

“MySpace: a place for friends?”
A Study of Friendship on *MySpace*

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Abstract

This thesis seeks to examine the concept of friendship on *MySpace*. It will address the need for a comprehensive study of the daily operation of friendship on the social software site. As the site itself is relatively new, previous studies of social software have not included a focus on *MySpace*.

This study will analyse the concept of friendship by using a theoretical framework of friendship based on the work of Aristotle, Kant and Derrida. It will focus on three identified types of *MySpace*: *MySpace* for artists, for businesses and for individuals. The thesis will study these friendship types then analyse them according to the motivations behind these friendships and the context in which they exist.

DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief;

- i. incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;
- ii. contain any material previously submitted or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; or
- iii. contain any defamatory material.

Signed.

Date.

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Introduction

Ms. Calendar: This isn't a fad, Rupert! We are creating a new society here.

Giles: A society in which human interaction is all but obsolete? In which people can be completely manipulated by technology, well, well... Thank you, I'll pass ('I Robot, You, Jane', *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, 1997).

MySpace was created in 2002 and in its relatively short life has accumulated over 150 million users world-wide (*MySpace*, n.d). This means that anyone joining *MySpace* today has immediate access to a network of millions of other users, or 'friends,' as *MySpace* calls them. But what does friendship involve on *MySpace*? What does it mean? How does it reflect and differ from friendship in everyday life? Does it resemble definitions of friendship offered by a philosophical canon?

Background

MySpace has received substantial negative media coverage in the wake of the site's increasing popularity (Bosworth 2005). Much of the focus has been on illegal activities occurring on or in association with the site. This includes identity theft ("MySpace stalker stole my life", Molitorisz 2007) and defamation ("High Court judge Michael Kirby has been defamed by identity thieves using the internet site *MySpace*", Sexton 2007). The fact that *MySpace* appears to be the domain of younger users has also sparked concerns that sexual predators and bullies can use *MySpace* to harass their victims ('Sex on the Net' 2007, 'Growing up in the digital age' 2007). These reports tend to neglect the way in which people use the site on a daily basis, especially in regards to daily interaction with other users.

Friendship is a crucial element to the social software site *MySpace*. When signing up for a new account, users are asked their purpose for joining the site: “is it to network? Is it to meet new people? Is it to make new friends” (*MySpace* n.d)? All of these purposes involve the connection between one user’s *MySpace* and another’s in a relationship that is labelled as ‘friendship.’ However the concept of friendship online is difficult to define. Some academics argue that online friendships cannot resemble offline friendships and may in some cases have negative effects on one’s social skills:

Some research has demonstrated that access to computers and online communications don’t lead to social connectedness and can in fact have negative consequences for social capital and community development (Hopkins and Thomas 2004).

Danah Boyd argues however that friendship on sites like *MySpace*, while different to offline relationships, they are no less valid: they simply have their own context in which they need to be understood (2006). The locus for this context is in the existing literature on social software.

Literature Review of Social Software

Literature on Internet communities in the 1990s is dominated by research examining the effectiveness of the Internet as a medium for fostering relationships between people. Earlier works on Internet communities such as Rheingold (2000) and Jones (1995, 1998) focus on how Internet communities are constructed and affect particular sub-groups of society. Kraut et al’s study analyses the effect of Internet usage on community involvement (1998). They claim that, in comparison to face-to face communication, online relationships are “weak” because they are built around narrow subjects such as interests or issues (p.1017).

Hopkins and Thomas' (2004) study of "e-social capital" focuses on Robert Putnam's definition of social capital to examine how online communities demonstrate 'community' through social capital. Their overall conclusion is that online communities foster community feeling, however, they do state that:

Online connectivity is not the same as offline connectivity. Unless a computer user is communicating with someone that he or she already knows from face to face contact, the relationship does not function in the same way as a real world relationship does (2004, p.8).

These examples indicate the position that some members of the academic field have taken towards social software: that the Internet does not allow users to have 'real' relationships (Kraut et al 1999, Hopkins and Thomas 2004, Kavanaugh and Patterson, 2001). However other researchers have taken a less pessimistic view. Danah Boyd currently dominates the field of research on social software and her position is in conflict with these earlier academic thinkers. Boyd's recent work (2002, 2004, 2006) deals with social software and identity online. She has an ongoing agenda of examining social software in a cultural studies context, in comparison to the quantitative studies of Internet effects on communities (see, for example, Jones 1995, 1998, Kraut et al 1998). In 'Friends, Friendsters, and MySpace Top 8: Writing Community into Being on Social Network Sites' she looks specifically at the types of relationships that exist on *MySpace* and *Friendster*. She posits that one cannot apply the rules for community bonding and traditional definitions of friendship to this arena as it is a fundamentally different space which has to be understood in its own context:

The architecture of social network sites is fundamentally different than the architecture of unmediated social spaces; these sites introduce an environment that is quite unlike that with which we are accustomed (2006, p.2).

And

... failing to understand the culture of Friending that has emerged in social network sites contributes to the fear of the media and concerned parents over how they envision participants to be socializing (2006, p.1).¹

She concludes that 'Friending' is largely a performative process on *MySpace* and people do not arbitrarily make 'Friendship' decisions. Rather she sees these decisions as being strongly related to how a person wishes to portray themselves on their profile as well as the desire to indicate a relationship status (2006). She notes at the end of this article:

As these sites proliferate and become more culturally embedded, I suspect that we will see shifts in how Friendship relates to offline relationship management...regardless, it is critical that we watch what people are doing and understand why their choices make sense to them (2006, p.18).

In her other studies on *Friendster* (2004) Boyd examines the choices people make in adding 'Friends' and particularly how they negotiate the matter of context in this online community (2004, p.1).

Finally her co-written article, 'Profiles as conversation: Networked identity performance on Friendster' (Boyd and Heer 2006), examines the act of communicating on *Friendster* and particularly the art of negotiating context in conjunction with the public performative nature of the site. My research will prove helpful in looking at how people behave and interact with their friends on *MySpace*.

Aside from Boyd, very few academics are directing their attention to *MySpace* from a cultural studies perspective. Nancy Willard looks at "three factors of concern" with regards to children's access to *MySpace* (2007) and Maes and Liu (2005) use *MySpace* as a source for gathering information in order to construct

models of people's interests. However these studies offer little assistance in understanding friendship on *MySpace*, as it is not addressed in these studies. As the examination of social software is still in its early stages however, many research projects are still being written and have not yet been published. One example is Gregg and Driscoll's 'Thanks for the Ad (d): Neoliberalism's compulsory friendship' (2007) which will look at youth and online intimacy.

Aims

This study intends to further Boyd's research by examining the various relationships that exist within particular *MySpace* communities such as those of artists, businesses, and individuals. While Boyd presents a convincing argument, her research has tended to neglect *MySpace* as a primary focus. This thesis will focus solely on *MySpace* friendships, examining the notions mentioned above with the primary question being: how does the concept of friendship operate in *MySpace*? My research will also be supported by an engagement with the philosophical canon on friendship which will provide a theoretical framework through which to analyse friendship on MySpace.

As discussed earlier, the media's presentation of the activities on *MySpace* tend to focus on extremes. This received position will not be challenged in this thesis; rather the argument I will present will focus on user's everyday interaction with the site and their online friends – something that has tended to be neglected in favour of more sensationalist media coverage.

The term ‘friendship’ seems arbitrary when used to name the relationship that exists between users of a common online network. However, if one examines how friendship has been considered prior to the advent of *MySpace*, using the concepts of friendship presented by Aristotle, Kant and Derrida one has a set of conceptual tools for examining how *MySpace* users have adopted and adapted concepts of friendship to suit their purpose in using the site. This thesis will examine the concepts of friendship as presented by Aristotle, Kant and Derrida and will consider how these concepts relate to *MySpace* friendships. By interviewing *MySpace* users to contribute to this analysis, I intend to demonstrate how a variety of concepts of friendship operate in *MySpace* within three categories of profiles that I have identified: *MySpace* for individuals, for artists and for businesses. After having established how *MySpace* friendships relate to those presented by Aristotle and Kant, I will extend this analysis to examine motivations behind the creation of friendships on the site and the online context in which they exist.

Key Concepts

MySpace is an online social software site where users can create profile pages in which they describe who they are, upload music, video and photos and share information with other *MySpace* users through a network. *MySpace* profiles can exist in many forms. Most are user created profiles that can be linked to other user’s profiles though there are some profiles that provide advertised content and are not available for friendship. While these can be considered business profiles, businesses are also using more common *MySpace* profiles to connect to specific target markets. This offers a new relationship of friendship between the

consumer and the business. Although some large corporations do have a presence on *MySpace*, there is a plurality of smaller businesses on the site and these are often arts/media related, such as the *Brag* magazine, *Russh* magazine, Sydney Festival and Sydney Film Festival.

MySpace has also provided subgroup profiles specifically aimed at artists. These are *MySpace* Music, which allows users to upload up to four songs on their profile page, *MySpace* Film, which connects users to the film community, and *MySpace* Comedy, which identifies users as interested or involved in comedy. These subgroups have been created specifically to ease in sharing of creative content as well as allowing users to belong to interest groups. This thesis will focus on these interest groups as sites for particular kinds of friendship.

