

# AN EXPLORATION OF THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN BLOGGING PRACTICES, BLOGGING MOTIVES AND IDENTITY EXPLORATION

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## Abstract

This study explored psychological aspects of the Internet practice of blogging, including blogging practices, blogging motives and engagement in identity exploration in emerging adulthood. Emerging adulthood is a theory of human development that proposes a new life stage between adolescence and adulthood stemming from recent societal changes (Arnett, 2000). Specifically, the study predicted that a relationship would exist between blogging motives, identity exploration, identification with themes of emerging adulthood and age. Participants were 182 bloggers aged between 18 and 57 years who maintain an English language lifestyle blog. They completed an online questionnaire comprising measures of identification with the themes of emerging adulthood, blogging practices, motives for blogging, and identity exploration through blogging. Results highlighted the personal nature of blogging and the strong link between the blog and “real life”. The most popular motives for blogging were Self-Expression and Social Interaction, and results indicated that many bloggers do not believe they are engaging in identity exploration. There was a weak relationship between developmental life stage and blogging motives and identity exploration. Implications for future research are discussed.

## Introduction

The rapid emergence and widespread use of the Internet has prompted numerous studies investigating topics such as the effect of the Internet on individual well-being (e.g., Kraut, Patterson, Lundmark, Kiesler & Scherlis, 1998); online relationship formation (e.g., Parks & Roberts, 1998); and the exploration or creation of the self or identity online (e.g., Turkle, 1995). Hermans (2004) stated: “the effect of electronic media on the mind of the person is an issue that concerns the evolution of mankind” (p. 315).

The current study focused on the Internet practice of blogging. Blogs, or Weblogs, are typically maintained by an individual, or a small group of individuals. Walker (2003) defined a blog as a: “frequently updated website consisting of dated entries arranged in reverse chronological order.” It is estimated that in America alone around 8% of Internet users, or 12 million people, maintain a blog (Lenhart & Fox, 2006). A survey of 7,012 American bloggers

found that 54% of bloggers were men; 46% were women and that 54% of the sample were aged 18 to 29 years (Lenhart & Fox).

While blogging has received considerable attention from media / communications researchers, there have been few studies of the psychological characteristics of bloggers. The current study explored relationships between blogging practices, motives for blogging and identity exploration by bloggers. Of particular interest was the meaning of blogging for bloggers in the *emerging adulthood* period - from 18 to around 25 years. Arnett (2000) proposed that the significant societal changes in industrialised countries of the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century have led to the development of a distinct developmental period between adolescence and adulthood: *emerging adulthood*. The Internet has emerged simultaneously with this theory, and it is a major aspect of emerging adult's environment. The current study proposed that blogging may be a forum through which emerging adults undertake some of the "tasks" of this life stage, particularly in relation to the themes of self-focus and identity exploration.

### Identity Exploration on the Internet

While there are few studies specifically looking at blogging and identity, the impact of the Internet generally on identity exploration and self-presentation has attracted considerable research attention. Early research was conducted by Turkle (1995) who investigated the "avatars" people playing multiuser computer games, or MUDs, constructed. Avatars can be as close or as far from the "real life" self as the player chooses, thus they provide opportunities for identity exploration. Turkle noted that the anonymity afforded by the Internet enabled experimentation with self-construction and she found that feedback received through interaction with other avatars shaped and strengthened people's online identity.

Hevern (2004) utilised dialogical theory to describe the multiple self "positions" evident in personal blogs, as well as changes observed over time. Dialogical theory (Hermans, 2001) emphasises the impact on the self of interaction with others and with culture, arguing that the self consists of "multiple 'I' positions in constant dialogue with each other within a decentralised cultural universe of other selves (Hevern, 2004. p.322). In a qualitative study Hevern examined 20 personal blogs and used the metaphor of *threading* to describe the identities presented in the blogs. He described the blogged identity as *threaded* in that the blog represents the author's journey through time, and the postings allow overlap between multiple aspects or *positions* of the blogger's self. The blog provides a picture of its author as he or she has chosen to construct it, which is not static, but is shaped over time as a result of the dialogical process between the multiple positions of the person and the positions of others who comment on the blog postings.

