both mobile and immobile activities, most of which took place in the domestic environment. In this way, usage of MXit overlapped with routine social practices, from "getting dressed" (Group Interview, Milnerton High, 17/08/2009) and "doing the

laundry” (Focus Group, Manyano High, 19/06/2009) to formally allocated study time in the home and classroom (Focus Group, SACS, 13/08/2009). The most meaningful *tête-à-têtes* took place late at night in the bedroom, once families had gone to bed and the teenager was afforded the privacy of their own bedrooms. This usage reflects adolescents’ negotiations of media into the broader patterns of the household, as well as the ability of social networks to provide an “invaluable lifeline” (Pascoe, 2010:145) for teens by conflating the privacy and intimacy they desire into a handheld object.

Texting offers privacy, speed and convenience over voice calling (Horst & Miller, 2006; Ito & Okabe, 2005) and allows messages to be sent while in the presence of others, stationary or on the move. Several learners mentioned how they would use MXit to organise their weekends’ social events while riding in the car with their parents. This “multitasking” (Focus Group, Milnerton High, 12/06/2009) exacerbated parents’ perceptions that teenagers are poor communicators (Garrett and Williams, 2005), given their common concern that teenagers are spending too much time on their phones in the first place. However, a girl at Milnerton High identified how her Mom “gets a thrill out of it [...] she tells me what to say” (12/06/2009). This suggests that parents, who grew up managing their social lives via the fixed locality of the home telephone and payphone (Levinson, 2004), can equally embrace MXit as a novel communicative practice. Parents like the Milnerton mom may view MXit as a curious novelty, which is in line with Fujimoto’s (2005) assertion that the playful, escapist qualities of *keitai* tend to increase its utility in users’ eyes. From this perspective, the functional role of MXit as an object of entertainment may have bolstered the popularity of the platform, broadening its appeal to an older demographic that would not ordinarily use it. However, as we will soon illustrate, adolescents do not advocate their parents having MXit accounts themselves, let alone communicating with their children over the application.

Privacy and accountability.

Communicating in transit entails a perpetual multitasking experience that is second nature to the user who has integrated texting into social practices that were once thought to demand one's full attention (such as homework and school lessons). This is illustrated by what Ling (2004) terms the 'microcoordination of social activities'. Here, teens use the mobile to plan and coordinate their social lives on the move as long as they are connected to their peers via mobile information networks – a practice that is increasingly common to youth in European (Larsen, et al, 2006) and African settings (Pfaff, 2009). When asked for their preferred location for 'mixing', a Masiyile Secondary respondent simply supplied the answer; "wherever" (27/07/2009). Her response, non-specific as it may be, encapsulates the advantages of this mobility in facilitating private dialogue between peers at the user's locale of choice (Ling and Ytirri, 2002). These actions augment the cellphone's advantage at establishing intimacy with peers, while keeping unwanted others at a distance:

[...] the mobile phone has helped to overcome the power geometry of space, allowing adolescents to communicate with friends without parental surveillance (Chigona, et al, 2009:4).

Insofar as the cellphone allows teens to communicate on the move and in private, it can simultaneously embolden the accountability of children to parents, ushering in what Levinson (2004) calls the "gripping hand" (86). If the transition to adulthood is defined as a "transformation of parent/children tabs from mandatory to voluntary" (Levinson, 2004:89), then the cellphone can be viewed as a way of keeping teens tethered to adult control by its ability to initiate contact at any given moment. From this perspective, the role of traditional socialisation structures like the family, deemed by Castells, et al (2007) to be weakening, can be augmented by the parental surveillance that is facilitated by mobile communication

(Bosch, 2008). As with Bosch's (2008) findings, communication with parents was central to teens' possession of the device, and emphasised the fears of disconnection from their primary support base should the cellphone be taken away from them. When asked to imagine the consequences that such disconnection would entail, responses like, "No way of contacting your parents" (Focus Group, Milnerton High, 12/06/2009) were commonplace in the current study.

Desires for privacy were especially pertinent to female users, who seemed to be placed under the most pressure by parents when it came to the age and gender of their contacts. This may be due to the unrelenting media attention paid to young girls' victimisation by 'sexual predators' in MXit chatrooms (Chigona & Chigona, 2008). The tension inherent in parents' alleged perceptions of MXit augmented girls' desires for privacy and autonomy, resulting in a sense of self-identity that is aligned to fellow teens, and symbolised by the object of the cellphone:

[...] for me, it's like my own time, where I can just sit and speak to my friends or go to my room and just relax [...] and then for some parents maybe it bothers them because you're not spending as much time with them [...] but we're different, like maybe we want to speak to our friends instead of being around our parents who just want to know about school all the time [...] and I think the pressure of studying [...] it's taking a break from everything (Focus Group, Milnerton High, 12/06/2009).

The bedroom, as a symbolic receptacle of adolescent sanctuary and privacy (Levinson, 2004), emerged as the most popular environment for using MXit, followed by a typically public interactive space like the family lounge. This finding reflects Fortunati's (2002) writing on the shifting, malleable boundaries between the public and the private. In

this case, intimacy is facilitated by ‘shutting out’ the outside world through the privacy of MXit’s conversations.

The mutual shaping of technology and its domestic usage is, as Rogers and Silverstone (1992) illustrate, a natural rhythm of the power geometries of the household, made all the more evident by the domestic appropriation of the cellphone and its concomitant practices of resistance (Goggin, 2006; Horst and Miller, 2006). This resistance is symbolised by the practice of using MXit in parental company while watching television, which has been traditionally viewed as a dedicated medium for co-present family time (Meyrowitz, 1986; Levinson, 2004). Although the familial makeup of their home lives was not a direct question posed to respondents, those who chose to comment on their domestic lives appear to stay at home with their parents or an adult relative. The hierarchy of power inherent in domesticity clashes with the communicative practices of teens, as it is often parents who hold sway over the moral economies of the household (Hirsch & Silverstone, 1992b; Hjorth, 2008).

The need for privacy and autonomy so central to adolescents’ healthy development of selfhood (Berk, 2003) is impacted by the family-oriented, domestic nature of the family television and PC, which demand a stationary user due to their fixed locations. Bosch (2008) highlights the cellphone’s navigation of the spatiotemporal boundaries of the domestic environment by enabling teens to communicate at times and locations when parents are no longer co-present. This is illustrated by a respondent’s use of MXit during the day and Facebook at night in order to accommodate his father’s daytime usage of the family computer:

My Dad works from home, so the chances of me doing it are only at night, whereas MXit I can go on any time during the day, when I’ve got my phone on [...] MXit’s

just a lot easier, a lot simpler, a lot easier way of talking to people (Interview, SACS, 23/04/2010).

Cultivation.

Given the parental disapproval of MXit across all research settings, it appears that the generally negative perceptions of MXit and the cellphone *writ large* actually increase adolescents' desires for autonomy. Sometimes, this criticism was understandable, with Khayelitsha respondents frequently mentioning household chores that would be compromised by their usage of MXit:

They don't like it because we spend much of the time through MXit. We don't normally come to reading books [...] and then we don't do, like, fetch water (Focus Group, Manyano High, 19/06/2009).

Several Masiyile girls emphasised that their parents had even disallowed the use of MXit in their presence altogether as a result of these chores remaining uncompleted. This is evinced by the quotes below, the first of which illustrates a somewhat draconian parental perception of MXit, while the second indicates the value that teens ascribe to the platform. As with the above excerpt, MXit is seen to impede the everyday chores required to sustain a lifestyle that is far more basic than the average SACS and Milnerton High learner experiences:

My Mom says it's Satanism [...] because people get addicted to MXit [...] you won't do things you're supposed to do, like you'll just speak to MXit (Focus Group, Iqhayiya Secondary, 27/07/2009).

They get irritated. They think it's a waste of time [...] hide MXit if you stay by your home watching TV [...] but there is something we must do [...] what we want is to go on MXit (Focus Group, Manyano High, 19/06/2009).

SACS and Milnerton High parents, on the other hand, were especially concerned about the perceived prevalence of sexual predators on MXit. As all of the Khayelitsha respondents purported their first language to be isiXhosa, it may be reasonable to assume that their parents are *less* exposed to the fears expressed in mainstream media (Chigona & Chigona, 2008) due to Cape Town's absence of isiXhosa-medium newspapers. Their concerns primarily centred on the cellphone's obstruction of routine social tasks, whereas the wealthier parents' views, as expressed through their children, indicated a moral dimension to the 'MXit debate' that was related to the consistent themes of child pornography embodied in MXit's reportage in the media⁹.

Mainstream media coverage of MXit in English-speaking newspapers represent MXit as a harmful entity in providing children with indiscriminate access to information that they would not ordinarily possess (Bosch, 2008). Coverage of MXit is therefore symptomatic of the moral panic identified by Chigona and Chigona (2008) and Chigona, et al (2009), and was reflected in participants' accounts of their parents' views. According to Cohen (1972/1980), moral panics occur when:

a condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and

⁹ In an IOL News article published on the 1/02/11, concerns of cyber-bullying and child pornography were unequivocally drawn into a story of an adult woman's robbery and murder by a man who she had allegedly met on MXit. Despite the the incident's complete absence of pornography, bullying or sexual relations with a minor, the journalist linked the characteristic themes in media representations of MXit to the current incident in a way that was logically inconsistent and deflective, attributing a level of blame to the application itself: "MXit is particularly popular among the youth and school-going children and has previously also come under fire for its use by "cyber bullies" who claim to "befriend" children before spamming them with porn" (Kassiem, 2011).

stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right thinking people; socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions; ways of coping are evolved or (more often) resorted to; the condition then disappears, submerges or deteriorates and becomes more visible (1).

It was, therefore, only the learners from Milnerton High and SACS who expressed frequent frustration at their parents' *fears* of MXit. When combined with MXit's coverage in the media, these fears may also indicate the tendency of upper-income citizens to fear crime more than other population groups due to their fear of the 'other', which by extension refers to an underlying fear of difference (Spinks, 2001). Discourses of safety and vulnerability to strangers were central to parents' concerns over their daughters' cellphone usage, while these concerns augmented girls' self-determination at attaining communicative autonomy (Campbell, 2006):

[...] and I said to him, "Dad you need to understand that there are chatrooms on MXit, but I don't go on them." [...] The only way [...] someone can, like, trace you or something is if you go on, um, a chatroom on MXit and tell them your name, tell them where you stay, tell them your personal details, tell them your phone number and stuff [...] I told my Dad that you can even check on my phone and Facebook, it's only my friends, it's not bad for me. That's why I think that people are so stupid to go on MXit and go on chatrooms [...] It's not always bad. People stereotype because they hear about all the bad stuff, but they never hear about how cool it is to just talk to your friends (Focus Group, 12/06/2009).

Perceptions of crime, whether real or distorted, and whether consumed through media reports or public discourse *writ large*, cultivated a tolerance of MXit on behalf of parents

across all samples. Fears of sexual predators were not as pronounced in the lower-income schools as they were at Milnerton High and SACS, which supports indelible role of mass communication outlets in influencing public perceptions (Boyle, 2004). However, as we will discuss in Part 5, the Khayelitsha respondents were able to anchor their concerns of crime and safety with actual stories of sexual violence – whether originating in actual experience or not – that had been passed around their networks. Suffice to say, this is something that the middle to upper-income teens only alluded to in general.

South African women are burdened with the majority of childcare, domestic responsibilities and additional fears of sexual assault, abuse, robbery and rape (Barbarin & Richter, 2001). For the average teenager residing on the Cape Flats, violent crime in its many manifestations is a real concern. The threat of violence is especially tangible in the lives of women, who occupy a vulnerable position in society due to their existence within patriarchal cultures of masculinity that are exacerbated by conditions of poverty (Wilkinson, 2002). Parents may therefore employ self-justification strategies to cope with the cognitive dissonance experienced when negative discourse in the press collides with the cultivating potential of MXit (Chigona, et al, 2009; Bosch, 2008). As a result, parents may view MXit as a device that encourages their children to stay at home, which is perceived by parents to be a bastion of safety and a welcome respite from the dangers of the outside world.

Fear of crime is greatest at night in South Africa, and is particularly pronounced in traditional black and coloured neighbourhoods, where crime rates are often higher than traditional white suburbia (Spinks, 2001). Yet, as Spinks (2001) illustrates, it is very often white, wealthier citizens who fear crime more. Whether their negative perceptions were the result of actual experiences of crime, fears of crime expressed through media discourse, the obstruction of household chores or religious concerns, parents' largely homogenous tolerance of MXit can be seen to cultivate a sense of safety in their children via the perception of safety

that the device offers (Lemish & Cohen, 2005). Statements like, “Sometimes they like it because it keeps my daughter at home” (Interview, Iqhayiya Secondary, 17/08/2009) support the cultivation hypothesis proposed by Lemish and Cohen (2005), and also indicate the continual negotiation of adolescents’ broader movement towards the autonomy of adulthood via digital technology (Ito, 2010; Weber & Mitchell, 2008; Russell, et al, 2008).

Invasion of privacy.

Horst (2010) has emphasised that parents’ desires to protect their children from age-restricted movies and pornographic websites are largely ineffectual once adolescents leave the household to socialise with their friends, who may possess heightened access to these media. As the cellphone allows its bearer to coordinate their social lives on the move (Ling, 2004), the very mobility of the device fosters privacy while indirectly promoting autonomy. Perhaps, then, parents see in the device a safer means to facilitate the loosening of the shackles of childhood as adolescents gradually begin to socialise more with peers in environments that parents do not have access to. Yet, insofar as mobility promotes privacy by allowing adolescents to withdraw into social spaces both internal and external to the household, so too does MXit enable privacy in the access to the users’ network itself. MXit’s user accounts and concomitant networks were deemed by respondents’ to be their strict territory, which was illustrated by the control they exercised by demarcating family from friend networks. In particular, respondents in general referred to separating ‘randoms’ from ‘everyone else’, which indicates the deliberate selectivity involved in the construction of social networks not dissimilar to that identified by Matsuda (2005).

Girls from the Khayelitsha schools did not indicate any online invasions of privacy akin to their Milnerton High counterparts, but this may reflect their parents’ absence from these digital social networks. Several of Milnerton High’s learners claimed to have parents on Facebook, some of whom were even on MXit. A boy in Cloeteville relayed his experience

of his mother repeatedly attempting to open a MXit account, which he kept deleting late at night once she had fallen asleep. Like the others, he viewed these attempts by his mother to join his strictly defined peer network as a direct invasion of his privacy. These frustrations indicate that adolescents view MXit as a social space in itself where offline desires for privacy are equally applicable to the online space of peer-to-peer interactions. The corollary here is that parents too see these online and offline contexts as one and the same, and attempt to monitor both social spaces.

Jenkins (1999) has argued that parents fear youth culture, especially when it takes the form of technological sites of expression that they do not understand. As a result, parents try to exercise the remaining control that they have during the teenage years over their children's communicative engagements with media technologies (Mazzarella, 2005b). In the extract below, a respondent's assertiveness indicates a latent desire to maintain communicative privacy within MXit itself. Yet, compromising her father's disapproval of MXit was his approval of Facebook, as well as an ironic desire to use MXit for reasons of novelty that negated the criticism he had levelled against it:

They hate it. My Mom hates it, she thinks it's disrespectful [...] Parents should stay out of their children's social lives [...] I don't think it's right that parents write on their children's Walls [...] My Dad has Facebook, but I don't talk to him, not because I'm embarrassed [...] because it's not right, it's weird, like if I'm talking to a friend about something personal, my Dad, he fears, he can like, see it. Parents sometimes try to be cool, like, 'I want to go on Facebook and be friends with my daughter's friends' [...] (Focus Group, Milnerton High, 12/06/2009).

This enthusiasm can be attributed to parents' desires to 'keep tabs' on their children's whereabouts and social activities (Levinson, 2004), but is interpreted by adolescents as an

infringement on their privacy and autonomy. Garrett and Williams (2005) have illustrated how ownership of space, information and possessions is an important action in families' recognition of adolescents' right to self-privacy. Social network sites contain the information-rich exchanges between peers (boyd & Ellison, 2007), while teens are fundamentally concerned with protecting their privacy in the limited spatial freedom they experience as dependents (Pascoe, 2010). The cellphone conflates these symbolic markers of privacy, as it is an individualised possession used in a myriad of spatial locations to construct a communicative space that is characterised by acute selectivity.