A variety of methods have been employed in this research and these will be examined in Chapter One. Chapter Two will use the information gained from interviews combined with an analysis of the primary theorists to examine the different forms of friendship that exist on *MySpace*. Chapter Three will further this analysis in examining how these friendships operate and how users employ them. This will include an examination of Bourdieu's theories of social capital which will inform an understanding as to the motivations behind *MySpace* friendships. Chapter Four will bring the research together to draw conclusions regarding the concept of friendship and its operation on *MySpace*.

Chapter One: Whose Space?

Methodology and conceptual locus for thesis

Method

There are three main methodologies that have been employed in this research project that come from a qualitative perspective in the media/cultural studies academic field.

These are:

1. Literature review
2. Textual Analysis
3. Interviews

Literature Review

The importance of a literature review to this project is threefold. It allows me to place the friendships on *MySpace* within a historical and philosophical field of understanding friendship and it allows me to draw out themes and issues in previous social software research. In so doing I will position my research with regards to previous studies of the field. Though other researchers such as Koehn (1998) use Aristotle and Kant to examine business-related friendships, they do not do this in an online context. I believe therefore that the particular choice of philosophers in this thesis is innovative to the study of online friendships. This literature review will also inform and provide a theoretical framework for my textual analysis and interviews. It is important to note here that literature does not refer to solely the academic field of discourse but also the current media discourse on *MySpace*.

Textual analysis

I have chosen to use textual analysis in order to understand the motivations of *MySpace* users in creating their profiles and to locate this within a process of online identity creation. I am basing this method on the definition offered by McKee: “Performing textual analysis... is an attempt to gather information about sense-making practices” (2003, p.14). Textual analysis is based on the need for “educated guesses” (McKee 2003, p.15) as to the understanding of the “practice of sense-making” (p.15). Like Boyd in ‘Friendster and Publicly Articulated Social Networking’ (2004), my research is better informed by my position as a participant observer.

As Jensen argues:

From one perspective, a textual analysis or case study might be said to perform, not an ‘analysis’ (e.g., an explicit segmentation and subsequent categorization of component parts to anticipate later inferences and conclusions), but a new ‘synthesis,’ a general reinterpretation of the object of analysis (Jensen 2002, p.245).

Using textual analysis through a specific theoretical framework creates this ‘new synthesis’ in this research. I will be using the work of Aristotle and Kant as a theoretical framework through which to analyse the types of friendships that exist, and the work of Bourdieu to better understand the motivations behind the creation of these friendships.

My research and methodologies are heavily influenced by the work of Danah Boyd and this is also true of my use of methodologies. My prioritising of Boyd’s work over that of others is because she is a leading exemplar in the field of social software analysis in a media/cultural studies context. For this reason, I believe

her method is best suited to inform my own as her research has provided the foundation for this study. While Boyd uses ethnography as her primary method (see Boyd 2004, 2006 and Boyd and Heer 2006), the constituent parts of her ethnographies include textual analysis and interviews. McKee argues that ethnographies involve, by necessity, textual analysis to aid in analysing the context of sense making practices (2003, p.88). Ethnographies also involve in depth interviews and long-term participant observation (Newcomb and Lotz 2002, p72). I do not claim this as an ethnographic study as, similar to Newcomb and Lotz, my work does not apply a rigorous anthropological style of an analysis that ethnographies necessitate:

... the case is not intended as the only model of qualitative production research. Moreover, it is most emphatically not an ethnographic study. That term implies much more extensive involvement, more detailed encounters with informants and closer engagement with the entire 'culture' of the production process. The present field visit was intended as observational and informational. It provided knowledge that could not be obtained in other ways, but the primary purpose was to gather material with which to supplement textual analysis and library research. It was therefore more open-ended, more opportunistic than a systematic ethnographic project would be (Newcomb and Lotz 2002, p72).

Interviews

The use of interviews as a methodology is designed to supplement and inform the textual analysis, as with Newcomb and Lotz (2002) or Gunter (2000, p.58). Seven 'respondent' interviews (Jensen 2002, p.240) were conducted in order to gain an understanding of the motivations behind creating *MySpace* profiles and to provide an insight into how users operate the site on a day-to-day basis. Interviewees were recruited through word of mouth and were selected based on their *MySpace* profile type and usage rates. High usage rates were preferred in order to gain an understanding of how people interacted with the site on a day-

to-day basis. This necessitated the choice of interviewees who used the site daily. A more systematic recruitment process was not necessary in the context of this thesis as covering a wide demographic was not significant to the aims of this research. Rather the more significant factor in recruitment was ensuring I had at least two representative samples from each of the three identified types of *MySpace* categories. I acknowledge that these examples are not indicative of the field however as Jensen says these ‘respondent’ interviewees are:

...conceived as representatives of one or more social and cultural categories. The assumption is that these categories are inscribed in, and can be recovered from, the respondent’s discourses with reference to the media (p.240).

This acknowledges that the interview process is informed by another analysis of the media itself – in the case of this thesis, a textual analysis of *MySpace* profiles. However, in using the notion of ‘representative,’ I realise that these interviews can only illustrate, not typify, daily *MySpace* usage.

The use of interviews intends to offer a reasoning behind the setting up of a user’s *MySpace* page and what choices they made in allowing and inviting friends. Interviews will also offer up information previously undiscovered in textual analysis. This will be aided by the use of semi-structured interviews (Bertrand and Hughes 2005, p.78).

There are shortcomings with every method. For this research the shortcomings are related to subjectivity in the interpretation and choice of literature and interview responses. Interviewee’s responses are also subject to subjective viewpoints (Bertrand and Hughes 2005, p.74) as well as issues related to the

context of the interview such as nervousness, location and the interrogative nature of the discussion – in other words, the nature of the “actions, arising from an interaction between interviewer and interviewee” (Jensen 2002, p.240). I believe these shortcomings will be addressed by using this combination of three methods as the disadvantages in one method will be corrected by the strengths of another. I also believe, after an examination of previous methods used in the field of social software research (see, for example, Boyd 2004, 2006) and the history of media research methods (see, for example, Bertrand and Hughes 2005, Gunter 2000, Jensen (ed.) 2002, and McKee 2003), that it is these methodologies and the combination together that will provide the most accurate results that will help me to achieve my outcomes.

Conceptual locus for this thesis

The following is a literature review of the works of Kant, Aristotle and Derrida on the topic of friendship. The ideas they put forward will be used to analyse friendship on *MySpace* in later chapters and will provide the theoretical framework through which I will conduct a textual analysis and present my interviews. I will also examine the issues involved in limiting the study of friendship to these discourses.

Aristotle on Friendship

Therefore we too ought perhaps to call such people friends, and say that there are several kinds of friendship – firstly and in the proper sense that of good men *qua* good, and by analogy the other kinds; for it is in virtue of something good and something akin to what is found in true friendship that they are friends (Aristotle 1980, p.199).

Aristotle acknowledges there are many difficulties that exist in defining friendship and in examining which people befriend one another (1980, p.193). He focuses on defining friendship by first looking at how men love “Do men love, then, *the good*, or what is good *for them?*” (p.194). Derrida examines this notion further through his study of Aristotle’s work. He states that according to Aristotle, it is “advisable to love rather than to be loved” (Derrida 2005, p.7), without demanding or receiving love in return. It is this that creates a friend, according to his reading of Aristotle. This idea has relevance to a study of friendship in *MySpace*, as it is only by asking or being asked to be a friend that one can become a friend.

The following are descriptions of Aristotle’s three types of friendship. I have given these types the following titles based on the word he most often uses to describe them.

Aristotle’s Friendship of Utility

Those who love each other for their utility do not love each other for themselves but in virtue of some good which they get from each other... Therefore those who love for the sake of utility love for the sake of what is good *for themselves* (1980, p.195).

Aristotle says that in this type of friendship, friends only stay in each other’s company as long as the friend remains useful (1980, p.195-196). While Smith Pangle agrees that this friendship is most prone to “ruptures” (2003, p.40) she points out that in later analysis Aristotle claims that each person loves what is good for themselves, and therefore even the perfect friendship of virtue would simply be a friendship of utility in the highest form (2003, p.43).

Aristotle's Friendship of Pleasure

Those who love for the sake of pleasure do so for the sake of what is pleasant *to themselves* (1980, p.195).

Aristotle roughly equates the friendship of utility with the friendship of pleasure, saying that in the case of both friendships, friends are made only in what they can get for themselves. In other words, people are only loved because they are pleasant company (1980, p.195). Friendships of this type are very common on *MySpace* with users choosing to become friends with user's profiles that provide them with pleasure, such as an individual becoming friends with a band. These friendships are also transient in nature as, like Kant's friendship of taste, friendships of pleasure end when tastes change or pleasure is sought from other sources. Occasionally this means that users 'unfriend' these bands however often users simply stop visiting their profile when tastes change (C. Dixon 2007, pers.comm., 3rd July).

