

5 Self in Web Home Pages: Gender, Identity and Power in Cyberspace

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Abstract. World Wide Web home pages have provided new ways for people to present and establish their identity and to find out about others. This chapter discusses the presentation of self in personal home pages in terms of Goffman's ideas as well as more recent social constructionist and feminist perspectives and approaches. Studies of personal home pages, comparing men's and women's pages, are reported. This is followed by a study in which women academics gave accounts of their experiences of the problems and opportunities that arose for them in creating and managing a public presentation of self and the proactive ways they were exploiting the opportunities of the Web.

It is assumed here that the Web is not different from the 'real world' and so our psychological perspectives therefore are critical reflections and commentaries on activities that take place in the context of real world and everyday activities. Oppression and difficulties which exclusion and prejudice can exert on any activity undertaken in (particular institutional) places, will inform our social constructs of identity and be part of the process of a predominantly male and patriarchal discourse. The discussion presented here reflects a growing interest in issues that surround challenges to the professional and private boundaries of the academic web user, and how the frame which institutions give to the establishment of a public identity often conflicts with an individual's need to have a personal presence on the Web.

There are grounds for being optimistic that the Web provides useful possibilities for encouraging links between academics, especially for those with less formal status.

The real space of cyberspace is on the bodily side of the screen, and the Web page presence may be a means by which people can increasingly find ways (in their own voice) to tell their stories.

Contents

5.1	Introduction.....	74
5.2	Self presentation on the web	74
5.3	Towards the electronic self.....	77
5.4	A framework for understanding web page identity	79
5.5	Conclusions	91
5.6	References	92

5.1 Introduction

Over the last ten years, in the light of increased and diverse use of information technology, necessary and re-invigorated discussions of psychological conceptions of self and identity have begun to take place - especially once it was realised that some of the psychological issues we face in real-life social interactions do not necessarily disappear in cyberspace.

In the late modern or post-modern view, the self is a flexible, varied, sometimes fleeting construction, which must be established and maintained by effort and involvement from one who would lay claim to it [1, 2, 3]. Indeed, as Gergen points out, as the consequence of technological and social change:

"With this confluence of changing conditions, it becomes increasingly difficult to determine precisely what the contents of the psychological self may be, what actions constitute their expressions, where and when they occur, and what social purposes may be served by one's continued belief in such occurrences." [2].

New technologies and changing patterns of communication provide new boundaries and opportunities for self, and new routes through which the self can be established. The personal home page on the World Wide Web is one of those routes.

Many approaches to the study of the relationship between psychology and information technology develop the idea that the new technology will give rise to new ways of being: that life in cyberspace is, or can be, different from what is called, by comparison, 'real' life.

It is noticeable however, that these accounts are based mainly on information which is *delivered to* the person by all the newly-available channels, and do not say much about how the self is expressed in the ways that are provided by new technology. Those who have studied the expression of self in Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) have either concentrated on how CMC allows the presentation of markedly 'different' aspects of the self, sometimes a disguised or other self [4, 5], or on how patterns of communication are different between genders [6]. Although a number of people have commented on the personal homepage as a rather different site for identity construction, making comments like "The medium where people tend to ostensibly be more their 'true' selves is the World Wide Web" [7], there are not many detailed studies of what people actually do with personal Web pages. Some accounts of WWW homepages and self can be found in work by Chandler and his associates [8, 9], Karlsson [10], Cheung [11], Kibby [12], Erikson [13], Shedroff [14], and our own [15-19].

5.2 Self presentation on the web

The World Wide Web gives anyone with a computer and an Internet account the opportunity of publishing whatever she or he wishes to an enormous public around the world. The personal home page provides the possibility of presenting one (or several) views of the self to that audience. We will examine the use of various kinds of personal home pages in establishing and presenting versions of the self from several theoretical perspectives, beginning with Goffman's Dramaturgical approach and including earlier Symbolic Interactionism and more recent work by Gergen, and other social constructionist and feminist perspectives.

Goffman [20, 21] has described how people negotiate and validate identities in face-to-face encounters and how people establish 'frames' within which to evaluate the meaning of encounters. These ideas have been influential in how sociologists and psychologists see person-to-person encounters. Branaman [22] gives a useful summary of Goffman's theory of self.

According to Goffman, one of the things that people need to do in their interactions with others is to present themselves as an acceptable person: one who is entitled to certain kinds of consideration, who has certain kinds of expertise, who is morally relatively unblemished, and so on. People have techniques and resources available to allow them to do this. There are 'back regions' in which backstage preparation can help in presenting an effective performance in 'front regions'; 'expressive resources' can be mobilised; and cooperation from others present in the interaction can often be relied upon to smooth over jagged places and provide opportunities for redeeming gaffes. Information about the self is displayed, but also needs to be managed, so that irrelevant or disconfirming information doesn't detract from the impression being maintained.

In face-to-face encounters, much information about the self is communicated in ways incidental to the 'main business' of the encounter, and some is communicated involuntarily: Goffman distinguishes between information 'given', that is, intended and managed in some way, and that 'given off' which 'leaks through' without any intention. He also points out a difference between the 'main' or 'attended track' of the interaction and other 'unattended tracks' which are at that moment less salient. For instance, if a colleague calls round, I may discuss a work problem and prepare a cup of coffee simultaneously, both of these going on cooperatively and interactively with the other person, but it is generally clear that the 'point' of the interaction is the discussion, not the coffee making.

Much of Goffman's interest lies in his analysis of the depth and richness of everyday interaction. This depth and richness is not immediately apparent in electronic interaction (though we will argue later that there is the possibility of depth and richness in the information provided by a personal home page), but the problem of establishing and maintaining an acceptable self remains, and there is a range of expressive resources available for this end. As the technology develops, more expressive resources become available. Also, as the culture of electronic communication has developed, people will construct expressive resources out of whatever facilities are available, as with the development of emoticons for email (and their adaptation to phone text messages, where they're even better suited). 'Electronic' communication has become more and more 'human' communication to the extent that there is more to it than just efficiently passing information to each other.

Goffman sees embarrassment as an important indicator of where people fail to present an acceptable self, and also an important motivator. A person wishes to present themselves effectively to minimise the embarrassment of a failing presentation, but other participants are also motivated to help the performance by their wish to avoid the embarrassment they feel at its failure. So, most of the time, we interact in a cosy conspiracy in which it appears as if everyone knows what they are talking about, can remember the names of those who they're talking to, and has an appearance and presence which is pleasant and unexceptionable, even though it often happens that this is not the case. In this sense, our 'selves' are presented for the purpose of interacting with others, and are developed and maintained with the cooperation of others through the interaction.

