School Connectedness: Using School Websites to Foster a Sense of Belonging in School

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School Connectedness: Using School Websites to Foster a Sense of Belonging in School

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Valerie L. Mergler

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School Connectedness and the Internet

Running head: SCHOOL CONNECTEDNESS AND THE INTERNET

School Connectedness: Using School Websites to Foster a Sense of Belonging in School

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Abstract

The current study explored the relationships between adolescents’ internet use, feelings of school connectedness, social anxiety, and interest in the school’s website. Participants were 8th (n = 121) and 11th (n = 71) grade students from a rural upstate New York, middle and high school. Data was collected using the Social Use of the Internet Survey, which was designed to measure participants’ internet use, interest in the school’s website, feelings of school connectedness and loneliness. No significant mean differences were present between the 8th and 11th grade groups on school connectedness and on interest in the school’s website. Multiple regression analysis showed that for both 8th and 11th grade samples, loneliness was a significant negative predictor of school connectedness. School connectedness and school contact via e-mail were significant predictors of school website interest among the 8th grade sample, while in the 11th grade sample, being bullied was a significant predictor of school website interest. The qualitative findings of this study provide the school with valuable information regarding students’ interest in using their school website, participants’ preferred online activities and students’ opinions of their school website.
Increasing numbers of adolescents are using the Internet in their homes, schools, libraries and other community facilities (Pew Internet and American Life Project, 2001). The Pew Internet Survey conducted by the Princeton Survey Research Associates in 2000 found that 73% of the 754 adolescents they telephone surveyed used the internet for Emailing, surfing the web for fun, visiting entertainment sites, sending Instant messages and looking for information on hobbies were reported as the top five online activities of adolescents (Pew Internet and American Life Project, 2001).

Most of the adolescents (94%) surveyed reported using the Internet to do school research. and a high percentage (74%) of them used the Internet as their main source for their most recent school project (Pew Internet and American Life Project, 2001). Students also reported downloading assignments from the web and using e-mail or Instant Messenger to contact teachers. Over half (58%) reported using a school website or teacher website. The majority of parents in the sample expressed positive feelings towards their children using the Internet for school, as it allowed access to homework help.

Unique characteristics of the internet make it an appealing tool. The internet overcomes obstacles of physical distance, allowing people to form relationships and communicate worldwide (McKenna & Bargh, 2000). Friends and family who are separated by distance can maintain relationships (McKenna & Bargh, 2000). Additionally, the internet allows individuals in remote areas convenient access to information and services that they would otherwise need to travel great distance to obtain (Young, 2005).

The anonymous nature of the internet is an attractive feature for individuals seeking health or psychological advice (Young, 2005). Young’s (2005) research on client attitudes toward online counseling found that 96% of adult participants (N=48) reported that their main
reason for seeking treatment for addiction online was the anonymity. This greater anonymity may also have a disinhibiting effect on clients, leading to greater honesty, which in turn facilitates individuals in the counseling process (Griffiths, 2005).

For adolescents, the anonymity of the Internet provides them with a platform to openly discuss with peers sensitive issues such as romantic relationships and sexuality, which they may not feel comfortable discussing with parents, physicians or school personnel (McKenna & Bargh, 2000; Subrahmanyam, Greenfield & Tynes, 2004; Suzuki & Calzo, 2004). Suzuki and Calzo (2004) conducted a qualitative investigation of online bulletin boards created for adolescents’ concerns. The researchers were interested in what types of questions adolescents posted and responded to, how adolescents responded to their peers’ questions, what questions elicited the most responses and the number of “hits,” or responses viewed by participants. To conceal users’ identities, pseudonyms were used rather than real names. The boards used in the study were monitored to prevent unsafe activity and profanity; however the questions and responses were otherwise uncensored.

Postings fell within 14 general topic categories: Parents/Adults, Peers, Romantic Relationships, Personality/Mental Health, Grooming, Body Image/Exercise, Physical Health, Sexual Health, Pregnancy/Birth Control, Sexuality-Interpersonal, and School (Suzuki & Calzo, 2004). Questions about body image and exercise solicited the most replies (Suzuki & Calzo, 2004). The topics most frequently viewed were Peers, and Sexual Technique, Grooming and interpersonal sex. Users frequently provided personal opinions, offered actionable advice, concrete information, and shared personal experiences. Replies also contained emotionally supportive comments (Suzuki & Calzo, 2004).
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The results of Suzuki and Calzo (2004) support the appeal of the internet as a private, anonymous tool for adolescents’ concerns and exploration, especially on the topic of sexuality. In an open, anonymous forum, adolescents were able to discuss issues important to them such as romantic relationships, sexuality, physical health, body image, exercise and situations with peers (Suzuki & Calzo, 2004). One limitation was that gay and lesbian youth, as well as adolescents questioning their sexual identity, may have been underrepresented in this forum as they may participate in sites that are more specific to their issues.

Subrahmanyam, Greenfield and Tynes (2004) conducted a qualitative investigation of adolescents’ interactions in online chat rooms to investigate how sexuality and identity, two major developmental issues faced in adolescence, were constructed online. Similar to bulletin boards, chat rooms are open to the public, and users remain anonymous and have the option of active or passive participation. The researchers analyzed a 30 minute transcript from a monitored adolescent chat room that was randomly selected from a larger sample of chat dialogue that had been collected over a two month period. The chat room was specifically for adolescents, but did not have a particular focus for discussion. Users paid a monthly subscription fee and the site provided an adult monitor.

Results showed that adolescents used the chat rooms to explore their identity and sexuality, socialize and build relationships (Griffiths, 2005; Subrahmanyam, et al., 2004; Suzuki & Calzo, 2004; Young, 2005). For example, Subrahmanyam et al. found that participants presented aspects of their identity (e.g. gender, sexual identity, interests) though their screen name, which enabled them to join a particular peer group, or attract sexual partners. By disclosing personal identity traits, adolescents “paired off” making sexualized advances to invite others to talk in a private chat room (Subrahmanyam, et al., 2004). This phenomenon of pairing
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off allows adolescents to experiment with sexuality and relationships, and may alleviate the pressure of traditional gender roles (Subrahmanyam. et al., 2004).

