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3 INTIMACY

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"I get out of the shower, get dressed, go to my PC, log on to MSN, and talk to Alice," said seventeen-year-old Jesse about his typical morning routine. At that time of the day, he finds it easier to instant message on MSN than to talk on the phone with seventeen-year-old Alice, his girlfriend. He has to "do my hair" in the morning. "So I go back and forth, back and forth," he said, miming his movements from the bathroom mirror to the computer in his bedroom. After logging off IM, the couple might talk on their mobile phones as they commute to school. During the school day they trade text messages about their whereabouts and plans, such as "Im in da band room."[1] After school Alice might join Jesse at his house, completing her homework while he plays his favorite video game, Final Fantasy, or they might continue to communicate by sending messages, such as "I'll be here for a while, go to sleep, I love you." The day frequently ends late, with Alice falling asleep talking on the phone to Jesse in the bedroom she shares with her two younger siblings as they watch DVDs on the bottom bunk. Though they have been dating for more than a year, Alice's parents, Chinese immigrants, do not know she and Jesse, a charming young man of mixed Anglo and African-American heritage, are a couple. Their secret relationship has been shaped and, in some ways, made possible, by the profusion of new communication technologies.

Though most teens do not carry on long-term relationships such as this one outside the purview of their parents, Alice's and Jesse's use of new media exemplifies much of what we have heard from our participants about their new media use in intimate interactions. Young people are at the forefront of developing, using, reworking, and incorporating new media into their dating practices in ways that might be unknown, unfamiliar, and sometimes scary to adults. In our interviews and observations,

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it has become increasingly clear that, much like in their friendship practices, teens have put new media tools to use in their courtship practices such as meeting, flirting, going out, and breaking up. This intimacy-oriented new media use exemplifies another type of friendship-driven technology practice introduced in chapter 2.

Like chapter 2, this chapter focuses on teenagers' normative new media practices. Because dating and romance are primarily teenage (as opposed to childhood) endeavors, most of the interviews are with teenagers between the ages of fourteen and nineteen and the material comes predominantly from studies that focus on friendship-driven sociability: C. J. Pascoe's study "Living Digital," danah boyd's study "Teen Sociality in Networked Publics," Christo Sims's study "Rural and Urban Youth," and Megan Finn, David Schlossberg, Judd Antin, and Paul Poling's study "Freshquest." Unless otherwise noted, the examples in this chapter come from Pascoe's study.

In this chapter we explore teens' normative and nonnormative patterns of intimacy practices and new media. In doing so we sketch out the trajectories of historic and contemporary teen courtship rituals and the ways new media have become a part of these rituals, as well as highlight themes of monitoring, privacy, and vulnerability. Looking at these themes indicates that boundary work is a central part of navigating new media in intimate relationships. These intimacy practices also show how casual, friendship-driven use of new media might be a form of informal learning through which teens develop literacy by building relationships and communicating with their intimates.

Dating, New Media, and Youth

Given that teens have been the developers and shapers of contemporary youth dating culture (Trudell 1993), it makes sense that they would quickly put new media to use in the service of their romantic pursuits. While courtship norms and practices are less formal and more varied than they were in the early and mid-twentieth century, our research on teens' new media use shows that the rituals are no less elaborate or important than those of their historical counterparts.

Dating and courtship, as enacted by contemporary American teens, is largely a twentieth-century development, as is the life stage of adolescence itself (Ben-Amos 1995). After the industrial revolution, when families

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declined in importance as economic units, romantic unions gradually superseded primarily economic ones as a social norm in the West. Middle- and upper-class young people courted through processes heavily monitored by parents, families, and communities in which young men would "call" on young women in their homes (Bogle 2008). Dating, as we now recognize it, emerged out of working-class "calling" practices, in which young ladies lacked the domestic space to entertain young men in their homes and thus the couple would go out somewhere together, a practice referred to in early slang as a "date" (Bogle 2008). As the 1920s progressed, rebellious middle-class youth emulated these working-class rituals (Bogle 2008). These imitations, along with the movement of youth from workplaces to public schools, the development of school dances, and the independence afforded by the spread of automobile ownership, laid the groundwork for contemporary teen dating culture (Modell 1989). In the 1950s teen dating norms were formalized, became close to a universal custom in America, and were solidified by the practice of "going steady" (Bogle 2008; Modell 1989). Youth who "went steady" indicated to onlookers that they were unavailable by trading class rings, letter sweaters, ID bracelets, or by wearing matching sweater jackets—their answers, as one historian puts it, to the "wedding ring" (Bogle 2008, 17).

In the 1970s and 1980s, these types of formal dating and "going steady" practices declined as dating became "merely one form of social contact among many" (Modell 1989, 291). The decline in formality is reflected in contemporary teens' language about these types of relationships, which frequently lack a clear vocabulary to define relationship status or practices: "The terms *courtship* and even *dating* have given way to *hanging out* and *going out with someone*" (Miller and Benson 1999, 106). However, the decline in the formality and uniformity of dating practices does not mean that the centrality of romance to teenagers' lives has declined in salience. One study showed that the strongest emotion during puberty was "the specific feeling of being in love" (Miller and Benson 1999, 99), and developmental psychologists consider romantic relationships an essential feature of social development in adolescence (Connolly and Goldberg 1999). Contemporary relationships among teens tend to be "casual, intense and brief" (Brown 1999, 310). They are also, for all their emphasis on privacy and exclusivity, profoundly social (Brown 1999). In adolescence "peers provide opportunities to meet and interact with romantic partners,

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to initiate and recover from such relationships, and to learn from one's romantic experiences" (Collins and Sroufe 1999, 126). Especially in the early flirtatious stages, "romance is a *public* behavior that provides feedback from friends and age-mates on one's image among one's peers" (Brown 1999, 308).[2] Teens learn about dating, intimacy, and romance from their friends and social circles. Further, while we usually think of these intimacy practices as individual and private, teen romance and dating rituals take place, in many ways, publicly and collectively.

Dating and romance practices and themes, so central to contemporary American teen cultures, not surprisingly are a central part of teens' new media practices (Lenhart and Madden 2007; Oksman and Turtainen 2004). Using social media, contemporary teens continue to craft and reshape dating and romance norms and rituals that are now deeply tied to the development of new media literacies. Social media technologies have provided a more extensive private sphere in which youth can communicate primarily with age-clustered friends, acquaintances, and sometimes strangers outside the purview of their parents or other authority figures. These more private channels of communication have allowed an elaboration of teens' intimacy practices, especially in forming, maintaining, and ending romantic relationships. The familial negotiations over the spheres of privacy in which these practices take place will be elaborated upon in chapter 4.

In their intimacy practices youth use three primary technologies—mobile phones (though many do still use home phones), instant messaging (IM), and social network sites. Mobile phones provide youth a way to maintain private channels of communication, maintain continual contact, and also serve as a "leash" through which teens in a relationship keep "tabs on" one another. Teens use instant-messaging technologies to maintain frequent casual contact with their intimates. As described in chapter 2, social network site profiles are key venues for representations of intimacy, providing a variety of ways to signal the intensity of a given relationship both through textual and visual representations. While most of their online relationships map closely to their offline ones, these digital spaces give teens the ability to reach beyond institutional and geographic constraints to forge romantic relationships. All these technologies allow teens to have frequent and sometimes constant (if passive) contact with one another, something Ito and Okabe call "tele-cocooning in the full-time intimate

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community" (Ito and Okabe 2005a, 137). Many contemporary teens maintain multiple and constant lines of communication with their intimates over mobile phones, instant-message services, and social network sites, sharing a virtual space that is accessible only by those intimates.

