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**BEYOND THE DIGITAL DIVIDE INTO COMPUTER-MEDIATED  
COMMUNICATIONS: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF THE ROLE OF  
COMMUNITY WEBLOGS IN BUILDING OLDENBURG'S VIRTUAL THIRD  
PLACES IN BLACK AMERICA**

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by

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation uses content analysis to examine how African Americans utilize blogs to create virtual “third place” communities (as described by Oldenburg), as a means to rebuild aspects of community that are lacking in their “real-world” communities in regards to HIV/AIDS discussion and emotional support. The need for this new source of communal support arose from the silence and inactions of traditional black institutions as it pertained to crisis. The analysis focuses on discussion threads in which individuals in an African-American blogging community, Black America Web (BAW) ([www.blackamericaweb.com](http://www.blackamericaweb.com)), respond to HIV/AIDS articles/commentary online.

The research addresses a basic question:

*How, and if so why, does the Weblog under study exhibit characteristics of “third places” as conceptualized by Oldenburg (1999)?*

The research lends credence to the belief that the importance of studying technology lies in the uniqueness of the social interactions the internet inspires, and not strictly for its technological attributes. Blogs were chosen because they represent a single virtual place, outside of large social gatherings, where people can engage in real time conversations on a grand scale, and unlike their physical counterparts, users are empowered by the relative cloak of anonymity afforded by the internet. Never before has a medium such as Information Communicative Technology (ICT) existed that can connect and enable conversations from members representing all classes of the geographically dispersed, cultural and ethnic community, with potentially everyone being able to contribute to the discussion and be heard.

***Keywords:*** HIV/AIDS, blogs, community, third place, social support, content analysis, African-American

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## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to the Igwe and Okoroego families, especially my parents.

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### *Background*

Although times change, there are certain human elements that survive through the ages. These elements include the need for expression, companionship, involvement, connection and information. The avenues by which humans engage in these social practices have evolved, and with the dawn of the Information Age we are seeing the emergence of new forms of computer mediated communication (CMC), with weblogs (or blogs) being a manifestation of this transformation. Some argue that within the on going information age in American society, no single individual is disconnected or separated from others due to the existence and prevalence of Information Communicative Technologies (ICT). These technologies have proved to be indispensable and are critical to communication between individuals, cultures and communities within the larger American society (Milne 2004).

This dissertation deals with these Information and Communicative Technologies, more specifically how weblogs (or blogs) are used by African Americans on the positive side of the digital divide to participate in virtual communities to rebuild communicative aspects of community that have been lost in “real-world” communities. In addition, the dissertation will determine whether these virtual communities fit the description of “third places” as portrayed by Oldenburg (Oldenburg 1999). These “third places” arise out of a need for individuals to find a dependable, neutral place of refuge to gather and interact, away from first places (home) and second places (work), often conferring or dealing with issues that may considered too taboo for public discussion by the community at large.

With this in mind the researcher identified an issue within the African American community that was of consequence, and yet was not being addressed due to individual or social pressures. The problem that presented itself was the lack of discussion and social support pertaining to the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), and Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS).

This chapter of the dissertation continues by laying out the concept of communities and expression, and provides the facts and figures of African American mortality. Cultural identity, societal fears and discrimination against African Americans, and Church influence are presented next; concluding portions discuss the purpose and contributions of the study, the importance of the study, research objectives, and research questions.

### *Communities and Expression*

An interesting element of any functional community is that it is self-sustaining. In order to be self-sustaining a community has to possess the ability to address issues that affect members' wellbeing, in either a direct or indirect fashion, to ensure that what members are getting out of the association exceeds the cost. Every healthy community discusses issues that threaten its survival. However, the number of African Americans infected and dying from HIV/AIDS is staggering, and the silence associated with the epidemic is akin to having "an elephant in the room" that nobody wants to talk about. This conflict, and the fear of violating group discussion norms, has created a prevalent silence on the subject, and degraded aspects of community, namely: emotional safety, sense of belonging, and positive reinforcement all found in dialogue. These factors will be expanded upon in subsequent portions of this dissertation.

It is believed that in an effort to “heal” itself of this silence, and restore aforementioned communicative elements of community that have been diminished, African Americans have resorted to finding other outlets to discuss the epidemic. One outlet is believed to be found in online third places. Blogs were chosen because they represent a single place, outside of large social gatherings, where people can engage in real time conversations on a grand scale, and unlike their physical counterparts, users are empowered by the relative cloak of anonymity afforded by the internet. Never before has a medium such as ICT existed that can connect and enable conversations from members representing all classes of the community, with potentially everyone able to contribute to the discussion and be heard. If it is found that technology is indeed an enabler for rebuilding aspects of community, then it adds impetus to the drive towards eliminating the “digital-divide” through real world benefits, such as the improvement of health outcomes, through preventative, rather than reactive, practices.

#### *African American Mortality Rates*

Within the continental United States of America, there has been over 200 years of health indicator research that has documented African Americans report poorer health than that of Whites, leading to a lower life expectancy for African Americans in almost every health indicator (Williams and Collins 2004). The mortality rates are especially high in categories such as heart disease, cancer, stroke, diabetes, kidney disease, homicide, hypertension and HIV/AIDS (Williams and Collins 2004).