Internet Use and Psychological Adjustment

Ever growing interest in the internet use has prompted curiosity about the impact of internet use on individual’s psychological adjustment and daily functioning. Kraut, Patterson, Lundmark, Kiesler, Mukopadhyay and Scherlis (1998) found that increases in internet use were associated with an increase in loneliness and decrease in one’s social circle over participants first two years of internet use. Kraut et al. (1998) argued that the relationship was causal with internet use resulting in increased loneliness and social isolation. Compared to adults in the sample, adolescents showed greater increases in loneliness and decreases in social circles with increased internet use (Kraut et al., 1998). Results showed that participants mainly used the Internet for social communication, yet few participants made new friends and negative effects were observed in real life social functioning. Kraut et al. felt this paradox was due to the fact that close, quality, real life relationships in the real world were replaced by convenient, less quality, online relationships, which resulted in increased social withdrawal and feelings of loneliness. Internet use was likened to other forms of passive entertainment such as watching television or reading, also viewed as activities which decreased social interaction (Kraut et al., 1998).

Similar to the results of Kraut et al., Morahan-Martin and Schumacher (2003) found that lonely adolescents spent significantly more time online weekly and used email significantly more compared to their non-lonely peers. Lonely adolescents’ motives for internet use were different from non-lonely peers in that they were significantly more likely to report using the Internet to relax, meet people, get emotional support, talk to people who shared similar interests, or to waste
time (Morahan-Martin & Schumacher, 2003). Among lonely adolescents, the anonymity of the internet was considered liberating, and internet communication was preferred over face-to-face communication (Morahan-Martin & Schumacher, 2003). Lonely users were also more likely to attest that they felt more like themselves online, that their online friends knew them better than friends in real life, and that the internet made it easier for them to make friends (Morahan-Martin & Schumacher, 2003).

Gross, Juvonen, and Gable (2002) conducted a study with specific focus on adolescents’ use of Instant Messenger to investigate the relationship between psychological adjustment and Internet use. Participants (49 males, 81 females) completed a survey to gather demographic information and background information on Internet use. Other measures were used to evaluate loneliness, (UCLA Loneliness Scale: Russell, 1996), Social Anxiety (Social Anxiety Scale for Adolescents; La Greca & Lopez, 1998), depressed mood (Child Depression Inventory: Kovacs, 1992) and friendship (number of close friends at school). The first night of the study and the two following nights, participants were asked to keep a log of their Internet activity, and write a detailed description of their longest conversation held over the Instant Messenger.

Gross et al. (2002) found that 90% of the sample indicated they used the Internet “occasionally” or “regularly” at home. and 84% reported going online on a “typical day.” According to participants’ daily logs, 70% used the Internet at least once over the three-day span of the study (Gross et al., 2002). The top three activities participants engaged in on-line were Instant Messaging, visiting websites, and e-mailing (Gross et al., 2002). The average time spent on-line using the Instant Messenger was most closely correlated to the time spent talking on the telephone and time spent with friends (Gross et al., 2002). Investigation into the characteristics of participants’ Instant Messenger partners revealed that the majority of participants (86%) were
communicating with same age school friends (Gross et al., 2002). Only 12% of Instant Messenger partners initially met on the Internet (Gross et al., 2002).

As hypothesized by Gross et al. (2002), with whom adolescents communicated was a predictor of psychological adjustment. Participants who reported higher levels of daily social anxiety or loneliness were more likely to communicate with a stranger, or someone who was not a “friend” or a “close friend” on the Instant Messenger (Gross et al., 2002). Participants who reported talking to close peers about friends or gossip and romantic topics had higher scores on social adjustment measures (Gross et al., 2002). The findings showed that participants who reported feelings of social anxiety and those who reported few friends at school were more likely to report communicating over the Instant Messenger as a means to avoid “being alone.” Conversely, socially adjusted peers most commonly reported communicating over the Instant Messenger to “hang out with a friend” (Gross et al., 2002).

The results of Gross et al. (2002) suggest that on-line social-communication serves different people in different ways. Socially adjusted youth may use online communication tools as an extension of their daily face to face interactions, by communicating with friends and discussing issues from their lives at home and at school (Gross et al., 2002). Conversely, youth who feel anxious or lonely use the internet to express themselves and reach out to others in a non-threatening environment (Gross et al., 2002; Morahan-Martin & Schumacher, 2003).

In 2004, Gross conducted a follow up study to further investigate the relationships between internet use, gender, well-being and identity experimentation. Participants were 7th and 10th grade students from an upper middle class middle and high school in Las Angeles (100 male and 161 female). Data was collected through a self-report questionnaire the first day of the study and four daily reports of participants’ Internet activities.
The most frequently reported motives for online communication were to hang out with a friend and relieve boredom (Gross, 2004). Internet usage was not correlated with any measures of psychological adjustment contrary to previous findings (e.g., Kraut et al. 1998; Gross et al. 2002; Morahan-Martin & Schumacher 2003). No significant differences were found between gender and overall daily Internet use. Gross (2004) found that both males and females spent most of their time online communicating with friends from their social circles about friends and gossip, consistent with Gross et al. (2002). These results suggest that as the Internet becomes a more integral part of homes, the gender gap narrows (Gross, 2004). Seventh grade girls spent significantly more time chatting on the instant messenger than 10th grade girls. This finding may illustrate that younger cohorts use the internet to meet the developmental need of relationship building via the internet during early adolescence.

Previous research (e.g., Subrahmanyam et al. 2004) suggested that adolescents use the internet for identity exploration, however; only about 10% of participants reported pretending “occasionally” (n=9) or all of the time (n=2). The majority of identity exploration took place with a friend physically present, to play a joke on another friend. Only a small percentage of participants reported pretending to increase an online partner’s liking of them or to truly explore a new self or other identities (Gross, 2004). The social context of pretending significantly predicted levels of loneliness among seventh graders, showing that the small percentage of adolescents who pretended alone, in the absence of others, were more likely to report heightened feelings of loneliness and social anxiety (Gross, 2004).