In this way, the reception of MXit, as a cultural object, cannot be separated from the cultural norms, values and fears that inform its consumption and exclusion of outsiders, for it *is* culture in the first place (Goggin, 2006). Parents' recognition of this exclusive youth culture has exacerbated tensions between adults and children. The discrepancy between children's and parents' views of MXit widens the generational divide in perceptions over the right to access and privacy in social media, which only encourages teens to further regard the platform as quintessentially *theirs*. Youth are, in this sense, the digital natives Prensky (2001) refers to, having grown up in tandem with digital technologies (Ito, 2010). Parents, on the other hand, are viewed by many youth as digital immigrants. They are the unwelcome denizens of an older era characterised by different media habits and an overt concern for their children's safety, now attempting to enter the social spaces in which adolescents' identities and peer circles are negotiated (boyd & Ellison, 2007; Horst, 2010; Ito, 2010). Mobility accounts for the locales in which the cellphone is used, but it is only partly attributable to the extensive nature of this usage. It is only one feature of the cellphone. As the following chapter illustrates, it is connection to one's social networks, facilitated by the mobile, that provides the *raison d'être* for such extensive communication.

Part Three

Always On, Always Available Friendship

If the present study has so frequently highlighted the importance of personal exchanges in using the cellphone, then perhaps both MXit and mobile telephony can be defined more accurately by their propensity for connection than by any overriding sense of mobility. MXit is characterised by its ability to facilitate texting between users at any time of day or night, save for the routine maintenance slots that the company perform and sporadic periods of poor Internet connection. In this way, mobility is ancillary to the relentless connectivity that the cellphone provides:

The key feature in the practice of mobile communication is connectivity rather than mobility. This is because, increasingly, mobile communication takes place from stable locations, such as the home, work, or school. But it is also used from everywhere else, and accessibility operates at any time. So, while in the early stages of wireless communication it was a substitute for a fixed-line phone when people were on the move, mobile communication now represents the individualized, distributed capacity to access the local/global communication network from any place at any time (Castells et al, 2007:249).

The chapter investigates the local manifestations of this connectivity in the context of teens' everyday social practices. Textual communication sustains the lifeline to the social networks that are contextually grounded in the broader experiences of youth. This is the primary appeal of MXit, and this is how it is used by its teenage user base.

Texting.

Throughout this paper, texting has been used to synonymously describe IM and SMSing. The international literature on mobile communication is dominated by the SMS

form, for it is this basic function that is most popular on a global level (Castells, et al, 2007), requiring no mobile Internet connection to operate and thus being embraced by anyone in possession of a ‘dumb phone’ – of which SMSing is a built-in feature (Terry, 2008). Youth have been remarkably resilient at shortening conventional language into an abbreviated form of textual communication that transcends various ICTs. Vosloo (2009) defines texting as a quintessentially shorthand appropriation of modern language that shows little regard for traditional laws of grammar and spelling. In this way, Drury (2005) has illustrated how young people use alternative language regimes to construct their identities in relation to adults, which can range from the development of slang to discursive practices that counter the representation of youth by the institutional order. Text messaging, as Goggin (2008) attests, is congruent with a mobile culture characterised by a shared appropriation of language conventions. In the case of MXit, mixing relies on the in-group identification by young users, who are familiar with the shortened language codes that constitute these ‘new literacies’ (Walton, 2009). This was illustrated in the current study, where youth across all research settings texted in an appropriated form of English.

Despite its English-based template and their isiXhosa mother tongues, respondents in the Khayelitsha schools used a hybrid of English, Afrikaans and isiXhosa that was dependent on the content of their conversations and the language of other users. For example, one boy at Manyano High used abbreviated English most of the time, but strictly isiXhosa when telling jokes over MXit. Yet, Khayelitsha and Cloetesville learners did not abbreviate their isiXhosa and Afrikaans first languages in these conversations, which echoes the findings by Deumert and Masinyana (2008) in their examination of the ‘grassroots literacies’ of isiXhosa and Afrikaans-speaking South African teens. Respondents frequently highlighted their appropriation of the English language, with acronyms such as *LOL* (‘laugh out loud’), *ROFL* (‘rolling on the floor laughing’), *BRB* (‘be right back’) the mainstay in their conversations.

These ‘initialisms’ (Jones, 2009) were known to all respondents, hinting at the possibility of a common mobile culture composed of its own rituals, discourses and social practices, symbolised by the textual appropriation of the English language, and united by youth (Castells, et al, 2007).

The integration of MXit into everyday life.

The extent to which MXit is integrated into users’ lives is exhaustive. This integration varies from individual to individual, but is best encapsulated by the following quote taken from a young girl at Milnerton High:

When I wake up in the morning, the first thing I think of is MXit (Focus Group, 12/06/2009).

The notion of *communication for the sake of communication* emerged as a constant theme during the fieldwork and is illustrated by the following respondents’ indictment of these conversations. She posits these exchanges as a waste of time bereft of any guiding purpose, even though her use of the third person effect (Davison, 1983) indicates that she may engage in these conversations herself. When asked to define what she regards as a ‘good conversation’ on MXit, she informed the researcher, somewhat assertively, that interesting conversations are rare, while “pointless conversations” are commonplace:

When it’s, like, abbreviated [...] ‘what you’re doing’; “I’m eating a sandwich”, and then, oh like, ‘What’s on your sandwich?’ I’m sorry, but seriously, do I really want to know what’s on your sandwich?” (Group Interview, Milnerton High School, 17/08/2009).

This learner, more so than the rest, valued what she considered to be authentic reciprocal communication between two willing participants. Her perspective on MXit was

more critical than most, yet did not acknowledge any potentially aggravating online behaviour on her behalf. This is reminiscent of Bosch (2008) and Chigona, et al's (2009) observations, who found a perceptual gap between users' own experiences of MXit and the imagined experiences of others. That is not to suggest that the respondent is lying, but rather that she too is engaging in the conversational interplay that she so fiercely detests. In this case, her attribution of blame to other users may stem from a shared perception among users that trivial questions of this nature are deemed undesirable. This would support Castells, et al (2007) and Larsen, et al's (2006) hypotheses that the presence of the surrounding network becomes the context of online behaviour for users. From this perspective, the practice of asking brief, trivial questions in a bid to 'kill time' can be as much of a network norm as a network nuisance. Given the commonality of (online) social practices in dictating the normative behaviour of the network (Kadushin, 2004; Lister, et al, 2009), it is understandable that no respondent would acknowledge their instigation of these questions for fear of being identified as a bothersome online presence.

The intimate appeal of network support.

It is through texting that common social practices – one of the foundations of any culture – are manifested in the digital terrain, as texting allows individuals to make sense of the world around them through written expression (Goggin, 2008). Similarly, one of these common social practices centres on the use of texting for self-expression and reinforcement (Castells, et al, 2007). This is none more so evident than when it comes to discussing matters of emotional import in the lives of South African teenagers. When asked whether he uses MXit as a source of help, or acts as a helper for friends who are similarly in need, a Cloetesville boy's response underscored the tendency to converse with members of the opposite sex. This is reflective of the gradual predisposition for seeking out opposite-sex romantic partners as adolescence progresses (Berger, McMakin, & Furman, 2005), as will be

explored in Parts 4 and 5. However, when it comes to emotional intimacy, the ease at which respondents admitted to 'opening up' to members of the opposite sex indicates that peers of the opposite sex provide a functional role as confidants. Many of these conversations centred on the deeply personal problems that teens face in their everyday lives, particularly those that involve domestic disputes:

I talk to most of the girls about the things that happen at home, about what happen, parents fighting, something like that. They talk to me, and I understand what they're telling me, they're giving me advice and stuff (Cloetesville, Focus Group, 23/11/2009).

It is interesting to note that teens attributed a greater level of privacy to online conversations, even when these conversations were with peers that teens had sometimes never met. These conversations are private in the sense that they are between two willing recipients, but the textual form appeared to augment this imagined sense of privacy. Pascoe (2010) has highlighted the decreased feelings of vulnerability associated with anonymous online conversations, while Waskul and Vannini (2008) have argued that intimate disclosure ironically increases on online dating sites, despite participants being in the initial stages of dating prior to co-proximate introduction. McLuhan (1964) argues that the medium is of greater importance than the content of the message in understanding the social and behavioural change that it effects. From this perspective, MXit itself is the message, while the content of the message remains auxiliary to the structural way in which they are transmitted (Goggin, 2006). The presence of the medium facilitates heightened exchanges of emotional sensitivity to the extent that conversations between strangers that would ordinarily not occur offline are commonplace on MXit. Nonetheless, the Cloetesville excerpt indicates that the *content* of these messages matters as much as the medium that bears them. It is in the content

of these messages that personal, idiosyncratic acts of friendship, romance and flirtation between peers are embodied in the textual form, despite the ease at which they are passed online.

Seeking support from friends in times of emotional distress allows adolescents to experience a sense of attachment to others who share a common identity as teenagers. The need for intimate exposure increases during adolescence (Berger, et al, 2005), necessitating deliberate attempts to connect to peer networks when adults are unable to provide the support that adolescents require:

It depends on your circumstances [...] It's also sometimes easier to talk to someone, say for instance if you have a problem or something, then it's easier to do it with a friend, or someone who maybe like might be older but on MXit or something [...] I know personally, myself I don't have a close relationship with my parents, so I'd rather talk to my friends and my parents would rather say, "OK, talk to your aunt" or whatever, because I'm closer with them [...] there are certain issues that I can't confront to them. On MXit you have, like, a confidence, because you can think about what you're saying, and it's so much easier speaking to somebody over MXit (Focus Group, Milnerton High, 12/06/2009).

MXit, like the device in its entirety, allows the individual to remain permanently connected to their peer networks (Ling, 2004). These networked publics enable teens to reach out beyond their surrounding social relations to the primary source of help and support that is friendship. Socialisation with peers is a key component of adolescents' construction of a peer-based identity in relation to adults, while constantly available social networks like MXit fulfil this need, accentuating the intergenerational socialisation of peers through the formation

of social and cultural forms, like shorthand texting, that exclude adults (boyd, 2010; Horst, 2010).

This connectivity was stressed by respondents from all backgrounds, and is illustrated by a learner's inability to acknowledge any specific reason for logging on other than a generic need to feel connected to her peer networks:

You just go on for unnecessary reasons, like you don't have anyone specific who you want to talk to, so you start asking them questions, like 'tell me something,' or 'ask me something', you know, stupid stuff like that (Focus Group, Milnerton High, 12/06/2009).

Ironically, this statement was uttered by the same girl who had previously criticised the practice of asking trivial questions— as supplied at the start of the chapter. Her response indicated that she too engages in these conversations, so it is on this note that we turn to the functional value of these seemingly insignificant messages.

Contentless meaningful chat and gift-giving.

Relentless connectivity provides the instantaneous means to engage with others on a quasi-perpetual basis during the periods of dead time that would not ordinarily be occupied by anything other than the task at hand (Bittman, Brown, & Wajcman, 2009). Respondents frequently alluded to the dreamlike state of multi-tasking in these conversations, which occurred anywhere from walking to class to sitting on the toilet:

[...] I'm half watching TV; half on MXit [...] (Focus Group, Milnerton High, 12/06/2009).

Socialising with like-minded peers in a uniquely interactive, fun online social space is the primary gratification that teens derive from using social media (Horst, et al, 2010).

Without the relationship-based networks of choice that Matsuda (2005) hypothesised, there would be very little reason for logging on. In this sense, the seemingly inconsequential messages that respondents complained about actually reinforced the friendships around which these conversations revolve:

Talking on MXit keeps our friendship going [...] more constant as well (Group Interview, Milnerton High, 17/08/2009).

Once again, these comments were made by the same critic of these short conversations, who now acknowledges the role of MXit in sustaining friendship, even if it may be via conversations that are of a trivial nature. These messages are second in importance to the fact that the medium *allows* them to be sent in the first place. In this way, trivial mixing functions as a form of ritual exchange between friends that Johnsen (2003) terms 'contentless meaningful chat'. Most of these messages take the form of gossip or small talk. However, the content does not have to be meaningful for the conversations to have resonance in users' lives, as it is the *practice* of communicating these gestures that carries the meaning. These messages can be viewed as a modern form of friendship-based gift-giving, where the 'gift' of a short MXit message symbolises the importance of the relationship between users (Taylor and Harper, 2003; Duck, 2007).

Adolescents' utilisation of texting for substituting dead time and periods of boredom with the companionship of friends is illustrative of Ki Park's (2005) 'ritualistic' mobile use. However, 'instrumental' usage is equally applicable in the case of MXit. Ki Park (2005) posits that instrumental usage fulfils a set of deeper cognitive needs in the user. In this case, this instrumental usage is dictated by a prior need for devotion or 'fidelity' to one's peer group, manifested in the simple act of hanging out in the same social space (Erikson, 1968). The frequency of these exchanges across all sample settings is testament to the extent to

which mediated, ritualised gift-giving is so heavily ingrained in adolescents' lives (Taylor & Harper, 2002; Taylor & Harper, 2002).

The timeless, spaceless reinforcement of friendship.

Respondents from the middle to upper-income schools frequently alluded to their removal of contacts whom they did not regularly chat with. This practice was prevalent at SACS and Milnerton High, who accumulated contacts from casual meetings at social events, only to never chat to the person again. Kadushin (2004) has argued that weak-tied relationships need more maintenance than stronger ties, as these relationships have not developed the intimate history that strong relations share. Respondents in Cloetesville and Khayelitsha, on the other hand, frequently made mention of their communication with these weak ties for purposes of self-affirmation and support-seeking. This underscores the potential resources that these relationships can confer in the form of emotional support, even if they are unknown to the contact. However, it also grounds these exchanges in the contextual conditions of economic hardship in which these teens live. MXit is one of the few amenities these youth possess for entertainment and hanging out with friends. In this sense, they perhaps value these unknown others more so than their wealthier counterparts, as they see in them a broader network that allows them to engage in the enjoyable aspects of hanging out, while using these peers as a support base when needed.

Bosch (2008) has illustrated how social connection and communication have always been of importance to teens, and the cellphone fulfils this need by simulating the co-presence of those in the user's network who are not within their immediate vicinity. Friendship guides the act of connecting to these social networks (boyd, 2010), while the dominance of short, clipped messages in these exchanges maintains these bonds. As a result, users can connect with physically absent peers "from all over Cape Town" (Focus Group, Cloetesville, 23/11/2009):

[...] here around us, you don't meet any girls here, but on MXit you just get girls in the chatrooms, you can chat to any girl you want to [...] Most of them I met in Eerste River, around my grandma's house and stuff (Focus Group, Cloeteville, 23/11/2009).

New media like the cellphone have a distinctly supraterritorial quality, with communication signals travelling through and beyond territories irrespective of time, space or distance (Scholte, 2000). The individual is the central node upon which other individuals, themselves members of overlapping networks, connect, facilitating the coexistence of multiple networks that intersect the ordinary spatiotemporal limitations of everyday life. Distance is effectively lessened by this communication, ushering in the compression of time and space as users are able to connect to each other irrespective of time or locale:

Widespread mobile phone ownership enables individualized yet connected small worlds of communication, in the midst of vast complex worlds of absence, distance and disconnection. Even when people are absent they can remain in communicative propinquity with their social networks, of work, family and friendship (Larsen, et al, 2006:40).

In their discussion of the co-presence facilitated by SMSing among tourists in New Zealand, White and White (2008) observe that the simple *act* of conversing matters more than the context or content of the message itself:

Text messaging allows for spontaneity, the ability to "play" with distant friends and to affirm relationships. [...] As with many telephone calls, the content of these communications was not the key issue. The immediacy and fact of sending a text message was confirmation that the correspondent was "thinking about you" at that instant (200-201).