Before looking at how the resources electronically available are deployed to produce impressions of self, it is necessary to establish how Web pages differ from face-to-face interaction and to work out what expressive resources are available.

Most Web pages are to some extent interactive. There is usually an email address where the author can be contacted, and homepage authors often solicit comment, or ask readers to

'sign my guestbook'. Pages may change and develop in response to this feedback. However, the pages aren't initially constructed interactively and authors cannot be sure who will access them. Structuring devices like Webrings and the 'themed neighbourhoods' of free site providers like Geocities do make it more likely that certain kinds of people (or at least people with certain kinds of expectations) will arrive at your site, and perhaps the popularity of these structuring devices shows our desire not to be completely promiscuous in our home page contacts.

However, this promiscuity of the Web goes deep. To talk to you face-to-face, we would have to travel to your town, walk up your street, knock on your door, and maybe get invited into your kitchen. Alternatively we might visit you at work. Even on the phone, one needs to know the appropriate area code and may have to go through various gatekeepers to talk to you. So when we finally interact, we both know to some extent where we both are (geographically) and probably where the other is coming from (socially or organisationally). We also know what kind of interaction this is: whether it's a customer order, a chance encounter in the street, or a bedroom conversation. This enables us to 'frame' the interaction appropriately [21], so that we both know how to interpret what goes on in the context of what is really going on. When you call up our individual University home pages, by comparison, you may get there through an orderly route via our institution, department, speciality, and so on, but you might have found one of the pages because it is 'nerdy homepage of the month' on the home page of someone in Mexico. If I knew that that was the way people were going to get to me, I might have arranged my public face differently.

Worse still, your communications (to the supposed audience of your pages) may be repeated by people you don't know to audiences you never intended.

So what is the communication involved in putting up a homepage? It *is* putting yourself up for interaction in some way, even if only a limited way. That limitation can be liberating. Goffman points out that one of the difficulties of interaction lies in establishing contact, because an offer to interact always leaves one open to rebuff. Conversely, starting an interaction always involves a risk about what the interaction might lead to, and possible difficulty in ending it. On the Web you can put yourself up for interaction without being aware of a rebuff, and others can try you out without risking being involved further than they would wish.

There is another liberation that can be negative, too. As discussed above, one of the regulating and controlling forces in face-to-face interaction is embarrassment. That is less likely to work on the Web. Others may find your Web page ridiculous, but you probably won't be aware of it. Those others who might be prompted to find ways to mend your presentation to reduce their own embarrassment in a face-to-face encounter are unlikely to feel pressure to smooth over the interaction between themselves and a Web page. So, in two senses, it is easy to make a fool of yourself on the Web: there is little to stop you doing it, but doing it will cause you little pain.

There are plenty of resources for presenting the self that can be mobilised. On Web pages, people can present photos of themselves (and their children), favourite graphics, snatches of speech and music, and access to a labyrinth of their interests and contacts. The homepage provides a locus for electronic self. These resources can be managed in the 'back area' provided by the web authoring package. There is plenty of possibility for misrepresentation because 'front area' Web pages are carefully set up before presentation to the world, and are only slightly interactive, though Buten [23] reports that most people he surveyed felt that they presented themselves 'accurately' on their home pages.

Now that people are becoming familiar with the Web, and know the 'usual' structure and content of homepages, it is possible to use this 'frame' more or less ironically to convey more subtle information.

The 'more or less' of the last sentence is an introduction to further consideration of the given/given off distinction suggested by Goffman. In many ways, this distinction would seem not to apply in electronic communication. Information about the self is explicitly stated and can be managed by the person making the communication. On the Internet, you can't smell my breath, catch the tremor in my voice, or realise that I'm watching the rest of the party over your shoulder. The implicit information that does leak through is paralinguistic, rather than non-verbal - a matter of style, structure and vocabulary - or paracomcommunicational - a matter of how I deal with a Web page compared with customary ways of doing it. Try calling up a succession of homepages and see if they give you hints about the nature of the people who composed them, even without reading any of the information given. Beware of taking these impressions too seriously. Someone may chose to include a picture of their partner on their page: that picture may be incorporated innocently and seriously, ironically, or in irony-transcending seriousness.

Other information may be given, or given off: as Mark Twain might have said: "show me what your links are, and I'll tell you what kind of person you are". The style and skill of the pages' presentation may be a major part of what's being presented, incidental to the main message, or a regrettable lapse that casts doubt on other aspects of the presentation. Even the domain name can be part of the show nowadays.

5.3 Towards the electronic self

Where does this lead to in a discussion of 'electronic self'? One of the things that has been a background worry in this discussion is the idea that Web pages are not interpersonal interaction of the kind that Goffman was describing. An interpretation of Goffman's work, and that of the Symbolic Interactionist school in sociology [24, 25] is that self is developed and maintained, as well as presented, in interaction. Perhaps the electronic self of the homepage can not be developed and maintained on the Web, but has to derive from face-to-face interaction, or at least email interaction. Or are there kinds and categories of electronic selves which can be presented and maintained in cyberspace, apart from our corporeal selves? That is one of the fantasies of cyberspace, but the selves presented in Web pages have not seemed to us to be qualitatively different from selves presented in other ways, and their styles of presentation can easily be likened to non-electronic presentations of self. This might mean that this aspect of electronic communication, at least, is not rich enough to support the interactive development and definition of distinctive 'electronic selves', or it might mean that we should wait to see what happens when people have actually grown up with the Web.

Another view, though, is that we shouldn't be concerning ourselves with 'fantasies of cyberspace': what people are doing on the Web is primarily what *people* are *doing* - just as is what they are doing at work, in the pub - and although the new medium offers new opportunities, those opportunities will be taken up in a way which is be continuous and coherent with the rest of life. As Daniel Miller and Don Slater [26] point out in their study of Internet use in Trinidad, people use the system to accomplish things - keeping in touch with relatives, proclaiming their faith, looking cool, promoting Trinidad - which are not at all 'electronic' projects, but social, personal, religious or cultural activities which are routinely carried on in many other ways as well as on the Internet. So, by and large, the things that people do on the Web, and the selves presented there, should not be expected to be distinct and separated from actions and self in other areas of life. As Lawley [27] says "The Web is not a new world, but an electronic reflection of the world we currently inhabit." People are likely to construct Web pages for some 'real world' purpose, and the content of those pages will reflect the aims, pressures and difficulties of the rest of their

lives. This is the point from which begin a wider analysis of the implications for self and identity and the nature of the interactions people have with the Web and in the production and use of home pages.