Relationship Formation

The Internet bypasses barriers to relationship development that are present in face-to-face interaction such as physical appearance, or visible signs of shyness (McKenna & Bargh, 2000).
As a result, individuals may be more likely to disclose personal information and express themselves; a critical aspect of forming relationships (McKenna, Green & Gleason, 2002).

McKenna et al. (2002) conducted three studies to examine issues surrounding relationship formation in people’s online and offline lives.

The purpose of the first study was to determine whether those who identified their true-self online were more likely to form online relationships and integrate the relationships into their real lives. Participants were 333 females and 234 males ages 13-70 (M=32 years), recruited through advertisements on Internet news groups. Participants completed an online survey designed to assess the relationship between social anxiety, loneliness, expression true self concept, the type of relationship formed and the level of intimacy of the relationship, and behavioral actions both online (e.g. chatting on instant messenger or exchanging email) and in real life (e.g. talking on the phone or meeting in person).

Participants who reported higher feelings of social anxiety and loneliness reported that their online relationships formed at a faster pace than their relationships initiated in real life (McKenna, Green & Gleason, 2002). Further, those who experienced higher levels of social anxiety and loneliness in real life were significantly more likely to report locating their true self-concept on the Internet, which is consistent with the findings from Anolli, Villani and Riva (2005), and Morahan-Martin and Schumacher (2003). Participants who felt they expressed their true self concept on the internet were significantly more likely to form relationships online, and to bring relationships formed on the internet into their real lives (McKenna et al., 2002). Those who felt they expressed their true selves online were also significantly more likely to become engaged with or have an affair with someone they met on the Internet. Talking on the phone was the only significant predictor of meeting in person (McKenna et al., 2002).
McKenna et al. noted gender differences in the perception of relationships formed online: women perceived the relationships they formed online as significantly stronger and deeper than their male cohorts. Additionally, the findings of McKenna et al. suggest that people who struggle with traditional social interaction or feel socially withdrawn were able to more successfully express themselves during online interactions.

The results of a two year follow up study showed that the relationships formed online were stable over the two year period, which is commensurate with statistics on the stability of intimate relationships formed in real life (McKenna et al., 2002). Seventy one percent of romantic relationships initiated online were still intact after two years. The majority of participants reported that their relationships had grown stronger and more intimate since the initial study. Over half of respondents (84%) felt that their internet relationships were as important and as legitimate as their relationships in the real world, which is contrary to the findings of Kraut et al. (1998) whom found that relationships online were merely weak ties.

Levels of social anxiety, loneliness, and depression were compared between Study 1 and Study 2. A significant reduction in feelings of loneliness was observed for all participants. Equal numbers of respondents (47%) reported that the internet had no effect on their feelings of loneliness, or that it had reduced such feelings, while increased feelings of loneliness were reported by a small percentage of the sample (6%) (McKenna et al., 2002). The majority of respondents reported that internet use had no effect on their feelings of depression, while about quarter of the sample reported it had reduced such feelings. Most participants reported that using the internet had increased their social circle. These findings are contrary to those of Kraut et al. (1998) which showed that Internet use was associated with a decrease in one’s social network, and an increase in loneliness.
The third study conducted by McKenna et al. investigated the effect of gating features (i.e. physical appearance, body language) on an initial meeting of two strangers. Participants were undergraduate students (31 males, 31 females). Participants were randomly assigned to one of three conditions (control, Internet chat room, or trading places) and interacted with a designated partner of the opposite sex for two, 20-minute meetings. In both the control condition and the Internet chat room condition (IRC), participants were informed that they would be interacting with the same partner each session. Participants in the trading places condition were led to believe that they would be interacting with two different people, when in truth they would be interacting with the same partner both sessions. Participants in the Control group met in person for both sessions while participants in the IRC condition interacted first over the Internet, then met in person. In the trading place condition, participants first met their partner online, and then met in person.

After each interaction, all groups were administered a rating scale to assess how much participants liked their partner, how they perceived the quality of the interaction and what level of intimacy they felt they had reached.

The results showed that the amount of liking after the first session between the control condition and the IRC condition was not significant. As predicted, after the second session, those in the IRC condition liked their partner more whereas the amount of liking in the control condition did not change significantly. The results of the trading places group showed that participants liked their partner greater when they interacted online, compared to when they interacted in person.

With respect to the quality of conversations, no significant differences were found in the control or IRC conditions after the second meeting. However, in the IRC condition, participants
were more likely to have told their partner what they liked about them than participants who initially met in person. In the trading places condition, the results showed that participants felt they knew the partner they met online better than the partner they met in person. McKenna et al. argued that this finding lends support that other aspects of face-to-face communication, such as physical appearance, may have played a greater role in determining how much they liked their partner.

In the IRC condition and the online session of the trading places condition, a positive correlation was found between how much participants liked their partner, and how well they felt they knew their partner. Factors that increased partners liking of each other were sharing intimate details about themselves, feeling like they could predict their partner’s attitude, and discussing a wide variety of topics in an easy flowing conversation (McKenna et al., 2002).

While the average age of participants in McKenna et al., was beyond adolescence, these findings still support the possibility of creating friendships online, especially for those who feel anxious or lonely.

Peter, Valkenberg, and Schouten (2005) were interested in researching adolescent’s motives for forming online friendships. Participants were 600 adolescents recruited from elementary, middle and high schools in the Netherlands. Eighty-two percent of the participants (n = 493) who had used online communication tools, completed a survey that asked participants about their online self-disclosure, motives for online communication, frequency of online communication and online friendships.