There are no pointless conversations on MXit, despite the Milnerton respondent's comments indicating otherwise. The limitless interplay of messages between users enables a form of ambient virtual co-presence (Ito, et al, 2010b) that transposes the physical co-presence of the communicating parties for the interactive space of digital social networks (Boshoff & Strelitz, 2008). These contentless meaningless chats afford users the opportunity to engage with a select few loved ones in the periods of time that are not occupied by time-consuming tasks and distance that would ordinarily limit the capacious use of the device. In this way, ambient virtual co-presence is anchored by the relentless connectivity of mobile communication networks, and is interspersed with the small talk characteristic of a "virtual tap on the shoulder" (Ito & Okabe, 2005:265).

The practice of casual mixing grounds Meyrowitz's (1986) medium theory, which, drawing on McLuhan, argues that electronic media create new types of social situations that transcend physically defined social settings and have their own rules and role expectations. In this way, electronic media reshapes social behaviour. This is precisely why relationships with unknown others can be sustained over distance with relative ease, as MXit creates a new aesthetic that is grounded in the material conditions of relational conduct, but is given its own codes of behaviour online. We will, however, return to this point in Parts 4 and 5 with reference to the online dating practices of the study's respondents.

Boredom as a precursor to mobile addiction.

Sometimes, the act of logging on and staying online becomes, where the presence of so many peers offers users an ostensible sense of comfort in the knowledge that there is always someone to talk to. These prolonged periods of connectivity are swiftly integrated into the inconsequentiality of everyday routines, providing a form of self-expression and peer-reinforcement that is there when needed, yet more often than not subtly embedded in the background of users' lives. For example, a SACS boy informed the researcher that he keeps

in touch with the comings and goings of his contacts through MXit's status updates, which was a new addition to the massively popular MXit version 5.9 introduced in July 2009 (MXit version 5.9 launched, network traffic spikes, 2009). These symbolic snapshots of user's subjective experiences are written for purposes of self-expression and public consumption (Sas, Dix, Hart, & Su, 2009). They afford him a brief glimpse into others' lives, informing him what his friends are doing at the time, how they are feeling, and so forth. More specifically, he emphasised how much he enjoys reading these statuses to the extent that he will "go away for five hours or something" and leave his MXit profile logged on, only to reply to his accumulated messages once he returns (Interview, 23/04/2010).

What this entails for the user is the ever-present opportunity to fall back onto a platform that connects them to those who they have chosen for their online social networks, even if they are in the presence of others who form their tangible, co-present networks:

If I'm with my social group then I'm cool, then I'm fine [...] but if I'm just with one or a couple of my friends I'll be like OK, I need MXit now (Female Respondent, Focus Group, Milnerton High, 12/06/2009).

From these excerpts it becomes clear that MXit is potentially addictive, as the device is always in close proximity to the user's body, while these ubiquitous networks offer a perennial source of temptation to log-on:

And that's the thing about MXit, you get heavily distracted. I mean, I'm doing my work and I've got my phone, so I'm like work, phone, work, phone, phone. I'll take my phone thank you very much (Interview, SACS, 23/04/2010).

It's just a natural instinct, you do it so much that sometimes you go onto your phone and sometimes, you're like, 'OK I'm gonna just send a message normally to

someone', but then all of a sudden you're on MXit, and you're like, 'How did that happen?' (Group Interview, SACS, 13/08/2009).

Respondents espoused a need *and* a desire for communication that was exacerbated by periods of boredom. This may explain why teens saw in 'Doctor Math' ¹⁰ a source of help for personal problems in their lives, whose anonymity as a perceptually similar peer encouraged a level of openness that would not occur around the usual authority figures at school. In his support of McLuhan's (1964) *the medium is the message*, Butgereit (2007) argues that MXit facilitates this honesty because it is perceived by teens to be fun, cool and private. Like the current study, these conversations with Dr. Math were believed to take place between peers, which is the reciprocal relationship upon which adolescents' secrets are usually bartered. However, as will be illustrated in Parts 4 and 5, these conversations are given added poignancy online, where the perceived safety of the medium guides the content of the conversation to the extent that personal revelations among strangers are commonplace.

Teens have come to associate boredom with the unavailability of their co-present peers. Having 'no one to talk to' or 'no one to hang out with' was a frequent frustration of teens exposed to long periods of relative isolation from their usual networks. This is especially so during school holidays, which, according to respondents, witness a spike in prolonged usage when academic responsibilities are nonexistent and learners are without the peer groups who they socialise with on an everyday basis at school (boyd, 2010). In this way, MXit addresses pre-existing social traits such as a need for communication, but simultaneously magnifies them in times of solitary boredom (Goggin, 2006)

¹⁰ 'Dr. Math' was the avatar for the Math on MXit application developed by the CSIR. The project employed tutors at the University of Pretoria to respond to high school learners' mathematics-related questions on MXit. An unexpected outcome of the study was the way in which learners challenged Dr. Math to reveal 'his' identity, even going so far as to pass flirtatious and sexually suggestive comments to the anonymous avatar. Additionally, some learners saw in Dr. Maths a source of anonymous help for the personal problems in their lives, using the service even after exams had officially ended (Butgereit, 2007; Botha & Ford, 2008).

Generational identity.

The cellphone has left its mark as the first place where young people meet prior to arranging their social activities (boyd, 2010). Mobile texting – represented in this study by instant messaging – is the primary means through which teens coordinate their social lives, overriding the hegemony of voice telephony in their peer-to-peer conversations. Although the learners sampled in this study are younger than the 18 to 21 population sampled by Blackman (2010), the current study's findings support the usage of the platform for the management of friendship networks. Texting facilitates frequent communication between the intimate ties that increasingly govern adolescents' social relations as they move through adolescence (Jin & Peña, 2008). This shifts the foci of communication away from their parents and into the online and offline social spaces of peer-to-peer exchanges, contributing to the formation of personal identities that are situated in the broader collective of youth (boyd, 2010). These networks are of fundamental importance to teens in defining their personal identities in relation to others, while remaining allied to the overarching social identities embedded in the social groups that they socialise with in co-present reality and cyberspace (Buckingham, 2008).

Despite discourses of race, gender and class embedded in these social groupings, respondents frequently positioned a shared identity of *youth* as the defining feature of their mobile peer groups. For example, the same SACS boy mentioned that when he was 16, "I was like 'MXit MXit MXit' [...] like if this hot chick's on MXit I'll just go talk to her now you know. I'm more matured now if you know what I mean. You probably if you went on MXit now you'd be like 'this is rubbish'." At this point the researcher informed the respondent that he never grew up with MXit, and that Facebook is a more popular social networking platform with university students. In return, the boy stated that, "Maybe the younger generation will carry it into varsity." He seemed to have little conceptualisation that

MXit as a fashion may be transitory, occupying a large role at only a particular stage in his life, as we discussed in Part 1.

Erikson's (1968) theory of a 'crisis of youth' highlights the transitional nature of youth as a constructive process in itself, complete with youth's engagement in "faddish attempts at establishing an adolescent subculture" (128) in response to their passage through various developmental stages. Erikson (1968) argues that technological advances are widening the age at which youth conclude school and enter specialised fields of work, which provides them with additional time to define themselves in relation to others. This can be seen in contemporary social networks and IM platforms like MXit, where music, Skinz, wallpapers and the composition of the contact list itself reflect the personal identities and idiosyncrasies of the user. Finally, what is quite conspicuous in the SACS boy's response is that he has made a clear identification between himself, as the embodiment of the younger generation, and the researcher, who is presumably, in his eyes, a denizen of that which can only be described as 'adult'.

MXit is remarkably inclusive in that teens, who view the platform as exclusively their own, share universal beliefs of generational inclusion and exclusion that favour their similarly-aged peers, yet exclude adults. This mobile youth identity (Staltdt, 2008) is reflected in teens' accounts of their MXit usage. Connecting to peers allows teens to temporarily flee their offline lives in times of adversity and engage in heartfelt conversation or contentless meaningless chat with the peers who may be going through similar trials and tribulations themselves. These networks provide the user with an abundant source of help and solidarity (boyd, 2010), supplementing the key tenets of the friendships that structure their offline relationships in the first place, yet at no point mimicking or replacing them. If physical, co-present socialising is so central to adolescents' development of peer-based relationships (Berk, 2003), then by extension we can observe that the mobile phone – and MXit – provides

a functional role in adolescents' identity formation. Communication is the foundation upon which socialising occurs (Thurlow, 2005), and text messaging, whether through SMS, instant messaging or status updates, facilitates communication between peers on a scale previously unheard of. The chronic possibility of communication with peers is best encapsulated by the following excerpt, which underscores the appeal of connectivity in guiding usage of the platform. Suffice to say, it is again articulated by the same girl who so frequently criticised the practice of trivial messaging:

I just want to know it's there [...] in case I need it (Focus Group, Milnerton High, 12/06/2009).

Part Four

Romantic Relationships

MXit emerged as a ritualised way of initiating, maintaining, and terminating peer-based romantic relationships, while the toneless qualities of text defined the expression of emotional intimacy. The chapter will explore how cellphones, and MXit in particular, facilitate intimate romantic relations, while providing a source of relational conflict. We will pay particular attention to adolescents' accounts of relational conflict, for respondents frequently positioned MXit as a device more prone to causing fights and altercations than fostering romantic exchanges. The chapter will focus on the implications of these mediated relationships for adolescents' formation of an age-specific identity characterised by shared practices of appropriation (Horst, et al, 2010). In this sense, it is useful to use as a starting point the question posed by Steve Duck (2007) – namely; *How does new technology affect relational life?* – by examining the role that texting plays in mediating these relationships.

The imperative of personal attraction in guiding MXit usage.

The nature of the relationship between contacts plays a key factor in determining the decision to connect to the network, while the dedication of time to a select few symbolises the nurturing of stronger ties in a social network that is principally composed of weak relationships (Miyata, et al, 2005). The number of contacts whom respondents chatted to on a regular basis varied, with sporadic interjections ranging from a popular figure of 10 at all of the schools to figures as high as 20-25 at Iqhayiya Secondary and as low as 5 at Manyano High. These figures are, however, unreliable, as only a minority of learners provided them in haphazard fashion, employing guesswork as estimation. However, what the researcher sought to gauge was a rudimentary perspective on whether the percentage of frequent contacts comprised a significant proportion of the learners' cumulative network. They did not. The most frequent contacts were either close friends or romantic interests, entrenching the

findings by Jacobson (2009), Blackman (2010) and Kadushin (2004). The potential for romantic and sexual exchanges dominated participants' responses, and was the primary reason for frequent logons and extensive periods of time spent on MXit.

The cellphone, as Duck (2007) illustrates, plays a vital role in sustaining romantic relationships because it makes communication with significant others possible on a quasi-perpetual basis:

The importance of the mobile phone is not that it produces constant contact but that it renders such contact possible. The stress on perpetual accessibility is a cue to the importance of the person and the need to be accessible so that others can order their lives satisfactorily [...] usage of mobile phones serves an essential function for relationships: frequent trivial calls embody and sustain the existence of the relationship for both parties (199).

A vocal personality from the SACS focus group confirmed that the amount of time spent online is tantamount to the importance of the corresponding contact. He reminisced over a night where he allegedly spent R70 on airtime SMSing a girl he had met while on school vacation in Knysna. His recollection was one of embarrassment mixed with astonishment, which perhaps, when viewed in the current climate of cheaper social networking options like MXit, he considered to be an excessive amount of money to spend over so short a time. In this case, these longer conversations are with well known, favoured others, where extended periods of time are dedicated to members of the opposite sex whom the user is attracted to.

However, intimate conversations with unknown others emerged as a common trend in Khayelitsha and Cloetesville. Like the SACS boy; romantic attraction, albeit of a digital kind,

guided these longer conversations, as can be seen below via the accounts of a girl at Manyano High:

[...] 40% of the conversations talk about something relating to love, but 40% of the time you speak to a few people [...] 20% I'm talking about dating [...] someone I've never seen before, but most people I chat to are boyfriends – [...]

At this point a boy sitting behind the respondent interrupted her, informing her that conversations with unknown others are impossible. Her response, however, underlined the importance of personal attraction in sustaining successful romantic relationships (Rubin, 1974), even if it may be an attraction that is mediated by digital technology:

All you need is their number. It's about *connection* (Manyano High, Focus Group, 19/06/2009).

A feeling of intimate connectivity is a common trend in the successful mediation of adolescent relationships, while relational certainty is augmented by the frequent contact facilitated by texting (Jin & Peña, 2008). MXit logons were predicated on the hope that one's romantic interest may be online at that very moment, or failing that, may have left a message for the recipient to respond to and thus continue the extended conversation. Intimate relations – whether close friendships or established romantic partners – share a common ground of mutual understanding, private information and shared experience, while the cellphone plays the mediating role in this relationship (Jacobson, 2009; Miller, 2009). The researcher had told the SACS boy about a statement provided in Part 2 (namely, “The first thing I think about in the morning is MXit”), and asked him whether he held a similar view of MXit. He identified frequent attempts to connect to MXit as an intrinsic part of the courting process, without which he would struggle to maintain the recurrent communication required to initiate the

potential relationship (Baker & Whitty, 2009; Jin & Peña, 2008). A desire for intimacy, therefore, provides the chief motivation for his intermittent attempts to access these potential romantic interests throughout the day:

It depends, like say I'm interested in this girl, the first thing I'm going to do is see if she's online, so I'll log on and see if she's online and I'll log off if she's not [...] It's the thing I'll do if I'm bored or relaxing, but I'm not going to wake up and think, 'MXit'. I'll only do that if I'm interested in a person and she's on MXit, and then I'll go on to see if she's online, but if I'm online and she's not online, what's the point of going online and talking to someone? It's so early in the morning, you're gonna probably not get anyone online anyway (23/04/2010).

His response immediately underlines the value that adolescents ascribe to their search for romantic partners. With the advent of social networking sites, courting is made easier by the perception that online conversations are safer than their offline counterparts (Blais, Craig, Pepler, & Connolly, 2008), as adolescents perceive online rejection to be a welcome respite from the threat of rejection in co-present courting. Miller (2009) has argued that the cellphone fosters a mobile relationships in itself, highlighting the way it fosters the transition from casual acquaintance to romantic partner by enabling conversation that is perceptually easy, safe, convenient and distant.

Relational conflict.

Mixing allows users to bypass the shyness associated with telephone calls in the early stages of relationships, while providing a conversational interplay between courting parties as the relationship matures (Horst & Miller, 2006). Texting is liberating insofar as it frees the user from the constraints of co-present social relations. Yet, Horst and Miller (2006) caution that the relationships that form the focal points of these conversations are incredibly volatile

when placed in the context of the toneless, unyielding connectivity that is the mobile domain. The gift-giving exchanges identified in Part 3 provide a form of lightweight social contact between peers (Ito, 2005b) that is used to sustain the romantic relationships of teenagers (Jin & Peña, 2008). Yet, insofar as these gift-giving exchanges bolster relational bonds (Taylor & Harper, 2002), so too can they place pressure on the ‘always on’ relationships enabled by the cellphone’s connectivity by making romantic partners feel too accountable to each other (Yates & Lockley, 2008).

With so much being said in brief, clipped sentences, already intermingled with the usual running of day-to-day activities, conversations can easily escalate into arguments that put strain on relationships in online and co-present settings. Relationships are at stake in these mediated interactions, with a simple textual cue having the potential to be conveyed in a way that is unintended by the disseminator of the message. ‘MXit fights’ were often triggered by a lack of verbal tone and general ease at which incendiary statements can be made on social media, where physical reprisal is perceived as a distant possibility. The misinterpretation and consequent quarrelling associated with textual communication is illustrated by the excerpt below, taken from an in-depth interview with a SACS boy who proved to be one of MXit’s more vocal critics. Like the Milnerton High girl who provided the focus of Part 3, he was also, ironically, one of MXit’s more avid users:

You can be in a hurry and say stupid things [...] it causes these fat-ass fights on MXit [...] you wouldn’t say that if you were talking to her on the phone [...] MXit is a bad thing for relationships. [...] You just wanna excite yourself, and say stupid things (23/04/2010).