The development over the last twenty years of approaches in psychology which emphasise the cultural and social *context* in which to understand such 'real world purposes', has also enabled a significant shift in approach to the study of self, identity and personhood.

Feminist and other post-structuralist psychologists, for example [28-31] have challenged those methodologies which claimed objectivity and dealt with abstractions of identity without acknowledging the importance of the actuality (and voices) of "somatic bodies weighed down by race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, age etc prompted by desires, memories and love" [32]. As we have argued, in many ways, the Web *is not* different from the real world as a site for identity - it is part of it and "like other seemingly private/public spaces into which we construct an identity" [18]. The body that lives the life 'outside' of the presence on the Web remains a core issue, and we need to explore psychological perspectives that enable us to at understand what it is that might make it "easier for people to find a way of connecting to others [and acceptance of]...the self as other" [18].

The psychology of identity in traditional forms suffers from bias towards providing accounts which make the object of their studies seem exotic or rarefied (especially when dealing with a relatively new phenomenon such as the Web) and compared to an assumed 'everyday' or 'real world' from a (usually male) western scientific view. A useful psychology will be one which allows analysis of our ways of knowing and doing (even in this technologically extended circumstances) in terms of everyday rhetoric [33], (Stanley, this volume). In our research and in the development of a psychological account of Web interactions, we assume we are involved in 'real life' concerns, not just with 'observations' of texts of identity, or with some new way of behaving and being. One aim of our analysis as it developed, therefore, was to understand what Gergen calls the "conventions of warrant" [34] that make ourselves intelligible, "hammered out on the forge of daily relationships" [35]. The perspectives that will enable us to take such a wide, yet grounded, view of what can be said about what people are *doing* at the interface with the Web's self-altering technology, and that can adequately deal with what happens when people cross the so called 'cyborg' boundaries, [36], are those which take account of the narratives and the interpretations we *usually use* to construct our social identity. Furthermore, whether individuals' 'presentations of self' are relatively confident and consistent in terms of their self-narratives [28], or are 'acts' created out of institutional hierarchical hegemony or text based identity constructs from dominant patriarchal discourse [37-41], our experiences of creating a Web identity need to be treated as phenomena to be explained "in [terms of] a dialectical relationship between them and the social context" [42].

The Symbolic Interactionist approach offers a way of discussing the problem of embodiment with respect to the nature of Web identity presence. We don't want to 'abstract' the body - either as an 'organism' of the behaviourist school, or a 'system' of the information theorists [43], but try to understand how the psycho-social context and the discursively moral issues affect 'real' bodies. So, in our attempts to consider what is happening when people *do* their interacting with the Web, we don't want to talk of 'anybody' and so impose boundaries and specific discourses. We would rather find a way of talking about how experiences are in relation to contexts which are social, gendered, racial, or historical [44]. "What is at stake in the struggle for control of the body... is control of the social relations of personal production" [43].

Individuals are predominantly *self*-reflexive as well as in a subject-object relationship to society. So, one way we could consider the Web, is as functioning as an act of communication [45], technologically saturated as these communicative selves might be.

The claim is that in the post-modern era, the 'virtually real self' is as real as the 'real', because in the virtual space of the Web, multiple identities can be 'communicated' simultaneously. In this approach, there is no contradiction between fluidity of identity and accepting the virtual real as 'real' [4], where identity is both the 'thing' and 'not the thing' and not transcendent [46]. However, this is not to reject those that treat [e.g. gender] coherence and consistency [21] as qualities that men or women use performatively (maybe narratively). Similarly, we still need to develop a critical framework which challenges the inequality of power differences in the 'doing' of identity in cyberspace.

In our work we have explored a number aspects of what happens when 'selves' include 'selves as hypertext'. The notions of embodiment which Goffman's approach elucidates, in terms of the 'display' of our bodies, need to be elaborated if we wish to discuss bodily 'boundaries' to include 'the text' of the Web home page. When we are 'in cyberspace' are we 'there' as extensions of ourselves or as versions of our selves? Mead in his approach identifies how the symbolisms of the social discourse of everyday life describes the self as only existing in relationship to other selves [24] and in this sense we would view people as self-productive (or identity-productive). To do this we must include reference to subjective experiences and ideas of the 'self in relation to others', as more than the merely performative aspects of identity [47]. We are dealing with the sense in which we *own* our identities without implying an essentialist idea of 'one singular identity'. As researchers therefore, we do not attempt to 'interpret' the multiplicity of presentations and contradictory feelings associated with the diversity of situations and symbolic 'requirements' or 'restricted meanings' and absence of co-equivalences of many 'dichotomised' concepts (e.g. masculine/feminine; internal/external; real/virtual) on our performances of self at any one time or in any one place: "We do not conduct ourselves as 'one continuing thing'... nor 'characteristics along a continuum' nor as 'having a multiple, fractured identity'" [1, 48, 18]. We experience ourselves holistically and act discretely.

We realise that Goffman's theory too retains something of what the social-cognitivist would traditionally call 'schemas' or 'understandings' and though this could be misconstrued as being limited to notions of individual socially skilled performances in role, derived from the norms and conventions of group characteristics, we would not wish to obscure what might be taking place in web home pages as the completion of an idea [49-50] in a performative way. Much of traditional social psychology from the 1960's onwards attempted to objectively describe [51] the fulfilment of social roles and interactions in terms of encoded (and as far as we are concerned oppressive) social categorisations, whether as personality characteristics, group norms of behaviour (e.g. gender-roles), or as psychological truth which interpreted role boundary changes as abnormal or even clinical deviance [39].

5.4 A framework for understanding web page identity

In attempting to provide a framework for understanding web page identity and the personal decisions and action required to make a public web home page, we argue that people take active decisions about the ways we organise and classify our and others' *actions*. This is what Shotter calls 'joint action' [52], which denotes the combination of thought and meaningfulness in our behaviour(s). In this way we hope to present ideas in terms of *practical* effectiveness for people who are not puppets of predetermined character or stereotypical role behaviour. "The idea of the relatively autonomous, self-contained and distinctive person ...reflect [s] the sham and illusion that is the bourgeois individual, not its reality" [53]. From a Critical Theory point of view [54], the myth of the integrated

individual with power to shape events, and the impact of ideological notions about the active/reactive agent of deterministic forces, still needs to be challenged.