Overall, the results of Peter et al. demonstrate the complexity of adolescents’ motives for forming friendships online. As hypothesized, those who communicated more frequently online
were more likely to create friendships (Peter et al., 2005). Contrary to the researchers’ hypothesis, extroverts were more likely to self-disclose information online.

The results also showed that participants who more often used Internet communication for social compensation were more likely to self-disclose. Gender differences emerged showing that girls disclosed more information than boys. While older students used online communication more frequently, younger students were more likely to create friendships online (Peter, 2005).

Personality characteristics such as introversion and extroversion are not directly linked to the formation of online friendships (Peter et al., 2005). While the anonymous nature of the internet is an attractive feature of online communication, it is not the sole reason for self-disclosure online. In line with McKenna et al.’s (2002) notion of the location of ones’ true self concept, Peter et al.’s. theory of social compensation implies that when a person feels most comfortable online, they will be more able and willing to self-disclose information thus leading to the formation of relationships (Peter et al., 2005). The interaction of personality, motivation, and frequency of online communication play a role in adolescents’ propensity to create friendships online (Peter et al., 2005).

*School Connectedness*

The versatility of the internet and adolescents’ interest in the internet make it a viable avenue to explore as a means of increasing school connectedness. School connectedness, or feelings of belonging to one’s school, is a protective factor during adolescence and students who feel connected to their school have lower rates of truancy, gang violence, substance use, school drop-out, and teen pregnancy (Bonny, Britto, Klosterman, Hornung & Slap, 2000; Catalano, Haggerty, Oesterle, Fleming, & Hawkins, 2004; McNeely, Nonnemaker & Blum, 2002; Wilson, 2004). Factors that have been found to be associated with increased feelings of school
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Connectedness include small school size, fair discipline policies, high expectations, and opportunities for participation (Christenson & Thurlow, 2004; Kupermic, Leadbeater & Blatt, 2001; McNeely et al., 2002; Wilson, 2004), family and community involvement, and social networks (Christenson & Thurlow, 2004; Wilson, 2004).

Christenson and Thurlow (2004) demonstrated the importance of building trusting relationships among students, families, and school staff to increase students’ engagement in school and thus increasing school completion rates. The researchers studied the Check and Connect program, in which students with disabilities who were at risk for school failure were paired with a mentor at school. The program focused on home-school collaboration and individualized interventions to meet students’ academic and social emotional needs. School staff were trained as mentors to work with the students and their families. Students’ connectedness to school was assessed through systematic checks on the students’ attendance, social behavioral performance and academic performances. In a sample of 150 urban ninth grade students who were followed for four years, results showed a reduction in truancy rates, out of school suspension and course failures, and increased rates of consistent attendance and school completion (Christenson & Thurlow, 2004). When the Check and Connect program was incorporated in a K-8th grade population, the majority of teacher’s ratings of student and family involvement reflected increases in parent follow through, communication and homework completion. Teachers reported that students in the Check and Connect program were more eager to learn, follow school rules, and consider the consequences of their actions (Christenson & Thurlow, 2004).

Increasing opportunities for student involvement and strengthening interpersonal relationships may enhance feelings of school connectedness (McNeely et al., 2002). McNeely et
al. analyzed data collected via a survey administered through The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health) during the 1994-1995 school year. The final sample included of 71,515 students in 7th through 12th grade, across 127 schools in the United States. School connectedness was assessed through five items regarding students’ perceptions of safety within their school and their relationships with people at their school. The survey explored schools’ environmental characteristics including school setting, school wide demographic information, teacher qualification, class size, and discipline policies, as well as individual-level variables such as age, family composition, ethnicity, GPA, absences and involvement in extra curricular activities.

The results showed that school connectedness means were lower in schools where harsh discipline polices were in place (McNeely et al., 2002). In addition, smaller schools had higher means of school connectedness among students (McNeely et al., 2002). The researchers contend that in large schools it is difficult for teachers to maintain close, positive relationships with students, resulting in lower levels of school connectedness. Participation in extracurricular activities and increasing ties through teacher-student relationships increased students’ feelings of attachment to their school (Christenson & Thurlow, 2004; McNeely et al., 2002). Additionally, close teacher-student relationships were negatively correlated with externalizing behavior in middle school students (Kuperminc et al. 2001). A significant, negative correlation was found between age and school connectedness, suggesting that as students grew older, they felt less connected to their school.

The internet may lend itself well to building upon ways students can feel connected to their school. The body of research on internet use has shown its utility for social communication, relationship formation, emotional support, identity exploration, and information
seeking for adolescents (Gross et al. 2002; Gross, 2004; Kraut et al., 1998; McKenna et al., 2002; Morahan-Martin & Schumacher, 2003; Peter et al., 2005; Subrahmanyam et al. 2004; Suzuki & Calzo, 2004). These findings may be useful when considering alternative ways to implement factors known to increase school connectedness, building positive teacher-student relationships within school systems, engaging students in extracurricular activities, and increasing parent and community involvement in schools (Christenson & Thurlow, 2004; McNeely et al., 2002).

Research Goal

The focus of this research was to explore school websites as a means of connecting students to their school. This study used data collected through the School Connectedness and Social Use of the Internet Survey to explore the relationships that exist between adolescents’ levels of school connectedness, loneliness, social anxiety, and interest in using the school’s website as a way to connect to their school. The researcher was interested in whether developmental differences were present between 8th and 11th grade students’ reported internet activities, levels of school connectedness, and interest in their school website. Moreover, this study investigates whether there is a relationship between participants’ communication with others at school and reported levels of school connectedness, loneliness, social anxiety, and interest in the school website.
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Method

School Demographics

Data was collected from 8th and 11th grade students at a small rural middle and high school in upstate New York. The student body was comprised mainly of White non Hispanic students (96.8%).

Participants

All students in 8th and 11th grade were given the option to participate in this study. Of the 8th grade students, 121 agreed to participate (50% male, 50% female). The majority of students were Caucasian (93.2%) and 13 years old (See Table 1). Students (N =15) enrolled in non credit bearing courses were not included in data analysis as they had difficulty understanding and completing the survey. Seventy-one 11th grade students agreed to participate (49.3% male, 50.7% female). The majority of participants were Caucasian (91.4%) and 16 years old (See Table 2).