Respondents from SACS and Milnerton High consistently highlighted the negative consequences of communicating romanticisms via text, even when the researcher avoided

mentioning the common usage of the device for terminating romantic relationships (Jin & Peña, 2008). When asked whether there is an imperative behind the use of MXit for purposes of dating, he expressed his frustration with the discrepancy between slower, tangible relational practices, and the hyper-communicative practices of cyberspace so popular amongst youth (de Souza & de Souza, 2008):

It's a nice way of getting to know someone, it's easier I mean, say I like this girl, I'll chat to her everyday on MXit, but I think it speeds up a lot of things, it speeds up, like, trouble in a relationship. If you think about it, if you speak to your girlfriend for four hours a day, every day of your life, you'll drive yourself nuts [...] but it's so easy, 'cos you say something to this girl as if in person you could express it, it means stuff- all on MXit, I mean it's nothing, I mean you can get yourself into a hell of a lot of trouble with girlfriends and stuff. You just fight [...] (Interview, 23/04/2010).

One reason attributable to the prevalence of online arguments on MXit could be due to the 'always on', 'always accessible' nature of mediated relationships (Yates & Lockley, 2008). With the growing popularity of built-in instant messaging services like Blackberry Messenger (BBM) and applications like WhatsApp that are more reliant on push messaging, one can surmise that the velocity and volume of this communication may increase the intensity of relational conflicts. These 'MXit fights', which were common to all samples, are exacerbated by the hyperpersonal nature of mediated communication, where users are engaged in intense sharing and self-disclosure made easier by the absence of visual cues and physical presence that would ordinarily govern offline dating (Baker & Whitty, 2009).

As usual, the middle to upper-income respondents were the most ardent complainants when it came to these MXit fights, which may illustrate the added value that their lower-

income peers ascribe to these conversations. With very little else to do in the form of recreation, the lower-income respondents somehow cultivate a tolerance of these fights:

Researcher: Have you ever had ugly stuff said to you by guys?

Respondent: Not often, sometimes, but if you can just ignore it, then no problem for you (Focus Group, Iqhayiya Secondary, 27/07/2009).

In contrast, many of the SACS and Milnerton High respondents had consistently lambasted the relational uses of MXit in an apparent attempt to downplay their participation in these practices. In this way, their criticism may be seen as an attempt to save face around their peers by remaining consistent to their earlier arguments. We can view this criticism as a performance of users' offline identities *vis-à-vis* the online practices they wish to be seen (or not seen) to participate in. Misleading the group may be a way of expressing a desired image of the self that relies on the transmission of an *impression* to the researcher and peers that operates in the absence of any direct observation into these online practices (Goffman, 1971).

It is easy to chat for prolonged periods in the space of flows and timeless time that constitute mobile communication networks (Castells, et al, 2007), especially on a platform like MXit. In the current study, respondents frequently mentioned that they felt like they were entering a world where time seemed to disappear as they lay in their beds chatting until "4 in the morning, every morning", which was the most extreme figure provided by a respondent (Focus Group, Masiyile Secondary, 27/7/2009). Some respondents, particularly boys at SACS, found these long conversations to be annoying, which hints at the possibility of women's natural enjoyment of conversation extending from tangible reality into mobile networks (Barbour, 2007; Castells, et al, 2007). These boys were especially critical of the practice of discussing matters of love and relationships over MXit, choosing instead to cultivate an image of relational control and emotional toughness not dissimilar to offline

ideals of masculinity (Addis & Mahalik, 2003). Once again, however, a further series of interviews made it abundantly clear that these teens were possibly performing their masculine identities in a bid to be respected by their fellow peers, as the interviews highlighted the reciprocal nature of emotional exchanges inherent in these intimate conversations. As we will illustrate below, hesitancy to disclose online displays of emotional vulnerability can transcend into outright boasting when the rewards of such conversations were recognition of heterosexual prowess from surrounding peers (Campbell, 1991).

Cyber-bullying.

When asked if they find it easier to confront or confide in someone over MXit, the general consensus among the respondents echoed Yates and Lockley's (2009) observations: MXit makes it easier to avoid undesirable social interactions, as it allows users to craft a logical response without the pressure imposed by of the corresponding user's co-presence (Focus Group, Milnerton High, 12/06/2009). Once again, the topic of MXit fights was brought to the researcher's attention, even when he sought to determine the role of these conversations in positively expressing romanticisms. Respondents believed that texting was directly responsible for causing discordance between romantic partners. This observation was mentioned more frequently than texting's potential for facilitating the frequent communication of healthy adolescent relationships (Berger, et al, 2005). One respondent even admitted to having fights "with people you're not that close to on MXit", emphasising the platform's potential for "breaking things up" – of which relationships emerged as the chief casualty (Focus Group, Milnerton High, 12/06/2009).

This emphasises the power of the medium in exercising real social change, where the choice of communicative channel influences the shape, form and intensity of the message that is conveyed (McLuhan, 1964). This is especially pertinent in mediated interaction, where the expressiveness of text can be appropriated to any purpose that the user sees fit (Crystal,

2008). However, abusive comments generate more offence when they are posted publicly on Facebook, where the user is unable to utilise the privacy that MXit affords. Several boys were embarrassed at being “made to feel stupid” by girls’ “bitchy comments” on Facebook (Group Interview, SACS, 13/08/2009). Girls were equally offended by these exchanges, which is exemplified by the emotional distress a girl experienced when reading an offensive Facebook Wall post:

Why couldn’t you have just written this in my inbox? (Group Interview, Milnerton High, 17/08/2009).

These statements may be made online, but the feelings that are associated with them are by no means limited to cyberspace. This finding echoes that of boyd (2010) and Lister, et al (2009), who identify the thin line that separates tangible reality from cyberspace, and the repercussions that infringements of online norms can have on users’ offline relationships. These public breakups are more tailored to Facebook, which Milnerton High and SACS learners identified as a more public, impersonal platform than MXit, and is therefore biased towards their media consumption habits. However, the humiliation that respondents felt at these public reprisals underlines the importance of peer status as a primary influence on adolescents’ sense of social standing (boyd, 2010).

boyd (2010) has illustrated the importance of attention-seeking and drama as a way of testing and confirming friendship, which locates these public infringements in the natural power struggles that teens use to define themselves in relation to others. However, the line between the affirmation of friendship and cyber-bullying is porous, and often necessitates outright removal from the respective friend list. Cyber-bullying recently came to the fore with

the blacklisting of Outoilet¹¹, which underscored the porous boundaries between freedom of expression, cyber-bullying, and child pornography (Goldstuck, 2010). On Facebook, speedy attempts to remove the offending contact from one's friends list can be read as attempts by adolescents to protect their social status by saving face on the public stage of social networking (Pascoe, 2010; Goffman, 1969). Once again, the surrounding network becomes the context of behaviour for users (Castells, et al, 2007), with the network exerting pressure on the way that users perceive themselves and their online actions. Although cyber-bullying was not an overt concern of respondents, Part 5 will explore the nature of MXit's photo-sharing exchanges, which provide the foundation for sexual exploitation and recall the dangers evinced by the case of Outoilet.

Insofar as users of dating websites find it is easy to confide in strangers when online (Baker & Whitty, 2009), the current chapter illustrates that youth can equally utilise this confidence, distance, anonymity and tonelessness for harm:

On MXit you have, like, a confidence, because you can think about what you're saying, and it's so much easier speaking to somebody over MXit [...] and a problem with that is it's hard to tell on MXit what somebody's approach is, because you can't hear their tone. That's why with fights and arguments it gets out of hand because you don't always know [...] how they're saying it [...] you're not sure; are they saying it aggressively, or being nice? (Focus Group, Milnerton High, 17/08/2009).

These MXit fights hint at the possibility of cyber-bullying as an abeyant practice among adolescents who use online social networks (Li, 2005), due in large part to the

¹¹ Outoilet is a Russian-based website that attained notoriety in South Africa throughout 2010 due to intensive cases of cyber-bullying, child abuse and humiliation in its chatrooms. Sexual solicitation became increasingly common on the site, with adults exchanging monetary rewards like airtime in exchange for sexually revealing photographs of teenagers and children. Outoilet has subsequently been blacklisted by South African telecoms operators MTN and Vodacom in a successful attempt to self-regulate the industry (Goldstuck, 2010).

confidence and anonymity associated with communicating via online avatars (Bamford, 2004).

MXit and the substitution of ‘real’ socialising.

A frustration with this tenet of MXit was especially noticeable at Milnerton High and SACS, who were the only learners to complain so fervently about the tonelessness of MXit conversations. When it comes to relational practices, this discrepancy may be attributable to the middle to upper-income respondents’ knowing most of their contacts in person. SACS’ respondents regularly mentioned “hanging out” at Cavendish Mall, which indicates that they have the opportunity to frequent the recreational centres where teenagers socialise. In this way, the Newlands boys have the opportunity to socialise with girls on a regular basis due to their disposable income, safer residential areas and access to private transport via parents. This would explain why a SACS learner can make a comparison between co-present and virtual dating in the first place:

MXit can get a little out of hand sometimes, I would have put a limit on MXit daily thing, like you can only go on for an hour a day or whatever, you know, use that hour wisely, but never four hours chatting to a girl in a row. I mean, in person, you normally have supper, you’ll be eating and you’ll slow the whole thing down, you won’t be talking to each other for ba-ba-ba-ba-ba for four hours straight. MXit you gotta do that (Interview, SACS, 23/04/2010).

Cloetesville and Khayelitsha learners, on the other hand, did not know a significant share of their contacts, so the practice of swapping contacts in a bid to increase their contact lists was pervasive. They openly admitted to accepting unknown contacts without question, with one girl justifying this practice by stating that, “It doesn’t mean you’re gonna meet them” (Focus Group, Masiyile Secondary, 27/7/2009). In light of this casual approach to

adding contacts, teenagers in lower-income settings perhaps attribute more value to MXit because it is their primary means of mediated interaction with peers and ‘randoms’ alike. They are ostensibly more tolerant of the disagreements associated with texting’s tonelessness when compared to their Milnerton and SACS counterparts, who use MXit as a supplementary aid to co-present socialising. Perhaps this tolerance can be viewed within the context of the gross lack of amenities, entertainment and recreational facilities in these respondents’ lives. In Khayelitsha, for example, daily life on this part of the Cape Flats is epitomised by fears of crime, with respondents emphasising the need to stay in-doors at night for fear of victimisation. MXit, then, becomes a necessary substitute for the co-present social lives that they cannot pursue outside the spatial boundaries of the household.

These contextual conditions impact on the amount of co-present socialising lower-income youth participate in and increases the value they ascribe to MXit for its ability to facilitate mediated ‘hanging out’ and dating. The middle to upper-income respondents, on the other hand, are used to socialising in co-present, physical settings. As a result, they have a point of comparison to make between online and offline relational practices, and are acutely aware of the role of MXit as a necessary – though often insufficient – alternative to co-present interaction. When asked whether they had ever chosen MXit over spending a night out with friends, the response across all samples was loud and clear. All respondents loudly admitted in chorus that they had never done so. This uniformity highlights the use of the platform as a supplementary aid to traditional, co-present socialising in those contexts where teens have the opportunity to socialise in online *and* offline settings (boyd, 2010; Preece & Maloney-Krichmar, 2003).

The latent need for romantic relationships.

The systemic disdain for voice calls and general avoidance of SMSing (particularly among those teens living in Khayelitsha and Cloeteville) is testament to the low-earning

power of teenagers living in this dense climate of costs. As a result, the ‘frequent trivial (phone) calls’ identified by Duck (2007) at the beginning of this chapter take the form of MXit messages. However, there was little direct evidence in participants’ responses to suggest that frequent messaging emboldens a relationship by providing a constant availability of amorous dialogue scattered throughout the day. Rather, learners tended to highlight the negative consequences of these interactions. In this respect, it was up to the researcher to infer that teens are using MXit for the building and maintenance of relationships. The fact that romantic attraction proved to be the primary appeal of these conversations is indicative of the application’s potential in requiting adolescents’ need for peer-based romantic socialisation in their process of identity formation (Berk, 2003; Berger, et al, 2005; Jin & Peña, 2008).

Gradual socialisation into the dynamics of romantic relationships is a cornerstone of adolescents’ identity formation, while textual conversations allow adolescents to familiarise themselves with the rules and codes of these relationships. Erikson (1968) has explored the crisis of intimacy that youth experience when they enter into intimate relationships when their own identities are still in a process of construction. Intimate relationships entail the fusing of two distinct identities, which are often incompatible in themselves, but are especially prone to discordance when these relationships are fostered at a young age. This may explain why fights with intimate partners are so frequent in the digital terrain. Incompatible personality types, hastily entered into a relationship with minimal co-present contact, now enter a social space where hostile messages are made possible by the facelessness of mediated interaction (Pascoe, 2010).

The transition from family to peer-based ties of romantic exchange marks a fundamental shift in thinking, behaviour and identity formation for adolescents. Ling and Haddon (2008) point to the role of peers in emancipating the individual from parental control,

where romantic partners play an increasing role as primary attachment and identification figures during adolescence (Jin & Peña, 2008; Berger, et al, 2005). Frequent communication is at the core of healthy romantic relationships, which the mobile assists by facilitating intimate exchanges, irrespective of whether they are content-rich or trivial (Berger, et al, 2005; Jin & Peña, 2008). However, these relationships can be threatened by the porous boundaries between the public and the private (Fortunati, 2002), the intimate and the stranger (Jacobson, 2009), the individual and the other (Barendregt, 2008), and the co-present and the virtual (Lister, et al, 2009).

Relational fallout caused by public affronts on social media are illustrative of these personal and social boundaries being crossed. The hypersocial (Ito, 2003) and hyperpersonal (Baker & Whitty, 2009) nature of networked sociability (Castells, et al, 2007) was enough to induce a degree of frustration in users' responses, owing to the sheer velocity of communication on MXit. Given their low earning power, dependence on parents and the prevailing perceptions of crime, mobility and personal safety that permeate their lives, MXit emerged as a viable, albeit flawed, antidote to the relative lack of autonomy that teenagers experience on a daily basis. MXit encourages written and symbolic expression and is utilised precisely for this reason, but it is as much a limitation as a libertine when it comes to adequately capturing the thoughts and feelings required for romantic trysts.

Part Five

Sexual Exchanges

In keeping with the cultural studies tradition, we posit identity as a performative act of self-representation in constant flux, manifested *in* and influenced *by* the social interactions that populate the autobiographical narratives of our lives (Bastos & de Oliveira, 2006; Schiff & Noy, 2006). MXit, as we will argue, is not a neutral territory free from the identity politics that govern our offline interactions, as there are normative ideals of gender and sexuality that influence the content and nature of online exchanges. There are gendered discourses that coalesce around the practices of photo-sharing and sexting, while race and social class segment communication along predefined lines not dissimilar to those found in South Africa *writ large* (Barbarin & Richter, 2001).

Offline repercussion for online behaviour.

There are repercussions for online liaisons with unknown contacts that can take the form of dire physical consequences of a sexual nature. Learners from the middle to upper-income schools expressed fears of these repercussions without the anecdotal incidents to support them, which indicates their greater fear of crime and heightened exposure to media coverage of MXit discussed in Part 2. However, in the context of the lower-income schools, learners were able to anchor their fears of offline repercussions with actual stories that they had heard, even though the legitimacy of these stories can be questioned owing to the 'broken telephone' effect that they entailed, being passed from peer to peer in the form of gossip. A boy at Manyano High told the researcher about an incident that purportedly occurred on the outskirts of Khayelitsha nearby their school. Here, a young girl had allegedly met a contact whom she had been chatting to on MXit, and was consequently gang-raped by the boy and his friends. In response to this account, a girl in the group relayed a story she had heard about

a girl who allegedly fell pregnant in Rustenburg after moving there to live with a stranger who she had been chatting to over MXit.