If we adopt a range of ideas that bring together Goffman and symbolic interactionist perspectives with wider feminist social constructionist views, then we can also take account of how personal identity is created in the context of a mass market of individualistic consumption and awareness of collective identities. We will presume that our interactions with others take place in *negotiation* of social meanings. Therefore the use of the Web is a negotiation that is flexible and a continuously interpretive process. Part of the difficulty, however, of moving towards such a social construction and 'psychologising' of the body into a language of discourse style and performativity, is that we risk losing our assertion that we are discussing a practical and embodied phenomenon. The web self is both part of and contingent upon society, "constructed by the symbolic not its point of origin" [55].

Although we do feel that the most useful approach to the influence of new technology on personal psychology is to consider how people continue to do 'being people' with the technology, not how technology forms new psychologies, it would be a mistake to deny the possible effects of new media on the psychological message. If we believe that the self is constructed out of the doing of things, then the new thing to be done, for instance constructing a personal Website, will give the possibility of new aspects of the self. The opportunity to make a complex, multi-layered, but controlled presentation - the hypertext self - does raise new possibilities for how people can think about themselves, and get others to think about them.

5.4.1 *Gender differences in personal home pages on the WWW*

Our research on presentation of self on the Web started in 1995 with a fairly impressionistic survey of an unstructured sample of the then mainly male personal home pages [15]. This led to the conclusion that home pages at that time reflected established print-based self-presentations.

We then went on to look at gender differences in personal home pages on the WWW [16], to see whether there were differences between the kinds of identity presented by men and women, or in the ways that identity is presented. Gender has been a significant topic in writings about electronic communication [4, 5, 56, 57], but this has mainly been about the negotiation of gender or gendered styles of communication in interactive communication. There are criticisms of focusing on gender differences, of course. Looking for differences between the genders has long been criticised as being sexist in itself. Why establish differences, unless it's for the sake of validating discrimination [58]? On the other hand, in a psychology where masculine is 'normal', it seems important to give equal attention to other ways of being, especially in male-dominated areas like electronic communication. We looked at a fairly random sampling of 35 each of men's and women's Yahoo! homepages, printed out the first page that loaded on each site (unless it was an almost content-free 'Welcome' page, in which case we took the second page), and did a quite simple analysis of main features of the page. The word 'fairly' in the last sentence reflects our continuing uncertainty about our sampling methods. To have an effective strategy for obtaining a representative sample of a population, one needs some idea of what the population might be, or where it could be found. We don't have any idea of what the total population of personal home pages are, or of how to go about finding them all. The most we can say of the pages we have looked at over the years is that we have mainly been concerned with 'ordinary' ones, although we have also picked out a few that seemed 'interesting'.

A traditionally-identified gender difference has been between 'expressive' and 'instrumental' orientation. We examined this by looking at what was mentioned and linked to on the page. A more expressive style would focus on feelings, people, and relationships, while the instrumental style might show itself in reference to abilities and achievements, material goods, and organisations and products rather than people. Mary Gergen has pointed out similar biases in popular autobiographies [59], and Csikszentmihalyi [60] and Belk [61] both found male-female differences along these lines in people's reactions to material objects and accounts of how those objects related to their idea of self. Various measures might relate to this dimension. We counted links to other people, compared with links to non-personal sites. Women did put up more links to other people (mean of 1.8 compared with 1.2 for men), but they also had more links to non-personal sites (12.0 vs 9.4). Women also show more awareness of, and engagement with, the visitor to the site.

Women's pages had a mean of 4.5 references to the reader (using words like 'you', 'yours', or expressions of awareness of the reader), whereas men's pages had 2.6. Guestbooks were more common on women's pages (10 to 6) as were counters (21 to 13).

Many home pages show pictures of the author. This is so common that it has become a norm, that can be satirised, opposed, or apologised for ('sorry no picture - I'll get one up just as soon as I can get my scanner working'). We thought there might be gender differences here. Aspects of objectification and male gaze [62], the way the dominant culture problematises self-portraits for women [63], and abuse by men (as in the 'Babes on the Web' page, on which women who put their photo on their Web pages were rated by a distant observer for their attractiveness), all make the posting of a photo more problematic for women than for men.

We identified four categories for self-image on the page:

- straight: an image which purports to be a straightforward likeness;
- joke: a distorted or caricatured or unrepresentative image: cartoon, baby photo, author just after falling off bike into mudhole, author caricatured as frog, etc;
- symbolic: an image which represents a human being, but not the actual person who posted the page. This is often a piece of clip art, like a cherub or a generic silhouette;
- none: no images of humans.

We counted blurred or pixellated photos which might be of the author, but were so unclear that they didn't really represent an individual, in the 'symbolic' category. We were a bit surprised to find that there were several (15 out of 35 for both groups) pages with no images at all. Men's pages had more 'real' images (10 compared with 6), as we expected.

The big difference was in the other two categories. Joke images only featured on men's pages (on 4), and symbolic images only on women's (on 10 pages; the most common form of image on women's pages). The issue of what kind of picture of the self is presented on the page has seemed relevant in all our studies of personal Web pages. In the first study, in 1995, when pictures on Web pages were less common, only one woman's homepage looked at had a photo, and that was of the grainy, blurred, non-individualised type. This issue will be discussed further when we report on interviews with women academics.

It's interesting that these pages often use buildings as metaphors for the structure being presented. The use of spatial metaphors for data is very common - it is *cyberspace* after all - ever since William Gibson's *Neuromancer* [64]. Perhaps pure non-spatial hypertext is too difficult to navigate - or perhaps the authors themselves need a structure within which to conceptualise their extended selves. A house or home does seem to be the ideal metaphor for the structure of the data of the self. One of Chandler's [8] home page categories is 'entire living spaces and homes, with their furnishings, posters, bookshelves, music

collections, photos and so on'. Auerbach [65] suggests that the real-house home is a useful analogy to help people evolve an acceptable etiquette in the undefined social setting of the Web.