Surprisingly, given its centrality to teen culture, very little has been written about teens' contemporary romance and courtship practices. Researchers have directed their studies of romantic relationships toward adults (Hartup 1999) and focused on teens' sexual practices (e.g., Ashcraft 2006; Martin 1996; Medrano 1994; Moran 2000; Strunin 1994; Trudell 1993). This research orientation likely reflects an American concern with teen sexuality as out of control and dangerous (Schalet 2000). In focusing on teens' intimacy, though not necessarily sexual, practices, we take a sociology-of-youth approach, following the categories and practices important to the teens we talk to, not allowing adult anxieties to guide our research. As a result we report little about teens' sexual experiences. Given the preoccupation with youth sexual practices, not to mention current popular concerns about sex predators and youth exposure to sexual content online, it seems odd to leave sex out of a chapter on intimacy practices. However, we simply did not hear a plethora of stories about sex in our interviews, as youth tended to discuss dating, crushes, romance, and heartbreak. This omission could be due to several factors. First, such intimate details might emerge in a second or third interview, which most researchers did not conduct. Second, we conducted these interviews under constraints imposed by our universities' institutional review boards, which heavily discouraged talking to youth in general and about issues of sex and sexuality in particular. Finally, it may be that intimacy practices were simply more salient to these youth than sexual ones.[3]

So even though romance is one of the focal points of youth popular culture, because of researchers' focus on sex, we know surprisingly little about teen romance, dating, and courtship practices, apart from scattered stories on historical dating practices (Diamond, Savin-Williams, and Dube 1999). This chapter begins to remedy this problem by examining the ways teens talk about their use of new media to craft, pursue, and end intimate relationships. In the first section we trace the practices of contemporary teen courtship and its relationship to the "domestication" of technology, or the way technology defines and is defined by those communities of which it is a part (Hijazi-Omari and Ribak 2008). Teens' stories revealed a

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set of norms about new media use and intimate relationships. According to most of the teens we talked with, it is appropriate to meet people offline and then pursue the relationship online; if one does meet someone, one should meet that person through friends; one should proceed slowly as he or she corresponds online using the appropriate communication tool; and when breaking up, one should do so in person, or at least over the phone. In the second section we discuss some of the emergent themes about relationships and technology we see from our interviews and observations.

Youth Courtship: Meeting, Flirting, Going Out, and Breaking Up

Liz and Grady, white sixteen-year-olds, sat at the dining room table during our interview, in Liz's family's comfortable middle-class suburban tract home, explaining the role that MySpace played in the origin of their relationship. Grady said that he developed a crush on Liz during the past year, and while he had known her since freshman year, flirting with her in person felt daunting, because, as he put it, "they didn't really talk." Luckily, because they shared a mutual friend, Liz said of her MySpace, "I had him on my Friend list from freshman year . . . and that's how you can be friends, just because your friend knows this guy and you kind of hung out with them, so you're like, 'Okay, I'm going to start talking to you.'" Grady used this loose friendship on MySpace to his advantage: "When I had a crush on her, I made sure I talked to her first in class before I sent her a comment on MySpace." Grady carefully planned his first comment to be casual: "My first comment to her was 'Oh, wow, I didn't know we were Friends on MySpace,'" though of course he knew full well they were Friends. After trading flirtatious messages online, they began dating. Liz and Grady are a fairly typical example of the role new media can play in meeting, flirting, and going out. As Grady put it, it is "easier to talk to them [girls] there" than in person, because one can manage vulnerability through what Christo Sims (2007) has termed a "controlled casualness." Indeed, their process is paradigmatic of teens' contemporary meeting, flirting, and dating practices, in which they can pursue casual offline acquaintances as romantic interests online.

Teens have told us that certain technologies and certain mediated and nonmediated practices are more appropriate for certain types of relationships or relationship stages than are others (Sims 2007). As Christo Sims

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found in his study, "Rural and Urban Youth," in the initial getting-to-know-you part of a romantic relationship, the asynchronous nature of written communication (private messages and comments on social network sites, text messaging, and the more synchronous IM) allows for slower, more controlled intimacy exploration and development. If a given relationship intensifies (because certainly not all flirtatious relationships do), couples typically shift to phone calls, text, IM, and in-person conversations. Social network sites play an increasingly larger role as couples become solidified and become what some call "Facebook official." At this point in a relationship, teens might indicate relationship status through ordering Friends in a particular hierarchy, changing the formal statement of relationship status, giving gifts, and displaying pictures. Youth can also signal the varying intensity of intimate relationships through new media practices such as sharing passwords, adding Friends, posting bulletins, or changing headlines. When relationships end (for those that do), the public nature and digital representations of these relationships require a sort of digital housecleaning that is new to the world of teen romance, but which has historical corollaries in ridding a bedroom or wallet of an ex-intimate's pictures. In the following section we trace the different types of teen courtship practices and the role of new media in these practices.

Meeting and Flirting

As Grady and Liz's story indicates, digital communication often plays a central role in casual relationships and the early stages of serious relationships. New media have provided a variety of venues for teens to meet and/or further potential romantic interests. Instant messaging, text messages, and social network messaging functions all allow teens to proceed in a way that might feel less vulnerable than face-to-face communication. These multiple lines of communication allow teens to follow up on casual meetings or introduce themselves to someone with whom they have only loose ties, perhaps sharing a mutual friend on- or offline. At present, teens' normative practice is not necessarily meeting strangers online (though that does happen) but rather using these mediated technologies to get to know the friend of a friend or further get to know someone with whom one has had only a casual or brief meeting.

For teens interested in someone they may not know well, the plethora of publicly accessible information on a given individual provides a fresh

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way to "research," or get to know, those on whom they have a crush. Melanie, a white fifteen-year-old from Kansas, in danah boyd's study "Teen Sociality in Networked Publics" said that she does not "talk to people I have a crush on, but I did look up the Honduran twins in our class. We looked at their MySpace." Like Melanie, a teen can research a crush's interests, likes and dislikes, friendship circles, and online behaviors through his or her publicly available social network profiles. John, a white nineteen-year-old college freshman in Chicago, disclosed that instead of asking for a phone number he will "Facebook stalk them" to discover more, though possibly superficial, information about a girl he has met briefly but finds interesting. Much like teens may have historically researched potential love interests through their friendship networks, contemporary teens have additional new media tools for laying the groundwork for flirting and relationships.

After an initial meeting and possible research on their object of affection, teens often use a social network site or an instant-messenger program to intensify a relationship or get to know another person better. This is what adults might think of as flirting or what teens sometimes call "talking" or "talkin' to" (Bogle 2008; Pascoe 2007a). After an initial meeting, a teen might initiate this "talkin' to" by following up through digital communication. As Sam, a white seventeen-year-old from Iowa, said, "The next step, I guess, in this situation is wall posts[4] [on Facebook]—that's kind of less formal. . . ." (boyd, Teen Sociality in Networked Publics). Sam noted that if he liked a girl he would post "stupid flirty stuff just trying to make her laugh or whatever through Facebook." At this point, teens flirt, proceeding cautiously, indicating that they like each other, trying to gauge the other's feelings while simultaneously not showing too much earnestness.

The asynchronous nature of these technologies allows teens to carefully compose messages that appear to be casual, a "controlled casualness." John, for instance, likes to flirt over IM because it is "easy to get a message across without having to phrase it perfectly" and "because I can think about things more. You can deliberate and answer however you want." Like John, many teens said they often send texts or leave messages on social network sites so they can think about what they are going to say and play off their flirtatiousness if their object of affection does not seem to reciprocate their feelings. Bob, a white nineteen-year-old[5] living in rural northern California, says he carefully edits his grammar and spelling to

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give the appearance of an "off-the-cuff" comment. These kinds of deliberately casual messages are evidence of what Naomi Baron (2008) describes as the "whatever theory of language" supported by online communication, in which people are increasingly using more informal linguistic forms to write and communicate. It is important, however, to recognize that these forms of literacy are not a "dumbing down" of language but a contextually specific literacy practice, acutely tuned to the particulars of given social situations and cultural norms.