Despite the logical inconsistency in these stories, MXit is blamed for causing both incidents. This is slightly in contrast to the Milnerton High and SACS learners, whose view often supported the critical – albeit distorted – perceptions of adults towards MXit (Chigona & Chigona, 2008). In addition to blaming MXit (which was standard across all samples), learners from the middle to upper-income schools openly engaged in a process of ‘blaming the victim’, attributing tragic incidents they had heard from others to the victim’s own shortcomings:

People who meet people who they don’t know on MXit are *stupid*, and I’d like to say that I don’t feel sorry for people who’ve met sexual predators – it’s just their *fault* (Focus Group, Milnerton High, 12/06/2009).

The cellphone is remarkably exclusionary of adults, particularly in the relational practices of adolescents. This is especially so when one considers the creation of new, anonymous identities that the Internet makes possible (Lister, et al, 2009). This mediated melioration of identity is illustrated by a Cloeteville boy’s realisation that he had been chatting to a woman who was in fact 22 years his senior, which spurred on the common concerns of safety among respondents in general:

I chatted to a lady who was 39 years old. She told me she was 16 years old, and I asked her if she can send me a pic, then she said she was 39 years old. She was from Somerset West. Then I just deleted her. She was too old for me, she could be my mother (Focus Group, 23/11/2009).

Scenarios of this nature illustrate the oft-unwanted exposure of children to adults in the networks of cyberspace, where age and gender do not constrain the shape of anonymous avatars (Lister, et al, Marshall, 2008). However, the boy's clear demarcation between himself and the older woman emphasises the homogeneity of age in determining adolescent peer networks (Ito, 2010) and romantic relationships (Blackman, 2010).

The betrayal of trust evident in his account accentuates adolescents' acute awareness of the difference in intergenerational relations between old and young (Ito, et al, 2010b). This tension hearkens towards the mobile youth culture outlined by Castells, et al (2007), of which commonality of age under the broad umbrella of 'youth' is an unofficial requirement for membership of the mobile in-group. Furthermore, this practice can be seen as a way of youth defining themselves vis-à-vis the older generation (Ling & Ytirri, 2002), particularly when respondents' maximum age threshold of contacts generally did not exceed 25. This was a young person's 'game' they were engaged in, and adults were, in participants' eyes, not welcome to participate.

Risks of sexual solicitation and online harassment have been explored by Schrock and boyd (2008) and are real concerns in the online relational practices of MXit, even if users' anecdotal accounts are the products of rumour or exaggerated media coverage. These risks are especially pertinent in South Africa given the unequivocal status of the cellphone in adolescents' lives and the economic hardships that many teens have to navigate in an attempt to use the device. The exchange of airtime for photographs has already come to the fore on the Cape Flats, with the Western Cape's "best kept sex secret" (Goldstuck, 2010:1) of Outoilet providing a platform for sexual solicitation in the lives of many teens. Yet, despite these risks, respondents who engaged in these practices displayed an overwhelming enthusiasm for sexting and photo-sharing, which is characteristic of adolescents' experimentation with the gratifying and arousing qualities of their first sexual relationships as

they progress towards early adulthood (Berger, et al, 2005; Blackman, 2010). As the following chapter will illustrate, these practices are fairly uniform across all samples, but are segmented by the gender scripts that users perform, and the cultural ideals that teenagers share over sex and sexuality.

Gendered identities.

Despite their divergent autobiographical experiences, respondents actively used MXit to meet, flirt, and court romantic interests. The popularity of sexting and photo-sharing are symptomatic of the transition to peer-based romantic relationships of sexual exchange (Somers & Vollmar, 2006), while adolescents have been shown to use mediated interaction for sexual stimulation in a way that minimises the risk of this behaviour in co-present relationships (Waskul & Vannini, 2008). The number and nature of these relationships, as well as the societal influences that influence them, differ quite substantially between males, females, and the samples in general. These online relationships, which position teens' identities in relation to the multiple others who they communicate with synchronously, find new avenues of expression and magnification on social networking platforms (Pascoe, 2010). In this way, instant messaging applications like MXit increase the velocity of intimate relationships by facilitating a constant stream of expression dispersed throughout the day-to-day exchanges where adolescents' identities are performed.

The gendered identities that teenagers perform in online social spaces (Ito & Bittanti, 2010) are, in the case of MXit, expressed as part of a role-playing 'game' that revolves around the relationship between the male as 'player' and the female as vulnerable 'chick'. This game is heavily influenced by the prevailing gender roles that adolescents perform in offline settings (Stokes, 2007) and was prevalent in the relational practices of two boys at SACS, who reflected on the goal-oriented nature of these exchanges. The researcher asked the boys if they had heard about the practice of sending sexually explicit photographs over

MXit (Chigona & Chigona, 2008) and whether they knew anyone who participated in these practices. Once again, the indignation expressed by the middle to upper-income learners was palpable:

I've heard of like a love game with a person, and they get like into this whole thing and they start sharing stuff, and I think it's stupid. You know, if you are mature enough, if you are mature about it, you just shouldn't talk to people who you don't know [...] They're just people who want attention [...] A lot of guys do that to get pictures from girls [...] because girls these days; they're often forced into things I rate [...] and then you get her to send pictures or whatever – that's how it works (Group Interview, 23/04/2010).

At this point his peer interjected, informing the researcher, that “us guys, we know the words and stuff, you know, different things for different times. For us it's like, ‘who can get this, who can get that’.” Speaking in the second person, the first boy informed the researcher that he feels less guilty when showing these pictures to his friends if the contact is a “random”. However, he apparently makes an exception when “the chick is yours”, which necessitates some consideration for the feelings of his partner. In this way, pictures from girlfriends are “for your eyes only. I mean, if you're a proper gentleman you shouldn't go around showing it [...] If you have respect for the person [...] then you won't do that.” When asked why photos of girls seem to generate increased media attention, his friend indicated that the gift of photos may not be as benign as initially suggested. He illustrated that there is an expected level of emotional intimacy attached to these exchanges that boys frequently exploit:

Because we know how to pressure girls, to get to the right stuff [...] you can write like the sweetest things ever, and she wouldn't even know.

Blais, et al (2008) have highlighted the importance of instant messaging in providing adolescents with the social skills needed to conduct healthy relationships, with relational intimacy resting at the corner of these exchanges. By extension, Thiel (2005) has illustrated how girls place particular emphasis on the intimacy of these mediated interactions. Based on the cross-sample accounts of learners, there is an indication that boys are perhaps more adept at communicating matters of emotional and relational import than is perhaps suggested in Ling and Haddon's (2008) findings on the gendered appropriation of texting. Perhaps, like Pascoe's (2010) findings, boys feel a sense of relief when attempting to court girls in the initial, nervous stages of relationships, whose attempts at 'womanising' are now made easier by the confidence-granting faculties of text and the minimised embarrassment that mediated rejection entails. However, boys' utilisation of intimacy appears to be often goal-orientated in an attempt to tease out photographs of a sexual nature from girls. Mediated interactions are sites of power to be contested by gender groups (Pascoe, 2010), and these boys soon developed a negative reputation over MXit among female users:

You find that players, you know, guys who speak to all these girls, they always go on MXit [...] because they always wanna speak to them (Focus Group, Milnerton High, 12/06/2009).

Ling and Haddon (2008) emphasised boys' affinity for the mobile's technical features, while girls were more adept at social networking and its concomitant expressive practices. In the context of the current study, boys displayed visual cues of excitement when talking about the latest smartphones that possess large screens and fast download speeds, allowing widescreen viewing of these photographs. Girls, on the other hand, frequently alluded to MXit's propensity for allowing communication that is first and foremost safe, fun and fundamentally playful by nature. Although not a single girl admitted to forwarding sexually revealing pictures of themselves, Khayelitsha's girls were the only ones to admit to

sexting, and seemed to enjoy the flirting that it entailed far more so than visual exchanges like photo-sharing. The latter can perhaps be attributed to the thrill that flirting entails among girls, especially among girls who occupy a lower status of power in their communities when compared to boys. In this way, they may see in flirting a way to experiment with the playful tease of ambiguity and passive power through the ‘controlled casualness’ of MXit’s textual exchanges (Pascoe, 2010).

Erikson (1968) has argued that all forms of playful intimacy, from flirting and friendship to sex play and love provide adolescents with the means to successfully delineate themselves from others. In this sense, ‘testing’ one’s own identity, or self, in relation to one’s own desires and the desires of others, is inimitably related to the process of identity construction itself. From Erikson’s (1968) perspective, stable identities indicate a relative cohesion with one’s inner ideals that have been fostered by ‘true’ engagement with peers. Failure to successfully realise this conflict often entails a deep-seated sense of emptiness with oneself and one’s relationships, necessitating the individual to repeatedly seek out incompatible partners in an unsuccessful attempt to attain one’s identity as an adult, which is still at an immature stage of development. Online conversations with the opposite sex offer teens their first sensations of romantic and sexual intimacy in an environment where they can exercise a degree of control over who they interact with and the boundaries that they are willing to draw. Perhaps, then, the successful adherence to these boundaries *vis-à-vis* the sexual expectations of others, whatever they may be, is indicative of a healthy realisation of Erikson’s (1968) psychosexual stage of development.

The performance of sexuality.

The increased levels of confidence and feelings of safety associated with instant messaging (Blais, et al, 2008) were a common feature of users’ responses, while the casual nature of these relationships are characteristic of the *ludic* relationships identified by Waskul

and Vannini (2008) in their discussion of Internet cybersex. These ludic relationships are often distant and noncommittal, evolving as part of a game that is fundamentally playful, where participants transpose the sexual gratification of co-present relations into the expressive and escapist qualities of online avatars. Given the context of “concerted cultivation” stemming from the perceived dangers of the physical world (Ito, 2010:302), we can perhaps view these photo-sharing exchanges as attempts by teens to substitute the lack of sexual intimacy they experience in offline settings for the perceived safety of online social networks.

Adolescent romantic relationships have traditionally been heavily monitored by parents (Pascoe, 2010), but have now been granted heightened self-sufficiency by the mobile. In particular, social media have enabled youth to appropriate customary practices of dating into an everyday set of relational practices that are quite casual in nature, yet still geared towards a generic need for intimacy. By using social media, contemporary teens continue to craft and reshape dating and romance norms and rituals that are deeply tied to the development of new media literacies. However, social media have provided a more extensive private sphere in which youth can communicate with age-clustered friends, acquaintances, and sometimes strangers outside the control of their parents. These private communication channels have expanded teens’ intimacy practices into the networked sphere, especially when it comes to forming, maintaining and ending romantic relationships (Pascoe, 2010).

Identity expression and the MXit alias.

Modern relationships have evolved in conjunction with the increasing integration of digital media into teenagers’ lives, allowing teens to push the boundaries of safety while exercising agency in their conduct of online relationships (Horst, 2010; Pascoe, 2010). One of the ways in which this safety-via-distance is exercised is through the creation of anonymous MXit aliases. While their SACS counterparts were hesitant to reveal their usernames, perhaps

owing to the presence of an all-male group, some of the more memorable MXit aliases from the mixed-gender Khayelitsha samples varied from 'deliciousbitch' and 'sexyeyes' (girls) to '2hot2handle' and 'Legend' (boys). Thiel (2005) has illustrated how adolescent girls express their sexual identities via IM usernames, while Stokes (2007) argues that screen names are actively used by boys and girls to construct their identities and attract the opposite sex. These claims are supported by the above examples, which were proudly revealed to the researcher by girls and boys alike. In this way, male and female users are engaged in a performance of the self as viable sexual partners through the symbolic display of their MXit aliases.

From these examples, it becomes clear that adolescents' usernames are tailored for the expression of sexual identity via the performance of 'personal fronts'; vehicles for carrying signs that provide a displayable snapshot of our identities in the offline (and now *online*) public settings that we inhabit (Goffman, 1971). It is interesting, then, to consider Meyrowitz's (1986) examination of the television interview, which draws heavily on Goffman's (1971) writing in the early 1970s. Meyrowitz (1986) posits that electronic media like the television encourage a greater level of public candidness due to the medium's association with intimacy. Twenty-five years later, the same can perhaps be said of MXit itself. MXit appeared to convey a perception of intimacy to users, providing them with the false sense of safety required to photographically display one's body on such a public stage. When asked whether they send sexually revealing pictures to the boys in their grade, Masiyile High respondents remarked that they were unsure, as users employ MXit aliases in an attempt to mask their identities. They did, however, indicate that they would rather not send these photos to boys whom they knew, as this would encourage boys to act older in an attempt to seduce them.

In keeping with Waskul and Vannini's (2008) analysis, it would appear that weak ties (Kadushin, 2004) provide a platform that is perceptually safer for the dissemination of these

photographs. This can be evinced by the series of quotes below, which capture the sexual dynamism of these practices in a SACS boy's life:

I mean, say I'm good friends with a girl, and we'll be going out or whatever, and [...]
[Pause].

At this point the boy looks around the small coffee shop, focuses on a lady sitting behind him, laughs awkwardly, and lowers his voice:

[...] You may slip her a picture or whatever, it's somebody's random who will send pictures across, but it won't be of themselves, they'll just download a picture off the Internet and you'll send them across you know. Someone is so gullible they're gonna accept that, and sometimes they'll send something back stupid. Sometimes they're stupid enough to take pictures of themselves and send the same pictures, because on MXit it costs, what 10 Moola, which is, what, 10 Cents. Gooi a picture somewhere else, people are just gonna spread it [...]

The researcher asked the boy if his friends share these photographs with their peers, to which he replied that it was common practice to forward them between friends, irrespective of whether the photograph was an authentic picture of the girl or an image that was downloaded from the Internet. His final statement indicates that random contacts are not only commonplace on MXit, but provide the majority of visual material to be sent around.

Hunters and gatherers of the information age?

There are several themes in the above extracts that are reflective of the lived realities of males and females in South Africa. The first is evinced by the hesitant, indignant, yet contradictory responses provided by the two boys, namely; that of culturally-constructed, engendered attitudes toward the opposite sex and courting (Barbarin & Richter, 2001).

Among the boys at Milnerton High and SACS, participant responses went through a transition from moral standpoint to complicit party. Here, the boys went from openly embracing the third person effect in an attempt to deny their participation in photo-sharing to outright boasting about their sexual conquests. These young men stopped short of condemning their own behaviour, even though they had implicitly done so by criticising the photo-sharing acts of ‘ungentlemanly’ others. However, the study’s young women also employed the third person effect, focusing more on the annoyance associated with male inquisitions than on any willing participation in these conversations:

Can I tell you something? This guy, this guy wanted to have MXit sex with me, so I didn’t say no and I didn’t say yes, I just said ‘LOL’, so he was now trying to make me in the mood [...] and he was sending me all these messages like, “I’m now touching your ear, and I’m running my fingers through your hair” [...] (Focus Group, Milnerton High, 12/06/2009).

Raucous laughter ensued among the largely female sample, of which there was only one male present. These responses echoed those of the first focus group held at the school, where the collective frustration of female users stemmed from a typical question posed by males in their attempts to elicit a sexual response, namely; ‘*What are you wearing?*’

The absence of any admission pertaining to Milnerton High girls’ participation in sexting and photo-sharing is attributable to several factors. Firstly, these respondents may not have taken part in these practices in the first place. Secondly, girls from the upwardly mobile schools seemed to wish to convey a sense of ‘properness’ to the researcher. This may be reflective of popular discourses of women as sexually reserved, passive recipients of male seduction (Connell, 2005) – discourses that are embodied in the general media and teen glossy magazines that girls use to formulate their feminine identities (Walsh, 2005). Failure

to respond to questions regarding sexting and/or photo-sharing when boys were so adamant that it was a common feature of girls' MXit habits may therefore be indicative of the expected gender roles these young women perform within the framework of Western discourses of sex, sexuality and femininity (Wiederman, 2005).