Aristotle's Friendship of Virtue

Like Kant's friend of disposition, Aristotle refers to this type of friendship as the 'perfect' form that exists only between people who are good and "alike in virtue" (1980, p.196). Aristotle does not offer a clear definition of virtue, however he describes virtuous acts as being "good", "noble," providing the initiator of these acts with pleasure and happiness (1980, p.17). His argument for this being the perfect form of friendship is due to the fact that it is only this form in which the friends wish well for their friend *for their friend's sake*. It does not mean that forms of usefulness or pleasure will not exist, for simply by being this type of friend one will be of use to one's friend, and similarly, they will offer each other pleasant company:

For all friendship is for the sake of good or of pleasure— good or pleasure either in the abstract or such as will be enjoyed by him who has the friendly feeling and is based on a certain resemblance; and to a friendship of good men all the qualities we have named belong in virtue of the nature of the friends themselves (1980, p.197).

Smith Pangle examines Aristotle's overarching concept of friendship. She questions the fact that only the virtuous friend can be a true friend, for surely if Aristotle uses the term 'friend' to describe those friendships of pleasure and utility as well then he must think them friendships in a sense (2003, p.45). Smith Pangle believes that Aristotle still uses the term friendship, even if he says that it is through "analogy only" (p.45) because he does consider them to be friendships.

Derrida questions the underlying concept of Aristotle's virtuous friendship, saying that one cannot be a friend of virtue. The virtuous friend is in fact defined by one enjoying the virtue of others and in committing virtuous acts; this type of friendship can only exist on the endurance of virtue in the individual (Derrida 2005, p.23). He also describes virtuous individuals as being "godlike and blessed" (p.18). While virtuous users of *MySpace* may exist, the friendship of virtue is perhaps more applicable to Aristotelian society where Aristotle considered the trait of virtue to be highly regarded. However in considering that Aristotle believed that the friendship of virtue was the only true and constant form, this type of friendship *is* exhibited between individual users who use *MySpace* as a communication tool to maintain existing friendships, having already proved their friendship through time, a necessary indicator of virtuous friendship (see Chapter Two).

Kant on Friendship

Friendship is not of heaven but of the earth; the complete moral perfection of heaven must be universal; but friendship is not universal; it is a peculiar association of specific persons; it is a man's refuge in this world from his distrust of his fellows, in which he can reveal his disposition to another and enter into communion with him (1930, p.206-7).

According to Immanuel Kant there are always two motivations for every action committed by humankind (1930, p.200). One is self-love. If everyone acted out of self-love than everyone should achieve happiness, as long as no one hindered anyone else's acts of self-love. They will however be acting without merit: "If I chose only self-love, there would be no moral merit or worth in my choice" (p.202). The other motivation is love of humanity. By acting in a completely altruistic manner, people can achieve happiness by helping others. In turn they themselves will be helped and made happy. These motives directly affect how we maintain and make our friendships. *MySpace* may promote community feeling of this type through its subgroups and through its culture of friendship, however the motivations behind friendship on the site often override altruistic notions of friendship for friendship's sake.

Kant concludes that friendship is too complicated to be defined under one title – simply 'friendship' – rather that more definitions are needed depending on the choices that are made by the individuals involved in the friendship. Thus, he designates three types of friendship based on need, disposition and taste.

Kant on Friendships of Need

This friendship arises when one can trust one another "in the mutual provision for the needs of life" (Kant 1930, p.203). This is perhaps the original form of

friendship, originating in social interactions between early humans – conditions of hunting for example (p.203). In contemporary society when one has more luxuries and a “multiplicity of needs” one has no time to attend to the affairs of others, for it soon becomes clear that one participant knows that the other seeks friendship to satisfy their needs, and as a result the “friendship becomes interested and ceases” (1930, p.204). However the knowledge of the needs of one’s friends on *MySpace* does not necessarily signify the cessation of friendship. If one looks at the example of the magazine the *Brags’ MySpace*, the needs of both the magazine and their friends are clear to both parties – one needs to create publicity through a readership, the other needs access to Sydney music information. Though their actions are self-interested, their relationship is still titled as friendship.

While Kant says that: “the delight of friendship does not consist in the knowledge that there is a shilling for me in a stranger’s money box” (1930, p.204) and the creation of a debtor-debtee relationship between friends makes friendship unequal, many *MySpace* friendships based on need rely on the acquisition of goods or services from a friend. *MySpace* Black Curtain Screenings and Listening Lounge, for example, give free tickets to attend their events. In turn advertisers and promoters get people at their events.

Kant on Friendships of Taste

“The friendship of taste is a pseudo-friendship. It consists in the pleasure we derive from each others company, and not from each other’s happiness” (1930, p.205). People who lead different lives will form this friendship more than those

whose lives are the same (p.205). This is because attraction exists when one can provide the other with something they do not already possess. (p.205)

Friendships of taste end when tastes change.

Derrida, according to David Webb, disagrees with the suggestion that friendships of taste are “pseudo-friendships”, saying that difference is in fact essential to friendship “...if it is anything... friendship is surely a relation to someone who is *not* me and whose difference from me is a necessary and insurmountable condition for the friendship between us” (Webb 2003, p.121). Difference is essential to a friendship of taste as it is difference that motivates interest. In the case of *MySpace* friendships, people make friends with strangers, with bands, with films, with brands, with festivals – all profiles that are very different from the individual user’s – simply because they interest them.

Kant on Friendships of Disposition

Kant describes this type of friendship as being “pure” friendship, in the “absolute sense” (1930, p.206). In regular social interaction we do not voice all of our feelings and judgments (p.206) but a true friend of disposition is someone who we can confide in completely, withholding nothing (Veltman 2004, p.7).

Grunebaum notes that this openness with each other is intended to replace the ideal of reciprocal goodwill, something which Kant sees as necessary to all friendship but not attainable in most (Grunebaum 2003, p.34). Significantly Kant says of this type of friendship that “It can exist only between two or three friends” (1930, p.206):

I can be a friend of mankind in general in the sense that I can bear good will in my heart towards everyone, but to be the friend of everybody is

impossible, for friendship is a particular relationship and he who is a friend to everyone has no particular friend (1930, p.208).

Derrida on Friendship

Derrida begins his work *The Politics of Friendship* (2005) by looking at Aristotle's essay on the topic. He claims that Aristotle, being the father of the Western canon on the issue (2005, p.230), offers the first definition of how friendship operates and, in turn, creates us as his heirs to his work on friendship. He writes:

(Aristotle)...stands guard over the very form of our sentences on the subject of friendship. He forms our precomprehension at the very moment when we attempt, as we are about to do, to go back over it, even against it (Derrida 2005, p.6).

Derrida's analysis of primary friendship suggests that it could only exist, within Aristotelian boundaries, if it has passed the tests of time. "There is no friendship without confidence, and no confidence which does not measure up to some *chronology*, to the trial of a sensible duration of time" (2005, p.14). Confidence, whether in someone or with someone, is essential to faith, which one must also have in someone in order to become friends with them. Everything, in other words, comes down to the fact that one must be virtuous and inspire faith, because "there is no reliable friendship without this faith" (p.15). These concepts need to be understood, according to Derrida, before other types of friendship can be examined, for it is primary friendship that authorizes the analysis of any other type, for without primary, no other type would exist (p.18).

Derrida also looks at Aristotle's comments regarding the counting of friends, and the impossibility of truly being friends with many people. Derrida says that while

Aristotle acknowledges that it is possible to love more than one person, he does put an unknown limit to loving many. Derrida seems to concede this point, but questions the act of counting one's friends, for surely that is like counting one's possessions. "This restrained multiplicity calls for an account, certainly, and one must not have too many friends, but it nevertheless resists enumeration, counting off, or even pure and simple quantification" (2005, p.21).

Derrida also notes that Kant is the first to place such importance on respect in friendship. "There is no friendship without 'respect of the other'" (2005, p.252). He criticises this position for taking on the Aristotelian tradition of referring to friendship in its 'perfection' something which goes hand in hand with his idea of the moral good and the moral law. "He confers on this perfection the perfectly rigorous status of what is called an idea in the Kantian sense in its perfection, therefore – that is, *qua* an unattainable but practically necessary idea – friendship supposes both love and respect" (p.253).

Derrida says, "The history of friendship cannot be reduced to... discourses" (2005, p.229). This thesis does not intend to reduce the study of *MySpace* friendship to "discourses," rather I will use these discourses, combined with contemporary internet analysis research and media discourses, to further an understanding of the operation of friendship on *MySpace*. This thesis also does not intend to simply propose a typological study of friendship on *MySpace* however, once having established a typology, I will analyse the motivations and context of these friendships.

Issues with a typological study

The concern with simply putting together a typology of the different types of friendship that can exist on *MySpace* is that it neglects many factors. The relationship that exists between *MySpace* users and their friends is highly complex. This is due to the many varying elements that contribute to the establishment of the friendship and the communication variances between users in terms of whether they communicate privately or publicly, or whether the communication is one-sided. There is also significance attached to the initial creation of the friendship regarding who made contact first and requested to be “approved” as a friend.

The mediation that exists between the site and its users also has an effect in this area in terms of the establishment of the friendship. One has to request to be friends; they don't simply ‘become’ friends. This means that one can choose to allow or deny friendship. They can also mediate comments that appear on one's profile. The level of this mediation can be adjusted through the site and signifies a highly controlled environment in comparison to an offline situation. This type of control gives power to the user to choose who they associate with and how, as specified here by Boyd:

...because the architecture of social network sites is fundamentally different than the architecture of unmediated social spaces, these sites introduce an environment that is quite unlike that to which we are accustomed (2006, p.2).