For example, youth use casual online language to create an intentional ambiguity. From the outside, sometimes these comments appear so casual that they might not be read as flirting, such as the following wall posts by two Filipino teens—Missy and Dustin—who eventually dated quite seriously. After being introduced by mutual friends and communicating through IM, Missy, a northern Californian sixteen-year-old, wrote on Dustin's MySpace wall: "hey.. hm wut to say? iono lol/well i left you a comment . . . u sud feel SPECIAL haha =)."[6] Dustin, a northern Californian seventeen-year-old, responded a day later by writing on Missy's wall: "hello there.. umm i dont know what to say but at least i wrote something . . . you are so G!!!"[7] Both of these comments can be construed as friendly or flirtatious, thus protecting both of the participants should one of the parties not be romantically drawn to the other. These particular comments took place in public venues on the participants' walls where others could read them, providing another layer of casualness and protection.

Generally, though not always, teens prefer to flirt with people online that they or their friends know or have at least met offline. A minority of teens we interviewed find meeting potential romantic interests online no different from meeting or flirting with attractive strangers they might meet in public, but the general sentiment was that meeting people only online was "weird," "unnatural," "geeky," or "scary." Ellie, a first-year student at the University of California, Berkeley, and respondent in Megan Finn and her colleagues' "Freshquest" study, described her best friend's meeting of her boyfriend on MySpace as weird: "It was really weird at first. She didn't want to tell anyone because she thought it was weird too. But they had such a strong connection that they thought they should meet. And now they're going out." Grady, Liz's sixteen-year-old boyfriend, said something similar about meeting girls online: "I'm not going to start a conversation with a girl on MySpace or text messaging. I'm going to start in person first.

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Then it's kind of like weird and geeky, you know?" The reasons vary as to why meeting someone online feels weird to some teens. But they all have, in some way, to do with insecurity about authenticity. Brad, a first-year student at University of California, Berkeley, said, "It doesn't seem natural, I guess. 'Cause you're not actually meeting the person face-to-face" (Finn, Freshquest). It is as if that face-to-face meeting allows one to verify who that other person is before embarking on a relationship with him or her.

If teens do meet initially online, they might use their offline friendship networks to verify the authenticity, safety, and identity of the person with whom they are corresponding. Dana, a Latina fourteen-year-old from Brooklyn, New York, met her boyfriend online through mutual friends. Her best friend's boyfriend's best friend saw her MySpace and

> he requested me 'cause he liked what he seen, and then my best friend talked to him about me and then because of MySpace we were goin' out. . . .' Cause if MySpace wasn't there, then I woulda not had him as boyfriend. We talked on AIM and then we exchange the numbers, and then I met him. I seen him before, but I got him noticed on MySpace and now we're together. (Sims, Rural and Urban Youth)

Like other teens we talked to, Dana and her boyfriend flirted online before they moved to offline communication and eventually met in person. Dana said, "He usually started getting on AIM every day, and I started talking to him from there." They communicated for two days through MySpace until they traded phone numbers and "talked like from twelve to six in the morning." Eventually they met in person in a public space—a local park—in the company of groups of friends. Dana's story is not an uncommon one. Teens regularly meet romantic interests through shared friends in online environments, using these online networks to further offline meetings or deepen casual ties to online friends. Teens rely on their networks to do some of the verification work in these online settings.

Though the in-person meeting went well for Dana, other respondents expressed hesitancy about moving online relationships offline for fear that people might not live up to their online personas. John, the Chicago freshman, asked, "What happens after you've had a great online flirtatious chat . . . and then the conversation sucks in person?" He experienced this phenomenon firsthand as he transitioned from high school to college. John had used Facebook to add as Friends "the girls you wanted to meet before school started that you thought were hot and wanted to get a head start on." However, once he reached his university in the fall, "you actually

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saw them and didn't say anything . . . the game was over." When asked why he didn't talk to them in person, he said, "You didn't say anything, because what are you gonna say . . . 'Hey, you're my Facebook Friend?' The key is to meet them in person . . . then Facebook them." Brad, the Berkeley freshman, expressed similar hesitancies about meeting people offline. "You don't know that's who you're meeting. It isn't a smart thing. And you'll end up idolizing the person, thinking they're just this perfect thing. But they probably aren't because no one is perfect. And it's just a big letdown." This "hyperpersonal effect" indicates that intimacy might be heightened online in a way that might not translate seamlessly into offline relationships (Walther 1996).

While most teens express hesitation about meeting people online, in the case of marginalized teens, the Internet allows them to meet other people like themselves (Holloway and Valentine 2003). This sort of digital contact provides a means for youth who didn't feel heard or who felt otherwise disenfranchised in their communities to participate in other ways (Maczewski 2002; Osgerby 2004). For example, Gabbie, a seventeen-year-old first-generation ethnically Chinese teen from California, wanted to find a Chinese boyfriend, but potential suitors were in limited supply in her immediate community. In part because of this desire, she joined the social network site Asiantown.net and struck up communication with a young man she found attractive. "Well, right now I'm talking to this guy. But he has a girlfriend. I don't know. We're just talking as like friends. It seems like he's being a little flirty, but then . . . I don't know." The boy she is talking to lives in the Central Valley, about an hour from where Gabbie lives. We rarely heard teens such as Gabbie, who lack specific offline social circles, talk about moving these relationships offline as being unnatural or weird.

In a similar way, new media also are important tools for gay teens who want to date, because "the biggest obstacle to same-sex dating among sexual minority youth is the identification of potential partners" (Diamond, Savin-Williams, and Dube 1999, 187). It allows them to meet other teens for friendship or dating and affords them a level of independence, as it does for straight teens, to carry on relationships outside the purview of their parents if need be (Hillier and Harrison 2007). The Internet can put gay teens in touch with other teens so that they can have the romantic experiences that their heterosexual counterparts presumably find more

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readily in offline contexts. Robert, a white seventeen-year-old at a private school in Chicago, became so frustrated about not finding other guys to date through his offline friendship circles that he wrote a Facebook "note" about his difficulties dating as a gay teen:

> Every time I have a crush or something, it doesn't work out (he's not gay, not enough time, etc). I'm not a downer, but I'm just realizing that if a straight person's chance of compatibility is 1 in 100. AND only about 3 in 100 are gay, and the compatibility is still 2%, then my prospect is .03 in 100, or 3 in 10,000. That is not very encouraging!

Robert said that a friend set him up on a blind date as a direct result of the announcement he placed on Facebook: "Andrew, another gay guy at my school, and [my] friend, set me up with Matt because he saw my desperate note on Facebook!" Matt and Robert were introduced through Facebook and after the initial setup, Robert was giddy with excitement and said, "We've been texting the past few days a lot; he is really good looking, and a jock, believe it or not, but we seem to really have hit it off. I hope for the best." The two had a very sweet day picked for their first date: Valentine's Day. Much like Dana, Robert found a date through a shared friend. But unlike straight, more mainstream teens, he expressed no hesitancy about meeting in person someone he had met online.

Going Out

Technology also mediates teens' long-term, steady, and committed relationships. Teens in relationships have high expectations of contact with and availability of their significant others as well as expectations that the relationship will be publicly acknowledged through digital media. These expectations of availability are compounded by the "always on" (Baron 2008) possibilities of new media. Additionally, these media help teens reach out beyond their institutional constraints, allowing them to maintain romantic relationships their parents wouldn't necessarily approve of as well as sustain relationships that might be geographically challenging. Like Jesse and Alice, introduced at the beginning of this chapter, teens who are steadily dating frequently text or call each other, post pictures of each other on their social networking sites, rank order their Friends in a particular way, and exchange digitized tokens of affection, signaling to their significant other and their online publics that they are in a relationship.