### Motives for blogging

McKenna and Bargh (1999) delineated two categories of motives for social interaction on the Internet: self-concerns, such as the need to express a secret aspect of the self, and social motivations, such as the desire to connect with and be liked by others. Nardi, Schiano, Gumbrecht and Swartz (2004) interviewed 23 bloggers and analysed their blogs. They identified five major motivations for blogging: documenting the author's life, providing commentary and opinions, expressing deeply felt emotions, working out ideas through writing, and forming and maintaining communities and forums. They noted that bloggers may be motivated by several of these motivations simultaneously, and that motivation can shift over time.

Trammell, Tarkowski, Hofmohl and Sapp (2006) investigated Polish bloggers' motives using *uses and gratifications* theory which assumes that individuals' media-related behaviours

reflect their psychological characteristics (Trammell et al., 2006). They coded the blogs for six motives identified in previous studies (Papacharissi, 2002): social interaction, entertainment, passing time, information, self-expression and professional advancement. Their results suggested that self-expression was the most common motivation, followed closely by social interaction and entertainment. Trammell et al. also observed that blogging was strongly linked with the blogger's offline world, with posts regularly containing: "highly specific and contextual information that becomes meaningless to an outsider" (p. 13). In this study blogger's motives were inferred rather than nominated by the bloggers themselves.

### **Themes of emerging adulthood**

Arnett (2000) argued that societal changes such as delayed marriage and parenthood, and an increase in people undertaking tertiary study, have altered the developmental path to adulthood. The central theme of emerging adulthood is *identity exploration*. While historically identity exploration has been associated with adolescence (e.g., Erikson, 1950) Arnett argues that nowadays more identity exploration occurs in early adulthood. Emerging adulthood is also typified by the themes of: self-focus, which is linked to increased personal freedom; instability, which reflects changes in areas such as occupation, residence or relationships; possibilities which highlight the optimism felt by many in this life stage; and feeling in-between, which is the sense of being inbetween adolescence and adulthood (Arnett, 2004).

Reifman developed a scale to explore these themes: the Inventory of Dimensions of Emerging Adulthood (IDEA; Reifman, Arnett & Colwell, 2003). They found support for the existence of the five themes of emerging adulthood in a series of factor analytic studies (Reifman et al., 2003). The IDEA scale was used in the current study to investigate whether younger bloggers identify more strongly with the emerging adulthood themes than older bloggers, and whether younger bloggers are more likely to explore these themes through blogging.

### **Research aims for the current study**

As this is a new research area, the aims for the current study were largely exploratory and focussed on the positive impact of blogging on individuals rather than any possible negative effects. The study aimed to investigate blogging practices, particularly the use of personal "rules" when blogging, motives for blogging, and bloggers' level of engagement in identity exploration, as well as gaining an understanding of the type of identity that bloggers present. The study also investigated the possible relationship between motives for blogging and engagement in identity exploration and the themes of emerging adulthood, with a prediction that bloggers in the emerging adulthood stage of life (i.e., younger bloggers) would be more likely to have self-focused motives and engage in identity exploration than bloggers who had reached adulthood. The online questionnaire developed for the study is described in the method section.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

The sample consisted of 182 adult bloggers: 116 females and 66 males with an age range from 18 to 57 years ( $M = 30.45$ ;  $SD = 10.65$ ). They all completed an on-line questionnaire. Participants all had an English language blog that they updated at least monthly. Forty three per cent of participants resided in the United States of America, 33% in Australia or New Zealand, 9% in Canada and 8% in the United Kingdom. The remaining 4% resided in "other" countries and 6 participants (3%) did not indicate their place of residence. The sample was highly educated: 42% had completed a tertiary qualification and 47% were undertaking a post

secondary school qualification. Most participants were employed, with 42% in full time work and 36% employed part time or casually.