In the context of the rather informal home pages on Yahoo!, issues like status, authority and credibility, one of Goffman's areas of focus in 'The Presentation of Self', were not very noticeable. In a later paper [18], we looked at home pages produced by people in institutional or commercial settings, where the impression given of these aspects of the self can be important. Given that it is often suggested that in such settings women find it difficult to have their status, authority and credibility recognised, it seemed worthwhile to see how the 'official' personal Web pages of women and men might differ in these aspects.

In the home pages of women academics, the awareness of the reader shown in the Miller and Mather [16] study seemed to be modified by their need to establish their credibility and authority, prior to communication about their 'work' presentation of self.

Our impression was, also, that women's pages were likely to refer to safe, established genres like 'academic CV', 'author's profile', or 'institutional factfile', whereas some academic men's pages subverted or sidestepped these models. This brought us back to Goffman's idea of presenting an 'acceptable' self. In terms of academic identity, to be 'acceptable' is to be adequately qualified, to have appropriate experience, peer-recognised publications and to present all that information in an appropriately academic structure. But (as Goffman would have agreed, and discussed to some extent in 'Stigma' [66]) what it takes to be 'acceptable' depends on power relations and on the extent to which one's 'basic' nature fits with others' ideas of an acceptable person for that place or role. Perhaps men just don't have to try so hard to be acceptable in the academic role, and don't feel the need to reassure others that they are appropriately qualified and competent. The real life sources of potential discrimination are not left behind at the computer screen and it seems that women may not wish to risk experimenting with the freedoms implicit in the new medium.

The men on the other hand are able to be confident about the way they present themselves and their work (which they can assume is the reason for the visit to their page) and discovery of their credentials is possible, but is not the most important presenting feature of their page. For men what they do is who they are.

Questions about the difficulties that might have to be addressed (especially by women) when they contemplated creating a web home page (or more usually modifying or 'customizing' the standard format given by the institution or department's Web wizard) led us on to the last study discussed here [19]. We also wanted to investigate further the idea raised previously, that women see themselves as 'interactional' and claim part of their identity (academic or otherwise) as part of a web-of-relationships [67]. Another aspect of this work was to explore the idea that the gendered self for women is constructed out of some constraint or even potential 'threat' [18], even in the privileged cultural environment of academia. We looked, for example, for ambivalence and caution in the use of the web by academic women who may have a less secure professional status than men.

In our analyses, therefore, we began to move away from the dramaturgical framework and take on board more recent discussions of self and identity [68, 41]. Also, the way these presentations have to appear within an institutional context, and are perhaps controlled by institutional guidelines, provide other interesting constraints for the negotiation of the self. The blurry distinctions between person, worker, and professional have to be dealt with.

This led on to a series of interviews with Women academics about their personal home pages. The main focus of our conversations were on current and potential interactions with the Web which the women interviewed perceived as significantly affecting their working academic practices. Initial contact was made with 10 academic women who were interviewed by one of the researchers on the phone and in person. In the interviews with this small sample of women academics, we asked what they 'did' with information from the

web and about its status for providing information at a personal as well as an academic level. We also wanted to get some immediate responses to something which would provide us with ongoing ideas and exchanges with women that would extend into a wider project to discover how the use of the web impacts on concepts of professional self and identity in academia.

5.4.2 *Women academics' views of the Web and their self-presentation*

The second stage of the research was to construct a questionnaire about women academics' views of the Web and their self-presentation on it, and post it as a Web page. We emailed about 20 women academics: people we knew, and women academics whose pages we had found in a fairly unsystematic sampling of faculty pages, mainly in Britain, Europe and the USA, asking them to complete the questionnaire, and inviting them to pass the URL on to any other women who they thought would be interested. The questionnaire itself was anonymous, but we provided an opportunity for those who were prepared to be interviewed further to give us contact details. We contacted these people by email or phone (occasionally face-to-face, if convenient), for a semi-structured interview, based on elaborating their responses to the questionnaire.

To understand more about the personal and subjective experiences of dealing with virtual academia and its people, we asked our respondents to reflect upon how their sense of identity was affected in the decisions they made about their own academic Web pages and in responding to those of others. We wanted to know whether there were any gender issues arising, either out of having to make specific decisions about the presentation of both personal and professional details, or when they were more generally engaged with interactions on the Web.

Some commented that this was the first time that they had considered this explicitly with regard to their Web pages. If, as we assumed, the self is 'fluid and multifaceted and dynamic' [48] then we could look not just for shifts in the ways roles and relationships are conducted, but also for changes in the ways that women viewed their 'constructed' identities [69]. All unattributed quotes that follow are from the respondents to this stage of the research, either from the on-line questionnaire, or from the follow-up interviews we conducted. The basis for seeking to discuss these matters further and in depth was to explore how far the new technology provides opportunities for new 'forms' of identity in contrast to the extent to which we remain grounded in physical and institutional existence.

Our enquiry was practical rather than theoretical. We assumed that we all have to make some effort to achieve a 'face' that is acceptable, because "in whatever media ... most people need to have interactions with each other to present themselves as acceptable people" [15]. The frustration experienced with the Web, as well as the feelings of recognition it affords, are because as yet the narratives and constructions which give us a sense of self on the Web are not yet part of a developed culture which has all the resonances and subtleties of taste, style, obvious political framework, etc. which we rely on in everyday life to position ourselves, know ourselves, or play our part.

Both men and women vary in the extent to which the technology is welcomed, and there are those who find personal home pages unnecessary, embarrassing or even frightening. Others don't really think of them as public documents. We were surprised at how often people we contacted about their pages were themselves surprised - "How did you find my page?" - as though it wasn't freely there for absolutely anyone who visited their institutional Website, or who did a search on their research topic. For the last fifty years or so, feminist concerns have been to promote non-discriminatory opportunities actively at the legal and macro levels of social interaction for women.

There has also been a considerable amount of effort to find ways that allow well-being in all areas of life at an inter-personal and intra-personal psycho-social level. The idea that the type of language used in communication was significant [70], and the pervasiveness of political in-correctness within the dominant (media) discourse out of which our identities are constructed, led women to learn how to claim equality through assertively developing a 'voice' that was their own [67, 71, 72], and which had influence and power without threatening the institutions upon which they relied for their livelihood and personal security.

Ideas of cyber self-identity cannot leave behind real world gender matters, and women recognise the implications:

"We want our work to be taken seriously - the men have far more space to be able to be 'playful' cos they don't have to think about not being taken seriously - but of course women do."