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Being in a relationship increases expectations of availability and reciprocity, which has implications for how teens use new media, given this "always on" potential. In practice this means that youth in a relationship exchange several phone calls, texts, and/or IMs a day. Teens use this intensified contact as a way to differentiate romantic relationships from other relationships—to indicate that their relationship is special or different. Zelda, a Trinidadian American fourteen-year-old from Brooklyn, New York, explained that if one is in a relationship and doesn't respond to a message, the other person will "probably get mad. If they call you and you don't pick up, they probably get mad. If they write a comment on your page you have to comment them back" (Sims, Rural and Urban Youth). He distinguishes this from interacting with friends through digital media: "It's not like it's a normal friend; it's your girlfriend or whatever. You're in a relationship; you're not supposed to just answer whenever you want." As noted in chapter 2, youth have expectations of reciprocity in online communications, and these are heightened in intimate relationships. Teens now do much of their relationship work by using new media—reciprocating in comments, differentiating their romantic attachments from less intimate friends, and giving priority to phone calls from significant others.

To signal to each other that they care and are in an intimate relationship, teens exchange small digitized symbols of affection, much like teens in the 1950s traded rings, jackets, or bracelets. Champ, a nineteen-year-old Latino who also lives in Brooklyn, explained, "Like if she's already your girlfriend, you probably send a little text message, 'Oh I'm thinking of you,' or something like that while she's working. . . . Three times out of the day, you probably send little comments" (Sims, Rural and Urban Youth). These comments are the digital interactional work that cements contemporary teen relationships. Derrick said,

> You know in your head you've just got to do it. It's like she writes you a comment; write her a comment back. It's not like a friend thing. It's not like your homeboy just wrote you a comment like "oh man, this kid wrote me a comment again." Write her a comment back. (Sims, Rural and Urban Youth)

Youth do emotional work to maintain a relationship through digitized media. Rather than (though sometimes in addition to) love notes exchanged in between classes, youth demonstrate affection through private and public media channels.

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These tokens are part of the interactional relationship work that happens through new media; another is the expectation of availability. Teens find that their significant others expect frequent check-ins, usually by mobile phone. Derrick said,

> When you're in a relationship one thing I learned [is] always pick up the phone for your girl because she complains if you don't. . . . The thing about a cell phone when you're a teenager is if you have a cell phone and you don't pick it up you're doing something that you're not supposed to be doing. (Sims, Rural and Urban Youth)

As Christo Sims notes in his research on urban and rural teens, teenagers are expected to account for their whereabouts. They are beholden to parents in this sense but also to significant others, especially in relationships in which trust might be missing or weak. As a result it might be hard to preserve space or time for oneself outside this frequent contact. In fact, Zelda said he knows he needs to answer the phone regularly because if he doesn't, "they probably going to get mad" (Sims, Rural and Urban Youth). The phone especially acts as a sort of leash, a way to keep tabs on a significant other, much like parents keep track of their teens. Teens seemingly endure this leash because of the increased independence afforded them by the phone.

In addition to the expectations of regular, if not continual, contact, teens affirm and are expected to affirm their relationships online, both by and for their significant others and for their networked publics. Zelda underscored the importance of representing relationships online: "You gotta acknowledge on your page that you [are] like with her" (Sims, Rural and Urban Youth). They define and affirm their relationship status, give public tokens of affection, and post pictures. On Facebook, default relationship options are preset, so in addition to indicating an "official" status, teens have creatively developed ways to include nuance and detail in their relationship descriptions. The existing categories hide a variety of relationships and elide the depth or length of a given relationship, so teens sometimes remedy this by indicating the seriousness of a particular relationship through noting its duration, a particularly popular practice among youth interviewed by Christo Sims in Brooklyn, New York. According to Dana, mentioned earlier, couples write a relationship-origin date in their MySpace headline "to show that they have a relationship or something, so like that's showing more, and it shows that he's in a relationship" (Sims, Rural and Urban Youth). The statement of a relationship anniversary is both a signal of intimacy to one's significant other and a hands-off signal to other teens

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who might be interested in one member of a couple. Nini, a Latina thirteen-year-old from Brooklyn, said,

> If you put the relationship date, whenever you got together, the girls know that you're in a relationship and this is the date, so don't really get into it with the boyfriend, 'cause you are really falling for each other . . . they know that you're a year, so I'm not gonna mess with the boyfriend. (Sims, Rural and Urban Youth)

Nini highlights the "hands off" message, arguing that the length of time a couple has been together indicates the intensity of their relationship to potentially meddlesome outsiders.

Couples typically negotiate offline the act of putting their relationship status online, whether it be a simple "in a relationship" status on Facebook or a more nuanced relationship date on MySpace, notes Christo Sims. Teens dismiss the practice of posting these sorts of public notifications about changes in their relationships through online venues before discussing it with their partner first, usually offline. Joan, a first-year student at the University of California, Berkeley, said,

> Yeah, I have friends [who] have confirmed they have gone official with their boyfriends through Facebook, which is ridiculous. I have known people that are dating and they'll get a request "so and so said that you are their girlfriend." They pushed the button and they are like, "Oh my God, we're official." (Finn, Freshquest)

Teens seem to have the sense that this sort of intimate decision should be made interpersonally, not just announced digitally.

The whole of these social network profiles, not just the relationship status, are the digital embodiment of teens' relationships. When in a relationship, teens rank their Friends to indicate the seriousness of their commitment. Derrick said that "you probably write something, have her on your Top Friends, don't put other girls, don't have girls write messages to you saying anything crazy. Just to make her feel better" (Sims, Rural and Urban Youth). When teens in a relationship do not rank their Friends in a way that reflects their relationship status—that is, they do not rank their significant other high among their Friends—conflict might result, as it did with Jesse and Alice. Jesse confessed, as he showed off his MySpace site, "Alice was actually not my original top one." Alice paused from her needlework to jump in the conversation and said, indignantly, "I was like number twelve or something." Jesse, clearly defensive, his voice growing higher, cried, "Does it really matter? You know! Really? My number one? Really?" Alice responded a little sarcastically, rolling her eyes, "Like he's not number one on my account." Clearly, it was not the first time they had had this

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discussion. While for these two teens, the tension did not challenge the basic foundation of their relationship, their disagreement indicates how important these public representations of relationship intensity are. Alice's feelings were hurt by Jesse's refusal to place her above his other Friends on his list.

In addition to ranking Friends, youth in relationships need to leave public messages for and post pictures of their significant others. Doing so sends messages to their significant others about their dedication and to their digital public about the nature of the relationship. Zelda said, "Sometimes, like on MySpace, you will leave a comment, and you leave a whole bunch of stuff on there 'cause they your girlfriend and stuff, so everybody can see your name. Girls get happy for that. I don't know why. They just get happy" (Sims, Rural and Urban Youth). Zelda explained that he comments "on their pictures. Like if they got a new picture up, leave a comment 'oh, that's a nice picture you got up' or whatever." Zelda indicated the dual message contained in this sort of digital relationship work—the girlfriend is happy because this sort of work feels attentive and loving and Zelda sends a message to their community, "everybody can see your name," about his dedication to his relationship. Another form of relationship work includes posting "couple" pictures on one's social network profile. As Derrick says, "Throw a picture in there of her on your profile. Have it in your pictures like when people look at your pictures they see you and her together or something. Something that makes her say, 'Aaahhhh.' To show her that you care for her" (Sims, Rural and Urban Youth). Again, Derrick's comment shows that these tokens are both for a significant other and a teen's audience. These practices also hold members of a couple publicly accountable. Once one states that she or he is in a relationship, this insures that both members of a relationship agree on their status and are ready to make it public, thus prohibiting one member of the couple from arguing that "it wasn't official."