The amount of time spent on the Internet per week for personal use (not work or study) varied greatly among participants, ranging from 1 to 150 hours ( $M = 19.98$  hours,  $SD = 19.44$ ). There was also considerable diversity in how long participants had maintained a blog, with responses ranging from 2 to 98 months ( $M = 26.34$  months,  $SD = 20.57$ ). Nineteen participants did not indicate the length of time they had been blogging. Half the sample (91 participants) had more than one blog, with 8 being the maximum number of blogs. A small proportion of the sample (14%) maintained their blog with others. Participants with multiple blogs were requested to respond to the questionnaire according to the blog they felt most personally invested in.

Most participants updated their blog at least weekly, with 23% updating weekly, 41% updating daily or every second day and 9% updating more than daily. Six per cent of the sample updated their blog fortnightly and 13% updated monthly. The remaining 8% responded in the “other” category. A sizeable majority, 86%, expected to still be blogging in six months time.

## Materials

Participants completed an online questionnaire divided into six sections: demographic information, personality characteristics, identification with the themes of emerging adulthood, blogging practices, blogging motives and engagement in identity exploration. The measures used for each of the sections used in the current study analysis are described below.

*Inventory of the Dimensions of Emerging Adulthood (IDEA)*. The IDEA scale measures identification with the five themes of emerging adulthood. It comprised seven subscales: Identity Exploration, Self-Focus, Instability, Feeling In-Between, Possibilities and Other-Focus, a counterpart measure (Reifman et al., 2003) The Feeling In-Between subscale was omitted in the current study as Reifman et al. argue that it is not applicable for samples containing participants with a wide range of ages.

Example items for the subscales are: For Identity Exploration: “time of finding out who you are”; for Self-Focus: “time of personal freedom”; for Instability: “time of unpredictability” for Possibilities: “time of trying out new things” and for Other-Focus: “time of commitments to others”. Items were ranked on a 4-point scale ranging from: 1 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree. For the total IDEA score, items were summed and divided by the number of items. A higher total score on the IDEA corresponds with a greater overall identification with emerging adulthood. The reported reliability of the IDEA is acceptable ( $\alpha = .70$  to  $.85$ ) (Reifman et al., 2003) and the current study demonstrated equivalent reliability ( $\alpha = .73$  to  $.86$ ).

*Personal Blogging Rules Scale (PBRS)*. This scale aimed to determine what people *do* with their blogs and measured the degree to which participants utilised personal rules when deciding what to write in their blog. An example item is: “There are some topics or events in my life I don’t blog about because they are too personal.” Participants ranked each item on a 5-point scale: 1 = disagree, 5 = agree. Item scores were summed and divided by the total number of items to provide an overall personal blogging rules score. A higher score represented an increased use of personal rules when blogging. Internal reliability for this scale was reasonable ( $\alpha = .78$ ) after the deletion of two items.

*Blogging Topics Scale*. This scale measured the topics participants wrote about in their blogs. It consisted of 12 topics: personal issues; family; friends; spouse, partner or relationships;

social activities; work, study or professional interests; personal interests or hobbies; travel; technical information; news, current affairs or politics; religion; and entertainment or celebrities, including movies, music and live performances. Participants rated how often they blog about each topic on a scale of 1 to 5, from 1 = “never” to 5 = “every time”. Due to their similarity, it was decided to collapse the “family” and “spouse, partner and relationships” items into one topic.

*Other blogging practices items.* The questionnaire also contained a number of single items asking about blogging practices such as: the use of pseudonyms, the importance of remaining anonymous, the number of comments received in a week and the importance of comments. The item relating to pseudonym use required the participant to indicate “yes” or “no”. The importance of anonymity and of comments required a response on a 5-point scale, with 1 = not important and 5 = very important. The item asking about the number of comments allowed for a free response, with participants requested to estimate the comments received in the last week.