Instrument

Data was collected using the School Connectedness and Social Use of the Internet Survey, which was developed for the purpose of this study (See Appendix A). The survey was comprised of 52 items in both open and closed question formats. The survey was designed to explore participants’ internet use, school connectedness, social anxiety and loneliness. School connectedness was measured using five items from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, regarding participants’ perception of how safe they felt in school, and how they felt they were treated by staff members and fellow students (See Appendix B). The items were reported to have good internal consistency (.79) and high reliability (.93) (National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, 1997). Four items were selected from the Social
Anxiety Scale (La Greca & Lopez, 1998), which used a four point Likert scale to assess adolescents’ experience of generalized social withdrawal, inhibition and distress in the school environment (See Appendix C). Nine items selected from The UCLA Loneliness Scale (Russell, 1996) were used to assess feelings of loneliness at school (See Appendix D). The Social Use of the Internet survey also included demographic information and questions created by the researcher to explore the nature and frequency of participants’ current internet use, and interest in using their school’s website.

The survey was reviewed by graduate school psychology students to confirm the clarity and readability of the questions and format. In addition, a pilot study utilizing five, eighth grade students was conducted. Feedback from these students resulted in simplified directions.

Procedure

Prior to data collection, all parents of 8th and 11th grade students received a notification in the mail explaining the purpose of the study (See Appendix E). Data was collected over two days during 8th and 11th grade study halls and during English or Social studies class. Surveys were administered to participants by the researcher or a graduate student trained in administration of the survey. Before completing the survey, participants listened to a script explaining the purpose of the study and stressed that students’ participation was voluntary (See Appendix F). Directions were explained for each section of the survey, and participants were encouraged to ask questions for clarification. The surveys took approximately 15-20 minutes to complete.
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Results

*T-test for Equality of Means*

An Independent samples t-test revealed no significant difference between mean levels of school connectedness between 8th ($M=18.76$) and 11th ($M=19.57$) grade samples ($t = -1.340$, $p = .182$). Further, no mean differences were found between levels of school website interest among the 8th ($M=7.64$) and 11th ($M=7.70$) grade samples ($t = -.160$, $p = .873$).

*Stepwise Multiple Regressions*

Four hierarchal regressions were used to determine the best predictors for school connectedness, social anxiety, loneliness, and school website interest (See Tables 3 and 4). In both the 8th and 11th grade samples, school connectedness was predicted by loneliness $F(1, 112) = 79.515$, $p<.000$; $F(1, 67) = 15.074$, $p<.000$.

In the 8th grade sample, the variation in social anxiety was attributed to the effect of being bullied at school and loneliness $F(2, 111) = 6.791$, $p<.002$. For the 11th grade sample, social anxiety was predicted by loneliness $F(1, 67) = 24.785$, $p<.000$.

About 50% of the variance in loneliness in the 8th grade sample was accounted for by the combined effect of school connectedness, social anxiety and receiving school counseling $F(3, 110) = 36.410$, $p<.000$. In the 11th grade sample, significant predictors of loneliness were social anxiety and school connectedness, which accounted for approximately 42% of the variance $F(2, 66) = 23.558$, $p<.000$.

Results of the 8th grade regression on the dependent variable school website interest showed that the combined effect of school connectedness and school contact via email was statistically significant $F(1, 106) = 50.770$, $p<.000$. Approximately 6% of the variance in school
website interest was accounted for by being bullied at school in the 11th grade sample $F(1.55) = 4.648, p<.05$.

**Online Activities**

Participants were asked to indicate what activities they engaged in online on a daily basis (See table 5). In the 8th grade sample the activities that were endorsed by a majority of the students were doing research for a class, downloading music, researching hobbies, playing computer games, and chatting on instant messenger.

Among 11th grade participants, the most frequently reported internet activities were downloading music, chatting on instant messenger, researching hobbies, researching for a class and emailing. Over half of the 11th grade sample also reported playing computer games, and using Myspace on a daily basis.

**School Website**

The majority of participants in the 8th grade sample (80%) and 11th grade sample (87%) reported that they had visited their school website. When participants were asked if they would be more likely to visit the school’s website if students contributed to the content, 28% of 8th grade participants agreed that they would “definitely visit the school website more,” while 53% said they would be “a little more likely” to visit the school’s website. Participants in the 11th grade sample responded similarly, with 28% of the sample responding that they would “definitely visit the school website more;” 57% reported that they would be “a little more likely” to visit the website more.

Participants were also asked to report whether they would be more likely to visit their school’s website if it appealed to their interests. About 80% of 8th grade participants and 86% of
11th grade participants reported that they would visit the website more if it appealed to their interests.

*Interest in School Websites as a Way to Connect*

Participants were asked if they would feel more connected to their school if their interests and hobbies were included in the school website. In the 8th grade sample, 21% of participants responded that they strongly agreed with the statement. In the 11th grade sample, about 13% of participants reported that they strongly agreed while 32% agreed with the statement, and 24% of participants reported that they were unsure. Slightly more participants in the 11th grade sample reported that they disagreed that they would feel more connected to their school.

When this question was asked in a yes/no format 48% of 8th grade participants reported that they would feel more connected to their school if their interests were included on the school’s website. Results of the 11th grade sample mirrored this statistic with slightly less than half of the participants reporting that they would feel more connected to their school (46.5%).

Respondents from both grade levels were most highly interested in the school website for getting homework information, reaching teacher’s personal websites, accessing information about school events and athletics, and viewing pictures. Respondents from the 11th grade sample were pleased about the website research links.