Breaking Up

Because of the integration of new media into their relationships, teens also experience mediated breakups. These new communication practices often require that teens take a variety of steps to sweep up the digital remnants of a given relationship and to deal with access to and the continuing digital presence of their former significant others.

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The media that some youth laud as a comfortable way to meet and get to know a romantic interest are viewed as a poor way to break up with an intimate. Billy, a white seventeen-year-old from a northern California suburb, said that as he was IMing with a friend he advised his friend to break up with his girlfriend. Apparently his friend did so right then, through IM. Representative of other teens, Billy said, shaking his head, "That was bad." Grady, Liz's sixteen-year-old boyfriend, agreed that breaking up through IMs or text messages was "lame" but that only "some people do it; most people don't." In line with a theme we heard, Grady claimed that breaking up in writing either through a social network site or through a text message was "disrespectful. Because they can't say anything back or anything." Teens acknowledge that breaking up in person is preferable to using text messages, instant messages, or messaging functions on social network sites, because face-to-face interaction is more respectful. Just as teens are thankful for the ways in which they can manage vulnerability using new media in the early stages of relationships, they sense that this vulnerability should not be managed in the same way at the end of a relationship.

New media have created a public venue for digital remnants, where digital representation might outlast the relationship. For instance, Gary, a seventeen-year-old Filipino senior from northern California, had created his MySpace site with his now ex-girlfriend. He laughed sheepishly during an interview as he logged on to his profile and the site title bore both his name and that of his ex-girlfriend, reading, "Sarah will always love Gary." This passive digital residue of their history together remained long after the relationship was over.

Box 3.1 The Public Nature of Mediated Breakups

danah boyd

When I first met them, Michael and Amy, a white seventeen-year-old and a white-and-black sixteen-year-old, respectively, had been dating for a few months. Amy was one grade below Michael at the same school in Seattle, but she was much more social. Her friends had introduced her to MySpace; she, in turn, had introduced him to MySpace. Amy created Michael's first MySpace profile specifically because she wanted him to have one so that she could send him messages and comments.

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As Michael learned to modify his MySpace profile, it became an homage to his three favorite things: football, his friends, and his girlfriend. Michael's profile picture showed the couple embracing. His About Me section began with "I love my girlfriend Amy." Amy's profile also reflected their relationship; she wrote about how Michael "has my heart" and included pictures. Both were in each other's Top Friends list and they performed their relationship through comments, leaving standard messages as well as sweet nothings. Their friends responded by leaving comments, teasing them about their public intimacy.

For Amy, MySpace and school were the two places where she could be with Michael. She is allowed out only on weekends and, even then, rarely. MySpace is the centerpiece of Amy's social life. As she explains, "My mom doesn't let me out of the house very often, so that's pretty much all I do is I sit on MySpace and talk to people and text and talk on the phone, 'cause my mom's always got some crazy reason to keep me in the house." Amy's lack of mobility frustrated Michael, who has much more freedom. His father is usually out with his girlfriend and thinks Michael is mature enough to take his car and do as he pleases. Michael noted that "it's almost like we're roommates more than anything." While he can do as he wishes, Amy follows her mother's rules and this means that the couple rarely saw each other except online. Being able to interact with Amy motivated Michael to log in to MySpace regularly. In some senses, the mediated performance of their relationship was their relationship.

A week after I interviewed the couple, Michael and Amy broke up. Through MySpace, I was able to watch this breakup play out. Their digitally professed love turned into a performance of animosity. The entire tone of Michael's profile changed. He changed his headline to "Michael is no longer fucking with stupid bitches." His status changed to "single." The About Me section on his profile still referenced Amy, although not by name. Rather than showcasing his love, his About Me section now proclaimed, "I hate my stupid bitch ex girlfriend." The photos were gone. Additionally, the two were no longer linked as Friends, let alone on each other's Top Friends. With the eradication of the connection, all comments also disappeared.

Amy's profile also revealed traces of the breakup. She had obliterated the relationship throughout her profile, removing all photos and textual references to Michael. He was removed from her Friend list and the list of guys she called heroes. What appeared in the place of his name was "boyfriend" with a link to a new boy: Scott. While Michael had written Amy into his bio, Scott proclaimed his love for Amy even more loudly. He had changed his name on his profile: "Scott + Amy," and his profile photo depicted the happy couple smooching. He had written two blogs: "I have fallen in love with Amy"

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and "Rawr! Amy is Awesome." One of these blogs contained a love poem written about Amy and the other contained a prose version of his feelings; Amy responded to these blogs with comments professing her love and other friends added approving comments. Loving messages from the new couple peppered each other's profile. Scott wrote, "I Love You" two hundred times on Amy's profile, followed by "here is the translation . . . i love you too baby. . . ."

The messages on Scott's blogs from Amy's friends made it clear that some knew that her relationship with Michael had ended, but not all appeared aware of the story behind the event. In Amy's comments, there were a handful of posts with messages such as, "what happened with you and Michael?" Amy responded to these by posting to each Friend's comment section with some variation of "alotta bullshit." Third-party references to Michael littered Amy's comments section but Michael himself was no longer present—Amy's new love had usurped him.

I was unable to ask Amy and Michael what happened, but there also was no need to. Just as they had performed their togetherness for all who were curious, so too did they perform their breakup. Michael performed the newly single angry ex-boyfriend while Amy simply replaced all references to Michael with references to Scott, erasing Michael's existence without comment. The public performance of breakups goes beyond he said/she said stories; it showcases each person's emotional reaction to the situation.

By publicly documenting their relationship and their breakup, Amy and Michael are looking for validation and support from their peers. Amy's comments are filled with supportive words from her girlfriends and she acknowledges these on their profiles. Conversely, Michael's posts about "stupid bitches" provoke his guy friends to leave comments teasing him about getting into drama with girls. When I checked back a month later, Michael had removed his picture, cleared his background and content, and deleted all his Friends. He had not deleted his profile, but his last log-in date suggests that he stopped logging in. Amy had continued to use MySpace, but every trace of Scott had been replaced with a new guy.

Even though teens say that the actual act of breaking up should not happen in a mediated way, breakups do take place online as youth sweep up the digital remainders of their relationships. Teens' breakups can be reflected passively through status changes or displayed actively through hostile public messages and announcements. Michael and Amy (see box 3.1 for their story) exemplify an actively public breakup—public animosity,

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angry messages directed specifically at an ex-intimate, and the seeking of public validation from their friends. Conversely, passively public breakups entail quietly removing pictures, changing one's relationship status, and reordering Friends. While these breakups also happen in public, they are tamer and perhaps more representative of the customary way teens end relationships. Trevor's most recent breakup exemplified this passively public practice. The white seventeen-year-old from suburban northern California said that he usually places the person he is dating as the top Friend on his MySpace and moves people instantaneously when they break up. But "the latest ex stayed on there for six months because I was waiting. . . . I thought I'd be in a relationship really quickly." Trevor says that his ex-girlfriends weren't upset when he removed them. "There was never drama about it. They got it. They understood. . . . I always try for that, because I really don't want to be the jerk." For teens, changing a public representation of a relationship is a normal part of these now-mediated relationships; thus, unless the couple does not agree on the status of their relationship, they are rarely surprised by this sort of alteration of an ex's profile.