*Blogging Motives Scale (BMS).* The BMS measured seven personal motives for blogging: Self-Exploration, Professional Advancement, Entertainment, Catharsis, Self-Expression, Record-Keeping and Social Interaction. For the Self-Exploration subscale an example item is “My blog allows me to learn more about who I am”; for the Professional Advancement subscale an example item is: “Blogging enhances my professional reputation.” For the Entertainment subscale an example item is: “Blogging is a way to entertain myself”; for the Self-Expression subscale an example item is “My blog allows me to express my creativity”. For the Catharsis subscale an example item is “My blog helps me understand and move on from distressing events.” The Record-Keeping item is: “I blog to record events and activities in my life” and for the Social Interaction subscale an example item is: “My blog allows me to interact with others who share similar interests.” Participants ranked each item on a 5-point scale: 1 = disagree and 5 = agree. A higher score represents stronger identification with the blogging motive. A score on each subscale was calculated by summing all subscale items and dividing by the number of items. For correlational analysis, the Self-Expression, Catharsis and Self-Exploration scales were summed to produce a Self-Focused Motives score. The reliability of the Self-Focused Motives score was good ( $\alpha = .86$ ) with the removal of one item. Following the BMS, participants were asked to write in their own words about their motives for blogging and how they have changed (if at all).

*Blogging Identity Exploration Scale (BIES).* This scale measured identity exploration through blogging. Identity exploration was defined as the degree to which the “blogged self” was different to the “real life self”. A greater difference indicated more identity exploration. An example item from the BIES is: “The self presented in my blog is closer to who I would like to be than my real life self.” Items were ranked on a 5-point scale: 1 = disagree, 5 = agree. Item scores were summed and divided by the total number of items to provide an overall BIES score. A higher BIES score represents greater engagement in identity exploration through blogging. Internal reliability was reasonable, ( $\alpha = .80$ ) with the removal of one item. Following the BIES participants completed a free response item, which asked how the self presented in the blog was similar or different to the self in real life.

## Procedure

Data were collected using an online questionnaire, hosted by the *Opinio* software program. Participants were recruited in various ways. Firstly, around 500 bloggers were invited to participate through the email address provided on their blog. Blogs were located using the “next blog” function of the [www.blogger.com](http://www.blogger.com) blog hosting site, through blogrolls, and

through blog directories. Secondly, the study was posted on several online psychology research sites, such as <http://www.onlinepsychresearch.co.uk>. Participants were also recruited from first year psychology students who could count participation as part of their course requirements and via the researchers' friends and family. In addition, participants were asked to distribute the questionnaire to other bloggers. Confidentiality of responses was assured and participants could withdraw from the study at any time. The submission of the questionnaire was taken as informed consent to participate.

## Results

### Blogging practices

Figure 1 gives the proportion of participants who indicated that they blog about the topic "sometimes" or more (e.g., a score between 3 and 5).