We also came across not just expression of the difficulties but also the intrinsic nature of the problem, but without much idea of how to get round it:

"I think men know how to make it easier for people to get to know what they are about - I want to do in a way that isn't too revealing."

The need to do the same thing only not in a revealing way indicates the depth of the trouble - gender trouble [73]. Women cannot afford to show too much about themselves.

The mixed feelings about this reflect a deep seated ambivalence by women about pushing the boundaries too far too quickly, even in cyberspace, where there are opportunities to bypass conventional routes to success and recognition. The safety found in remaining part of a group or acting collectively is both salient and possibly contrasts with the confidence that men can show about individuality:

"I don't want to present myself as so individualistic and about my career and so on: It breaks the rule to step out as an individual - women are used to the culture of the collective and the group."

There are contradictions that arise in the psychological struggle to present oneself as the person fulfilling the role of the academic rather than as a gendered person. Frequent academic Web users are as aware of the gender of the owners of the sites that they visit as they are in real life, but there may well be a lack of particular interest in gender when viewing a site. We argue, though, that gender interacts with many key issues raised in our considerations of identity on the Web. We assume that gender will apply to constructions or interpretations of identity on the Web just as in other domains: "especially prejudice on the part of people [...] to weigh masculine opinion more heavily than feminine."

On the other hand the impact of the new technology is recognisable in traditional ways but with some optimism too:

"There is such a risk of being a woman stepping out: it's a psychological shift - men don't question themselves so much: they don't have to worry about what they're doing. The interface challenges the essences of Women's lives, but we need to model our voice so that other women will recognise."

These are issues which are understood by all women, not just academics and not just on the Web:

"Women have different concerns and issues - an awareness of discriminations and substantive issues - learning to say 'I am legitimate' - 'I am an authority' - using the Websites for real academic acceptability."

"We can be honest about (crossing) lines and boundaries ...[having] someone to 'talk' to - it can be so isolating for women in real life."

"One of my concerns is that we don't get behind in the tech race and that women learn to use the Internet ...women should learn to just play with the medium."

"The point of establishing who we are is for discovering like-minded people: we are always reinventing ourselves."

Or the comment:

"There is something positive about the web being a gateway and we can get access to appropriate subjects and documentation for conferences. etc. Women still don't always have much confidence."

Old fears can of course reassert themselves, and we found that negative self-deprecating factors are also part of the initial problem, and women don't value themselves enough and lack confidence about what they have done:

"I suppose I react on the web no differently from any other seemingly private/public space in which we construct some identity - but we get concerned not to be pushing ourselves forward - not to be separated off by being too prominent - if I've gone beyond a whole paragraph I think 'Oops, I've said too much'."

"I don't want to become a Babe on the Web - hah ha - I don't think so!"

Our respondents had clear ideas about what kind of a Web presence was appropriate for women:

"I think by having a Web page, I have a more 'techie' persona, which counters my frumpy, middle-aged woman persona."

"I wanted to include an element of fun, but I was also conscious of wanting them to look professional. Professional and fun were difficult enough, but I also wanted to avoid having the pages viewed as being either cutesy, or too feminine."

"I don't want to have too fancy software full of fancy stuff that can't be opened - surely the whole feminist critique of the technology would be that you think 'Hey, let's make this accessible'."

Establishing an identity on the Web involves the problem of underrating the significance of representation while at the same time acknowledging that as an 'intervention' activity establishing control without conflict is important for the maintenance of one's 'objective' self worth: safely maintaining 'face' in Goffman's terms.

"Assertiveness is keeping our mind to the path - e.g. we [need to be aware] of both

traditional and future aspects of our work - it is a risk to be visible, and women are not used to having too much force."

Assertive communication skills can be what some women have already learnt: there's the point of establishing 'who we are', and an understanding that:

"It's very important to keep a profile even though blokes are trying to dominate the Web." and recognising that credibility relies on active participation in educational technology:

"I find I'm talking more and more about the technology (and to my students) and using the Internet and needing to use it to find information."

"Women are often single-minded and at the cutting edge of use of technology - not in a nerdy way but practical."

What means do we have to make something which speaks in ways that do not offend but at the same time indicates a political or personal statement?

"We can use the Website design - floral patterns and flashy flags - it's very subjective - but how to make a feminist Website?"

"The Web is one of the more woman-friendly environments on the Internet. Usenet news, chat, and other sorts of environment are much less woman-friendly than the Web. Having said that, I think that whatever I am doing online I am always in some sense guarded because I am female. This is not necessarily different to when I am walking along an empty street though."

Experiences in face-to-face interactions of gendered stereotyping would not have led women to expect Web interactions or reactions to their own presentations of their identity on their home page to be any different from the rest of their academic life. So the possibility that the Web could provide women with a sense of freedom - unrestricted by the usual limitations of hierarchical academic structures and associated notions of identity - meant that they were able to engage in discussions and to present their work and their views, and as a result - in terms of professional claims - who they were.

When we looked for examples of whether the establishment of credibility or authority and the difficulties of presenting a credible Web 'status' were issues, both for young academics as well as those with tenure and very well established positions within the academy, we found that:

"For young researchers there's no prestige to lose and it's easier to try new things, and established people get the 'professionals' to make a home page so they keep status - but they notice there's a race to 'be there' and be 'visible'... my presence is there all the time" (young researcher) though with the rider (from a senior academic) that so long as: "presenting a 'gendered' identity [...] did not undermine my academic credibility." (No man would ever say this.)

Many women felt that titles and qualifications were neutrally acceptable for a Web presence to maintain status, in a way no different from real life, conservatively fulfilling academic requirements.

The younger women academics in particular (postgraduate research students or women in research assistant posts or junior lecturers) were aware that the Web was providing them

with some new freedoms. They found that they had access to people, and they were not restricted by the usual limitations of power which normally arose from age and status. In fact, one respondent suggested that the increased readiness of junior staff and research students to put up Web pages might trouble the academic hierarchy:

"For the person visiting the web page of my department, I am more visible than the professors (who don't have pages). This might have interesting implications for academic hierarchy. The page listing the staff also indicates who has personal pages - and these are mostly PhD students. In addition, some of the pages are rather place-taking - both visually and when it comes to the amount of information. Interestingly enough, one of the professors (a woman, if that is important) wants to organise a centralised creation of web pages for all employees at the department, where someone (the system operator, for example) would make standardised pages for all. An attempt to bring things back to order perhaps?"