The premature death rate of African Americans is brought into focus when one considers that for every 100,000 African American and White males born, there will be 5,400 fewer Black males than White males that will survive to see their 45<sup>th</sup> birthday, and

16,000 fewer will see their 65<sup>th</sup> birthday. For every 100,000 African American or White females born, 97,000 White women will live to see their 45<sup>th</sup> birthday, and 87,000 will live to see their 65<sup>th</sup>. Comparatively, only 94,000 and 78,000 African American women will live to see their 45<sup>th</sup> and 65<sup>th</sup> birthday, respectively. According to a government report, this difference in race mortality results in over 60,000 excess deaths per year in the Black population (Williams and Collins 1985; Williams and Collins 2004). The authors provide a table that dramatically compares the annual “excess” deaths of African Americans to the annual number of deaths due to major wars fought by the United States throughout its history. This table is shown below.

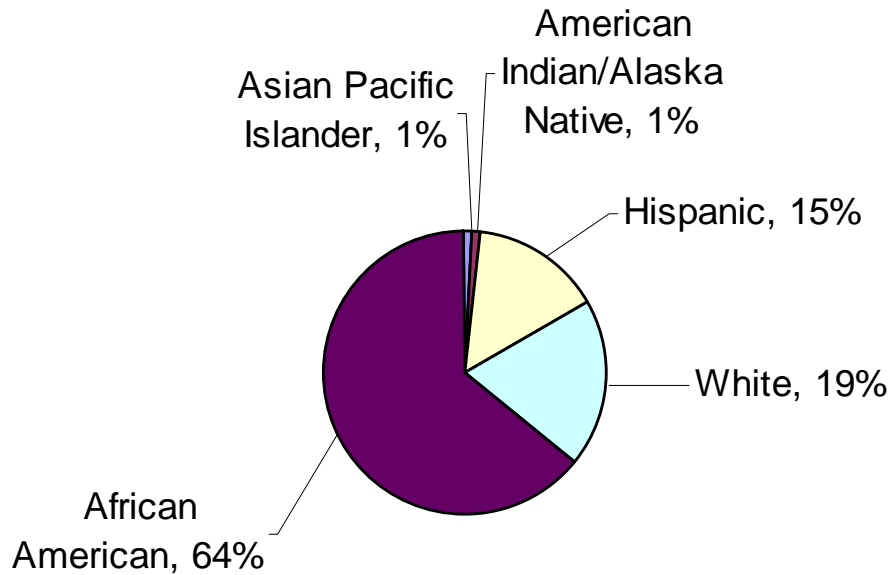
**Table 1: Comparative Number of African American Deaths**

War	Deaths
Revolutionary War	4,435
War of 1812	2,260
Mexican War	1,733
Civil War	184,594
Spanish American War	385
World War I	53,513
World War II	292,131
Korean War	33,651
Vietnam War	47,369
Gulf War	148
Excess deaths for Blacks (annually)	65,960

SOURCE: United States Civil War Center (2002)

More specific to this study, it is acknowledged that African Americans are contracting HIV, and subsequently dying from AIDS, at a faster rate than the general population as illustrated in Figure 1 below.

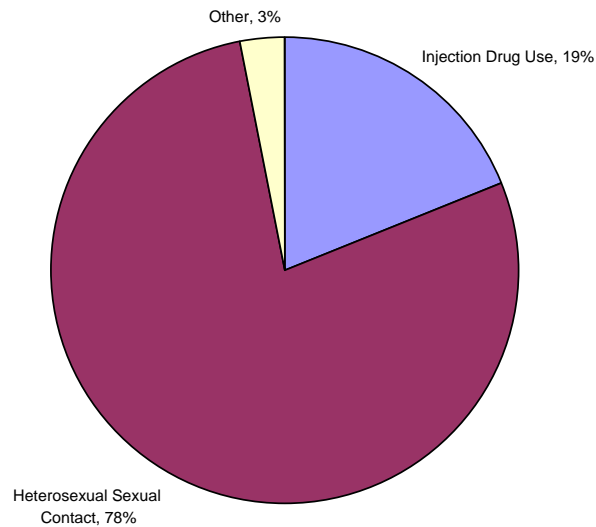




**Figure 1: Ethnicity of Individuals Living with HIV/AIDS. Source: (CDC 2006)**

Statistics paint a particularly disturbing picture for African American females, due to the fact that they account for a disproportionate number of HIV/AIDS infections relative to other social groups (Phillips 2005), and 75% of new HIV/AIDS cases within the larger African American population. An important note gleaned from the HIV/AIDS literature is that male sexual contact is the dominant gateway through which the virus enters the African American female population (almost 80% of new female HIV/AIDS cases come from heterosexual contact {See Figure 2}). The Center for Disease Control (CDC), states that HIV/AIDS is among the top 4 causes of death for African American women aged 25–54 years, and the number 1 cause of death for African American women aged 25–34 years (CDC 2006). In 2001, HIV/AIDS was among the top three causes of death for African American men 25-54 years of age, and of persons diagnosed with AIDS since 1995, a smaller percentage of African Americans (60%) were alive after nine years

compared with whites (70%), due in part to late diagnosis (Health 2007). With these grim statistics in mind, the African American population was selected to be the focal point of this research. See Appendix A for HIV/AIDS statistics within the continental United States.