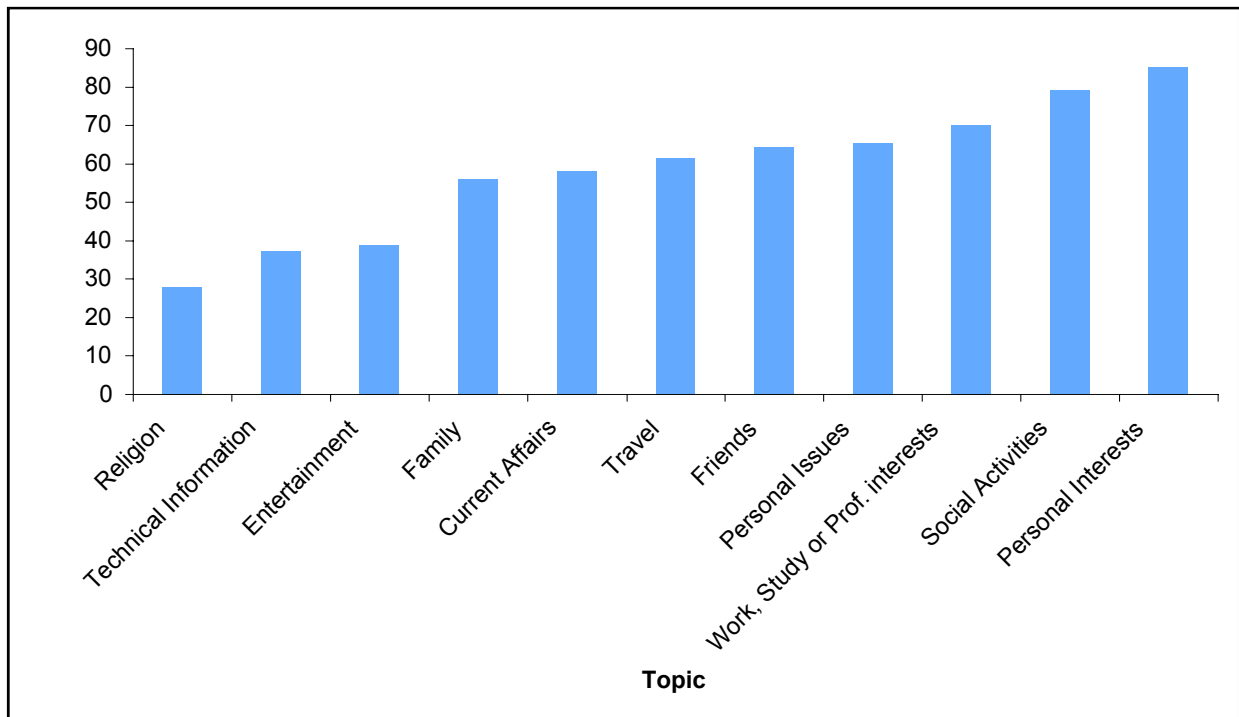


Figure 1. Percentage of participants responding "sometimes" or more to blogging topics ( $N = 182$ ).

The popularity of topics such as personal interests (85%), social activities (74%), personal issues (65%) and friends (64%) confirmed the personal nature of participant's blogs, suggesting a close relationship between the blog and "real life". This contrasted with the lower proportion of participants who blog about less personal topics such as religion (28%), technical information (37%) and entertainment (39%).

Support for the argument that participants employed personal rules when blogging was evidenced by a total PBRs mean score of 3.72 ( $SD = .86$ ), which indicated agreement with the items. The item with the highest mean (4.22,  $SD = 1.22$ ) was: "There are some topics I don't blog about because they are too personal". Taken together with the blogging topic

findings, this implied that while blogs have a personal focus, limits are imposed on the personal information revealed.

Most participants (60%) said that they do not use a pseudonym on their blog suggesting anonymity was not particularly important to them. Almost all participants (97%) allow people to leave comments on their blog, with the median number of comments received in the last week eight. Participants viewed comments as important, with only 20% responding that receiving comments was not important.

### Blogging motives

Means and standard deviations for the motives measured by the Blogging Motives Scale (BMS) are provided in Table 1.

**Table 1**  
**Descriptive Statistics for the BMS Subscales**

Motive	Mean	SD
Self-Expression	3.95	.80
Social Interaction	3.63	.92
Record-Keeping	3.55	1.39
Entertainment	3.34	.98
Self-Exploration	3.14	1.06
Catharsis	3.11	1.21
Professional Advancement	2.61	1.20

*Note.* N = 182

Table 1 shows that the most prevalent motives for blogging are Self-Expression, Social Interaction and Record-Keeping. Professional Advancement attracted considerably lower levels of support, as did Catharsis and Self-Exploration. Forty five per cent of participants said their motives for blogging had changed over time.