There was a difficult balance between the formal requirements of an academic website and revealing some non-pompous aspect of the self (and women seemed very aware of the dangers of the medium to allow self indulgence and pomposity and the opportunity to 'show off', instead of modestly hoping to share ideas with others of like mind). At the same time women are aware of the opportunities of self-promotion not to be missed and considered carefully the amount of personal or political information it was wise to put in.

At another level there was an awareness that the academy itself is not 'about' individual personality, and in an area where for women the 'wrong' impression could so easily be given (sexuality and youthfulness or even bloneness being in antithesis to serious research), women seemed concerned to represent their research, not themselves:

"It's my programme that's important... not what I look like."

"I tried to give both myself and my research as much credibility as possible by making us both appear professional."

They try to strike a balance by appearing capable, approachable and friendly in order not to let the worthiness of their work become adversely associated with the personal. The Web home page is a public arena. Calling attention to themselves: 'look here I am', 'this is me: this is what I do' is potentially in conflict with what they are showing off, what they can 'do'.

5.4.2.1 Women on the web: Internet as opportunity

It is difficult to create the text content of the web page to be something which could be recognised as being an electronic version or extension of a person's (professional) persona.

However, for some the machine is a tool: "My Website is currently a teaching tool, focusing on my courses and students' work, rather than my own." This aspect of professionalism as providing a service rather than as a means of enabling an experience blocks the possibility that this new medium could be the means for accessibility and a directness of exchange reminiscent of the old fashioned academy where there was time to think and engage in dialogue.

The challenge may well be that new ways of communication mean that the nature of the relationship in such interactions focuses on how the gendered roles are played out and become visible, but the idea persists that there also might be an opportunity for an extension of existing ways of being, doing, sharing :

"It starts off with a conversation and three years later we can be running a conference together."

Even if information about the author available on Web pages is limited, the freedoms might outweigh the difficulties. The opportunity to 'meet' people, usually outside individuals' limited spheres (real time, real space, real status, real officially tenured credibility or place in the hierarchy, or fast-tracking mentoring) does allow real life preferences and judgements of personal likes and tolerances (e.g. "If they seemed friendly and not pompous") to be made, through 'content' and 'layout of web site' and the good links provided. Ease of accessibility and the apparent willingness to share work is inspirational, if the contact is with people who have something to offer and who can be participated with on their own terms and in their own time. Perhaps the Web is a place where women can achieve credibility and possible equal status too:

"I feel strongly that collectively we need to be supportive - it's a great way of networking - mostly women in academia are trying just to keep things together - it's important that feminists organise and have a good profile"

"We could see the Web as something useful. Women in academia can be so isolated... It can mean that women become more powerful outside the system. Women could be using Websites for real academic acceptability."

"Like getting a bicycle must have been for the freedom of movement and liberation of women."

In all our investigations into how women academics interacted with the Web, the omnipresence of the institution and struggles to have some control in the decision-making about institutional sites emerged as a reminder of the context in which the drama of cyberspace presence was being enacted. The idea that women (and men) could, in whichever part of cyberspace, become other than who they were, or do other than what they do, is confounded by the notion that how we perform our self-identities cannot entirely escape into another realm.

The idea that we are "only ourselves in relation to other selves" [24], and we are always in some sense negotiating our position through our interactions, raises questions about the relative power of hierarchical demands and constraints that are placed upon us. This is clearly shown in some of the ways many have to literally negotiate [45] an identity whilst using the 'corporate pro-forma' provided by the institution. This is the professional approach - the uniformity implied by the role and the requirements of conformity. The extent to which this is adhered to or broken free from might well be an indicator of a quality of 'independence' of the home page designer, or merely pose yet another set of dilemmas about how much one can be 'who you really are' in a professional role, where the presentation of individuality is subsumed under the closely guarded image of the institution. Problems of what can be placed on the web and the restrictions produced by institutional control, especially when mediated by technical staff, leave the dissatisfaction of wishing for "a more hands-on procedure which allowed me to construct and edit my own Website."

How could it be said that the site is even an 'extension of me', let alone a version of me, if it was entirely a 'ready-made', a thing off the shelf, and so constrained that individuality could not find its way through? People make attempts (e.g. use of different type faces, pictures in non-academic settings, informality, as we have already mentioned), just as at school we constantly tried to prevent the uniform overwhelming the differences between us

and we each developed a 'signature' mark of rebellion that did not go so far as to infringe the rules of authority and bring censure. So when the women try to seem professional and individual while using a formal or standard format they could follow departmental guidelines and discuss the content with the Web manager, but could quite subtly "resist going more formal, though - I think it's a mistake to take oneself too seriously. Pomposity is to be avoided!"

In academic personal home pages, in contrast to individual personal home pages, it might be seen as more appropriate to be 'professional' than 'personal'. For those whose status can be questioned, it may be important to play down the personal content of one's page:

"I was particularly careful not to include personal information, as that only makes it easier for visitors to discount my professional persona."

"I have felt sad that I did not feel that I wanted to be up front about who I am on my Web pages, preferring instead to remove all traces of myself in order to present a credible research project to the world."

Also, even where self-presentation on the Web is an individual choice, not an institutional one, then people may choose not to include any personal details: "only when I know who I'm talking to" or to see the value such details (pets, gardens, partners, music we like, hobbies and past relevant experience etc) may give, but still feel uneasy:

"People do want to relate to you as a whole person, not just as a lecturer - but it seems very invasive."

Women do attempt to address this difficulty by making very clear distinctions between the private and the way that personal (and therefore accessible) aspects of themselves are presented as style of communication:

"I guess that's why I have put photos on my site - the style and the way I've put it up and written an accessible style (not holiday snaps) and I guess it's not about me personally but it's about my personal mode of communication and getting things across."

Also, just as in real life, people will make choices in what is and is not disclosed, so academics are aware of the dangers of exposing private matters in an interaction that would provoke negative discrimination:

"Yes, I realised that if I hadn't just been chosen director of [a program], I would probably do something to identify myself as lesbian [...] I don't want my identity to hurt our program."

"As a lesbian I have had to think about whether or not to present my 'private self' (in much the same way as I must deal with these issues in RL I'd say!"