**Figure 2: Female HIV/AIDS Infection Rates. Source: (CDC 2006)**

*African American Identity: The Tie That Binds*

African Americans are not a monolithic group within American society. They are distinguishable along gender, class, age, socioeconomic lines, with these lines often bleeding into each other. However, when it comes to African American identity development, we find that there exists one similarity that acts as a “tie that binds” most, if not all, African Americans together. This tie is racial-ethnic identity. Identity development has been described as a cognitive process by which an individual establishes a relationship with a reference group, with the group being capable of influencing the individual’s world view through adoption of group values and goals (Greenwald 1988;

Thompson and Akbar 2003). It is posited by Cross et al, that identity development among minorities in general, and African Americans in particular, differ from their peers in the majority (Cross 1995). The historical oppression of African Americans is one factor that helps to demonstrate and explain the unique characteristics of African American identity formation.

America has a seemingly permanent system of racial meanings and stereotypes that permeates its culture (Omi and Winant 1986), which affects the life path of all Americans (Sanchez and Carter 2005). Race relations, as they relate to African Americans and other ethnic groups, is often strained, with other ethnic groups viewing African Americans as the “Others”, which carries the baggage of suspicion, hostility and anger (Keating and Robertson 2004). In fact, popular discourses show that blacks are often constructed as threats that should be feared (Pain 2001; Keating and Robertson 2004).

African Americans at some point become aware of themselves as objects of oppression within American society, and their attitudes towards themselves, their minority group, and members of other minority or majority groups crystallize to form a core sense of identity (Crawford, Allison et al. 2002). This identity includes coming to a point of positive and personal understanding that one’s cultural heritage influences who one is, and being an African American serves as the primary reference group to which one belongs (Helms 1993; Crawford, Allison et al. 2002). The American experience tends to create a protective psychological “banding together”, or psychological unification, of individuals of African American descent, who may vary a great deal in their experiences and cultural expressions, to protect against insults in a racist society

(Sellers, Smith et al. 1998). The African American Church has played an integral role in this protective process against racism, and has also helped to cultivate black solidarity and empowerment by using a belief in a powerful “Other” as an anchor.

#### *African American Identity and the Religious Institution*

The Church is a religious institution that has occupied a central part of African American society due to the group’s history of slavery and oppression in America. Religion is defined as a “institutionalized system of attitudes, beliefs, and practices through which people manifest their faith and devotion to an ultimate reality or deity” (Kelly 1995). The adoption of a religious belief system enables one to develop a “worldview”, which is pivotal in the development of identity, and how one feels connected to society (De haan and Schulenberg 1997; Sanchez and Carter 2005). Institutions, such as religion, are built to sustain this worldview and resist change, and have been defined as:

*“Social structures that have attained a high degree of resilience. [They] are composed of cultural-cognitive, normative, and regulative elements that, together with associated activities and resources, provide stability and meaning to social life.”(ISWorld 2007).*

These institutions can be observed and analyzed on several levels ranging from localized interpersonal relationships, to worldwide systems, and consist of rules that are borne from public opinions, laws, and history. This “institutionalization” determines what is considered “normal”, and dictates how things are “supposed to be”. Deviation from the norm is discouraged, and those in violation are frowned upon.

Churches have traditionally served as the community support center for black Americans in need, however, many black churches refuse to discuss or provide support

for HIV/AIDS programs because they view it as a conflict of church values. These churches view the contraction of the HIV virus as a consequence of behaviors that are stigmatized within their religious communities, framed within the context of sin and immorality. These behaviors include: promiscuity, homosexuality, or drug use (Baker 1999). As such, many churches view community awareness programs that deal with needle exchange, education on condom use, or dental dams, as an unacceptable option (Baker 1999).

When it comes to church, African Americans report comparatively higher levels of attendance at religious services, read more religious materials, monitor more religious broadcasts, and seek more comfort in religion than their White counterparts (Sanchez and Carter 2005). Given their history (expanded upon in subsequent sections) it should come as no surprise that African Americans seek direction and guidance from the pulpit on issues such as HIV/AIDS. The influence of this dominant institution has shaped and perpetuated the belief that HIV/AIDS is a consequence of sin or immoral behavior.

#### *Purpose and Contributions of Study*

Although HIV/AIDS is a critical area of study within this dissertation, it should not be conflated with the essential purpose of this study, which is to study if technology, more specifically blogging, is used to create virtual “third place” communities as described by Oldenburg, to rebuild lost communicative elements of “real-world” community. As stated earlier in this dissertation, HIV/AIDS is a leading cause of death in the African American community, and yet is not discussed at length by the community at large. This can be attributed in part to the intuitional stigma attached to the disease, precluding healthy discussions of prevention and coping. Technology, and the relative anonymity

associated with online interactions, provides a means to mitigate the stigma found in the real world, and affords individuals of similar mindsets a place to gather (albeit virtually) and discuss issues without fear of social sanction. The study was undertaken through virtual ethnography using content analysis<sup>1</sup> of conversations of HIV/AIDS found on the internet weblog (blog) site Black America Web (BAW) ([www.blackamericaweb.com](http://www.blackamericaweb.com)) See the website's front-page in Figure 3 below.