Participant's free responses offer further insight into blogging motives. Consistent with strong support for the Record-Keeping motive, a number of participants likened their blog to an online diary: "My blog is like a diary where I write my personal thoughts and experiences that I hope to learn and grow from" (Female, 19 years old). Interaction with others was a prominent theme. For some, social interaction was linked to keeping "up to date with friends and family" (Female, 20 years), whereas for others it was tied to forming new relationships: "I blog as a way to 'meet' other people. I may never see them face-to-face, but they are still dear friends!" (Female, 25 years). Social interaction was also linked to Self-Expression motives: "Being able to express my opinion to an audience is the number one reason I blog. It's great fun to argue!" (Female, 53 years).

Alternatively, there were respondents who emphasised more individualised motives. One participant likened blogging to "self therapy", claiming it allowed her to "stand outside of it [the personal issue] and look it [sic] from a third person perspective" (Female, 35 years). Another underlined the cathartic nature of blogging: "I blog to get issues that plague me off

my mind. It's the only way I can stop focusing on them" (Female, 18 years). Linked to Self-Expression, blogging was also used as a creative outlet and a means to improve writing skills: "I love writing. I appreciate an audience, but my first audience is myself, and I blog primarily for myself, to keep a record of my writing" (Male, 35 years).

**Identity Exploration**

Means and standard deviations for each of the Blogging Identity Exploration scale (BIES) items are presented in Table 2. The mean for the total BIES score was 2.79 (*SD* = .76).

**Table 2**  
**Descriptive Statistics for the BIES Items**

Item	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Through my blog I can be honest about aspects of myself that I feel are positive.	3.73	1.05
My blog presents a number of different aspects of my identity.	3.66	1.18
Through my blog I can be honest about aspects of myself that I feel are negative.	3.17	1.25
Through my blog I feel less pressure to conform to the expectations of others.	2.74	1.33
The self presented in my blog is closer to who I would like to be than my real life self.	2.66	1.20
Through my blog I express aspects of my identity that I don't feel able to express in real life.	2.45	1.33
The self presented in my blog is closer to who I feel I should be than my real life self.	2.39	1.22
Through my blog I explore aspects of my self that I am afraid of becoming.	2.19	1.23
People who know me in real life would be surprised if they read my blog.	2.17	1.22

Note: N = 182

These results show a low level of support for many of the items. The item with the lowest score, "People who know me in real life would be surprised if they read my blog", corroborates the previous finding that blogs are strongly tied to "real life". Only three items had mean scores above three, which denoted "neither agree or disagree". The use of blogs to present positive aspects of the self was the most strongly supported item, although interestingly, there was reasonable support for the item relating to honestly presenting negative aspects of self. The item referring to the presentation of multiple aspects of self was also supported.

To investigate this finding further, the free response answers were examined and coded (Figure 2).