After a relationship ends, teens often inhabit the same, or overlapping, networked publics. Frequently, members of a former couple can still see each others' profiles, see messages left by their ex–significant other on shared Friends' social network profiles, and receive automatic updates about their ex, should they retain him or her as a Friend. As Christo Sims's research has highlighted, these indirect communication channels mean that youth can still be in touch with and possibly monitor each other after an intimate relationship has ended. These communications can be caring, respectful, retaliatory, hurtful, or angry, or they can be ways to send messages to an ex–significant other without having to interact directly with him or her. While teens may have the sense that they should sever real-world and digital ties with their former girlfriends or boyfriends, Bob, the white nineteen-year-old from suburban northern California, said that monitoring one's ex on a social network site is

> one thing that you shouldn't do but everyone does. You can go check all their stuff. Like you look at their Facebook, you look at their MySpace, you see if they take off the photos of you, you see if they changed their relationship status to something, you see if they've got a new person writing on their wall. Like you become a stalker, and a highly efficient stalker. Because all the information is already there at once.

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You don't have to ask your friends or her friends if she's seeing someone new. Like you know. And then they want you to know. (Sims, Rural and Urban Youth)

Teens are aware that their exes see them in these networked publics and use the opportunity to communicate with them, though not directly. Ono, a Haitian American sixteen-year-old from Brooklyn, New York, used the opportunity provided by social network sites to communicate her anger toward her ex-boyfriend.

You want to make them feel so bad that the relationship ended. So you take out all the comments, unless, it depends, unless you are still friends with that person. Take out all the pictures. Put some other person, or maybe delete him from your Friends list, and, but you know that he's gonna look at your profile anyway, so you put other males next to you, or put pictures of another male and say how nice he looks in that outfit or whatever, or my future man, or whatever, so you could put as much anger in that person as you can, or if you guys have the same Friend, like if me and my boyfriend have you as a Friend, I'll use you to get his attention. (Sims, Rural and Urban Youth)

Ono strategized about how to use her shared public to make her ex-boyfriend feel bad by signaling that she had severed ties with him, that he was no longer her Friend, and that she was intimately connected to other boys. The same technology used to publicly affirm intimate relationships can be used to publicly demonstrate their demise and to communicate anger toward someone with whom a teen may no longer have direct contact.

Bob used the same technology to communicate to an ex-girlfriend a gentler message. He had just endured a "really rough breakup" with a girl who wanted to "get back together" with him, though he did not reciprocate her wish to reunite. He wanted to communicate to her the fact that he was not willing to reconcile, but he felt constrained because he had learned of her desire in confidence from a mutual friend. To communicate his feelings to her, he changed his relationship status on Facebook to "in a relationship," even though he was not involved with anyone. At that point his ex-girlfriend realized that "I was unavailable. I knew she would read that; I didn't tell her or anything, but I knew that she would find it. And so that ended it officially." His ex-girlfriend communicated back to him in a similarly passive way:

I go on her MySpace and there's a blog about how she can finally move on. But it's addressed to no one. Right? I know who it's talking about; she knows who it's talking

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about. So that was a weird instance where "I'm not telling you but I know you're going to find this." (Sims, Rural and Urban Youth)

These sorts of indirect communications can enable teens to exit relationships in a dignified way and enable them to "have their say." Instead of communicating through oral conversations, or less directly through handwritten notes or chains of friends, teens can passively communicate through their online profiles and presence.

Despite popular emphasis on the one-to-one communication opportunities provided by these technologies, youth often use them to communicate indirectly, both through the technology and through intermediaries. Christo Sims's research on the ends of relationships shows that through new media, teens can retain an indirect channel to communicate after breaking up. While teens stop engaging in continuous contact after a breakup, they still use new media to communicate indirectly with each other and their larger mediated publics. Mechanisms on social network sites for indicating status or posting to an undefined public enable teens to delegate some of the more awkward social articulation work to technology-based, mediated forms of communication.

Intimate Media: Privacy, Monitoring, and Vulnerability

Themes of privacy and vulnerability weave through teens' new media practices. The ability to monitor one another and be monitored, emotional and physical vulnerability, and tensions around privacy thread through the variety of intimacy practices in which teens engage. Digital communications allow teens a sphere of privacy, when they don't have their own spaces, to communicate with their significant others through a circumvention of geographic and institutional constraints. The ability to talk beyond the earshot of one's parents and other adults, such as teachers, is part of this circumvention. Teens told us that the ability to communicate outside of adults' view and hearing was important. For instance, Joan, the Berkeley freshman, claims that she and her first boyfriend would talk

> online all the time, all the time. Like, we talked on the phone but then sometimes we talked on the phone and IMed at the same time . . . especially it's like our parents was in the room and then we would talk to them and then if there is something that you don't want your mom to hear you could type it and then you could talk about it. (Finn, Freshquest)

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Similarly, youth are able to maintain relationships with people of whom their parents might not approve, much like Jesse and Alice, because of this privacy. However, given the expectations of high contact with other teens and the amount of personal information in a semipublic realm, teens also have to negotiate new boundaries and spheres of privacy in their intimate relationships (Livingstone 2008). In this sense, social media carve out a new private realm in which teens can communicate, largely outside the purview of adults, while simultaneously redrawing and often weakening boundaries around their personal spheres of privacy.

Monitoring and Boundaries

From investigating crushes, to being in contact with significant others, to enduring breakups, the aspects of digital media that let teens be constantly in touch also allow them to monitor one another more intently. This monitoring varies from researching potential love interests to using a shared password to check up on one's significant other to attempting to restrict one's significant other's communications with his or her friends. Some youth regularly check on their significant other's websites simply to see what they are up to. Gabriella, a Latina fifteen-year-old from Los Angeles, logged on to her boyfriend's profile daily as part of her routine after she logged on to her own, "just to check" (boyd, Teen Sociality in Networked Publics). Similarly, Samantha, a white eighteen-year-old from Seattle, admitted, "I have done some checking up [on my boyfriend]" (boyd, Teen Sociality in Networked Publics). This sort of "checking" behavior happens when one has a crush, when one is monitoring one's romantic partner, and sometimes after a breakup.

The importance of passwords to one's online presence is central to these monitoring practices. Sharing a password both denotes intimacy and allows a significant other to monitor the private portions and manipulate the public parts of a social network profile. For some couples, such as Clarissa and her girlfriend, Genevre, white seventeen-year-olds in northern California, sharing a password feels like a way to maintain a connection even when they are apart. In fact, as Clarissa logged on to her MySpace profile she laughed, seeing that her girlfriend had updated it and altered the background to a more attractive one. However, not all teens feel comfortable with the amount of power a significant other wields with the password. Derrick, the Dominican American sixteen-year-old

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living in Brooklyn, New York, argued that girls want the passwords because

> they want to check up on you all the time. They want to get your MySpace password, they want to get your AIM password, they want to get your phone, your answering machine, the password. They want to get anything they . . . know that another girl can get in contact with you through. (Sims, Rural and Urban Youth)

While Champ, the Latino nineteen-year-old from Brooklyn, shares his password, he protects his privacy by changing his password regularly. "You gotta change it. . . . I'll be changing mine like every three weeks" (Sims, Rural and Urban Youth). Clarissa's, Derrick's, and Champ's varying responses to sharing a password show how this practice is both a sign of intimacy and a possible invasion of privacy. By refusing to share it, some youth attempt to set a boundary around their intimate relations, sometimes to the frustration of their significant others, usually girlfriends. This may be because some girls feel powerful when they know their boyfriend's password. Dana, the Latina fourteen-year-old living in Brooklyn, explained, "I made my boyfriend give me his password and that shows power" (Sims, Rural and Urban Youth). Given the research that documents continuing gender inequality in heterosexual adolescent dating relationships (Hillier, Harrison, and Bowditch 1999; Hird and Jackson 2001; Jackson 1998), it is not surprising that girls are strategizing ways to feel more powerful in these partnerships.