**Figure 3: Black America Web FrontPage**

For added context, the researcher searched the extant literature of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, and constructed a framework that detailed the factors that were referenced as significant to the promulgation on the virus within the African American community. This provides further insight into the salient issues addressed in the online conversations,

<sup>1</sup> Content analysis seeks to determine the different meanings that data, printed matter, images, or sounds have to different people within the context of its use.

and reveals the urgency of developing a third place community. The framework highlights the demographical information that are thought to color most of the online conversational references in some form or fashion, and it is believed that by elucidating these factors, it will be easier to determine if some form of communicative community rebuilding is being performed (i.e., venting, explaining, consoling, etc.). This framework is detailed in Chapter 2 of this dissertation.

### *Importance of Study*

Research involving the internet and its social consequences is still in its infancy, and as such there is a shortage of research on the social uses of the internet (Hornsby 2001; Bargh 2002). This research seeks to fill this void, and add support to Kiesler, who highlights that the importance of studying technology (and blogs) lies in the uniqueness of the social interactions the internet inspires, and not strictly for its technological attributes. Individual wellbeing, and the provisions of community, are highly pertinent to the research on the social consequences of the internet, because community/social support is positively linked with quality of life (Haythornthwaite 2000; Hlebec, Manfreda et al. 2006).

As stated earlier, Churches have traditionally served as the community support center for black Americans in need, however, many black churches refuse to discuss or provide support for HIV/AIDS programs because they view it as a conflict of church values. Nonetheless, the need for community support remains a vital necessity for humans, because we are, by nature, social beings, and not having an outlet to discuss pressing issues degrades vital aspects of community. The stance of the black church as it

pertains to HIV/AIDS discussion and support necessitated the rise of a new community communicative outlet, found in blogs.

Kiesler gives communicative examples of how the internet can be used as a source for community/social support, formation of friendships, debates, etc (Kiesler 1997), and it is with these insights that the researcher seeks to explore the social, cultural, and “third place” community building aspects of the internet, specifically blogs, as it pertains to African Americans. This research is timely and germane as we see the gap closing between white internet users and their African American counterparts, both male and female. This holds implications that the internet may someday be as widely used as the telephone, which also evidenced a “divide” between haves and have-nots in its early inception (DiMaggio and Hargittai 2001).

#### *Research Objectives*

The study attempts to determine whether or not the African American social group utilizes technology to create virtual “third place” communities to address issues that have been inadequately addressed by mainstream African American institutions, due to social taboos. The claim of communicative community rebuilding via virtual third places, shall either be accepted or rejected through empirical content analysis according to categories derived from Oldenburg (1999). The proposed study adds insight in that:

1. *It seeks to determine if, and if so, why, weblogs frequented by predominantly African Americans can be considered “third place” communities*
2. *It adds to the comparative literature of Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) through content analysis and virtual ethnography.*



Data for these research questions was collected through ethnographic observations of several blog sites, utilizing individual blog posts as units of analysis. These posts were analyzed using content analysis, to determine their meanings within the overall content of the discussion at hand. It is believed that the analysis answers the question of whether or not communicative community rebuilding is occurring in a virtual environment. The findings in the study will be applicable to the social analysis of groups, and how technology both hinders and fosters virtual third place community building, and potentially its accompanying communicative communal support. Finally the study will examine if characteristics of third places are present in the online community, namely: that they are on neutral ground, they are levelers, conversation is the main activity, they are accessible, they have “regulars”, and the mood is playful.

The dissertation continues as follows: Chapter 2 presents the literature review, while Chapter 3 provides the theoretical foundation. Chapter 4 identifies the research methodological approach, Chapter 5 details the results, while Chapters 6 and 7 comprise the discussion and conclusion, respectively.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter begins by presenting a description of the phenomena known as the “digital divide”, and provides conceptualizations on the notions of technology, the people who use this technology, and the information gained by these people from using the technology. Weblogs and their different forms are also detailed, as well as descriptions of what constitutes a community (whether physical or virtual), and how “third places” play a role in this community structure. Following that, there is discussion on the difference between supportive and unsupportive social support systems, and how the African American Church served as a traditional support system for members of the community, but failed in regards to addressing the HIV/AIDS crisis. The relation between this failure and the subsequent rise of blogs as a means of communal discussion and support is introduced, and finally a framework is presented that contextualizes HIV/AIDS promulgation factors along economic, social, psychological, behavioral, and cultural lines.

### *The Digital Divide*

Past research has shown that there exists a chasm between individuals who have access to information via computers and the internet, and those that do not. This chasm has resulted in a corresponding gap between the information rich and the information poor, the haves and the have-nots. This phenomenon has been described in literature as the “digital divide”. The digital divide was first observed as distinct group clusters most likely to use the internet, namely: white, men, residents of urban areas, greater access to education, income and other resources necessary to get ahead (Norris 2000; Mossberger, Tolbert et al. 2003; Kvasny and Keil 2006).

Debates and research about the digital divide are categorized into two broad categories, namely policy studies and social impact studies, with the policy approach emphasizing technological capabilities of computing devices, and the adoption of ICT by “have-nots” if provided with access, basic computing skills, and an understanding of the potential benefits of ICT (Kling 1980; Kvasny and Keil 2006). The social impact study approach refers to the segmented institutionalist perspective, where the digital divide is shaped by a complex web of social, political, historical and cultural factors (Kling 1980; Kvasny and Keil 2006). This research is conducted utilizing the social impact approach.