Respondents from both grade levels indicated that they would like to make their school website “more fun” by including games, music, more pictures, and additional sports information. Students from both grade levels frequently suggested that the website should be updated more regularly; especially teachers’ web pages and homework links. Two students recommended incorporating a chat room into the school’s website.
In response to the question, “what would you change about your school website?” one 11th grade student voiced a concern with changing the school website in regard to privacy and censorship: “Nothin. It’s just for basic activity schedules and to see if anything is going on. Nobody wants to be in contact with their teachers online, nor do they want anybody monitoring their personal online stuff. Especially in a public school.”
Discussion

The current study examined adolescents’ current Internet use and their interest in using their school website as means of feeling more connected to their school. The researcher was interested in the relationships among grade level, school connectedness, loneliness, social anxiety, and school website interest.

Developmental differences were not found between levels of school connectedness among the 8th and 11th grade participants in this study, contrary to the findings of McNeely et al. whose findings showed a decrease in school connectedness with age. McNeely et al.’s finding may not have been reflected in the current sample due to differences in school size, setting, and ethnic composition. Unlike the majority of schools included in McNeely et al.’s analysis, data in the current study was drawn from a small, rural school district, with little variation in students’ ethnicity; all factors associated with higher levels of school connectedness.

For both grade levels, the variance in school connectedness was most attributed to levels of loneliness. That is, students who reported higher levels of loneliness felt less connected to their school. This finding is consistent with previous research that found that increased feelings of loneliness were associated with low academic achievement and increased absenteeism in middle school students (Juvonen, Nishina, & Graham, 2000). The inability to form bonds at school may lead to a disconnect between students who feel anxious and/or lonely and their school.

Contrary to the researcher’s prediction, students who reported higher feelings of loneliness and social anxiety did not report more frequent use of the instant messenger or email to connect with people from school. Lonely adolescents in the current study may have used
instant messenger or email to form bonds with people met online rather than friends at school as suggested by Anolli et al. (2005), Gross et al. (2002), McKenna et al. (2002).

In the 8th grade sample, the variance in school website interest was most attributed to levels of school connectedness and e-mailing people from school, suggesting that students that already felt a strong bond to their school would enjoy using the website as another way to feel connected. Moreover, 8th grade students may use e-mail to strengthen and maintain relationships with peers or teachers from school, which could lead to greater feelings of school connectedness (Gross et al., 2002).

The current findings partially supported the hypothesis that students who reported increased feelings of loneliness and/or social anxiety would report greater interest in the school websites as a means of connecting to their school. In the 11th grade sample, students who reported higher levels of social anxiety showed greater interest in their school website as a way to feel connected. In comparison, in the 8th grade sample, there was an unanticipated, negative relationship between loneliness and school website interest, meaning that the lonelier the students, the less interest reported in using their school website. A possible explanation for this inconsistency could be that older students recognize greater opportunities for involvement via the school website as computer use is more integrated into courses and activities at the high school level. For example, high school students may take courses in computer graphics, business, year book committee, and the school book store, while these opportunities are not present at the middle school level.

Being bullied at school was the only significant predictor of interest in the school’s website as a way to connect to school in the 11th grade sample. Students who experience bullying at school typically have lower levels of self-esteem and feel less connected to peers.
teachers, and their school (Skues, Cunningham & Pokharel, 2005). Experiencing bullying may result in feeling alienated by negative, face-to-face interactions that take place during the school day. Such students may feel less intimidated by seeking a connection to their school via the school’s website.

**Limitations**

As this study was mainly exploratory in nature, data analysis was limited to correlation and frequency analysis. No causal relationships can be determined between the variables of school connectedness, loneliness, social anxiety and interest in the school website as means of connecting. Also, these results may not generalize to other populations of adolescent students as participants in this study were mainly Caucasian adolescents, within a small, rural middle and high school. Adolescents from other cultures and school settings may have reported using the Internet in other ways, and have differing opinions on using their school website to feel more connected.

Limitations of this study also include characteristics of the Social Use of the Internet Survey and the nature of Internet use. The ability to multi-task online makes it difficult for researchers to identify what percentage of adolescents’ time is spent on various daily activities. Participants were not asked to report the overall time they spent online daily, thus data could not be commented on. Also, the overlap of categories may not have clearly defined adolescent’s activities. For example, one may consider downloading music a hobby and thus reported spending time doing both on a daily basis when actuality these activities were occurring simultaneously.
Conclusion

Overall, the current research findings show that adolescents are interested in various aspects of the Internet, and nearly half of all adolescents in this study expressed an interest in using their school website as a way to feel more connected to their school.

While interventions used to increase school connectedness may only target students at high risk for failure (Christenson & Thurlow, 2004), school websites may provide a way for school staff to reach all students, especially in large schools. The school’s website could be used to provide increased opportunities for student, family and community involvement to increase school connectedness. School counselors, psychologists and nurses could collaborate to create informational web pages on sexuality, health, and mental health to provide adolescents with accurate information that they may be seeking.

Special interest groups formed through the school website may allow students to surpass boundaries of social cliques and physical appearance that inhibit social interactions during the day. The opportunity to learn about one another online in a less threatening environment, may allow students to discover commonalities with peers they would not otherwise find the opportunity to bond with. Such features on a school website could be especially beneficial to those who struggle with interpersonal interaction during face to face interaction.

Wartella and Jennings (2000) proposed collaboration between educators, internet providers and the government to increase the quality and safety of media, such that new technology can be “harnessed” to build children’s minds and emotional well being. Along this line of thinking, creating a fun, safe, website only accessible to students and staff could alleviate parents’ concerns regarding their children’s Internet activities. While parents see the benefits of the internet for information and communication, they may be worried about possible detrimental
effects of the Internet. Parents’ concerns include the effects of the internet on social isolation and psychological adjustment (Gross et al., 2002), the possibility that their child will talk to or give personal information to strangers, or be encouraged to do dangerous or harmful things (Pew Internet Survey, 2001), the threat of online predators, pedophiles, and access to inappropriate sexual or violent material (Wartella & Jennings, 2000). Having a safe internet resource that students find engaging may appeal to parents.