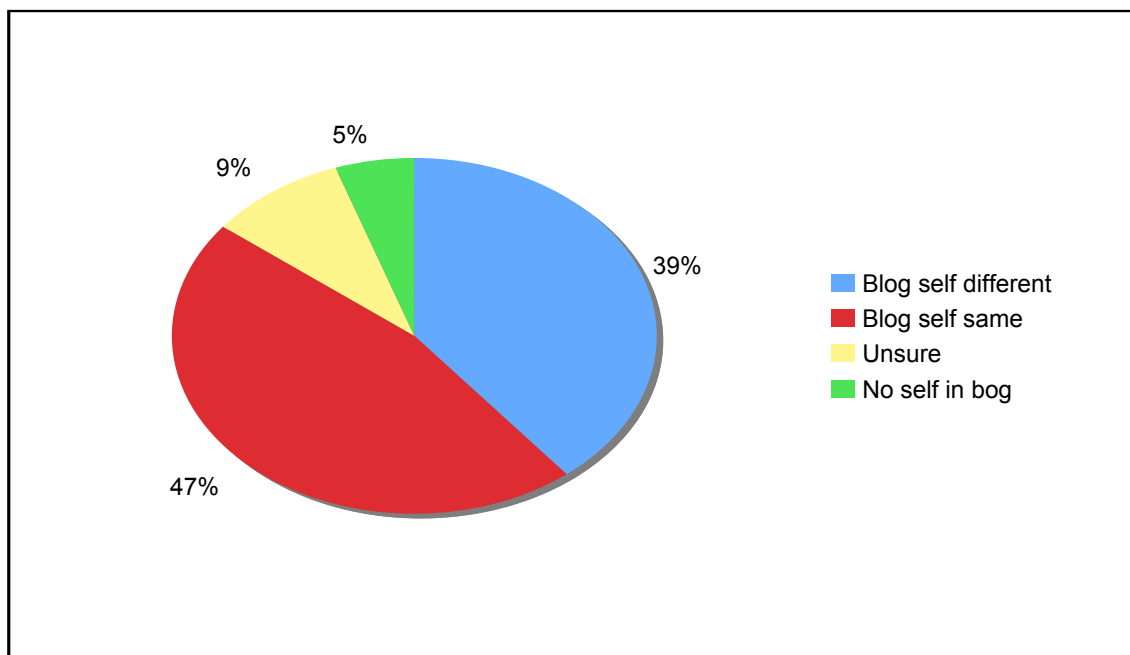


Figure 2. Identity exploration through blogging based on coded free response data ( $N = 153$ ).

The free response question asked participants to describe how their blogged self is similar or different to their real life self. The coding system had four classifications: 1 = Blog self is different in some way to real life self (identity exploration through blogging); 2 = Blog self is the same as real life self (no identity exploration); 3 = unsure or ambivalent about whether blog self and real life self are different; and 4 = Do not feel a self is presented in the blog. An example of a response that was coded 1 was: “More outgoing and outrageous”. An example of a response coded 2 was: “Not at all different. I am very honest about myself in my blog.” An example of an unsure or ambivalent response (coded as 3) was: “I am who I am. I sometimes share feelings in the anonymity that I would feel vulnerable to share in real life.” An example of a response coded 4 was: “It’s hard to say my blog presents much of a self.” Twenty nine participants did not provide a comment that could be coded.

The findings from the free response data largely supported those from the BIES. Firstly, almost all respondents (95%) feel a self is presented through their blog but only about half report engaging in identity exploration. However, it is worth noting that within the “blog self different” group there is considerable variability as to *how different* the blog self is. For some participants this difference was relatively small, for example “[blog self is] similar to how I normally am, slightly more open and expressive.” For others this difference was more pronounced, for example “I am able to present my true feelings about current events and issues that are presented in everyday life.”

### Relationships between variables

To explore the relationships between variables, Pearson’s correlations were calculated (Table 3). The variables included were age, gender, Self-Focused Motives (SFM) score and overall scores from the IDEA, PBRs and BIES. Table 3

### Relationships Between Age, Gender, SFM Score and Overall IDEA, PBRS and BIES Scores

	Age	Gender	IDEA	PBRS	SFM
Gender	-.07				
IDEA	<b>-.46**</b>	.10			
PBRS	<b>.23**</b>	.04	-.04		
SFM	-.12	<b>.23**</b>	<b>.35**</b>	-.01	
BIES	<b>-.22**</b>	.02	<b>.24**</b>	-.06	<b>.63**</b>

\* =  $p < .05$

\*\* =  $p < .01$

The negative correlation between age and the overall IDEA score showed that, as expected, younger participants had a significantly stronger identification with the themes of emerging adulthood than older participants. Although weak, there is a significant negative correlation between age and BIES score and a positive correlation between the BIES and IDEA scores, showing that identity exploration through blogging is related to both variables. Self-focused motives were also weakly correlated with the IDEA and gender, although not with age. The strongest observed correlation is between Self-Focused Motives and BIES scores, indicating that motives play an important role in determining whether a person will engage in identity exploration through blogging.