Another issue regarding the establishment of a typology is that the types of friendships posited by Aristotle and Kant, while they may exist on *MySpace*, need to be considered as *examples* of possible friendships that may exist on

MySpace. Kant and Aristotle were selected as models for this thesis as they acknowledged that numerous types of friendship can exist and the examples they offer exhibit numerous qualities that can be detected in the relationships between users.

The purpose in drawing attention to types is not only to acknowledge the variety of friendships that can exist but also to point out the existence of any friendship at all. For if the forms of friendships that Aristotle presents exist on *MySpace* in whatever form, then the relationships that do exist on *MySpace* should be considered fitting within an established philosophical canon of friendships types. However as so many factors need to be considered with regards to these friendships, as well as the simple fact that several types of friendships exist simultaneously within each instance of friendship, it is not enough to simply draw attention to the comparisons that can be made between the types of friendships these philosophers posit with those on *MySpace*. One must also examine how these friendships operate and evolve in the particular *MySpace* environment.

In considering the literature on friendship, Sandra Lynch also argues that ancient conceptions of friendship are not sufficient for defining friendships in contemporary life. She argues that mobility, dislocation, time constraints and the heterogeneity of modern life cannot allow for the relatively simple definitions of friendship that Aristotle and Kant offer:

Underlying the heterogeneity that characterises modern society is an appreciation-perhaps even a veneration- of individuality and freedom of choice; and these concerns are reflected in the nature of our relations with friends (Lynch 2005, p.ix).

The concerns raised by Lynch are also reflected in the relationships between *MySpace* users. Individuality and freedom of choice are essential components to not only each user's construction of their online identity, but also the construction of their friendships. Lynch also argues that it is Derrida's approach to the study of friendship that is more appropriate for an analysis of modern friendships. She writes that Derrida's main motivation in studying these philosophers and their definitions of friendship is to argue that definitions of friendship are fluid and that each category is open to interpretation.

“Consequently, Derrida argues that we can no longer ask ‘what is friendship?’ Rather our query must be: ‘who is the friend?’” (Lynch 2005, p.4). In order to do this, I must first examine the types of friendship that have been exhibited by *MySpace* users who have contributed to this research in order to establish the existence of a variety of friendships on *MySpace*.

Chapter Two: You've got a friend in *MySpace*.

A study of *MySpace* friend types

Everyone wants a friend, and everyone wants to be a friend (C. Macready 2007, pers.comm., 14th July).

The growing popular awareness of *MySpace* has been evidenced by the ongoing coverage the site has received in the media over the last year. Editorials (Mehta 2007, p.22), business and arts news (Durman 2007, p.26; Patterson 2006) and television chat shows (*Difference of Opinion* 2007) have all focused on the variety of uses that *MySpace* users have found for the site, including illegal activities (Sexton 2007, p.27) and the launching of international music careers (Shedden 2007, p.14). There has also been a strong presence of conservative columnists and pop culture commentators studying the interests of the “*MySpace* Generation” (Moses 2007, p.7). However, this media coverage has tended to neglect the average user and how they use *MySpace* on a day-to-day basis and relate to their *MySpace* friends.

The decision made in adding a friend is not taken lightly by *MySpace* users. Individuals and artists that took part in this research all exhibited an anxiety regarding whom they chose to add or requested to add, demonstrating that:

...their choice of Friends online is not a set of arbitrary personal decisions; each choice has the potential to complicate relationships with friends, colleagues, schoolmates and lovers (Boyd 2006, p.18).

This anxiety indicates that the act of making friends on *MySpace* needs to be examined by looking at what those friendships are, what they mean to the user and how they operate.

These friendships also operate within particular communities of both *MySpace* interest groups and user-created communities of friends. The purpose of this chapter is not to examine the formation of communities on *MySpace*, although the sense of belonging to a community and the existence of communities plays an important role in the choices that people make in adding friends. This chapter will examine what kinds of friendships exist on *MySpace* by comparing an existing philosophical stance on friendship, as presented by Aristotle and Kant, with interview responses on the topic of friendship.

Aristotelian Friendship on *MySpace*

As was established in Chapter One, Aristotle presented three different types of friendship based on what and who people love, whether it is themselves or others (1980, p.194). Aristotle wrote that these friendships were based on pleasure, utility and virtue and his descriptions of these friendships suggest a simple classification of friendships according to these characteristics. When examining the friendships that exist on *MySpace*, it is evident that these categories can also apply.

Simply speaking, one can demarcate how these friendships exist within the three categories of *MySpace* that I have identified. For example, friendships of utility are most likely related to business *MySpace* pages because of a desired reciprocal relationship between the *MySpace* friend and the business. Friendships of pleasure can relate to artist *MySpace* pages as people choose to be friends with these artists in order that they can receive pleasure in the form of music or video content. Finally one could argue that friendships of virtue exist between

individuals on *MySpace* who are friends offline as well as online and therefore have tested the bonds of friendship through time (Aristotle 1980, p.197).

However, in many cases these different types cross over into many categories. For example, friends of virtue may also give one pleasure and may also prove themselves to be of utility. Smith Pangle acknowledges this as a possible flaw in Aristotle's argument (2003) in that even he acknowledges that people can have a friendship of both virtue and pleasure simultaneously, seemingly rendering any facile classification of friendship types flawed (Smith Pangle 2003, p.38).

However, the significant point regarding Aristotle's friendships is that he acknowledges that more than one definition can co-exist, even if the classifiers do cross over among the different types. This is notable in examining friendships on *MySpace*, where multiple definitions of friendship exist in order that users can differentiate between their friendships just as they would offline. Therefore Aristotle's different friendships can play a role in understanding friendship on *MySpace* depending on the friend and the type of *MySpace* that is in discussion.

An important factor regarding all types of friendship on *MySpace* is determining who was the active agent in the establishment of the friendship. For example, the band *Red Riders' MySpace*, according to administrator Alex, was initially established with a mass 'adding effort' in order to present a popular image to new visitors to the page (A Grigg 2007, pers.comm., 27th August). Since then, the popularity of the band and its featured use on the *MySpace* home page has resulted in many more people adding them as friends. In the case of *Red Riders* adding new friends, this relationship can be seen as being one of utility – they

relied on the new friends they were adding to advertise the band's *MySpace* page and to make their page appear to have a lot of visitors. Conversely, when people add them as friends, the relationship evolves to being one of pleasure as it is new visitors to the page that decide to add on the basis of the pleasure in the music they hear, the profile page, and the photos.

Kantian Friendships on *MySpace*

Similarly to Aristotle, Kant presents a series of three different types of friendship, each of which is motivated by either self love or love of humanity (1930, p.202). These motivations are what drive the three friendships Kant specifies: friendship of need, taste and disposition. Each of these can find their place in *MySpace* among the varying friendships between different users. A friendship of need can exist in many if not most *MySpace* friendships, as having a friendship with other users is one of the defining aspects of *MySpace*. All friendships on *MySpace* are in some way determined by need as each user *needs* another friend in order for their existence on *MySpace* to be acknowledged, and thus to fulfil the purpose of the site: "a place for friends" (*MySpace* n.d).

More specifically, friendships of need exist between artists and their fans. In order for a band to have both online and offline popularity, they often rely on the word of mouth produced by *MySpace* users sharing the band's music, listing the band in their interest section on their own profile and adding them as a friend. Friendships of need also exist between business users of *MySpace* such as the Sydney Festival and their friends. Without a friendship base, there would be no purpose in a business such as the Sydney Festival to maintain a *MySpace* page,

as there would be no word of mouth advertising and therefore no return in ticketing revenue. This relationship can also be considered as one of a friendship of taste if looked at from the perspective of the individual who decides to add Sydney Festival as a friend. They may enjoy the Festival events and so add themselves to be kept up to date with information regarding performances and events.

A friendship of disposition, according to Kant, is easier to identify than one of Aristotelian virtue, though one may consider them similar categories as they are both friendships that exist between people for the sake of the friend themselves rather than the friendship. This type of friendship expects a 'purity' (1930, p.206), which, while it can exist online, is more likely to exist between offline friends who then transfer their relationship to the online world of *MySpace*. This is because the explicit definitions that both Kant and Aristotle specify with regards to these friendships involve spending time with each other. Friendships of all types however can be found on MySpace in many different manifestations.

***MySpace* Artist friendships**

I interviewed the *MySpace* administrators of two bands and one solo musician in order to discover what they consider to be friendship on *MySpace* and how those friendships operate. In studying the *MySpace* profiles of these three artists, one can determine what kind of relationship they have with their *MySpace* friends by examining comments, blogs, and how they choose to present themselves to the internet community through decoration of their profile. For example, in analysing the profile for *Derwent River Star*, they chose a repeated image as their

background motif – a fairly simple design. They have chosen not to use any flashing imagery and they have a straightforward ‘About me’ section which explains briefly who the band is and where they are located. They have over six hundred and twenty friends who have posted over one hundred and forty comments.ⁱⁱ Their Top Friends include many other bands located in the same area and many of the comments are from these bands advertising their own gigs.