However, it is not the validity of participant responses that we seek to establish, but the discourses that constitute and 'play out' users' identities (Baynham, 2006). It is through the words of users that we can gauge the interrelationship between the offline norms that inform online behaviour, and the role of the cellphone in mediating adolescents' identities. Thurlow and Marwick (2005) have illustrated how speaking – or refusing to speak – plays an important role in constructing teens' self-presentation and identities. Boasting about the exchange of photographs – or refusing to disclose any participation in these practices – provides a unique insight into the way that adolescents define themselves in relation to others. Cammack and Phillips (2002) have argued that silence is a discourse in itself, so it was by observing this silence that the researcher was able to gain an understanding of girls' desires to save face around their male and female peers (Goffman, 1971).

The cellphone exists at the centre of this process, allowing shy teens to engage in practices that they were not willing to divulge in public due to the pressure imposed by normative ideals of gender and sexuality. However, patriarchal discourses are not limited to co-present settings and are articulated in the claims concerning the one-sided nature of these photo exchanges. Identity construction is performed in the context of culturally-grounded discourses (Butler, 1990), while the gendered discourses performed by the study's respondents are indicative of differing cultural notions of sex and sexuality. Here, Wiederman (2005) underscores the role of socially-constructed gender roles in dictating Western cultural ideals' adherence to normative 'scripts' of sexual behaviour:

Masculine gender roles dictate general independence, assertiveness, and exploration; feminine gender roles are based more on ideals of behavioral restraint and personal control [...] As a result, women end up being given the role of sexual gatekeeper in most male-female relationships [...] Sexual activity is viewed as potentially dangerous to a female's body and to her reputation (497-498).

Although writing on gender-based sexual behaviour in co-present, pre-IM settings, Wiederman's (2005) analysis is augmented by the grassroots use of mobile media by South African youth; many of whom appropriate the social roles they perform in tangible reality to the intangible experience of Mxit. As Wiederman (2005) continues;

It is the female's role to limit sex [...] so the male is free to focus on outwitting her defenses to the extent necessary to achieve sexual activity. That females' standards typically represent a barrier each male must overcome fits well with the competitive and achievement-oriented aspects of masculine gender roles. Masculinity calls for being proactive and able to outdo one's opponent, and unfortunately this is the stance many young men take in relation to early sexual relationships (498).

Notwithstanding their ability to resist these dominant discourses (Connell, 2005; Wiederman, 2005), boys in all of the schools believed that they were performing the role of masculine 'hunter'. This finding draws some striking parallels to Meyrowitz's (1986) 'hunters and gatherers of the information age'. Meyrowitz (1986) argues that we are witnessing the regression of humanity to a pre-industrial era due to the increasing integration of electronic media into our lives. From this perspective, the boundaries between public and private places are blurring into an overlapping space of digital interaction not dissimilar to the communal nature of the nomadic village. Children find themselves with increased freedom in this electronic and digital era, allowing them to experiment with sexuality at a younger and

younger age by possessing access to information that would ordinarily be unavailable to them. The accumulation of information akin to the hunting and gathering of natural resources is a by-product of the shift towards an information-based economy, and can be seen in boys' accumulation of photographs for the purposes of conspicuous sexual gratification and recognition from male peers. Conspicuous consumption (Veblen, 1899/1953) may explain the apparent greed at which boys attempted to stockpile these photographs, but the contextual conditions of users' lives are at the heart of this practice.

Hyper-masculinity and social capital.

Gendered performances of the self were particularly marked in Khayelitsha and Cloeteville, where boasting of the accumulation of photographs was commonplace. Here, the researcher was given the impression that hypermasculinity¹² becomes more prominent as the economic wellbeing of the region decreases. Campbell's (2001) investigation into the polygamous sexual practices of South African mine labourers draws some striking parallels to the sexual behaviour reported by black and coloured youth in Cloeteville and Khayelitsha. Among Campbell's (2001) sample of young black working class miners, a masculine culture of chauvinism and promiscuity developed in response to the powerlessness associated with life on the mines. Future financial security is virtually nonexistent in these all-male communities, so hypermasculinity serves the purpose of substituting sexual relationships with multiple partners for the one practice where masculinity could traditionally be established: employment (Campbell, 2001).

The boys in Khayelitsha and Cloeteville may still be school learners, but employment-wise, their social mobility is limited. For example, when asked whether they will ever meet the geographically dispersed contacts whom they interact with, a boy from

¹² A form of masculinity characterised by the repression of emotion and exaggerated attempts at attaining an idealistic form of manhood (Scheff, 2006).

Cloetesville stated that he would – but only if he had a car (Focus Group, 23/11/2009). In this sense, the notion of social capital explored in Part 1 can be applied to the accumulation of pictures from unknown, distant others, which was especially prized among the lower-income schools. Social capital is predicated on the size of the individual's network and the corresponding resources that the individual can draw from (Bourdieu, 1986). However, as Bourdieu (1986) continues, social capital presupposes the acknowledgement of geographical proximity, of which the Cloetesville respondent, whose MXit contacts are “from all over Cape Town”, does not possess.

In this way, we can view his frequent communication with unknown contacts, who are largely comprised of girls, as an investment in the co-present, intimate relationships that could potentially develop should his material conditions improve. This may contribute towards an understanding of why lower-income youth seem to spend so much time on MXit when compared to their wealthier peers (as explored in Part 1). The accumulation of these photographs and their frequent display amongst male peers may additionally support Djamba's (2003) finding of male sexual practices in the Democratic Republic of Congo, who correlates social capital with the amount of children men can procure from multiple women in hypersexual acts of promiscuity. It is a crude parallel to draw, but one that may explain why the lower-income opinion leaders (Rogers, 2003), who hold the most popularity among their peers, purport to possess the greatest number of photographs.

The Cloetesville boy's statement underlines the dire pecuniary conditions experienced by these young men on a daily basis and the physical constraints that prevent them from pursuing co-present relationships with distant others. Hyper-masculinity can therefore function as a respite from the “thousand petty humiliations and hardships” (Rowling, 2008: Page Unavailable) of poverty (Campbell, 2001) by allowing young men to gain respect from their peers through the accumulation of these photographs. Indeed, the relationship between

co-present reality and cyberspace is interconnected, with some boys even going so far as to remove girls once they had extracted photographs out of them – a practice that echoes the characteristically casual, fleeting nature of South African sexual relations once sex has been acquired (Parker, et al, 2007).

These identities find an outlet in text-based expression and manipulation, where sexual prowess is measured by the accumulation and exchange of digital photographs. That is not to suggest that boys in Cloetesville and Khayelitsha are homogenous simply because they share similar township experiences, but rather that their masculine identities were performed more flagrantly than their SACS and Milnerton counterparts by virtue of their shared experiences of hardship. This is evinced by their uninhibited justification of these practices when compared to the indirect manner in which the SACS boys relayed their stories of perceived sexual prowess:

Because I'm a guy I have no choice you know (Focus Group, Iqhaya Secondary, 18/08/2009).

The digital photograph and self-objectification.

Photo-sharing is a sexual appropriation of gift-giving quite dissimilar to the ritual exchange of contentless meaningful chat (Johnsen, 2003) discussed in Part 3. Photo-sharing is not concerned with the ceremonial safeguarding of friendship, as it is tangible in nature and it is embodied with an obligation of exchange (Taylor and Harper, 2002). According to the boys sampled in the study, girls had expectations when providing sexually explicit material that ranged from similarly revealing photos of boys' bodies (SACS) to the actual provision of airtime (Iqhaya Secondary and Cloetesville High). These exchanges were often characterised by unequal power relations skewed towards the wishes of male users, which

was most prominent in the focus group composed entirely of males in Cloetesville. Here, the boys laughed throughout the popular boy's account, seemingly in support of his actions:

We will manipulate them. We tell them we will give them airtime or something [...] then some of them send their picture to me and I go off of MXit and I delete them [...] Most of the girls are my friends, but this one girl she asked me if I want a naked pic, and I must first get her airtime, then I was thinking, then she just send the pics [...] where she stands naked, where she lies on the bed, something like that, open legs (23/11/2009).

When asked whether he knew the friend personally, the boy seemed surprised that I had asked him this and responded by saying, "No man, it was an Indian from Mitchells Plain." We will explore the racial discourses governing these relationships in Part 6, but at this point it is evident that there is an element of sexual othering in his response that mirrors a salient discourse of race in post-Apartheid South Africa (Liladhar, 1999; Seekings, 2008). Jaynes (2007) has highlighted the continuing discourse of racialism that governs young South Africans' choice of romantic partners in adherence of the status quo. Here, the boy inadvertently justifies these same-race relations by positioning himself in relation to the 'other', which in this case is represented by non-coloured race groups. After his assertion, the boy sitting alongside him began to elaborate how he "steals" his "naked pics" from his friends. His friends reciprocate in this practice the moment they find these pictures on his phone, with the difference being that they allegedly steal his entire MXit contact list in an attempt to contact the girls who have provided the photographs. These revelations continued to unfold, with the initial question inspiring a series of anecdotal tales of masculine sexual conquest:

My friends in Blue Downs, they actually make bets on how many naked pics of girls they can score by the end of the weekend. R50 bet, R100 bet. 15 boys in the group, like they get new contacts, and the one who has the most naked pics on Monday, he gets the money (Cloetesville, 23/11/2009).

Connell (2005) identifies two key tenets of gender – namely, the interplay between emotional attachment (or in this case, *detachment*) and power relations – both of which are embodied in the above extract. Here, a conspicuous display of power is taking place, where female contacts are objectified and bartered in the form of the digital photograph. Statements such as, “I think they bribe the girls like that” (Focus Group, Cloetesville, 23/11/2009) were commonplace, and reinforce the economic conditions of the impoverished township and the prevailing culture of risk-taking masculinity that exists on the Cape Flats (Ratele, et al, 2007). Power and rivalry are frequently played out in the conversations of mobile phone users, as the device is an object of exchange embodied with the discourses and power relations of tangible relationships (Taylor and Harper, 2002; Taylor and Harper, 2003). Pictures that would ordinarily be reserved for the eyes of the recipient are now spread from user to user, depersonifying the photographer by subjecting her to the male gaze as an object of desire (Mulvey, 1999). In this way, emotional attachment is absent from boys’ accounts, with a concomitant desire for emotional *detachment* being quite palpable.

Concurrent relationships.

Concurrent relationships ¹³among young adults are commonplace in South Africa (Parker, et al, 2007) and extended into the online relational practices of the lower-income respondents. Several of the boys boasted of having numerous girlfriends on MXit, some of whom they had never met before. These relationships reflected their offline relational

¹³ Relationships where two or more partnerships overlap at the same time (Parker, et al, 2007).

practices, with all three of Iqhayiya Secondary's boys in a group interview alleging to have separate relationships with several girls living in their areas. There is, however, the possibility that the boys were exaggerating these relationships in an attempt to gain admiration from their peers. There is no guarantee that participants' claims to online relationships mirrored their offline relationships as well. Meyrowitz (1986) and Marshall (2008) have argued that gender norms overlap and even conflict in the increasingly blurred, uncertain space between the public and the private, which may explain the confusion inherent in separating online partners from offline partners. However, it was not the actuality of these practices that the researcher sought, but respondents' claims to their existence, for it is in language that discourse is manifested, and through discourse that cultural understanding and shared meanings are represented (Hall, 2003b).

In a small group interview conducted with two girls at Iqhayiya Secondary on a separate day, it became clear that the practice of online dating with multiple partners may be common to both males and females, as it was in Parker, et al's (2007) study. Like the boys in their class, they too admitted to having online boyfriends, all of whom they had never met. For these girls, their concurrent relationships were limited to cyberspace, yet were just as casually fleeting as the relationships evinced by their masculine peers. Concurrent relationships are, as Parker, et al (2007) illustrate, inherently transitory by nature, and this is supported by boys' frequent assertions that they would 'remove' girlfriends from their contact lists once photographs had been acquired. The Iqhayiya sample in particular held views on love, romance and sex that informed the very discourse they employed in a way that the researcher did not expect. The frequency at which words like 'love', 'sex', 'girlfriends' and 'female friends' were used interchangeably by respondents may indicate the deep-seated language barrier between researcher and respondents. However, the normality of these relational practices in respondents' lives was illustrated by an Iqhayiya girl's story of being

proposed to several times on MXit by men from different parts of the country who she had never met before. Perhaps, like the practice of solicitation outlined by Molony (2008) in the following chapter, these proposals were hoped to be in exchange for some sort of sexual gain that might occur after co-present introduction had been made.

Like Parker, et al's (2007) study, there was a positive relationship between the mobility of boys and their participation in co-present, concurrent relationships. In this respect, the only sample that claimed to have online and offline relationships of a concurrent nature were the Khayelitsha males, while their female peers seemed to pursue these concurrent relationships only in the relative safety of cyberspace. The Khayelitsha boys' claims stood in contrast to those from the other samples, who admitted to pursuing online sexual *relations* with girls characterised by photo-sharing and sexting, but not necessarily multiple sexual *relationships*. The only exception then is the Milnerton girls, who claimed to have no participation in online practices of a sexual nature.

These findings, though divergent, reflect the influence of cultural and societal norms on the identities of the study's respondents and the way that they are played out in cyberspace (Thiel, 2005). The extension of the Khayelitsha teens' concurrent relationships into the mobile terrain is reflective of the culturally pervasive concurrent relationships among black, urban, isiXhosa-speaking youth (Parker, et al, 2007). On the other hand, masculine discourses of sexual prowess were evident in the SACS boys' responses, while the Milnerton girls' general unwillingness to reveal any participation in these practices is reflective of Western constructs of women as passive objects of sexual desire (Wiederman, 2005). Wiederman's (2005) analysis comes to the fore in all of these cases, as it advocates the role of culture in socialising the individual to the adherence of sexual scripts in dating, communication, and sexual behaviour itself. The fact that Milnerton High's respondents, who were the most racially diverse sample available, shared similar views on monogamy is indicative of the

pervasiveness of Western cultural norms for adolescents who are attending urban mixed-race schools (Wiederman, 2005).

The importance of sexual exchanges.

Insofar as mobility increases the likelihood of learners meeting the opposite sex in public, so too does a lack of mobility decrease the likelihood of adolescents being able to pursue intimate *or* concurrent co-present relationships:

Researcher: Has MXit made your life better in any way?

Respondent: I would say yes, but here around us, you don't meet any girls here, but on MXit you just get girls in the chatrooms, you can chat to any girl you want to [...] (Focus Group, Cloeteville, 23/11/2009).

Learners from the Khayelitsha and Cloeteville samples frequently expressed frustration at their inability to see their romantic partners in person. As a result, MXit emerged as a digital antidote to this lack of mobility. To a limited extent, MXit circumnavigated this immobility by simulating the co-presence of young lovers by allowing them to *imagine* being in each others' presence (White & White, 2008). However, as one girl emphasised, these relationships cannot replicate the emotional intimacy of physical co-presence:

They're different because you just communicate with them [...] they can't hold you if you cry, so you don't depend on them very much [...] You can't see that something [...] they're all the same, because they're all friendly (Group Interview, Iqhayiya Secondary, 17/08/2009).

From this perspective, we can locate the pursuit of online concurrent *and* monogamous relationships as much in the cultural norms in which the cellphone is embedded

as in the broader immobility of youth *writ large*. Notwithstanding the power displays inherent in these practices, there is an element of youthful naivety in both boys' and girls' accounts that hints at a deeper need for communication with the opposite sex. The ways in which these needs manifest themselves are influenced by the cultural ideals that the teen has been socialised into, but their initial engagement in these practices underscores the frustration – both emotional and sexual – that teenagers living in low-income communities felt at not being able to have sufficient co-present time with members of the opposite sex. Respondents from the lower-income samples frequently attributed their pursuit of online relationships to the lack of alternatives when it came to seeing their romantic partners. In this respect, the researcher asked the Iqhayiya boys whether 'MXit girlfriends' are the same as the girls who they know from face-to-face interactions, to which one of the boys interrupted the researcher, completing his sentence with the words, "real life":

You see, most people do it just because it's fun. Maybe they connect with that person on MXit, otherwise they wouldn't connect with them in real life, and that's why most of them have online boyfriends or girlfriends (Group Interview, 18/08/2009).