### Discussion

On the whole, the results suggested that blogs are personal and defined by the amount of information bloggers choose to provide. Blogs appear to be carefully edited rather than “tell-all” accounts of the blogger’s world. A strong link between blogging and real life was evidenced by the relative unimportance of anonymity and the popularity of blogging topics such as personal interests and social activities and motives such as Record-Keeping. This blogging-real life connection is consistent with the conclusions of Trammell et al. (2006), as was the finding that Self-Expression and Social Interaction were the most commonly held motives for blogging.

Unlike findings from other studies of Internet behaviour (Bargh, McKenna, & Fitzsimons, 2002; McKenna, Green, & Gleason, 2002; Yurchisin, Watchravesringkan, & McCabe, 2005), the low overall BIES score suggested that many bloggers do not believe they are exploring their identities when blogging. This finding was backed up by the free response data and the relatively low agreement with the Self-Exploration motive. A possible explanation is that identity exploration takes place through other avenues, with the “finished product” presented on the blog. Blogging could be conceptualised as a forum for self-conformation or self-affirmation, particularly given its public and interactive nature.

With regard to the type of self presented through the blog, there was strong agreement with items relating to being honest about aspects of self that are positive *and* aspects of self that are negative. Taken together, this would suggest frankness in blogger’s self-presentation. The reasonable level of support for the idea that blogging presents multiple aspects of self ties into

Hevern's conception of the blogged self, which emphasises interaction between the numerous positions of self and of others.

The results provided weak support for the prediction that a relationship would exist between age, identification with the themes of emerging adulthood and identity exploration. Results suggested that this was not due to younger blogger's lack of identification with the themes of emerging adulthood. Rather, the finding seems linked to the observation that many participants did not associate identity exploration with their blog. The prediction that age and identification with the themes of emerging adulthood would be related to Self-Focused Motives (SFM) was also weakly supported, with no relationship between age and SFM and a weak positive correlation between IDEA score and SFM. This may be related to the comparatively lower level of support for Self-Exploration and Catharsis motives on the BMS. In addition, it may reflect that the personal nature of blogging can encourage bloggers of all ages to focus on the self, more so than in other facets of life. The reasonable positive correlation between the SFM and BIES scores suggested a link between motives and engagement in identity exploration, which makes intuitive sense and supports the validity of the measures.

### **Focus for future research**

Building on these findings, and keeping in mind the newness of this area as a focus for psychological research, there are numerous avenues for future research. Firstly, a potential limitation of the current study was the looseness of the definition of blogging and the fact that participants self-identified as bloggers. Researchers such as Boyd (2006) have argued that the term "blogging" encompasses a diverse range of activities, so that studies into blogging may need to be more specific in defining the "type" of blog or blogger under examination. For future research involving blogging and identity, it may be necessary to create more strict eligibility criteria for participants, or more clearly establish the blog type, to ensure that like-bloggers are being compared with like.

A second possibility for future research stems from the definition and measurement of identity exploration. The identity exploration measure (the BIES) was developed for the current study, based on the idea that identity exploration was taking place if the blogged self was different to the real life self. This scale would fail to capture bloggers who felt they were exploring identity both in real life and through blogging, but that these identities were the *same*. Future research could perhaps use a general measure of identity exploration, such as the Identity Exploration subscale of the IDEA, to establish the degree to which the person believes they engage in identity exploration more broadly, followed by questions measuring the extent to which this identity exploration extends to blogging activities.

Finally, if the finding that people do not explore identity through blogging is accepted, it may be appropriate to explore the possible connection between developmental life stage and Internet behaviour through looking at an alternative Internet medium, where identity exploration is more common. Drawing from previous research, such as that conducted by Turkle (1995) on MUD participants, it may be more suitable to study an online activity that necessitates the creation of an avatar. An example could be Second Life players, who inhabit a virtual world that has grown significantly since its inception in 2003. Future research could investigate the connection between developmental life stage and the creation of Second Life avatars, their relationship to the "real life" identity of the player, and how they change or stay the same over time. Alternatively, future studies could compare Second Life players in the emerging adulthood developmental stage with emerging adults that do not participate in Second Life, examining differences in identity exploration and the construction of the self.

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