With over six hundred friends and just over one hundred comments, it would seem that *Derwent River Star*’s friends do not always actively engage with the band. An active engagement is needed for a friendship of disposition (Kant 1930, p.205) or one of virtue (Aristotle 1980, p.197): ‘true’ friendships according to these philosophers.ⁱⁱⁱ However Kant clearly states that in a friendship of need, there is often one active and one passive participant (1930, p.204) suggesting that need could be what drives this relationship.

One could argue that the friendship of taste is more appropriate to explain the relationship that exists between a band and their friends on *MySpace* as it is “through the pleasure we derive from each other’s company” (1930, p.204) that this friendship arises. This would certainly explain much of the motivation of *Derwent River Star*’s friends requesting to be added to their profile. However the needs of *Derwent River Star* include the accumulation of a number of people who know about the band in order to have a fan base and have people buy their album and attend their gigs. This is a definitive need on the part of the band and so the lack of activity on the part of the friends in actively engaging with *Derwent River Star* on their profile can be explained as being a friendship of

need where one member (the band) is active and the other (the friend) is passive. This is also true in the converse, as individuals create a friendship of need with the band in order to keep up to date with the band's actions.

The passivity and activity in this relationship is defined by the action of posting comments on profile pages, as this is the only activity for which there is evidence. However there is conscious action in the motivation that begins the friendship and in maintaining the friendship. This will be discussed in Chapter Three in an analysis of these *MySpace* friendships and their involvement in competition for social capital.

The administrator of *Derwent River Star's MySpace* page, Robin Dixon, states that the relationship his band has with other people through *MySpace* is predominately professional, as the relationship is used primarily to communicate information regarding the band's activities with their friends. When asked to describe the relationship, Robin noted:

I guess practical as much as anything else, we mainly use it for letting people know when we're playing a show, letting people know if anything's been released, letting people know if we've put a new track up, that's kind of when we send out bulletins....And most of that... communication is fairly impersonal. They're not personal relationships, it's just you guys have all expressed an interest in the band, it's like having a mailing list I guess, yeah it's kind of like having a mailing list with the slight improvement that we can tell them about songs we've just put up and they can listen to the song straight away (R Dixon 2007, pers.comm., 7th August).

Though he argues the relationship is practical and impersonal in its nature, it still fits into the definition of Kant's friendship of need. The needs of the band are simple: they have to communicate to their friends to maintain their friend's

interest as well as “ideally to get legions of new fans”(R Dixon 2007, pers.comm., 7th August).

Solo artist Ben Carey demonstrates the friendship of taste or perhaps more specifically, Aristotle’s friendship of pleasure in the relationships he has with his friends. Ben’s purpose in being on *MySpace* is to correspond with artists of a similar persuasion. “*MySpace* is mainly just for me about putting my stuff out there, and checking out people who are doing similar stuff: overseas, here, that kind of thing” (B Carey 2007, pers.comm., 28th August). He has made friends by searching for artists through the *MySpace* Music search engine by genre and location in order to make specific contacts in places he is likely to visit. While Ben notes that he refers to his *MySpace* friends as contacts rather than friends, he acknowledges that there is a mutual appreciation involved in the relationships he has with his *MySpace* friends:

It’s just having them on the contact list and knowing what they sound like and them knowing what I sound like in a collaborative kind of thing. It’s a good way to know whether you want to work with someone or not (B Carey 2007, pers.comm., 28th August).

***MySpace* Individual Friendships**

Individuals who are users of *MySpace* have demonstrated a variety of friendships that they maintain with other users. Andrew Dowling notes that many of his *MySpace* friends are offline friends first and foremost: “It’s (*MySpace*) good for being able to speak to friends... a way of being able to contact people when you’re not actually with them” (A Dowling 2007, pers.comm., 11th August).

These friendships would be classified as friendships of virtue, according to Aristotle, as they have gone through a test of time (1980, p.197) and have proven

to be true friendships between people of a similar disposition (Kant 1930, p. 206). *MySpace* then becomes a tool through which they can communicate.

While he does maintain contact with some people that he met online, Andrew acknowledges the difficulties in interacting with these people in terms of establishing a genuine friendship, calling them instead “virtual pen pals:”

I don't really talk to anyone online that I don't know. It's not that I think it's dangerous... it's just that, what can I really talk to you about? That's my problem with the virtual pen pal; I end up sending them a message asking them about a thousand questions because I'm trying to find some common ground (A Dowling 2007, pers.comm., 11th August).

While both Andrew and Charlotte Dixon, another individual user of *MySpace*, indicate that their relationships with their friends on their site are strictly between people they have met offline, a true friendship of disposition can not only be maintained through contact on *MySpace* but also established there. Robin Dixon, in using his personal *MySpace* page (separate from that of his band) established contact and maintained a relationship with someone in Canada simply through noticing that she shared many of the same interests as him:

She's listed about five of my favourite books and about five of my favourite bands and about six of my favourite films which was just really weird. So I sent her a message saying, 'this is really weird but we're really alike' and we've been communicating for over two years now... that's a real friend and this is where the *MySpace* thing becomes arbitrary because we went to email as soon as we could rather than go through *MySpace*... (But) that's actually why the page has been set up... so you can find likeminded people around the world, which is a noble ideal I guess (R Dixon 2007, pers.comm., 7th August).

This friendship is clearly one of both Kantian taste and disposition – taste gave them the motive to be friends and their similar dispositions helped them to maintain that friendship. This is also true in the case of Andrew's virtual pen

pals, as they were initially established as friendships of taste however their dispositions were not suitable to become friends of this type.

***MySpace* Business Friendships**

Business *MySpace* profiles seemingly have very little desire in creating friendships so much as customers. Some advertised profile pages cannot be added as friends however many businesses do create more typical profiles in order to reach a particular market. This does not mean that the friendship they have with other users is any less legitimate; again, it is just of a different nature to traditional offline friendships. Aristotle understood that people make relationships with those that they will find useful in the future – in Ancient Greece this would often have been related to business or politics. This is why he designated the friendship of utility. Utility friendships are becoming more and more prevalent on *MySpace* with not only an influx of businesses onto the site as it grows in popularity (A Fletcher 2007, pers.comm., 3rd July) but also a change in how people see their *MySpace* profiles as operating for them in terms of who they maintain contact with.

Sydney Festival's *MySpace* page for example, was initially created with the purpose of fostering a community between the Festival itself and the artists performing at Festival events (C. Macready 2007, pers.comm., 14th July). The benefits for the Festival in creating this community were in the provision of another marketing venue for the Festival to publicise itself which in turn assists in ticket sales and profit for the Festival. "Ultimately it's about selling tickets, and that's not because we're particularly mercenary, it's because we're a not-for-

profit organization that has really limited resources”(C. Macready 2007, pers.comm., 14th July).

The commercial imperative translates into a very particular type of relationship between the Sydney Festival *MySpace* and its friends, as the friends are ultimately being sold something. Therefore, for the Festival, their friends are friends of utility. This does not suggest that there is no sense of genuine affection between these friends; Aristotle himself acknowledges that affection *must* exist in the lesser forms of friendship, as one cannot have a friendship of utility without affection for the person who fulfils a need (Smith Pangle 2003, p.46).

MySpace itself operates as a business with the intention of providing its users with services. In creating profiles such as Black Curtain Screenings in which only its friends have access to the location of private preview screenings of upcoming blockbusters, *MySpace* is giving something back to its community:

It’s about adding incentives for people to get on there. And once they’re on there, they’ll find that they’ll probably start engaging with people... and what I’ve also noticed through Black Curtain is that people meet each other in the line (at the event) and then contact each other through Black Curtain forums (A Fletcher 2007, pers.comm., 3rd July).

This type of interaction demonstrates the nature of friendships that often exist on *MySpace*; while Black Curtain needs friends (in the Kantian sense of a friendship of need) people add themselves out of taste and pleasure. They see the rewards that they can receive and join, which inadvertently puts them in contact with people of similar tastes and offline friendships are formed. Alex sees the point of profiles such as Black Curtain Screenings and *MySpace* Secret Shows as being to facilitate communication around a common interest and in so doing, draw traffic

through to the site. One can dismiss this type of relationship as merely pandering to the interests of record companies and film distributors; *MySpace* users however are content to take the benefits that their friends offer. Black Curtain Screenings' *MySpace*, for example, has over 35745 friends.^{iv} As Aristotle notes, friendships of pleasure and utility are rooted in what people can get for themselves (1980, p.195).

However, there is a far more complex relationship than simple acts of selfishness that take place in the establishment of each of these friendships: "Cynical dismissals of friendship as a relationship of self-interest are simplistic responses to the complex motivations operating in relations among friends" (Smith Pangle, 2003 p.xi). The complexities evident within the friendships of the interviewees who took part in this research will be explored further in the following chapter.

Chapter Three: On *MySpace*, nobody knows you're a friend.

Motivations and context of *MySpace* friendships

I'd rather have a smaller group of friends and actual people that are interested in the band and come to the band [*'s MySpace*] of their own volition; that attitude of having more friends- you know I don't care. I'd rather have actual friends (A.Grigg 2007, pers.comm., 27th August).