Emerging technology has been feared to increase the perceived inequality between the information haves and the information have-nots by virtue of their online, or offline, status (DiMaggio and Hargittai 2001). A study by Mossberger and Tolbert et al. (2003) showed that individuals with household incomes of greater than \$75,000 had an internet connection rate of 77.7%, while those with household incomes of less than \$15,000 had connection rate of 12.7%. The same study showed that there is a high correlation between divides in access and divides in skills, one often feeding the other. This can be more clearly delineated when one considers that individuals without computer skills have no need for computers, and this lack of computer usage leads to less opportunity to develop skills through practice, or trial and error.

DiMaggio and Hargittai describe five broad forms of inequality that they deem as critical. These forms are (DiMaggio and Hargittai 2001):

1. Technical means, i.e., inferior (or superior) hardware and connections to access the web. Presumably more inferior equipment will stifle the internet experience, and will prohibit full access to the range of information on the web.
2. Autonomy, i.e., does access to the internet occur in a monitored or unmonitored setting. The setting may be determined by the flexibility or hours an individual may be allowed to access the internet.
3. Skill, i.e., do individuals know what to search for when they access the internet.

Internet users are found to vary along four dimensions of relevant knowledge:

- a. Recipe knowledge that deals with logging on, conducting searches, and downloading information
  - b. Background knowledge, which is useful for Web users but not specific to Internet use
  - c. Integrative knowledge on how the Web operates, that may help users navigate more effectively, i.e., domain names, etc.
  - d. Technical knowledge about software and hardware
4. Variation in the purposes of technology use, i.e., how do factors such as gender, age, income or education affect the purposes for which one may use the internet.
  5. Social support, i.e., individuals within the participants social circle (e.g., family and friends) that encourage internet use. These social support groups serve as a resource to draw upon when the individual user reaches the limit of his or her own skill. In addition, these groups serve as an emotional reinforcement mechanism

when problems are encountered, and provide positive interest when things proceed well.

Although African Americans are the largest single ethnic minority group online with about 21 million users (61% of the African American population), they are still considered proportionately ill-represented in regards to online status when compared to other groups (Kretchmer and Carveth 2001; Pew 2006). This study deals with an arguably privileged portion of African Americans who find themselves on the positive side of the digital divide.

Blogs were considered a suitable data source to study the African American social group because there is a unique window of opportunity presented in social research, which posits that technology is used as a “reaching up” tool for African Americans, where this population views the internet as an information source more so than their white counterparts (Wilkins 1999; Spooner and Rainie 2000; Cotten and Gupta 2004). Additionally, it has been stated that when it pertains to African Americans in general, we find that it is not an issue of them not “getting” information technology. In fact, we see that they are more highly motivated than most other social groups to learn how to use technology when given a chance (Mossberger, Tolbert et al. 2003). African Americans are more likely than their white counterparts to use the internet to search for information about major life issues, such as employment, training for the job, research for school, housing location, and religious/spiritual issues. African Americans are also more likely to use the internet for entertainment purposes, such as downloading music, instant messaging, or playing games (Kretchmer and Carveth 2001). This is aligned with the findings of Selwyn (Selwyn 2003) who argues that people use the internet when there are

perceived social benefits attached to it, and conversely, people opt out of using the internet when they do not perceive it having any relevance in their lives .

### *Conceptualizations of Technology*

Orlikowski and Iacono (Orlikowski and Iacono Jun 2001) clustered specific conceptualizations and set of assumptions of information technology into five broad meta-categories, namely: Proxy view, Computational view, Nominal view, Ensemble view, and Tool view. For the purposes of this dissertation the tool view is the chosen conceptualization, because it is believed that members of the African American community use technology as a tool to “reach out” to other members of the community of similar mindsets for collective discussions on the subject of HIV/AIDS. Each conceptualization of technology is discussed below, providing a basis of understanding for why they were not chosen as a technological orientation for the study.

### *Proxy View of Technology*

The proxy view of technology states that a computing resource, whether a particular piece of equipment or software, is best conceptualized using one of three “labels” to capture, or represent the essential aspect, property or value of the ICT. The three proxies in presented in IS literature are: measures of individual perceptions (cognition or attitude), diffusion or penetration rates, or dollars spent.

Individual perception focuses on the importance of human understanding of technology, such as ease of use, or utility of features. How a user perceives the technology influences how they explain its effects on the world. Diffusion and penetration rates of technology pertain to how quickly the technology spreads through firms, industries and economies, and how they become integrated into their day to day

operations. Monetary measures of technology pertain to how much money is spent developing or implementing the technology within a firm or economy. It is assumed that the amount of money spent, or the operational dollars saved, from utilizing a technology is a useful indicator of its value (Orlikowski and Iacono 2001). This view of technology was not chosen, because the researcher is not seeking to determine the value of technology per se, rather, it is the conversations fostered by this technology that is of central importance.