In a similar move, some of the youth we spoke with draw boundaries by altering digital footprints that might make their significant other question their commitment. These footprints may be messages, search histories, phone numbers, or texts that reveal one's intimacy practices to families, siblings, friends, or significant others. Zelda, the Trinidadian American fourteen-year-old living in Brooklyn, New York, actually deletes information on his site to get rid of evidence that might anger his girlfriend: "Sometimes I'll just go in there and I delete stuff that girls wrote me. I'll just delete it." To avoid these privacy compromises, Champ and Zelda change the names on their mobile phones. To prevent his girlfriend from scrolling through to look at his contacts and call logs, Champ records "their names different," explaining, "Yeah, if it's a girl's name, you put a boy's name that probably sounds similar to it. . . . Like, let's say the girl's name is Justine, you'll probably put Justin" (Sims, Rural and Urban Youth). While these technologies have provided a greater realm of privacy, digital

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footprints might compromise this privacy and thus youth are often drawing digital boundaries to protect a personal sphere.

Some of the monitoring that happens during teens' relationships veers eerily close to serious emotional control or abuse. Lolo, a fifteen-year-old Latina from Los Angeles, said that her boyfriend did not like the fact that her social network profile was public. Using the password she shared with him, "He kinda put it on private, hello. He's like, 'I don't wanna know every boy's going in there searching you'" (boyd, Teen Sociality in Networked Publics). We heard this insecurity over their claim on their romantic partners throughout our interviews with youth. Teens may intensify some of the monitoring practices we found as a way to attempt to control some of their anxiety about the stability of their relationships.

This sort of control might also intensify when economic transactions are involved. In our research, teens sometimes paid their own phone bills, but usually their parents paid. This meant that teens needed to obey their parents' rules (to the extent the parents could enforce them) about mobile phone use. Something similar happened when one's significant other paid the phone bill. Ono, the Haitian American sixteen-year-old living in Brooklyn, New York, said that her friend's boyfriend pays her friend's phone bill and as a result

> he expects when he calls, even if she's not available, to just pick up and say, "I can't talk to you right now, I'll call you back." Or if he's with her, then he would be asking who else is calling if it's not her parents or something. That's what happens when he pays your bills. And yeah, he can talk to you every day, even if you're not free, because he pays for it. (Sims, Rural and Urban Youth)

Girls in this type of relationship seemingly trade one type of control, parental, for another (Hijazi-Omari and Ribak 2008). Their privacy is compromised because they do not retain economic control of their mobile phones.

Youth monitor one another in the early stages of, during, and after the ending of the relationships. This monitoring manages anxiety so central to teen relationships in which teens for the first time are crafting intimate ties with one another. The monitoring capabilities afforded by digital media seem like a way to manage such anxiety as teens seek to put to rest their fears about vulnerability and betrayal. The ability to monitor others through these new media venues both allows teens to learn about others and makes them vulnerable to surveillance and control by others.

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Vulnerability

New media simultaneously increase teens' vulnerability and their control over their emotional exposure. This heightened vulnerability may allow teens to craft new and strong emotional connections with one another (e.g., see box 3.2) as well as render them more open to being victimized by their friends, acquaintances, and other adults. However, the removed and asynchronous nature of some new media also allows them to manage emotional exposure and render teens less vulnerable, especially in the early stages of a relationship.

Box 3.2 Bob Anderson's Story: "It Was Kind of a Weird Cyber Growing-Up Thing"

Christo Sims

When Bob Anderson was in middle school and the first few years of high school, social network sites such as MySpace and Facebook had not yet taken hold in the rural region of California where he lived. The popular social application was instant messaging (IM), and Bob would log on for hours a day to chat with other teens. As is emphasized in chapters 2 and 3, these online engagements typically enact and extend offline relationships and the identities associated with them. Bob's use of IM supports this observation as he primarily chatted with teenagers from school. Yet Bob, who is now in college, also tells of using IM to chat with teenagers beyond his given social worlds. While this book illustrates many instances in which interest-driven practices transcend given social worlds, Bob's story is unique as it falls within the realms of friendship and intimacy.

Bob recalls forming a friendship through IM with a teenager from the East Coast. The friendship lasted about two years but the friends never met. It took place toward the end of middle school through the early part of high school. Via conversations on IM, he and his new friend created a space where vulnerable subjects could be broached and swapped:

> We kind of went back and forth on a personal level. Talking about a range of things. But we were really just going back and forth with fundamental problems and questions that people have with growing up. Going through puberty. Sexual experiences. Where you fit in society. Real friends, fake friends.

When reflecting on the experience now, he frames the experience as part of the growing-up process:

> It was kind of a weird cyber growing-up thing. Just like checking in. . . . I was finding out more about myself, and trying to figure out what I was about, and trying to figure out what people were about, and trying to figure out what the world was about.

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Bob makes the point that these were topics that could not be easily discussed in other contexts. As he puts it, "You can suddenly say things you would never say in person." As chapter 3 shows, new media have become integral to the ways teenagers try to manage exposure and publicity. When it comes to vulnerable subjects, there are particularly good reasons to be cautious as to what one exposes and to whom. In Bob's case, he perceives it as safer to expose vulnerabilities to a stranger than to someone he already knows. This may seem counterintuitive but actually makes a lot of sense when one considers the context of his social world. At fourteen, Bob's given social world was small and persistent. His growing up in a rural area meant that his peer-based social world was largely bound to his school. His graduating eighth-grade class had fewer than thirty students, his high-school class fewer than two hundred. Short of a major family transition, these schoolmates would make up his peer-based social world until he left for college. Within this small-world context, the consequences of embarrassing exposures and public missteps can seem global and resilient.

Through IM, Bob and his friend created a space that seemed safely distant from these given and ongoing social worlds. As such, personal vulnerabilities could be swapped without risking lasting local consequences to reputation and identity. It was a place in which private thoughts, experiences, and feelings could be voiced for the first time, an intimate sphere, confidential by means of a perceived disassociation from the given and ongoing social worlds to which he belonged.

Boys in particular, because of contemporary association of vulnerability with a lack of masculinity (Korobov and Thorne 2006), express relief about the extent to which new media allow them to control what they perceive as emotional vulnerability. They feel less exposed because they can text a girl or leave a message on her MySpace page rather than risk embarrassment by calling her and stumbling over their words or saying something embarrassing. Bob, for instance, said,

> It's a lot easier to flirt digitally than it is in person 'cause there's no awkward silence. You can't say something you don't mean 'cause you could sit there at one comment on a person's profile and spend a half an hour making sure that everything is right. Like some words are lowercase on purpose. The punctuation's just the way . . . I want it to look sloppy, but it really has this, you know, acute meaning to it. (Sims, Rural and Urban Youth)

The asynchronous nature of texting and leaving messages allows boys to save face when flirting with a new girl. In this way, the controlled

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casualness discussed earlier is a form of emotion management and a way to control vulnerability.

The same technologies that allow youth to manage emotional exposure might also render them more vulnerable, in part because of the amount and type of information shared and the speed at which it can travel. Teens are not necessarily in control of digital representations of intimate practices or in control of the audience who sees those representations. For instance, Elena and Brett, two gregarious white sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds, respectively, from northern California, talk about how embarrassing pictures might be forwarded. Elena said, "That's a lot of drama too. They can send pics to other people." Brett continued, laughing, "People might take a picture of other people making out at a party." Elena continued, "Like so-and-so was kissing so-and-so or that so-and-so made out with so-and-so at a party. Then the next week they're like, 'Look at the picture; obviously it meant something.' Then they're with somebody else." Elena said that the picture might get "around school and you're like, 'Wait, how did you even get this picture? You weren't even at the party.' It goes further than you think sometimes." In this way, even teens' offline practices may be monitored online if people forward compromising pictures of them. This digital proof of one's intimate life may spread rapidly, outside of one's control.