In the previous chapter I examined the definitions of 'actual' friends as posed by Kant and Aristotle and concluded that friendships, according to the definitions offered by these philosophers, do exist on *MySpace*. In doing so I established a typology of some of the different kinds of friendships that exist on *MySpace* using a comparison with Kantian and Aristotelian friendships. It is important to understand, however, how *MySpace* friendships exceed and differ from these established modes. Therefore it is necessary to examine the friendships that exist on *MySpace* in a different way. After acknowledging that friendship does exist in various forms, one must also acknowledge the unique aspects that make up *MySpace* friendships. In this chapter I will turn to the particulars of how friendship on *MySpace* reflects and differs from previous definitions.

There are many possible motivations that inspire not only the creation of a user profile but also the establishment of friendships between users. In understanding these friendships it is also necessary to examine the online nature of the individual's existence on *MySpace*, and how that existence affects the relationships that occur between users as Boyd indicates:

Friending is deeply affected by both social processes and technological affordances. I will argue that the established Friending norms evolved out

of a need to resolve the social tensions that emerged due to technological limitations (2006, p.2).

While some friendships do fall into the categories that were proposed by Aristotle and Kant, it is clear that as Boyd suggests, some friendships online do redefine, exceed or at least stretch offline definitions.

Motivations in *MySpace* Friendships

One way to study these relationships is to examine the motivations behind them. According to Pierre Bourdieu, there are particular motivations that guide one's decisions in every facet of life, particularly in choosing who one associates with (Bourdieu 1984). In order to analyse this, Bourdieu realised the concept of the field:

A field is a field of forces within which agents occupy positions that statistically determine the positions they take with respect to the field, these position takings being aimed either at conserving or transforming the structure of relations of forces that is constitutive of the field (Bourdieu 2005, p.30).

In turn, each decision in the field is governed by one's habitus, which is a:

structuring structure, which organises practices and the perception of practices (and) also a structured structure: the principle of division into logical classes which organises the perception of the social world is itself the product of internalisation of the division into social classes (Bourdieu 1984, p.170).

All of these motivations affect the decisions one makes in approving a new friend in *MySpace*, or from choosing to invite a new friend. These motivations also affect the choice to register with *MySpace* initially, as Alex Fletcher discusses:

People started to use it for not only personal self-expression, they started using it to highlight skills and almost make it, because it was so easy to

use it almost became a web page for some people and if you're a musician, a comedian or even a filmmaker you can post up there all your screening and tour dates (A. Fletcher 2007, pers.comm., 3rd July).

Fletcher also identifies the “unified playing field” that *MySpace* offers due to the simplicity of the software which allows for an equality of profile design between any garage band and a chart topping super group (2007, pers.comm., 3rd July).

Capital, in terms of recognisability, may seem difficult to compete for when there is such a level playing field. However the capital on *MySpace* is defined not in the ability to physically or visually stand out from other profiles, but is instead directly related to the number and type of friends one has. This correlates to what category of *MySpace* one has, whether or not it is a *MySpace* for businesses, individuals or artists, as the competition for friends is different in each of these fields.

When looking at businesses for example, one would assume that the primary focus would be to seek as many friends as they can in order to generate as much business as they can. This certainly was the case with the Sydney Festival *MySpace* page, however in the initial stages of the page, the primary concern was to attract the ‘right’ kind of friends; those that had an association with the Festival or those that seemed desirable in terms of what they could offer. This meant that friends were sought from among the friends of Festival artists, keeping the friendship group as a contained entity. This entity was also highly exclusive in its membership, as friends were all carefully chosen.

Other possible motivations people may have in joining social network sites are examined by Donath and Boyd. They study ‘signalling theory’ in relation to

people's presence on these sites by looking at what signals are being created by exhibiting aspects of one's persona and in demonstrating a relationship with others:

A useful way of analysing the reliability of displays of connections is to think of them in the framework of signalling theory. This theory, developed in both biology and economics, describes the relationship between a signal and the underlying quality it represents. Most of the qualities we are interested in about other people... are not directly observable. Instead we rely on signals, which are more or less reliably correlated with an underlying quality (Donath and Boyd 2004, p.72).

This theory, while interesting in its examination of people's deliberate actions on these sites, does not provide sufficient evidence for motivation in using sites like *MySpace*. This is because the signals the Donath and Boyd describe aren't always directly observable on *MySpace* nor are they always accurately interpreted. This is especially true with the prevalence of fictional identities having *MySpace* profiles.

Bourdieu and Social Capital

A subset of the typologies established in Chapter Two is hierarchy, which exists in Kant and Aristotle's separation of 'true' friendship from lesser friendships, but which also clearly exists on *MySpace* in terms of people establishing a "Top Friends" list. This hierarchy is significant in analysing who these friends are and what they mean to each user. It also lends itself to a social capital style of analysis as presented by Bourdieu.

Bourdieu begins his work 'The Forms of Capital' by criticising a tendency to look at capital solely through its economic framework (1986). While the world of economic profit may exist, its monetary interest inevitably produces its

counterpart: the artistic/cultural world of disinterest (1986, p.242). Since this exchange cannot be disinterested, as no exchange is according to Bourdieu (p.242), there must be a form of capital that artists are in competition for; thus Bourdieu introduces the idea of cultural capital. Such alternative forms of capital operate in conjunction with economic theory and are competed for on *MySpace*.

Economic capital also is in competition on *MySpace* amongst many users.

Advertised “Feature profiles” (*MySpace*, n.d) are present on the site’s homepage and also feature on the user’s homepage. These can be organised through *MySpace* (the business) itself (A.Grigg 2007, pers.comm., 27th August) in order to boost publicity for a band, event, film or business. This exhibits trading in economic capital as the more people that see that advertised profile, the more people likely to buy that record or visit that store. However *MySpace* offers a new dimension to simple advertising, as businesses with profiles can also be friends with *MySpace* users. Alex sees this as representing a new era in Internet marketing:

It’s harnessing that Gen Y thing... basically people these days aren’t consumers, they don’t want a brand to just dictate to them, they want the brand to be their friend. They want a relationship with that brand (A. Fletcher 2007, pers.comm., 3rd July).

This idea is overly simple however, as it suggests that all younger *MySpace* users are friends with brand profiles such as ‘Coke Music Europe’ simply because they are of a generation that is brand orientated. Brand profiles such as Coke, or V Raw have friends on *MySpace* because of the capital that can be gained by the individual user. For example, V Raw, while it is a sponsored page that advertises the energy drink V, it also advertises jobs in the arts industry for young designers

(V Raw *MySpace* n.d). Therefore, by being friends with this profile, one has access to bulletins advertising upcoming jobs that may not have been listed on employment websites or in newspapers. *MySpace* users are aware of the advertising that exists on these sponsored pages however they understand the benefits that exist in being friends with these profiles on *MySpace*.^v

This relationship is closely connected to that of competition for social capital, which according to Bourdieu is:

[T]he aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition—or in other words, to membership in a group which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively-owned capital (1986, pp.248-9).

One's profile page can offer users not only simple economic capital, but also the ability to network with other users in a resource rich environment. Cultural capital also exists in abundance on *MySpace*. Individual users adding themselves to band and film profiles suggests not only an attempt at constructing their identity through recognisable cultural forms (Chandler and Roberts-Young 1998) but also acknowledges their competition for cultural capital in that particular field. Musical tastes and friendships with particular bands played an important role in Andrew's decisions to allow or request friends:

Commercial tastes are what I despise the most. I'd probably much prefer to speak to someone who lists a whole bunch of bands I've never heard of before than 'Favourite music: Anything on Ministry [of Sound]'... I much more respect someone listing Jeff Buckley or The Smiths or something cool like that (A. Dowling 2007, pers.comm., 11th August).

According to Bourdieu, cultural capital can only be accrued over time through the disposition of one's habitus, which allows for the possession and understanding of cultural capital in its various forms (1986, p.246-7). However

MySpace allows users to immediately accrue cultural capital by displaying their taste in cultural goods in the “Interests” (*MySpace*, n.d) section of a profile, and through the friends that one has. Someone who is friends with many artists, filmmakers or musicians could be seen to possess a large amount of cultural capital in the *MySpace* field, as well as within the many smaller fields of particular tastes and interests. This suggests that people choose to add these particular friends to not only indicate to the band themselves that they are a fan of that band, but to also indicate this to the greater *MySpace* world. It also implies some form of musical and therefore cultural sophistication, which is further emphasised by the relationship between artist and individual being labelled as a friendship by *MySpace*, suggesting a personal bond between users.

The significance of this bond lies in its location within a field. While someone who enjoys jazz music may not recognise the cultural capital possessed by a heavy metal band with thousands of *MySpace* friends, within the heavy metal community (and field) the capital the band possesses is highly valued.

It is these small interest groups that render relationships on the Internet distinctive according to Kraut et al, as people are becoming friends over shared interests alone:

Some scholars argue that the Internet is causing people to become socially isolated and cut off from genuine social relationships, as they hunker alone over their terminals or communicate with anonymous strangers through a socially impoverished medium... Others argue that the Internet leads to more and better social relationships by freeing people from the constraints of geography or isolation brought on by stigma, illness or schedule. According to them, the Internet allows people to join groups on the basis of common interests rather than convenience (Kraut et al, cited in Hopkins and Thomas 2004, p.7).