#### *Computational View of Technology*

The computational view of ICT focuses on the computational power of information technology, that lend themselves to supporting, processing, modeling, or simulating aspects of the world. There are two schools of computational views that are of importance. The first is the development of algorithms and code by researchers to exhibit the power of the technology when applied to particular areas of interest, and the second involves the creation of computational programs that can simulate real world events to test particular research questions of interest (Orlikowski and Iacono 2001). This view of technology was not chosen, because the researcher is not seeking to determine the computational power of the various technology used, because again, it is the conversations fostered by this technology that is of central importance.

#### *Nominal View of Technology: Technology as Absent*

The nominal view of technology states that a computing resource, whether a particular piece of equipment or software, is conceptualized, or invoked in “name only, but not in fact”. This means that technology may be referred to on paper, but in reality there is no use described, conceptualized or theorized. In analysis, the technological artifact is

neither a dependent or independent variable, rather it is an omitted variable (Orlikowski and Iacono 2001). Sawyer et al state that the conceptualization of ICT by this group does not provide a definition or operational depiction of what is meant. The ICT is named in many of these cases, but its features, functions, model or proxy are not defined (Sawyer and Chen 2002). This view of technology was not chosen, because the use of the technology to participate in conversations is central to the dissertation, and as such the technological artifact has to be conceptualized and theorized, as this section attempts to do. Thus, rather than being an omitted variable, technology is considered a critical dependent variable, enabling rich, communal discussions online.

#### *Ensemble View of Technology*

The ensemble view focuses on the dynamic interactions between people and technology, and often focuses explicitly on how a particular ICT is used. This use can be during construction of the ICT, or its implementation, as well as its use within organizations or the general societal population. The ensemble view of technology states that a computing resource, whether a particular piece of equipment or software, does not stand alone. It states that technology is best conceptualized as a “package”, which includes components that allow the application of the artifact to some socio-economic activity. This package has been referred to as a “web of computing”, which includes the technological artifact, training, support services, policies, skilled staff, and incentives for use. This web amounts to an “assembly of forces” or “systems of alliances” which collaborate to develop and ensure a technological artifacts existence (Orlikowski and Iacono 2001). This view of technology was not chosen, because the researcher is not seeking to determine the application of the technological artifact to some socio-economic



activity, because it is believed that the conversations found online for this study rarely involve any economic transactions.

### *Tool View of Technology*

The tool view states that the ICT performs in the way that its creators or designers intended for it to perform, and as such it is seen as mostly technical in nature with direct effects. This is the most prevalent view of ICT. The tool view of technology also posits that a computing resource, whether a particular piece of equipment or software, is best conceptualized as an artifact that provides specifiable information processing capabilities. These capabilities are represented in IS literature as being either: a labor substitution tool, a productivity enhancing tool, an information processing tool, and a social relations changing tool (Orlikowski and Iacono 2001).

It should be stated that technological artifacts cannot transmit information, because information is defined as “data with meaning” (Callaos and Callaos 2002), and this meaning can only be created by the individual who receives, perceives and evaluates this data according to information and knowledge already embedded within them. It is from the tool view of ICT (specifically the social relations changing perspective) that the researcher analyzed the problem domain, and the specific tool used is via a technology commonly referred to as weblogs.

### *Weblogs*

Weblogs are defined as “frequently modified web pages in which dated entries are listed in reverse chronological sequence” (Herring, Scheidt et al. 2005), and this form of online activity has grown exponentially over the last seven years, due to the main-stream media focus on the grass-roots power of blogs as an alternate source of news, and blogging

software becoming easier to use (See Appendix B for a discussion of blog growth and the “State of the Blogosphere” taken from Technorati). Blogs cover a myriad of topics, with each site containing its own norms and conventions, a feature that separates it from other web practices. Blogs have no restrictions on what material can be posted, and can be easily accessed by commonly used web-browsers. Coupled with the unique features of the web, it allows anyone with access to a computer to publish their thoughts and let their voices be heard in a public setting (Blood October 2006).

At its most base level, blogs arose and enjoyed great success because people need to connect with others, and the communicative ease afforded by blogs is part of the social construction of reality that arises from the interaction of community members of similar mindsets (Milne 2004). A blog is similar to a journal in that it contains entries in chronological, or reverse chronological order, but it differs from a journal in that the entries are made public by virtue of the fact that they are published on the web. Unlike traditional journals, blogs can contain links to other sites or other blogs, and can support a wide array of web technologies, however it is the interaction of the participants of the specific web community that give blogs their uniqueness and distinction. The appeal of blogs is their unvarnished emotional sharing of self, in that the accounts that are posted are considered “real”, and have a personal touch that is often missing in traditional journalism outlets (Downing 1990).

It is currently estimated that there are more than 2.1 million blogs worldwide, with 66% being actively maintained (Herring, Scheidt et al. 2005). Weblogs have been valued by readers because of their news filtering nature, which in essence pre-surfs the countless pages on the web, and highlights the articles or issues that may be of interest to

specific readers. These blogs also serve as a virtual location for the initial poster, or subsequent posters, to disseminate, interpret, or provide additional facts, alternative views or commentary on a subject matter (Blood October 2006).