The other vulnerability teens talked about is that of the stereotypical risk conveyed through fear-based narratives of the Internet, that of the stalker, the stranger, and the predator. Teens rarely mentioned these stories in our research (apart from noting that this was what adults were concerned about), but a minority of youth reported having negative interactions with predatory-type adults online. Those youth who seek out intimate communities online, such as gay teens, might be more at risk for this sort of unwanted stranger intimacy. For all the opportunities to create community for gay teens, the Internet also puts them at risk as they seek this community. Robert, the white seventeen-year-old from Chicago, told a particularly affecting story about his experience on the Internet as he was coming into his early teens.

> A couple times a week, after my parents went to bed, I visited some Internet sites . . . then after a while, I found a chat room website, a gay teen chat room. I chatted with a lot of guys; eventually I started to talk to people outside of the chat room, on MSN Messenger. There were people who wanted to do things with cameras and pictures, and for a while I went along with some of it, not really doing too

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much. Then one day, it wasn't a teenager who sent me their pic, but an old fat man. I was disgusted, beyond words. I smashed my computer camera, deleted my MSN, and barred any memory from those times out of existence until I recollect now.

Robert was trying to explore his sexuality the best he could, as a single gay teen, but in doing so, he ended up on non-age-graded sites, which, though not inherently risky or problematic, may be dangerous for marginalized teens looking for community. Instead of getting to experiment in more public and socially acceptable ways, through structured rituals of heterosexuality, gay teens often must find their own way. On the one hand, the Internet is an invaluable lifeline, but on the other, it renders gay teens more vulnerable to situations such as this one.

New media allow teens to manage their vulnerability; permit them to have intensely emotional, vulnerable conversations; and render them potentially susceptible to the forwarding of information about them and vulnerable to those who wish to take advantage of them.

Conclusion: Controlled Casualness, Continuous Contact, and Passive Communication

While many adults may perceive social network sites as being simply glorified dating sites, this chapter, in conjunction with chapter 2, on friendship, demonstrates that teens are not one-dimensional beings interested only in prurient communications and subjects; rather they craft complex emotional and social worlds both publicly and privately on and offline. Academic work has rarely taken youth courtship practices seriously, but in examining the way teens talk about these practices and their emotions about them, our project demonstrates that romance practices are central to teens' social worlds, culture, and use of new media. For contemporary American teens, new media provide a new venue for their intimacy practices, and render these practices simultaneously more public and more private. Teens can meet people, flirt, date, and break up beyond the earshot and eyesight of their parents and other adults while also doing these things in front of all their online friends. As chapter 2 also points out, participating in these mediated relational and emotional practices is central to being a part of an offline social world. Youth are developing new kinds of social norms and literacies through these practices as well as learning to participate in technology-mediated publics. These sites of peer-based learning

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need to be taken seriously, as they are structuring social and communicative practices that differ in some important respects from the experiences of these teens' parents, and they can become a site of intergenerational tension and misunderstanding.

When meeting and flirting, teens find online communication extremely useful. This is especially true in terms of furthering casual acquaintances. They have more freedom to get to know friends of friends or others they have met briefly at parties or other group gatherings without risking too much embarrassment. They can also use social network sites to learn about, usually unbeknownst to the other person, someone in whom they have an initial interest, be it someone they see every day in class or the person who sells them burgers at the local fast-food restaurant. While meeting people solely online is not the norm, some teens do meet and flirt that way. Others consider this brave, scary, or weird, depending on their perspective. Their messages and interactions during this time might be characterized as a "controlled casualness." Dating teens use new media often, engaging in what one might think of as "continuous contact." When in a relationship, teens frequently communicate with each other and expect their significant others to publicly acknowledge and maintain their relationship on their social network profiles. Teens' relationships also end in the presence of their networked publics. The breakups might be active or passive, but because of their shared publics, teens retain the ability to passively communicate with each other even after ending intimate ties. Their continuing indirect communication about relationship status is a way in which these sites enable intimate content to be made very public. This publicity both allows teens to exact revenge and communicate important, but indirect, messages about their emotional states to their former significant others. Because of the dearth of research on teens' intimacy practices, we lack comprehensive comparative case studies, but it seems that teens' current use of new media might be a unique moment in the recent history of teen dating practices. New media allow, and seem to encourage, teens to make relationships and relationship talk explicit. They let teens access romantic others' personal information and share versions of or information about themselves that might not be done as easily in offline circumstances. Much as friends have in the past, technology now acts as a social intermediary, enabling communication that is passive, but very important, at liminal relationship stages, such as beginnings or

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endings. Finally, among teens in relationships, technology allows them to maintain a passive copresence with each other and provides new ways to subvert expectations of that copresence.

As we saw in the case of friendship practices, these online tools and communication practices make peer-based interaction and pressures more consistently available to teens. Unlike more familiar forms of public space, networked publics and private communication channels such as IM and mobile phones can make it harder for parents to passively monitor their children's romantic communications (though written records of these communications often linger in digital environments should parents know how to access them). Youth call and send messages to each other directly, bypassing mediation by parents or siblings. This is part of the trend toward what Misa Matsuda (2005) has called "selective sociality," in which youth can make more intentional decisions about those with whom they affiliate. Further, some parents do not fully understand the norms that govern teens' online interactions, and the literacies they deploy in these interactions, and thus they may be tempted to resort to blanket prohibitions rather than more nuanced forms of guidance. These dynamics are explored further in chapter 4.

The snapshot of contemporary teens' intimacy practices presented in this chapter indicates that today's teens are part of a significant shift in how intimate communication and relationships are structured, expressed, and publicized. Networked publics of different sizes and scales contextualize these intimate communications and practices, allowing youth to observe the intimate interactions of others, and conversely, to display their own emotions, practices, and relationships to select publics. The new possibilities of self-expression available online, characterized by more casual and personal forms of public communication, complicate our existing norms about the boundaries between the public and the private.

Notes

1. This practice has varied with Alice's changing access to the text-message function on her mobile phone, because she depended on her parents' phone plan.

2. As with other parts of teen culture, contemporary practices of dating and romance are deeply gendered (Best 2000; Martin 1996; Pascoe 2007a). Gender difference and inequality is central to heterosexuality and thus is embedded in dating practices.

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Contemporary dating practices emphasize a gender-differentiated heterosexuality in which girls frequently possess less subjectivity than boys and in which "power is naturalized through a discourse of romance" (Best 2000, 67).

3. Indeed, in spite of the current flurry of concern over what kids are doing online, the Internet and social network sites have hardly led to an explosion in teen sexual behavior. In fact, the number of teens who say they have had sex before they graduated high school has declined from 54.1 percent in 1991 to 47.8 percent in 2007 (CDC 2007).

4. A "wall" is the place on a typical social network site where someone's Friend might leave a message for him or her to read. These messages are usually visible to others, but their public nature depends on the privacy settings of a given profile.

5. Christo Sims interviewed Bob several times, such that during the course of our research Bob's age ranged from nineteen to twenty-one.

6. Like many teens, Missy wrote using typical social media shorthand. Translated, her comment would read: "Hey, hmm, what to say? I don't know. Laughing out loud. Well, I left you a comment. . . . You should feel special haha (smiley face).

7. "G" is slang for "gangsta," in this case an affectionate term for a friend.

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Hanging Out, Messing Around, and Geeking Out

Kids Living and Learning with New Media

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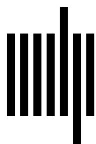

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