While offline people also can form friendships based on common interests, *MySpace* provides its users with numerous and easily accessible sub-groups that they can join, such as *MySpace* Music and *MySpace* Film in order to readily declare one's interests.

Friendships in an online environment

The defining characteristic of *MySpace* friendships is that they exist online. The method of communicating is predominantly public, and this signifies that the friendships are public as well. Not only can visitors to the site see that Charlotte has been laughing with her friends through reciprocal comments on each other's profiles, they can also see in her photos that she has just received a present from one of her friends for her birthday. Also, one can see the hierarchy among Charlotte's friends in seeing whom she chooses to list as her Top Friends and whom she chooses to list among her hidden friends list.

In noting this, it is also important to note that the interaction between people on *MySpace* is heavily mediated: not only by the user in allowing comments to be published, or in choosing what form of communication they will have with other users, but also in the limitations of the site itself in how it allows users to interact. While instant messaging brings *MySpace* conversations into real time, often users interact by posting comments on each other's profiles which tend to act as a bulletin board for user relationships. Ben Carey says he posts publicly only when he's making light-hearted conversation with friends or thanking people:

The only time I post publicly is when I'm thanking people for an add, or answering a direct question that was asked of me publicly. If I really like

someone's stuff, or I want to ask specific questions about their music etc, I'll message them privately. I've noticed at least with other artists that this is what people are doing professionally. With 'real' friends I might post on their sites with personal messages (B.Carey 2007, pers.comm., 28th August).

Charlotte agrees, saying she will only send private messages when it contains personal information but will generally post publicly as it is usually idle chatting with her friends (C. Dixon 2007, pers.comm., 3rd July). Yet both of these interviewees, in choosing to write public comments, are publicly exhibiting their relationships for scrutiny in choosing to write public comments. This correlates to a conscious decision to compete for social capital in displaying a close relationship with friends and professional contacts. Ben has noted this in his decision making process in choosing between private and public messaging:

I have found myself consciously thinking about the fact that others may read what I write when I post publicly, and because I use it as a resource for gaining musical contacts and expanding my network, I have from time to time written things on purpose to capture the attention or spark the interest of others that may be browsing through someone else's comments (B.Carey 2007, pers.comm., 28th August).

These aspects emphasise the online nature of friendship on *MySpace* rather than defeating the idea of friendship itself – despite possible motives. Chandler and Roberts-Young criticise the “phonocentric” notion that only face- to-face communication reveals one's meaning when communicating with friends:

Some people feel more 'at home' in representational media than in face-to-face interaction. And such representations need not be purely verbal. One seventeen-year-old told us: 'I'm not very good at describing myself. It's not possible for me to create a complete portrayal through the medium of the Web, I'm sure - but it is possible to include a great deal of information not only through writing, but photographs, music, videos, tables etc.' On the Web, some webpage authors may feel better able to 'express themselves' by manipulating images and sounds (Chandler and Roberts-Young 1998).

They argue that online communication is just as valid for expressing thoughts and feelings as face-to-face communication is, though it is predicated on the fact that online, one creates a presentation of oneself for the consumption of the public world.

Online identities

Establishing friendship on *MySpace* is a complicated activity when one considers the process of choosing and accepting friends and the motivations behind these decisions. Often there are self-promotional motivations that determine one's decision to have a *MySpace*. Many of the interviewees that took part in this research claimed it was for entirely practical purposes, for example in maintaining contact with their fan base (R.Dixon 2007, pers.comm., 7th August) – yet there is no doubt that many people who choose to have a *MySpace* are operating out of the desire to 'make their mark'. Alex Fletcher argues that this is a generational issue and: "Generation Y and even the younger generation are very expressive people and love to have their opinion heard" (A. Fletcher 2007, pers.comm., 3rd July). In the case of the artists who took part in this research however, it was about having their music heard, or in the case of the businesses it was about having their businesses advertised. These more practical purposes are often overshadowed by the perception that *MySpace* is a tool of self-promotion (R.Dixon 2007, pers.comm., 7th August).

This does reflect, however, the nature of the software, if not the medium.

Personal websites are, according to Daniel Chandler, a construction of one's online identity that reveal as much about the author to the world, as they do to

the author themselves (2004, pp. 11-12). Significantly, authors are not only publishing for themselves in a similar way to using a diary, they are simultaneously writing and being published on a worldwide forum (Chandler 2004).

It is necessary to address the fact that online identities are pure constructions:

In the real world the body anchors identity, making it both singular and difficult to change. Identity deception, while not unheard of, is difficult. On-line, identity is mutable and unanchored by the body that is its locus in the real world (Donath and Boyd 2004, p.73).

This does not mean that the relationship between these constructed identities is any less valid, simply that both users are aware that they are communicating with the digital construction of a self, designed for presentation to a particular public. Online, “identity is faceted; we have different interests, beliefs, traits etc, and share different ones with different people” (Donath and Boyd 2004, p.74). Though this also occurs in an offline environment, where one chooses to present different aspects of their personality to different people in particular contexts, online context can be skewed due to the archiving of material. This is why Boyd argues: “the architecture of the digital realm fundamentally conditions potential social interactions” (Boyd 2002, p.31).

Friendship in this space, especially of the kind posed by Aristotle and Kant, would seem to be unachievable if the relationship is affected by possibly selfish motives and falsity of presentation. However it is through this desire for self-expression, whether or not it is false, that Sandra Lynch argues one can find friendship:

It is my view that these features of autobiographical narrative allow such texts to serve a role in our lives analogous to the role that others can take in our lives, particularly those who are our friends. Autobiographical texts can serve as mirrors in the sense that they can create possibilities that allow readers exposed to these texts to see themselves differently (Lynch 2005, p.174).

This statement suggests that it is through personal self-expression and awareness that people can empathise with one another. This empathy is necessary for friendship to occur. The “About me” section of any *MySpace* profile becomes crucial in not only having an understanding ‘about them’ but also whether or not one can empathise with that person to the point of friendship. This is confirmed by one interviewee who noted that the “About me” section is the defining factor in whether or not he will decide to add someone as a friend. He notes that not only is it a good indication of their tastes but also of who they are:

I know that my good friends, they spend quite a bit of time saying what means a lot to them and what doesn't mean a lot to them and they've nailed it and things like that just to give people an idea (of who they are)... The stuff I hate is when they have things like ‘which Victoria's Secret model are you most like or when it's stuff like here's one hundred questions that would sum up who I am and it's stuff like ‘what moisturising hand cream do you use?’ This is already saying a lot about you (A. Dowling 2007, pers.comm., 11th August).

While Kant argues that the friendship of disposition must exclusively include the sharing of personal ideas and desires (1930, p.206), every person with a *MySpace* profile is asked to describe these to every reader. In opening oneself up to friendship in this way, a *MySpace* friendship differs greatly from one presented by Aristotle or Kant, as it is not as selective and exclusive nor is it as related to physical proximity as the friendships they present. *MySpace*, which allows for friends to be organised into friendship boxes, combined with the ability to express one's individuality, encourages a “greater differentiation between

persons” making for a discontinuity in relations unlike the Ancient Greek polis; therefore “modern individuals simply cannot sustain a friendship in the Aristotelian sense” (Lynch 2005, p.166). While Lynch does not specifically refer to the online world when making this claim, this statement is just as relevant when one looks at the context of *MySpace* friendships.

While one’s online self may or may not resemble one’s offline self, the way in which the friendship operates is not affected by whether or not the ‘self’ in question is real or fake, or is an entity such as a band or business. The friendship can still exist, motivated by any number of causes. If however, the construction of self on *MySpace* can so easily be manipulated, then so can the friendship. This suggests that the relationship is less ‘real’ in the sense that it is a pre-meditated, and, consciously or unconsciously, users are deciding what they want, who they are and whom they are friends with. These characteristics are not, however, peculiar to *MySpace*. Offline friendships can be just as easily manipulated and are also determined by similar motivations.

However, Riccouer argues that this is the only way that one can learn to know oneself: through a discourse with others (cited in Lynch 2005, p.176) Therefore, these friendships *are* real and have been faithfully entered into. This suggests that one’s existence on *MySpace* is defined then by the friends that one has, as existence on this site would be meaningless unless one has friends; not dissimilar to Derrida’s argument that “we wish to *believe* in the other because we want... to believe in ourselves” (Derrida 2005, p.281).

Its title, whether called ‘friendship’ by the software system or ‘contact’ or ‘fan’ by its users, does not affect the nature of the relationship itself. Most online social software programs since *Friendster* have used the word ‘friend’ to describe the connection between profile pages, and this word has become a part of the vernacular of online communities (‘Sex on the Net’ 2007). *Facebook*, *MySpace* and *Friendster*, as the three largest social software programs, have heavily influenced this premise with their use of the word ‘friend.’ Although the use of this word has been criticised by conservative commentators (‘Sex on the Net’ 2007), it has been adopted by the communities themselves, with each user devising their own definition: “Overall, individual users and groups of users probably negotiate the meaning of ‘friend’ in any social network site, and ‘acquaintance’ is probably a more accurate general description” (Thelwall 2007).