Respondents in all of the samples were unanimously clear that they would remove contacts of the same sex over opposite-sex contacts. Conversing with the opposite sex was enormously important to boys and girls, even though girls were frequently subjected to boys' unwanted questions. Despite their initial indignation, girls experienced an ostensible sense of gratification by feeling constantly 'in demand' by boys, which gave them a degree of power and control over the direction of these conversation. However, autonomy in reciprocal communication is to an extent subject to the wishes of others, with several of Iqhayiya Secondary's girls reciprocating in "creepy" questions usually of a sexual nature (Focus Group, 27/07/2009). One respondent claimed to provide intimate answers to these questions,

even detailing the colour of her underwear and hair for those contacts she had never met, while displaying no signs of the privacy concerns evinced by Milnerton High's girls. After her revelation, laughter engulfed the largely female group. However, she remained resolved in her avocation of her responses:

You answer as freely as you can be, because in the end he's not here and he's not going to harm you [...] He's far away, you're far away (Focus Group, 27/07/2009).

The collective acquiescence that followed her response was unanimous. Several of the lower-income girls seemed to perceive these online interactions as occupying a completely separate 'world' to their offline realities. This alternative reality was not only aesthetically different, but perceptually safer than the dating practices that they associate with the impending risk of sexual violence. There is an element of sexual autonomy in her response that is reflective of adolescent girls' common usage of instant messaging as a way of experimenting with feminine identities amidst the confusion that is adolescence (Thiel, 2005; Erikson, 1968). As Thiel (2005) illustrates, this experimentation allow girls to temporarily emancipate themselves from the dominant cultural and media discourses that impose a normative set of standards on their identities. In this way, the cellphone's role as an emancipatory agent is quite palpable, especially in the lives of the Khayelitsha girls. It facilitates a level of empowerment in these users, who now have the control to manage these relationships in ways that may not be possible in offline settings due to the nervousness associated with face-to-face interactions (Yates & Lockley, 2008) in a largely patriarchal dating structure (Soskolne, 2003). In this way, photo-sharing allows girls to flirt with the parameters of risk-taking behaviour while entrusting in the belief that safety lies in the improbability of a co-present meeting (Marshall, 2008).

The exercise of power, and the exorcise of network offenders.

The practice of soliciting sexual services for material gain is pervasive in Africa and has increased as the device has grown in social status (Molony, 2008). Molony (2008) highlights the prevalence of this practice in Tanzania and Zambia, where *mobitel*¹⁴ women offer transactional sex in exchange for material rewards from older, financially successful men. In this sense, the exchange of photographs for airtime is once again linked to the perceived social status of the cellphone, with the device occupying a central role in the culture of relative deprivation that permeates everyday life in Khayelitsha. Given the latent boredom associated with township life, the device has the potential for providing users with an unequivocal source of status *and* entertainment. This was exemplified by a story that one of the respondents told, where a friend was so desperate “to Mix” that she began asking her friends if she could borrow R1 to continue chatting. The enthusiasm to mix may be benign, but it does contextualise the economic imperative underlying the provision of sexual imagery for material gain emphasised by the cases of Outilet and MXit.

For the Khayelitsha respondents, their day-to-day activities are so intertwined with the connectivity at the core of networked sociality that failure to ‘mix’ is tantamount to the severing of their peer networks and entertainment (Castells, et al, 2007). In an attempt to interpret the saliency of the technology in users’ lives, the researcher asked the groups how they would feel if their cellphones were taken away from them, to which a girl replied, “If you want me hanging around boys then try it” (Focus Group, Iqhayiya Secondary, 27/07/2009). Telling the researcher that MXit “keeps us off the street”, she argued that the cellphone offered a perception of safety to the extent that she could use the knowledge of

¹⁴ In Dar es Salaam slang, *mobitel* women are named after the GSM operator Mobitel (now rebranded as Tigo) and are characterised by their trendsetting fashion and cosmopolitanism. However, these young women often attain this position of status due to their provision of transactional sex for older men in exchange for the ‘3Cs’: a car, a chicken or a cellphone (Molony, 2008).

crime to bargain against her parents' disapproval of the device. Once again, this finding recalls the cultivation of the mobile explored in Part 1 and the interrelationship between MXit usage, parental perceptions, and the prevailing crime in the country.

New communication technologies create unprecedented opportunities for romance, as they allow users to extend their relational practices outside of the domestic environment, unbeknownst to disapproving family and authority figures (Hijazi-Omari & Rivka Ribak, 2008). With the perception of physical reprisal as a distant possibility, Khayelitsha's female users may see in these exchanges an opportunity to momentarily escape their social circumstances through the self-authentication of the photograph (Rivière, 2005). This authentication is important for adolescents' sense of identity formation, as it positions adolescents' 'body selves' in relation to the bodies of others in a mirroring display of narcissism (Erikson, 1968). Despite the patriarchy evident in photo-sharing, girls can manipulate these exchanges by the appeal of their sexuality – even if this patronage is in exchange for airtime. Insofar as boys manipulate girls through their emotive wordplay, so too do girls exercise a reciprocal degree of power over boys' desires' for co-present liaisons by frequently rebuffing these requests after the photos have been sent. In this way, MXit allows girls to escape the realities of crime, media and parental criticism of MXit by hiding behind the "digital fences of cyberspace" (Boyle, 2008:274).

The relative homogeneity of boys' responses regarding photo-sharing, as well as the seeming prevalence of this practice in the female population hinted at the possibility of a mobile youth culture that *is* a culture precisely because of its shared practices of adoption and experience (Heaven & Tubridy, 2003). Mobile youth culture is, after all, defined by Castells, et al (2007) as:

[...] the specific system of values and beliefs that inform behaviour in a given age group so that it shows distinctive features vis-à-vis other age groups in society [...] there is a mobile youth culture that finds in mobile communication an adequate form of expression and reinforcement (127)

MXit's mobile youth culture, though championed by youth as their own distinct territory of expression and socialising, can nonetheless be infiltrated by the unwelcome intrusions of adults and the intrusions of peers who disrespect the unofficial codes governing 'mixing'. Removal from one's contact list emerged as the most effective way of sustaining the relative adherence to these cultural codes, as it enforces the 'assisted virtual suicide' of the transgressor within the users' own network (Cox, 2010).

Part Six

Race and Class in Intimate Relationships

Brubaker and Cooper (2000) propose that identity is the product of multiple, competing discourses that are ‘activated’ in different contexts. In this sense, cyberspace occupies an increasingly dominant role as a contextual space of interaction in which adolescent identities are activated and performed (Stern, 2008). This chapter will illustrate that there are sociocultural forces at work in this identity construction that are extrinsic to adolescent’s online experiences, but intrinsic to the communicative experience of social media (Goldman, et al, 2008). Discourse and community are the foundations upon which identity is formed (Goldman, et al, 2008), so it is in this respect that the chapter explores the dominant discourses that inform adolescents’ identities. Discursive practices emerged in conjunction with the perceived similarities between MXit users, ushering in segmented communities of practice that provide a unique insight into the collective identities that South Africans share. In particular, the chapter focuses on the formation of group identities in convergence with overarching discourses of race, geographical location and class that permeate South African social relations (Jaynes, 2007). Relational practices provide the most vivid performance of users’ identities, perhaps owing to the underlying differences between users that come to the fore in these mediated interactions. Affiliation to group identities play a key role in the choice of intimate ties in adolescents’ online social networks, so it is with reference to ASLR¹⁵ that the chapter pays particular attention to.

Identity is essentially shifting, malleable and unstable (Liebes & Curran, 1998; Staldt, 2008), while new media provide a platform upon which users can fashion identities of choice (Lister, et al, 2009). As a result, adolescents have embraced social media for its predilection

¹⁵ ASLR is an acronym commonly used as an initial question in MXit chatrooms to gain a broad perspective of unknown users’ most immediate biological and social attributes: age, sex, language and race.

for facilitating the development of personal identities that are perceived to be autonomous of co-present structures of authority like the family and school. However, identity is not unhindered by the sociocultural collectivities of the physical world. Apartheid has left a legacy of racial and division that permeates the relational practices of MXit. The chapter will illustrate how discourses of race and class – like the dominant discourse of gender identified in Part 5 – govern adolescents’ choice of romantic partners, and influence their online identity performances.

ASLR.

In terms of MXit usage, respondents frequently made reference to cultural similarity in guiding their choice of romantic partners (Pavlou, 2009). This trend is reflective of the broader lived realities of South African adolescents, who are socialised into normalised conventions of same-race relationships (Jaynes, 2007; Pavlou, 2009). These relationships tend to cluster around group identities that are characterised by collective association with perceived and actual similarities between individuals (Meyrowitz, 1986). Respondents generally did not admit to using the acronym ASLR in their initiation of communication with unknown others, which stands in contrast to findings by Bosch (2008) and UNICEF (2011). This can perhaps be attributed to the public nature of focus groups, which require participants to respond to questions of a controversial nature (such as those dealing with race) in full view of their peers. However, as we will now illustrate, the prevalence of ASLR usage is intimately related to its usage in MXit chatrooms and gradually emerged as a term that respondents had used at some point in their experience of MXit.

The researcher suspected that this denial may indicate the waning popularity of chatrooms as MXit users grow older, for it is only in chatrooms that participants alleged to have encountered the term. Respondents did, after all, appear to have grown weary of chatrooms long before the fieldwork was conducted. Chatrooms seemed to be inextricably

related to adolescents' initial uptake of MXit, as it allowed users to rapidly increase their share of contacts, which was a practice that learners in the middle to upper-income samples soon grew tired of:

Researcher: Do you know all of your Contacts?

Respondent: You know, I used to go on chatrooms when I was younger, but I've gotten over that stage, because it's just stupid, it's absolutely pointless, and, you know, you do add people that you don't know, but [...] when you reach an age of maturity, say 16 or 17, you realise that it's just stupid. You just delete them and move on. You can only have friends you know on MXit, and then someone that adds me now that I don't know, I will, you know, remove them (Interview, SACS, 23/04/2010).

When asked whether he uses the term ASLR, he too emphasised that it is common parlance in chatrooms, where users frequently ask it "just to get a simple idea of who you are." According to his experience, ASLR functions as a chatroom "symbol" that demands an immediate response, but is seldom used by his peers, who do not use chatrooms anymore. This in itself may be attributable to the significant presence of Facebook in their lives, which is more suited to meeting new people than MXit. MXit requires a cellphone number or user-specific ID to add new contacts, which is in contrast to the simple name required by Facebook to add new Friends. Without Facebook, which none of them possessed, the Khayelitsha learners used ASLR in chatrooms, where it is most suited to gauging a broad perspective of unknown contacts in line with the social constructs deemed pertinent to socialising in adolescents' lives. However, as the Khayelitsha learners' most popular way of accumulating contacts was by exchanging unknown contacts of the opposite sex with friends, ASLR was seldom used. These contact lists were largely constituted by racially homogenous

peers from similar socioeconomic backgrounds, which seemingly limits the capacious use of the term to chatrooms only.

The salience of class, and the continuance of race.

Adolescent identity is in a process of continual construction, evolving in conjunction with the relationships that are mediated through the networked publics of social media (boyd, 2008). The networks that coalesce multiple individuals are negotiated and tested in adolescents' formation of personal and collective identities, with strong, intimate relations replacing weaker, peripheral ties as teens journey from childhood to adulthood (Staltdt, 2008; Jin & Peña, 2008). This can be illustrated by respondents' fashioning of their own social networks around close friends and romantic interests. This transition is made possible by social media's ability to include or exclude members from individual networks, which in this case is centred on peers who he perceives to be similar to himself. Race continues to segment social interaction among South African teenagers (Mathoho and Ranchod, 2006) and occupies a discursive presence in mediated interactions (Byrne, 2008). Learners frequently created a racial and classist opposition between 'us' and 'them' when referring to the strong and weak ties that populate their online social networks. Despite their initial disavowal of ASLR, racial affiliation among upper and lower-income teens played a key role in determining the level of communication between users:

Researcher: If someone is from a different race group, do you not chat to them, or do they not chat to you?

Respondent: I don't wanna lie, but I don't chat mostly with black people, or with white people. I like my race (Focus Group, Cloetesville, 23/11/2009).

Common association with perceptually similar others plays a defining role in the contacts that comprise one's social network (Meyrowitz, 1986; Kadushin, 2004). The above

boy's affiliation to a fundamentally 'coloured' group identity is embodied in his response, entrenching race as a discursive practice in his subjective experience of cyberspace. Furthermore, his response is indicative of the deep divides that exists in cyberspace, originating in decades of material division that now manifest in the networking practices of young South Africans (Everett, 2008). Identity, in this case, is an ongoing process of subjective experience intertwined with a history of Apartheid, yet intimately related to current processes of racial and social segregation. This is particularly evident in Cape Town, which is a city beset with racial, economic and social inequalities, structured along geographic lines, and embedded in the relational practices of school-going adolescents (Bekker & Leilde, 2006b).

Yet, insofar as common race dictates the selection of contacts, interaction appeared to be influenced as much by common notions of race as by South African dichotomies of class. This is illustrated by the following interview with a SACS boy living in Newlands, who emphasised the informal criteria he employs in his search for a romantic partner whose socioeconomic status and geographical location matter as much as her race. Here, he takes for granted a naturalised view of the world that is structured by class as a dominant discourse in shaping social relations (Berger, 1999):

Researcher: Would you be more likely to chat to someone with similar 'ASLR' to you?

Respondent: If she was English, white, you know, similar to me, ja, if she was my age, white you know, and she lived somewhere in Cape Town I'd obviously talk to her, add her, but if she lives in Johannesburg, what's the point? You often find that when you add someone from Cape Town, you'll find that they live in Worcester or

somewhere out there, you know, on these farm places. It's more these township-type settlements where the chatrooms and stuff are very high.

Researcher: Do you mean like little dorpies?

Respondent: Ja, because they don't know a lot of people, everyone's in one area, but I mean I [...] meet people all the time, there's no point in going to chatrooms. In chatrooms you're going to meet like fake people anyway, I mean you don't know what the person's like (SACS, 23/04/2010).

Here, the respondent clusters the notions of class, race and location together as collective identities owing to their perceived role in fostering similarity between users. The relationship between race and class has weakened since the end of Apartheid (Boshoff & Strelitz, 2008), with the opening of the labour market to all races, and affirmative action witnessing a growth in the middle class (Seekings, 2008). Race is therefore no longer a primary determinant of economic (dis)advantage, with discourses of class arising that increasingly structure social relations (Seekings, 2008). Although many respondents did not admit to using the term ASLR in the initial stages of familiarisation with randoms, the term is nonetheless embedded in the informal criteria that guides adolescents' choice of partners – which are by extension rooted in the structural conditions that influence South Africans' relational practices (Jaynes, 2007; Pavlou, 2009).

In this way, the SACS boy has identified his compatibility with the other contact via a diverse, albeit superficial, array of sociocultural attributes. These similarities are, as Buckingham (2008) illustrates, often stereotypes stemming from a process of “cognitive oversimplification” (6). They allow the individual to assert his own identity in relation to the differences and similarities of others around him, while simultaneously locating himself in the collective identities that are embodied in the groups he is socialised into – and against.

Here, the boy makes a clear disjunction between the racial and classist identity of himself and the 'other' user, emphasising the operative word 'white' on more than one occasion, but also highlighting the broader themes of class-based interaction that characterise South African romantic relations (Seekings, 2008).

His response is characteristically intertwined with the notions of geography and territory that South Africans so often employ when defining their sense of 'place' in their culture and community (Dolby, 2001). Furthermore, geographical proximity plays a prominent role in determining attraction (Pavlou, 2009), which is understandable in the lives of teens given their general lack of mobility, and would explain the emphasis on 'location' in the acronym ASLR. Indeed, he is correct in surmising that poorer, geographically isolated areas witness increases in MXit usage, as this study has sought to attest. The social conditions of respondents both impede and encourage the enthusiasm at which youth use the platform. In this way, a robust social life in the form of school-based socialising, supplementary media and after-school social activities places less onus on the platform as a primary source of entertainment and communication, which is precisely the lifestyle the middle to upper-income respondents purported to live.