According to Bon von Sternberg of the *Sun Tribune*, the rise of blogs was fueled by the attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 “because bloggers were frustrated by the performance of the mainstream media and wanted to grab control of the information flow...without relying on the media’s self-appointed gatekeepers” (Von Sternberg 2002). This newfound control afforded by blogs acts as a means of connecting individuals of similar mindsets, which helps resistors feel empowered, even though their subordinate class position may not change (Bird 1992). As stated by Bausch (2002), “Weblogs provide an alternative to the corporate-produced content found online, and offer up their very own web-based versions of reality programming. Weblog posts, with all their misspellings and typos, and unedited rush of emotion, resonate with readers searching for that authentic human experience online.”

### *Types of Blogs*

There are typically three types of blogs classified in literature (Bausch, Haughey et al. 2002; Kornblum 2003), namely:

1. Format blogs
2. Content blogs
3. Community or Group style blogs

### *Format & Content Blogs*

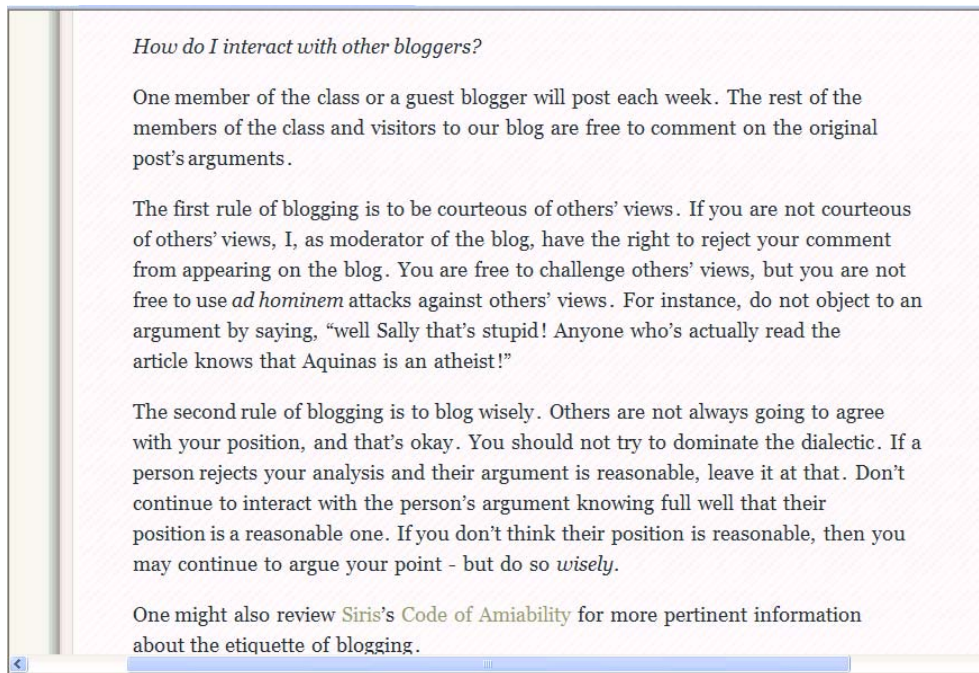
Format blogs are identified by the way text is structured and posted, characterized by short bursts of text and journal, while content blogs are categorized by the contents of the

postings themselves, characterized by being link-driven, single topic news opinion, journal or photoblog. Content blogs can be further deconstructed as being either personal weblogs, or filter weblogs, with a personal weblog being defined as “a reflection of its author, and provides a view into the writer’s life and mind through the content the author chooses to reveal and share with the audience” (Bausch, Haughey et al. 2002). Conversely, filtering blogs are blogs that filter and sift through the vast amounts of information on the web, and are of value to those who wish to eliminate the “pre-packaged” information that is frequently presented by mainstream media, and opt instead for news or information that is often overlooked, interesting, unexpected, and important (Barger 2001). These blogs are often specialized, focusing on specific topics of interest, and the use of the news articles posted on the blogs is used as a cornerstone for continued commentary on the subject of interest (Blood 2002).

### *Community Blogs*

A third type of blog is the community or group style blog, which share many of the same qualities of filter and journal blogs, but differ in the sense that more than one person posts thoughts or links. The links placed on community blogs are stories that participants feel will be of interest to others, and the ensuing discussion based on a “thread”, or posting, give these blogs the “feel of a real community gathering” (Kornblum 2003). These blog sites have their own customs and etiquette, with newcomers often urged to avoid adding commentary or links until they have spent a number of days getting a good sense of the community maintenance in order to prevent breaching community etiquette or posting a faux pas (Loft 2004). These community blogs often have a etiquette and policy page that focuses solely on comments, questions, complaints, etc. that serve as a forum for

participants to discipline or criticize other community members. An example of an etiquette page is illustrated in Figure 4 below.



**Figure 4: Example of Online Etiquette Page<sup>2</sup>**

In a May 1999 article on Slashdot, Katz noted that newcomers to web communities who were not conversant on the means of seeking and acquiring information may anger some individuals who already dwell in these virtual environments. He states that "They don't know as much, ask stupid questions, speak a different language. Intruders, they throw the ecological balance out of whack" (Katz 1999). It is these community blogs that were the focus of this research.