Perhaps the real issues of identity seem to be that both men and women struggle to maintain a balance between the personal and the professional. Although people's professional sites are not always highly personalised, in some ways having any 'off-topic' personal information on an academic site needs some explanation: people don't attach photos of their pets to their CVs, or on the covers of their books. In the interviews, a comparison with the office was made: a web page is a personal space as well as a

publication, and it seems right and comfortable to allow it to be furnished with a few personal touches. Daniel Chandler and Dilwyn Roberts-Young made the same point in their study of adolescent home pages:

"While it seems useful in some ways to compare the genre of the personal home page with conventional written genres, the nearest real-world analogy for the personal home pages of teenagers is probably the environmental space of teenagers' own bedrooms in their real-life homes." [9]

As in our previous research, an important aspect was the presence or use of the photograph - the decisions that have to be made about actual body 'image' and how it is represented. The difficulties ("it was expected - though I don't really like it") were resolved in a number of ways:

"I don't have my photo immediately visible on the page - but you have to click on a link to get it"

"There is an issue about the distance between personal boundary and the public. I don't want to present [...] my personal self alongside my professional self."

"OK, it's relevant to see what a person looks like - but it is not the first thing you should promote - it has a place but not so dominant."

"I happen to have a holiday photo and I like the symbolism of it ...that is 'this could be one of the things I am in certain circumstances'."

However, there is an awareness by women that there is a dilemma whether to have a photograph or not. It is difficult to make decisions over the management of a style of image which would at least do no harm:

"I hesitated over choosing the picture, because I realised that whatever image I portrayed to the Web, people would make assumptions about me. Eventually I went for the one that I show to the world the rest of the time - the one on my travelcard!"

So what do we make of this level of ambivalence over the photo? To be so very cagey about whether or not to have a photograph, or what kind to use, recognises its potential to be revealing, capable of deceit, and at worst to create unwarranted stereotypical and negative impressions:

"We are never going to change anything if we let personal appearance affect what people want to make of what I do or about my work."

Some of the self-deprecation and throwaway embarrassment we found about photos shows, we think, that some of the difficulties which women faced with the issue of the photograph were whether or not they could get away with being ironic in some way, or just had to go for the friendly but normal, or serious and academic.

We can go further with this idea of overcoming fears of violation of boundaries implied in the photograph dilemma - and reflected in the expression of more deep-seated qualms about being 'misunderstood'. Firstly, the fear that what we look like might affect our status, credibility and the authority of our work is very real, and second, some interpretations by the viewer of the 'absence' of a photo might result in some threat to 'real-life identity':

"...eventually decided to include one on the grounds that I didn't want to be a faceless personto emphasise that there was a real person behind the bits."

As Marj Kibby says in a review of non-academic women's pages:

"...many women in creating their personal home pages seem reluctant to abandon the body as a marker of their identity, representing themselves through images of a sexualised body." [12]

Women seemed to appreciate attempts to make their site part of a friendly 'community' and that enabled some to overcome their reticence enough to be able to reveal personal characteristics (so long as they were photogenic) as well formal ones. This was especially true if seeing others' friendly photos made them think it was OK to make contact - send an email, join a chat line, because there was a 'real person' out there. The fact that the work did not just sit there as if produced by a faceless academic as in journals or books, made a real difference to how they felt about who they were too:

"At first it was a small, black and white passport photo (the most dull photo I could find). Recently I changed it into a holiday photo where I looked a bit happier (partly, again, because that is what I like to meet on other people's pages - men's and women's)"

The fact that both of us are practising academics means that we test our own interpretive insights on our own experiences. The continuing difficulties of working in academia mean that if we have to have a presence 'out there' as well as at our desk and in the classroom there will be challenges for our praxis and we anticipate that the dominance of male discourse will prevail (to the furtherance of male/female discriminations) unless we can voice some of our concerns. It is a space that has possibilities: "I'm allowed to dawdle."

The Web is a medium where women could be in control, in the timing and pacing of their activities at least. It is an opportunity for women to take time to be 'explorers' too (though not too much time and they can be impatient with some of it: "I haven't got time to get by some of the personal things - I just want the nitty-gritty").

This getting to the 'nitty-gritty' is a positive attitude, but is also a reflection of the way the women we talked to never forgot that who they are is part of a community of others; that it is the 'professional' that legitimises and gives intelligibility to what they do. We have used examples from our conversations with these respondents, to illustrate identity in process, as reflections on praxis, governed of course by the parameters of available discourse. It is this discourse that contains all the richness of contradiction and change of people struggling to live in this increasingly complex 'stage'. The extension of the 'workplace' into cyberspace may be as much another 'place' as it is another 'self': a place to be, which can extend the range of what can be communicated about your place in the scheme of things. What we have established through our discussions with users of Web pages (and even though the context is the rarefied sphere of academia) is that what people can present in home pages is not just a matter of limitations of the medium, the constraints of hypertext or problems of communicating about 'selves'.

5.5 Conclusions

Our concerns with the psychology of 'doing' does not contradict the fact that corporeal selves have found ways to 'represent' something of who they are in a different medium -

and we resist the particularly western opposing of personal/social, private/public. Across a range of situations it is possible to suggest the "common ground" for electronic communicative acts and non-electronic ones (e.g. [10]).

The people we talked to did not think of themselves as becoming 'cyborg'. The extent to which their Web presence was part of themselves varied widely, from those who had a page only because the institution required it, to those who felt that it was an integral part of their academic (and personal) life. For some, the internet had developed aspects of the self and extended personal powers - but so can the camera and the mobile phone. Losing any of these can lead to a sense of personal loss and diminishment. It seems that what the Web and the

Internet provide are new ways of being in the World, but not in a way which is intrinsically mysterious or different from other aspects of being. We claim and construct identities in order to authenticate our experience as we did in infancy when we first discovered our separateness and along with it our identity [52]. The frames for action in cyberspace are not necessarily less (or more) problematical than in real life - because they are part of real life.

In looking forward we realise that there will continue to be as many different feminist preoccupations as there are voices to be heard in the cyberspace [74]. Opportunities may arise from the sheer presence of this diversity as women link into this new Web, who will by their 'representations' challenge the power of stories currently told in many other places.

Women across the world are discovering that whatever the cultural or political regime, it is possible to dream of 'new worlds' using the Web to 'tell the story' differently. There are likely to be changes in ways we understand the idea and use of 'autobiography' [75, 76, 59] from all of those creatively making individual or collective Web pages, and these will influence how we then make psychology narratives as well [77]. There is much work to be done to raise awareness that story telling is doing something positive. People will always tell stories. As psychologists we are ready to listen and to make up our own too. The stories might start to be different.

5.6 References

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