Again, one of the critical characteristics of *MySpace* friendships is that they operate online. Whether or not the friends in question are people that one interacts with offline, the interaction with one’s friends on *MySpace* is in a purely online environment that is heavily mediated and contingent on a number of factors, including simple access to the internet as well as the motivation to regularly log on and converse with other users. This separates *MySpace* friendships from offline relationships, and distinguishes them as particularly located in a modern, digital environment.

It has been argued that modern friendships (and I include *MySpace* friendships under this ‘modern’ title) are difficult to define as they are uniquely related to each person. Suzanne Stern-Gillet for this reason argued that “modern

friendships are fundamentally non-rational” (1995, p.8). Lynch agrees, stating that it is “unsurprising that modern friends do not attempt to analyse their relationships” (2005, p.29) and that “modern friendship is highly differentiated and difficult to define in part because of its inclusiveness – a feature that we have reason to commend” (p.167). Friendships on *MySpace* are decidedly more difficult to define because they can be both inclusive and exclusive simultaneously through an active creation of a hierarchy through the “Top Friends” function. A hierarchy is also created when distinguishing between friends with whom one has a high or low level of interaction and in terms of what these friends share.

The motivations behind the friendship distinguish one friend from another, each representing their own unique relationship with the user. The construction of *MySpace* determines that most friendships are predicated on similarities between users, due to the various sub-groups that exist as well as the details one is asked to provide on one’s profile page. However Lynch argues that the recognition and acceptance of difference is crucial to a friendship being truly authentic (2005, p.169). She explains that Derrida also emphasises this difference, in order for there to be a separation between friends (2005, p.169). If friendship were only about similarities, according to Derrida, it would be more comparable to fraternity, and would therefore seem to be something which is automatic, yet:

Since friendship does not – and above all must not – have the reliability of a natural thing or a machine; since its stability is not given by nature but is won, like constancy and ‘fidence’, through the endurance of a virtue, primary friendship (Derrida 2005, p.23).

Despite the reliance on similarity in the formation of *MySpace* friendships it is not like Derrida's fraternity because it lacks the other feature of automaticity as it needs to be requested or allowed if it is to exist at all. While users may share the fraternal bonds of having a *MySpace* profile, the relationship changes from being fraternal to friendship when one user requests friendship from the other.

MySpace friendships do exist in a particular context. They are defined by the field in which each user operates and are therefore predicated on specific motivations. These friendships also are defined by the fact that they exist online between constructed identities. These issues do not however, signify that *MySpace* friendships are not 'real.' Rather the many contexts under which *MySpace* friendships exist and were created situate them as being different to offline relationships and therefore noteworthy and significant of study.

Conclusion: WhySpace?

Towards a future understanding of *MySpace* friendships

The trademarked tagline of *MySpace*, “a place for friends” (*MySpace* n.d) suggests that it is a gathering place for people who are friends. It can also be read to imply that it is a place to make friends. Yet another reading suggests that there are a few words missing at the end of the line, such as “to communicate.” Either way, the *MySpace* tagline implies that all those who join are friends – if not of each other, of the site itself.

Another interesting aspect of this tagline is its inclusiveness, despite the fact that in joining *MySpace* one is deliberately creating one's own space, belonging to the individual. It is ‘My’ space. Yet it is also “a place for friends.” While the individuals, artists and business that use *MySpace* create their profiles in order to have their own space online, they are simultaneously creating a place for them to make and maintain friendships.

If on *MySpace* everyone is a friend, it is only fair to assume that users do distinguish between friends. In Chapter Two of this thesis I examined the distinctions made between types of friendships on *MySpace* within a comparative study of the friendships discussed by Aristotle and Kant. I used their typologies combined with interview data to analyse the relationships that exist between *MySpace* users of different types: those that are artists, businesses and individuals. I argued that the type of *MySpace* user one is often determines the type of friends one has. However I concluded that one could not definitively argue that users of one type of *MySpace* could only possess friends of one type.

Rather I argued that users often simultaneously conduct friendships of different types and while users of one type of *MySpace*, such as bands, were more likely to possess friends of one type, such as individuals, their relationship was determined by numerous factors including who initiated the relationship and what was on offer within the relationship. This typological study of *MySpace* friendships provided an insight into the organisation of *MySpace* friendships according to interests as well as into hierarchies.

In Chapter Three I examined the motivations that affect friendships on *MySpace*. In doing so I examined the work of Pierre Bourdieu and his concept of social capital. His theories support the idea that *MySpace* friendships are created in order to compete for social capital of various forms. For example, bands choose to be friends with as many individuals as they can in order that they can possess social capital in the form of looking popular among the *MySpace* community. His theory would also suggest that individuals choose to be friends with bands in order that they can possess cultural capital by demonstrating a relationship with the band and in so doing, demonstrating ‘good’ taste in music. Bourdieu argues that competition for capital of various forms is a strong motivation for action. This is demonstrated on *MySpace* in the form of friendships, which are not created arbitrarily, but which are confirmed by requesting friendship and one’s approving or denying that request.

I further argued that *MySpace* friendships need to be studied in the specific context in which they exist: online. These relationships exist between online identities and are predicated on the fact that users communicate via text, music,

video and graphics. This thesis does not argue whether or not online friendships are any more or less valid than offline ones but rather that *MySpace* friendships need to be considered within an online framework and therefore in a context of mediated communication. While many media reports and earlier academic works argue that friendships in an online context cannot compare with offline relationships (see, for example, Kraut et al 1998, Hopkins and Thomas 2004, ‘Sex on the Net’ 2007), this thesis supports Danah Boyd’s argument (see Boyd 2006) that friendships on social software sites are not like offline ones, yet they are still friendships; they simply exist in a different context.

Further research needs to be conducted into the simple day-to-day usage of *MySpace*, examining how users manipulate the site for their own uses, in order to better inform current discourses. Questions need to be asked of more users, such as why they choose to be on *MySpace* and what type of activities they conduct on the site. This will help academics have an understanding of the popularity of *MySpace*. Further research conducted on *MySpace* friendships will also assist in an understanding of relationships on other social softwares sites such as *Facebook*, which is becoming increasingly popular.

The popularity and the regular usage of these sites worldwide mark them as important sites for academic research. Without a complete exploration into the workings of *MySpace* and its social software counterparts, academics will have little understanding as to why over one hundred and fifty million people world wide spend so much time in these environments (*MySpace*, n.d). A comparative study of *MySpace* friendships with offline relationships may help to dispel the

fear of online social software exhibited by the press as well as going some way to understanding the complexities of modern relationships that exist online.

The fact that major movie distributors as well as politicians in both the American and Australian Federal elections have chosen to use *MySpace* as a major component of their publicity campaigns suggests that more people are considering *MySpace* to be a gateway to the online public. Whether or not they consider the relationship they have with their consumers to be friendship or not, they receive the benefits associated with labelling the relationship ‘friendship.’

As it stands, *MySpace* friendships do operate in a particular environment, predicated on specific motivations according to the type of *MySpace* one wants to maintain. This is why friendships on the site are complex relationships that should continue to be critically analysed in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the site and its functionality. As I have established, friendships on *MySpace* should not be considered solely for the value of the friendship itself.

Rather, as Elizabeth Telfer states:

...too much dwelling on the values of friendship has its own dangers. It may lead people to concentrate on looking for *friendships* rather than friends, and to value the other person as a possible term in a relationship rather than as himself. But it may well be that this attitude which is wrong in itself and hurtful if detected, is also self-defeating: in other words, that we attain the valuable relationship of friendship only when we cease to think about it and concentrate on the friend himself (cited in Pakaluk 1991, p.267).

As *MySpace* and other social software sites continue to proliferate, they must continue to be analysed to discover not only more about how these friendships operate, but also who these friends are. Soon, the age-old salutation “Nice to

meet you” may well become obsolete. Instead, these burgeoning online friendships begin simply with “Thanks for the add.”

^{i i} In order to distinguish between the process of Friending on *MySpace* and *Friendster* and that of friendship in face-to-face contact, Boyd capitalises the online process. I have recreated that capitalisation here to highlight the distinction she draws (2006, p.1).

ⁱⁱ At the time of writing of this thesis

ⁱⁱⁱ An active engagement in this type of friendship refers to Kant’s description of the sharing of information such as ideas, judgements and fears with another to truly be a friend of disposition “If we can unburden our heart to another, we achieve complete communion” (Kant 1930, p.205).

ⁱⁱⁱⁱ Aristotle notes that a friendship of virtue “requires time and familiarity” (1980, p.197) – something which can only be attained through active engagement.

^{iv} At the time of writing

^v User benefits are integral to a business profile remaining successful. Skyy Blue vodka’s *MySpace* offers friends the chance to listen to anticipated albums before their release. *MySpace* Black Curtains offers friends the chance to see blockbuster films before their national release. All of these are, for all intents and purposes, designed to draw traffic to their profiles and create more *MySpace* friends for the profile in question. However users can often take advantage of the benefits without becoming an advertising target.