This study was exploratory in nature and raises many areas for future research. Future research could involve assessing measures of school connectedness after implementing students’ recommendations for the school website. Schools may wish to investigate the impact of online student support groups, or school based chat rooms. Additionally, research could focus more specifically on communication between students and teachers, in relationship to feelings of school connectedness. Studies may examine the impact of online groups formed by students to see if additional interest groups among students increase their social circles, and their sense of belonging to school.
References


*Exceptional Children, 65*, 7-21.


Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of the 8th Grade Sample (n=121)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General Characteristics</th>
<th>Percentage (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>50 (60)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>50 (60)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omitted</td>
<td>0.8 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>59.5 (72)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>35.5 (43)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>5.0 (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethnicity</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>93.2 (109)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>3.3 (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian or Pacific Islander</td>
<td>1.7 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alaskan Native</td>
<td>1.7 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omitted</td>
<td>3.3 (4)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2

*Demographic Characteristics of the 11th Grade Sample (n=71)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General Characteristics</th>
<th>Percentage (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>49.3 (35)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>50.7 (36)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>63.4 (45)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>35.2 (25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>1.4 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethnicity</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>91.4 (64)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>2.8 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>4.2 (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian or Pacific Islander</td>
<td>1.4 (1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3

*Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis for Predicting School Connectedness, Loneliness, Social Anxiety, and School Website Interest for Grade 8*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R²</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>A. School Connectedness</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loneliness</td>
<td>.644</td>
<td>.41</td>
<td>-.644</td>
<td>-8.917**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>B. Loneliness</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Connectedness</td>
<td>.644</td>
<td>.415</td>
<td>.617</td>
<td>-9.076**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Anxiety</td>
<td>.684</td>
<td>.467</td>
<td>.240</td>
<td>3.537**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Counseling</td>
<td>.706</td>
<td>.498</td>
<td>.177</td>
<td>2.597*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>C. Social Anxiety</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullied</td>
<td>.330</td>
<td>.033</td>
<td>.217</td>
<td>2.310*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>D. School Website Interest</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Connectedness</td>
<td>.399</td>
<td>.159</td>
<td>.386</td>
<td>4.499**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-mailing People from School</td>
<td>.472</td>
<td>.223</td>
<td>.253</td>
<td>2.947*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p<.05, **p<.01

Excluded Variables:

A. E-mailing people from school, School counseling, parental monitoring, Parents limit time spent online, Parental monitoring, Bullied at school.

Bullied at school. Social anxiety total.

B. E-mailing people from school, Parental monitoring, Parents limit time spent online, Bullied at school.

C. E-mailing people from school, School connectedness total, School counseling, Parental Monitoring, Parents limit time spent online.

D. Social anxiety total, Loneliness total.
Table 4

*Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis for Predicting School Connectedness, Loneliness, Social Anxiety, and School Website Interest for Grade 11*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R²</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>A. School Connectedness</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loneliness</td>
<td>.429</td>
<td>.184</td>
<td>-.429</td>
<td>-3.883*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>B. Loneliness</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Anxiety</td>
<td>.519</td>
<td>.270</td>
<td>.485</td>
<td>5.132**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Connectedness</td>
<td>.645</td>
<td>.417</td>
<td>.385</td>
<td>-4.074**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>C. Social Anxiety</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loneliness</td>
<td>.519</td>
<td>.270</td>
<td>.519</td>
<td>-4.976**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>D. School Website Interest</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullied</td>
<td>.258</td>
<td>.067</td>
<td>.258</td>
<td>.035*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p<.05, **p<.01

Excluded Variables

A. School counseling, E-mailing people from school, Parental monitoring, Bullied at school, Anxiety total, Parents limit time online

B. School counseling, E-mailing people from school, Parental monitoring, Parents limit time online, Bullied at school

C. School connectedness, School counseling, E-mailing people from school, Parental monitoring, Bullied at school

D. E-mailing people from school, Loneliness total, Social Anxiety total, School connectedness total, Online school counseling, School counseling
Table 5

*Daily Internet Activities Reported by 8th and 11th Grade Students*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>8th grade</th>
<th>11th grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research for a class</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Check class assignments</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visit school website</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read sports news</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local or global news</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research hobbies</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Download music</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myspace</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-mail</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instant Messenger</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chat rooms</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play computer games</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get homework help</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get health advice</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix A

Social Use of the Internet Survey

Age

Grade

Gender

Ethnicity
For each of the following questions:

Please write the corresponding letter to indicate how long you engage in each online activity outside of school every day.

For items with a star also write the corresponding number to indicate the people you do the activity with. List all the numbers if more than one choice applies to you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>People</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A- None</td>
<td>1- Friend(s) from school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B- 30 Minutes or less</td>
<td>2- Friend from outside of school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C- 1 hour</td>
<td>3- Friend(s) met online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D- 2-3 hours</td>
<td>4- Stranger(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E- 4 hours or more</td>
<td>5- Family member(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6- Boyfriend or Girlfriend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7- Adult(s) from school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8- Alone</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Research for a class
2. Check class assignments
3. Visit my school's website
4. Read Sports news
5. Local or Global news
6. Research hobbies
7. Download songs/listen to music
8. Myspace
9. Email
10. Instant Messenger
11. Blog/journal
12. Chat rooms
13. Online Gambling
14. Play computer games
15. Get homework help
16. Get health advice
17. Other________________________
18. Please place a check next to the choice that best describes the majority of your grades.
   Below 60%  60-69%  70-79%  80-89%  90% and above

19. Have you ever been suspended? Yes No
20. Do your parents closely monitor your online activities? Yes No
21. Do your parents limit the amount of time you spend online? Yes No
22. Do you have access to your teachers online for Home work related questions? Yes No
23. Have you ever received counseling services at school? Yes No
24. Would you like to be able to “talk” online with a school counselor about stress in your life? Yes No
25. Have you ever been bullied at school? Yes No
26. Would you feel more connected to your school if your interests were included in the school’s website? Yes No
27. Have you ever visited your school’s website? Yes No
   • If yes, what did you like about your school’s website?

