

## Chapter 4

# Connected at any Cost: Adolescent Developmental Needs and Online Relationship Formation

**Susan M. Miller**

*Kent State University, USA*

**Kenneth L. Miller**

*Youngstown State University, USA*

**Christine Allison**

*Kent State University, USA*

### ABSTRACT

*The goal of this chapter is to explore the formation of online relationships in the dual contexts of adolescent cognitive and psychosocial development and characteristics of Internet communication technologies. Research revealed that teens use the Internet to support existing, offline relationships and that such use is associated with closer relationships. For those who form online relationships, these are viewed as close or even romantic in nature. However, when compared along various dimensions, online relationships demonstrate weaker ties than do offline relationships. In general, extroverted teens are more likely to form online relationships, although, if that is their purpose, so do introverted teens. Forming online relationships may rest with the teen's awareness of how to present him or herself given the anonymity of the cue-free Internet environment.*

### INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter (and indeed this book) is to explore relationships among adolescent development and the use of Internet technologies that influence the formation of online relationships. The focus on adolescence is designed to illuminate unique developmental characteristics and needs

of that group which influence use of the Internet environment for forming relationships.

Developmental characteristics of the adolescent include unfolding abilities to think abstractly, to consider multiple points of views, to engage in counterfactual reasoning, and to reason deductively. These characteristics describe the stage of cognitive development identified by Jean Piaget (1967) as formal operational reasoning. For each stage of cognitive development Piaget described a

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-60566-926-7.ch004

form of egocentricism or limitation in thinking. A fundamental limitation for the adolescent is that these new-found abilities mean that they can envision utopian conditions while criticizing the state of the real world. The developing capacity for metacognition (i.e., being able to think about their thinking) translates to a high degree of self-consciousness. This characteristic is mirrored by new-found self-centeredness—the teen’s belief that s/he is special, invulnerable, and omnipotent.

These egocentric characteristics are often discussed in terms of psychosocial and affective behaviors typical of adolescents. Erikson’s (1950/1993) psychosocial theory provides a heuristic description of the opposing forces felt by most adolescents – the press to find their identity in society while overcoming their sense of confusion about who they will become. As adolescents experience new ways of seeing the world, they are afforded expanded interpersonal and social opportunities. Adolescent development takes place in a sphere of otherness, where the important social referents are other adolescents.

The importance of peer relationships is reflected by the frequency with which teenagers use the Internet for social communication. Data from a National Center for Education Statistics 2003 survey (N = 56,000 families) revealed that about 70% of students in grades 6 to 8, and 79% of high school students used the Internet (DeBell & Chapman, 2006). Older adolescents were more likely to use the Internet for social communication: 64% of high school students and 45% of 6 through 8 graders used the Internet for emailing/instant messaging.

One difficulty in constructing a sufficient, if not comprehensive, understanding of online adolescent relationship formation is the rapidly evolving nature of Internet communication technologies. Teens who participated in early research studies (just over a decade ago) were limited in their communication goals by the types of applications available to them (i.e., public arenas

such as listservs and chat rooms or private spaces using email). After 1997/1998, instant messaging emerged as a communication tool. Around this time social network sites began to support communication among individuals already connected, but teens had little access until MySpace began to attract teenagers in 2004. Facebook, originally designed for college students, was opened to high school students in 2005 (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). An early study of novice online users found that adolescents used multi-user domains (MUDs) to meet new people (Subrahmanyam, Greenfield, Kraut, & Gross, 2001). Referring to current massive multiplayer online role-playing games (i.e., MMOs or MMORPGs), Yee (2006) reported that 20% of male users and 4.4% of female users were between 12 and 17 years old. As communication technologies become even more ubiquitous (e.g., multimedia phones, or integrated clothing and personal accessories) it is likely that the ways in which teens use and integrate them will dramatically evolve.

## **Chapter Objectives**

The goal of this chapter is to explicate relationships among adolescent development, characteristics of Internet communication tools, and online relationship formation. After reading this chapter, the intended readers (i.e., researchers, teachers, students, and parents) should understand:

1. The major cognitive and psychosocial developmental characteristics that emerge occur during adolescence
2. The affordances offered by the Internet for formation and support of online relationships in the context of anonymous and cue-free Internet communications
3. Associations among types of online relationships, Internet affordances, and relationship quality

17 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage:

[www.igi-global.com/chapter/connected-any-cost/39290](http://www.igi-global.com/chapter/connected-any-cost/39290)

## Related Content

---

### How Middle School Principals of Small Rural Schools Address Cyberbullying

Christina M. Force (2016). *International Journal of Cyber Behavior, Psychology and Learning* (pp. 27-41).

[www.irma-international.org/article/how-middle-school-principals-of-small-rural-schools-address-cyberbullying/149169](http://www.irma-international.org/article/how-middle-school-principals-of-small-rural-schools-address-cyberbullying/149169)

### A Scoping Study of the Structural and Situational Characteristics of Internet Gambling

Abby McCormack and Mark D. Griffiths (2013). *International Journal of Cyber Behavior, Psychology and Learning* (pp. 29-49).

[www.irma-international.org/article/scoping-study-structural-situational-characteristics/76275](http://www.irma-international.org/article/scoping-study-structural-situational-characteristics/76275)

### A Survey Study of Smartphones Behavior in Brunei: A Proposal of Modelling Big Data Strategies

Muhammad Anshari, Yabit Alas, Norakmarul Ihsan binti Pg Hj Sabtuand Norazmah Yunus (2019).

*Multigenerational Online Behavior and Media Use: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools, and Applications* (pp. 201-214).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/a-survey-study-of-smartphones-behavior-in-brunei/220943](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/a-survey-study-of-smartphones-behavior-in-brunei/220943)

### The Case for Universal Design for Learning in Technology Enhanced Environments

Stuart Peter Dinmore (2014). *International Journal of Cyber Ethics in Education* (pp. 29-38).

[www.irma-international.org/article/the-case-for-universal-design-for-learning-in-technology-enhanced-environments/123981](http://www.irma-international.org/article/the-case-for-universal-design-for-learning-in-technology-enhanced-environments/123981)

### Evaluating the Online Learning Experience at Higher Education Institutions

Abdel-Salam G. Abdel-Salam, Khalifa Hazaa and Emad Ahmed Abu-Shanab (2022). *International Journal of Cyber Behavior, Psychology and Learning* (pp. 1-23).

[www.irma-international.org/article/evaluating-the-online-learning-experience-at-higher-education-institutions/298692](http://www.irma-international.org/article/evaluating-the-online-learning-experience-at-higher-education-institutions/298692)