Despite its propensity for facilitating communication with anyone who owns a MXit account, the existence of MXit does not, by default, mean that online interaction frequently crosses the barriers between the privileged and the 'other'. Discourses of race and class come to the fore in the mundane relational practices of South African adolescents, where MXit plays a prominent role as a mediator of racial and classist identities. Structural realities of race, class and gender provide the conditions for the formation of group-specific identities that are performed in the shared relational practices of South African teenagers, while these

identities are augmented by users' interactions with homophilous ¹⁶others (Kadushin, 2004; Buckingham, 2008; Byrne, 2008; Meyrowitz, 1986). In this sense, dating may be common to respondents in general, but it is the ostensibly 'natural' decision to seek out members of the same race group that reflects the broader divisions of race relations existing in South African society *writ large*.

Writing before the global proliferation of social networking sites, Lister, et al (2009) posed the question, *Who are we when we are online?* In Lister, et al's (2009) analysis, online identity is constructed through discourses not dissimilar to those that operate in our physical social realities. Lister, et al (2009) argue that co-present stereotypes are strengthened on the web, with normative ideals of race and class being commonplace. In a country as divisive as South Africa, characterised by centuries of oppression now thrust into a comparably inequitable dispensation (Mathoho & Ranchod, 2006), it is not surprising that the overarching discourses that permeate everyday social relations now manifest in the group identities that extend into cyberspace. Mathoho and Ranchod (2006) have illustrated how the identities of the nation *writ large* are inseparable from the identities that South African youth form. However, as South African youth struggle to subscribe to a unified national identity, these identities tend to evolve around popular discourses shaped by *difference*. These differences are articulated in young South Africans' intimate relationships (Pavlou, 2009), and extend into the mediating space of MXit.

Seventeen years after democracy, race is still a defining feature of South African adolescent identities (Bosch, 2008; Barbarin & Richter, 2001), "consensually accepted as a tenacious social construct that continues to evolve with great elasticity to shape social relations, subjectivities and configurations of personhood" (Stevens, Franchi, & Swart,

¹⁶ Possessing one or more common social attributes, such as the same social class or interest in music (Kadushin, 2004).

2006b:4). However, the notion of race in participants' responses was primarily used to guide their choice of romantic partners, which is, on a global level, largely defined by a search for a partner that is perceptually similar to oneself (Berk, 2003). In this way, commonality of cultural traits – or indeed, *perceived* cultural traits – governs the continuing homogeneity of race in social (and romantic) relationships:

Race remains relevant in South Africa for primarily cultural reasons. Most South Africans have clear racial identities [...] and readily view others in racial terms [...] Rather, it reflects the persistence of racial discrimination in a softer sense, that is, in terms of social preferences. South Africans may not be hostile to racialised others, but prefer to live and generally socialise with culturally similar neighbours, and for their kin to marry within racial (that is, cultural) groups rather than outside them (Seekings, 2008:22).

However, as has been evinced by the quotes scattered throughout the thesis, class subordination remains a strong influence in learners' lives. For many young people, their positions of social status roughly correlate with the socioeconomic wellbeing of the communities they have grown up in, which is aligned to the dominant race of the designated area. This was particularly so among the study's Khayelitsha-based black learners, who carry the "full weight of disadvantage" (Soudien, 2007:122) that has been crudely and historically shaped by the racial structuring of Apartheid, and was anchored by their frequent mention of basic amenities that they did not possess (such as running water).

At the onset of this study, the researcher assumed that the potential to use MXit as a platform to engage with disparate others would be embraced wholeheartedly by teens. That is not to suggest that teens would use MXit specifically for this reason, but rather that the association with so many networked others would create a culture of online exchange

unhindered by the various divides that segment users' offline identities. However, grassroots usage of mobile media by South African youth indicates that this is not necessarily the case. As long as the young Cloeteville and SACS learners identified above seek similar others for romantic trysts, and as long as their searches for romantic partners provide the key motivation for using MXit, then their online relational practices will inevitably extend those found in their co-present social networks. SACS boys in particular positioned themselves in relation to the respondents from lower-income schools in ways that underlined their deeply classist identities.

The researcher mentioned the case of the Cloeteville boys who have competitions over weekends to accumulate the most photographs of girls (discussed in Part 5), and asked whether they engaged in similar practices. His response seemed to carry a level of indignation that was directed at the researcher as much as the learners in Cloeteville:

No, I personally don't know anyone like that. I mean, they're in gangs and stuff, and I'm at SACS, which is a bit of an upper class school [...] We don't do that type of thing (Interview, 23/04/2010).

The researcher then asked the respondent somewhat facetiously whether there were any gangs at SACS, to which he simply smiled and said, "No." Suffice to say, this interaction followed the boy's earlier assertion that only girls send photographs of themselves, while "guys do the spreading". His concluding statement was followed by his own laughter, which blurred the boundary between the strikingly similar practices that all of the samples' boys participated in. Here, the boy has established his commitment to an informal set of group-specific values centring on the discourse of class (Etzioni, 2004), underscoring the deeply structural of this identity (Soudien, 2007; Seekings, 2008) in influencing behaviour when males in all of the samples participated in this practice.

Identity resistance.

Gilroy (2000) defines identity as the fragile interplay between subjective experience and the cultural and historical contexts upon which individuals ascribe meaning to their social realities. This can be observed in the accepted norms of socialising with predominantly same-race peers. A respondent from Cloetesville illustrates this volatile process of identity construction in his assertion that he converses with peers from all race groups. He maintained that as long as the conversation was “fun”, he would chat to teens from all race groups. A single, superficial element of endearing playfulness has guided the boy’s affiliation with the ‘other’ to the extent that long-term shared experience and homogeneity of social networks no longer define his sense of group identity (Meyrowitz, 1986) as much as a shared, youthful sense of enjoyment. That is not to suggest that his response is merely reactive against his fellow peers, but rather that he is able to challenge the dominant discourses of race via the freedom of communication made possible by the cellphone, and in particular; MXit.

This statement is symbolic of Gilroy’s (2000) definition, as it highlights the individual tendency to resist dominant discourses through the emancipating faculties of digital technology (Byrne, 2008). MXit conflates discourses of race, class and gender, while simultaneously allowing adolescents to challenge these discourses by networking with so many disparate others of competing identities. Furthermore, his assertion indicates the relative erosion of group identities rooted in immobile discourses of race and class in cyberspace, where identities can be fashioned into mediated self-representations of the user’s desired image (Lister, et al, 2009). This feeling of identity ‘freedom’ guides adolescents’ usage of MXit, and proves to be the primary reason for its resonance among South African teenagers:

I think what MXit offers most people is that you can be who you want to be on MXit. There's no visual of how that person looks around you. You don't have to care about anything like that, you can just be who you want to be. It's almost like, MXit offers you a safe haven. You can be free as you want to be, there's no concerns, that's the biggest reason why most people want to MXit (Focus Group, Cloeteville, 23/11/2009).

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CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

The study has illustrated that there are distinct similarities in MXit usage across socioeconomically diverse and geographically dispersed teens in Cape Town that are largely reflective of the international trends in mobile media usage identified in the literature review (Chapter 2). Throughout the thesis, we have explored the ways in which this mobile youth culture manifests itself, from the diffusion of MXit itself (Part 1) to the usage of the device for purposes of privacy, mobility and autonomy (Part 2), and finally to the fostering and maintenance of intimate relationships (Parts 3–6). Many of these practices draw parallels to the key tenets of the global mobile youth culture espoused by Castells, et al (2007) in *Mobile Communication and Society: A Global Perspective*. However, as Goggin (2006) has emphasised, the appropriation of technology cannot be separated from the cultural context in which it is consumed. In this respect, constant attention has been paid to the cultural context of consumption, for it is through the prism of culture that discourses came to the fore in the relational practices of South African adolescents.

We have used a qualitative-interpretive approach comprised of focus groups, group interviews and one-on-one interviews to investigate three primary areas of MXit usage: the formation of a mobile youth culture; MXit's role in the construction of adolescent identity; and the expression of discourses in adolescents' intimate relations. We have used the predominant themes in participants' accounts to guide the foci of the thesis, while inferring conclusions about identity based on the underlying discourses in these responses and Erikson's seminal *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (1968). We have argued that MXit has been embraced so enthusiastically by youth as it provides the platform to address adolescents' latent needs for consistent intimate and sexual relations, identification with similar others, and a deep-seated sense of identification with oneself as an autonomous agent (Erikson,

1968). These needs are magnified on MXit, which facilitates the constant connection to friend bases that teenagers require in their shifting of intimate relations from parents to peers (Levinson, Berk, 2003; 2004; boyd, 2010). Coming of age in an era of intimate socialisation with digital media has evolved to the point where adolescents now require social media to address their needs for peer-based relationships and mediated expression (Horst, 2010; boyd, 2008). This is illustrated by the unimaginable consequences that disconnection from MXit entails in the lives of teens, who equate a removal of their disembodied cyber-selves to a comprehensive severing of their very sociability.

Age, as a discourse in itself, has been emphasised throughout the thesis, as its emergence is intimately related to the generational identities that adolescents construct through mobile media in relation to adults (Ito, et al, 2010b). In this sense, MXit plays a mediating role in the construction and expression of a quintessentially adolescent identity that is manifested in the textual exchanges of mobile social networking, which MXit embodies by virtue of its textual template and ability to facilitate connections with multiple others through the use of aliases (boyd & Ellison, 2007). Stalder (2008) has postulated the emergence of a distinctly *mobile* identity that is in a constant process of construction as adolescents interact in mobile social spaces with similarly networked others who challenge, support and inform their definitions of themselves and the world around them. This is evinced by the expression of discourse-laden identities of gender, race and class in MXit's relational practices. Shared affiliation to *youth* is the defining feature of this identity and was embodied in participants' responses, who regarded themselves as the rightful bearers of MXit, despite the platform's popularity with a youth demographic that is substantially larger than the small sample of 16-18 year old school-going learners used in the study (MXit International Expansion: Case Study, 2009).

In this sense, MXit is the symbolic repository of both a mobile youth culture *and* a peer-centric mobile identity that is inclusionary of peers, but exclusionary of adults. Yet, as we have illustrated in Part 5 and Part 6, the context of these mediated interactions is heavily laden with the discourses and status ideals that inform users' overarching group identities. These discourses come to the fore in the relational exchanges of MXit, where issues of age, sex, language, race and class play a definitive role in the initiation of romantic relationships. These discourses are particularly acute in South Africa, where continued segregation has impacted adolescents' choice of romantic partners to the extent that dating peers from racially and socioeconomically homogenous backgrounds is simply taken for granted (Jaynes, 2007). The acronym ASLR explored in Part 6 is illustrative of the interrelationship between offline norms and online behaviour that Lister, et al (2009) surmised, and further grounds the platform in the sociocultural context in which it is consumed. This may indicate the perceived – and actual – similarities between peers that coalesce around racially-defined practices, but respondents' constant reference to the 'other' also underscored the peculiarity of South Africa's social relations, and the overwhelming construction of race and class as conceptual categories in themselves.

Ultimately, however, we have sought to illustrate that identity is still largely contingent on the individual. These individuals came from a variety of backgrounds, sampled partly out of convenience from four Cape Town suburbs that provided a socioeconomically diverse cross-section of teens owing to the racially and geographically segregated nature of Cape Town's suburbs (Bekker and Leilde, 2006b). In the context of teenagers' structural conditions of everyday life, parental dependency, and the negative discourses surrounding MXit; the individual propensity for exercising agency in the face of dominant discourses emerged as a key feature of MXit usage. The expression of a personal identity is facilitated by the autonomy, privacy and relative anonymity of MXit's mediated interactions, which

allow teens to fashion their digital identities in ways that may be incongruent to their physical markers of offline identity. MXit's emancipation of the tangible self is exemplified by the following excerpt taken from a focus group held in Cloetesville:

I think what MXit offers most people is that you can be who you want to be on MXit. There's no visual of how that person looks around you. You don't have to care about anything like that, you can just be who you want to be. It's almost like, MXit offers you a safe haven. You can be free as you want to be, there's no concerns, that's the biggest reason why most people want to MXit (23/11/2009).

The element of escapism in the above excerpt was echoed across the research samples, but was most vividly brought to the fore in the hyper-social exchanges of the Khayelitsha and Cloetesville respondents. These teens used the perceptual refuge of MXit to circumnavigate surrounding fears of crime, while embracing MXit as a marker of social status and supplementary source of entertainment amidst the shortage of communicative, recreational and relational avenues in their communities. Increased confidence is a key feature of this usage, and ushered in what many respondents described as mobile selves that are distinctly different to the lives they live in 'real life'.

From this perspective, Goffman's (1971) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* has been used to contextualise the performance of identity on offline and online 'stages'. The medium emerged as the message in the practice of mixing, and would account for adolescents' multifarious performances of the 'self' (Erikson, 1968). MXit activated discourses of gender and sexuality that were rooted in offline cultural norms, but were amplified in relational exchanges that would not ordinarily occur in co-present settings (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000). Yet, insofar as we have used Meyrowitz (1986) and McLuhan (1964) to examine the role of digital technology in effecting actual change in social

behaviour, so too does the message emerge as the medium in this analysis. Content-rich conversations with intimate relations provide the primary appeal of using MXit so extensively (boyd, 2010), while these relationships are anchored by the gift-giving exchanges that characterise daily life for these digital natives (Taylor & Harper, 2003; Prensky, 2001).

There are increasing concerns that the generation who are growing up using digital technology are entering an era of uncharted territory. No previous generation has experienced such deep embeddedness of a technology that shows little regard for spatial and temporal constraints (Castells, et al, 2007). The study's respondents supported the view that the generation who have been using social networking throughout their teenage years are growing increasingly reliant on mediated interaction for the everyday coordination of their social and relational lives. In this sense, the study has addressed a central concern in Goggin's (2006) *Cellphone Culture*, namely that the cellphone addresses pre-existing modes of communication, while simultaneously altering and creating new ones.

The importance of communication for adolescents' identity formation has been stressed throughout the thesis, especially when one considers that identity is an ongoing, lifelong process (Thurlow, 2005; Erikson, 1968). In this respect, we have investigated the interplay between adolescents' identities – already in a normative crisis of development (Erikson, 1968) – and their increasing mediation by digital technology (Buckingham, 2008). This is especially pertinent when one situates this identity construction in the context of the moral panic exhibited by the South African public towards MXit. For many adolescents, their communicative agency is compromised by MXit's representation in the media at a time in their lives when they are increasingly capable of autonomous self-regulation (Lemish & Cohen, 2005). In this way, there is a risk that "Today's young people will have to live with the consequences of the actions of decisions taken by adults, yet they rarely have the chance to influence these decisions" (Carter & Allan, 2005: 82).

Despite overwhelming parental disapproval, the study's respondents showed a remarkable aptitude for exercising agency by bargaining with their parents in a bid to continue using the application. Power contestations of this nature entrench the importance of the mobile in adolescents' lives, and the domestic and cultural contexts in which it is consumed. The only certainty in this analysis is that the formation of adolescent identity is actively intertwined with mobile communications technologies and will continue to be so with the diffusion of BBM and WhatsApp that compress the need for peer-to-peer communication into the handheld singularity of MIM platforms. Yet, insofar as the study highlighted the unprecedented value that teens ascribe to the cellphone, so too does it underscore the difference in social status between users who are in possession of a cellphone (and by extension; MXit), and those who are not.

From this perspective, the formation of identity in tandem with communications technology is in itself exclusive when one considers that a large portion of South African teens still wholly rely on co-present interactions for their socialising. The exclusivity of the device between adults and peers, and between peers themselves, underlines the role of context in shaping not just a technology's diffusion, but its appropriation as part of adolescents' identity projects as well. It would be interesting, then, for future study to compare the relational exchanges of adolescents who have frequent access to MXit, and those who have no access whatsoever. It is only through a comparison of this nature that the full effects of social change Meyrowitz (1986) prophesied can be measured. The indiscriminate embeddedness of mobile media does not allow easy removal of a technology that is such a poignant symbol of sociality, and a striking expression of youthful exuberance.

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