28. What information would you like to see on your school’s website? Please place a check next to all that apply.
   School News written by students
   Career Information
   Lunch Menu
   Health Information
   Articles about students
   Pictures of students and events at your school
   Hobbies (ex. Music, art, local theatre events)

29. Would you visit your school website more if the content appealed to your interests? Yes No
Please answer these questions using the following scale:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Scale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>31. I am happy to be at this school.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32. The teachers at this school treat students fairly.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33. I feel safe in my school.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34. I feel close to people at my school.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35. I feel like I am a part of this school.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36. There were people I felt close to in school during the past week.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37. I only talked to people I know really well in school in the past week.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38. I felt left out in school in the past week.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39. I felt that no one really knows me well at school in the past week.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40. It was hard for me to ask others to do things with me in school this week.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41. This week I felt like there were people at school who really understand me.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42. I felt shy around people I didn’t know in school this week.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43. I felt isolated from others in school this week.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44. I was quiet when I was with a group of people in school this week.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45. In school this week, I felt shy even with peers I know very well.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46. I felt that I had a lot in common with the people around me in school this week.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47. In school this week, I got nervous when I talked to peers I don’t know very well.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48. I worried about doing something new in front of others in school this week.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49. In school this week, I was afraid to invite people to do things with me because they might have said no.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50. I felt that there were people I could talk to in school this week.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
51. If the school website included information aimed toward my interests and hobbies, I would feel more connected to my school.

52. Would you be more likely to visit the school website if students contributed to the content of the website?
Appendix B

School Connectedness Items

5 point Likert scale ranging from “Not at all” (0) to “All of the time” (5)

31. I am happy to be at this school.

32. The teachers at this school treat students fairly.

33. I feel safe at my school.

34. I feel close to people at my school.

35. I feel like I am part of this school.

National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (1997)
Appendix C

Social Anxiety Items

Five point Likert scale ranging from “Not at all” (0) to “All of the time” (5)

40. It was hard for me to as others to do things with me in school this week.

42. I felt shy around people I didn’t know this week.

44. I was quiet when I was with a group of people in school this week.

45. In school this week, I felt shy even with peers I know very well.

Social Anxiety Scale (La Greca & Lopez, 1998)
Appendix D

Loneliness Items

5 point Likert scale ranging from “Not at all” (0) to “All of the time” (5)

36. There were people I felt close to in school during the past week
38. I felt left out in school the past week
39. I felt that no one really knows me well at school in the past week
41. This week I felt like there were people at school who really understood me
43. I felt isolated from others in school this week
46. I felt that I had a lot in common with the people around me in school this week
47. In school this week, I got nervous when I talked to peers I don’t know well.
48. I worried about doing something new in front of others this week
49. In school this week, I was afraid to invite people to do things with me because they might have said no
50. I felt that there were people I could talk to in school this week.

UCLA Loneliness Scale. (Russell, 1996)
Appendix E

Parent Letter

Dear Parents,

I am a graduate student completing my Master’s in School Psychology at the Rochester Institute of Technology. For my Master’s thesis I am exploring adolescent’s social use of the internet. Internet research shows that adolescents’ internet use is increasing and that adolescents use the internet for a variety of activities including communication, researching hobbies, and using academic resources.

If students agree to participate, they will complete a short survey regarding their current internet use, feelings of social withdrawal, how connected they feel to their school, and knowledge of their school’s website. The survey is approved and supported by the school. The findings will provide the school with valuable information regarding student’s interests and their likelihood to use their school’s website as a way of connecting with their school.

Students in 8th and 11th grade will be surveyed. The survey will take about 15 minutes to complete. Students’ participation is voluntary and they have the option to discontinue the survey at any time. Students who participate in this study will remain anonymous and the information gathered through this survey will be kept confidential by the examiner.

*If you do not wish for your child to participate in this study, please contact me by March 17th at the number below.* If requested, copies of the survey are available to parents. The results of this study will be available upon completion of my graduate coursework if requested.

I am happy to answer any additional questions you have regarding this study.

Thank you,

Valerie Mergler
School Psychology Intern
554-6442 x2723
Appendix F

*Survey Administration Script*

I am a graduate student completing my Master’s in School Psychology at the Rochester Institute of Technology. For my Master’s thesis I am exploring adolescent’s social use of the internet.

If you would like to participate in this study, you can complete the Social Use of the Internet Survey. This is a survey asking questions about your current internet use; use of the Marcus Whitman district website, feelings of how social you are, and how connected you feel to your school. This survey will be your chance to give the school feedback to the Marcus Whitman School’s website, and will provide the school with valuable information regarding your interests and your likelihood to use the school’s website.

All students in 8th and 11th grade have the opportunity to complete this survey. It will take about 15 minutes to complete. Your participation is voluntary and you may discontinue the survey at any time. All the information gathered through this survey will be kept confidential.

If you do not want to participate in this study, please leave the survey on your desk as it will be collected at the end of class. You may do an independent activity at your desk.

I can answer any questions you have.
Appendix G

Institutional Review Board Approval

Form C
IRB Decision Form

TO: Valerie Mergler/Jennifer Lukomski
FROM: RIT Institutional Review Board
DATE: April 26, 2006
RE: Decision of the RIT Institutional Review Board

Project Title School Connectedness and Social Use of the Internet

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) has taken the following action on your project named above.

☑ Approved, no greater than minimal risk

Now that your project is approved, you may proceed as you described in the Form A. **Note that this approval is only for a maximum of 12 months; you may conduct research on human subjects only between the date of this letter and April 30, 2007.** The Form F will be used for the following: To report to the IRB any proposed modifications, unanticipated risks, or actual injury to human subjects. Return the Form F, at the end of your human research project or 12 months from the above date. If your project will extend more than 12 months, your project must receive continuing review by the IRB.

Heather Foti
Associate Director, Office of Human Subjects Research