### *Conceptualization of Information*

The word community is derived from the root word "commune", meaning the interchange of ideas or sentiments<sup>3</sup>, which often relies on verbal or textual dialogue for

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<sup>2</sup> <http://oohlah.wordpress.com/blog-etiquette/>

<sup>3</sup> [www.dictionary.com](http://www.dictionary.com)

fodder. Despite the outsiders who may occasionally throw a virtual community “out of whack”, these spaces house a wide spectrum of unique individuals, each one providing their own “data” on a myriad of issues. Through subjective understanding and personal spin, this “data” becomes “information” as individual members of the community see it. Whether or not the “information” found on the blog sites is accurate is beyond the scope of this study. This stand is taken because there has been no absolute convergence of a definition of “information” across or within IS research communities, and indeed, the word has vastly different meanings within other research disciplines and communities. Of import is whether or not the expression of “information” within the virtual community allows the participant to express their feelings on the HIV/AIDS epidemic without fear of shame. In other words, the community aspect of dialogue is what the researcher focuses on.

Information is often referred to as “interpreted data”, which would signify that different individuals viewing the same data may “interpret” it differently. This “interpretation” is of course dependent on the subject’s internal reasoning, experiences, state of mind, etc. By definition, an “interpretation” is subjective, or dependent/related to the subject (Callaos and Callaos 2002). Other researchers have defined information as “meaningful data”(Mingers 1997; Callaos and Callaos 2002), but Callaos 2002 et al state that the conclusion drawn from this definition leads back to subjectivity, because it can be restated as “data plus significance”, or “data plus the thing conveyed by it in the mind”. This information is something that ought to be in the mind of a person or a subject, and is therefore subjective (Callaos and Callaos 2002). “Information”, then, is comprised of two entities: (1) data, which is objective in nature and (2) the information,

which is subjective in nature. The data is transformed to information by means of a person's perceptions or interpretations of what he or she is seeing. Another way of stating this would be say that information is provided when data answers an explicit or implicit question made by the data receiver (Floridi 1999).

Following the direction of Sawyer et al, information can be classified as object, as embedded, or naively. Descriptions of each of the views is as follows (Sawyer and Chen 2002):

1. *Object*: When information is viewed as object, it is thought of as a discrete entity that can be passed from sender to receiver with no diminishment of value. It can also be thought of as an entity that can be stored and retrieved at a later time, existing and understood on its own merits.
2. *Naively*: With this view of information, the explicit meaning of the word "information" is not stated on one hand, and on the other hand there may be many implicit meanings of the word with no encompassing discourse of the conceptual issues.
3. *Embedded*: The embedded view of information states that the referenced information is embedded within a larger entity. This information can be co-constructed through discussions, resulting in the development of collective meaning, or can be embedded into the design of organizational structures, such as organizational information processing.

For the purposes of this dissertation information is viewed as being embedded, and information seeking is considered a dynamic process of sense-making by the individual.

### *Use of Technology to gain “Information”*

Data can be efficiently transmitted through technological artifacts, and this data could potentially be effectively translated into meaningful information by users with access to a computer console and an internet connection. The increased accessibility of information, and the ability to publish online (a key tenet of blogging), means that groups, or subgroups, that have historically been disadvantaged, now have a chance to add their collective voice to the myriad of discourses occurring daily online. Active authorship serves as an ideal for participation in the information society, because communities can use ICT to pursue self-defined goals as well as to create collective meaning through social support and communication (Gurstein 2003).

According to Brock (2006), the formulations of technological illiteracy and digital divides that have typically been used to explain the slower internet adoption rates of Blacks are limited because they fail to consider the paucity of internet content relevant to Black interests. This lack of culturally relevant content has motivated African-Americans and other underserved groups to create their own content and to form their own communities for interaction online (Lazarus & Mora 2000). Hence, new opportunities emerge for research that examines the ways in which these underserved groups are harnessing the internet to support practices such as social support, information sharing, and content creation that reflect their worldview and experiences (Kvasny, 2006). We are seeing the manifestation of information and communicative technology (ICT) utilization by African Americans when we consider specific weblog sites such as “Crunk and Disorderly”<sup>4</sup> (<http://crunktastical.blogspot.com/>), Black America Web ([www.blackamericaweb.com](http://www.blackamericaweb.com)), Young, Black and Fabulous (<http://ybf.blogspot.com/>),

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<sup>4</sup> “crunk” is a euphemism for getting crazy and drunk



etc, that are geared toward this specific American ethnic group. See Appendix C for a more complete list of websites with an African American target audience.

In the “Information Age” these weblog sites can be relatively easily accessed, and filtered through, using general search engines such as Google, metasearch engines such as Dogpile, and specialized blog search engines like Technorati. This ability to access and filter through volumes of information means that social groups that have historically been disadvantaged now have a chance to connect with other like-minded individuals with minimal time, frustration or financial costs. In addition to accessing information already in existence, ethnic groups such as African Americans, now have the ability to simultaneously create and shape information that reflects aspects of what they perceive to be their own identity and culture, online. In other words, online communicators bring aspects of their ethnic identity online, thereby reproducing offline culture in online venues.

### *Conceptualizations of People*

The third construct in the IS triad is comprised of people who actually use, implement, or otherwise influence the acceptance or conflict of technology adaptation. There are three major conceptualizations of the people construct: (1) one being the characterization according to individual attributes, (2) the second being of an organizational or social nature, where the unit of analysis occurs in accumulation units that are greater than one (3) the third conceptual view of people is one of naïve, in which the construct has no credible theoretical foundation (Sawyer and Chen 2002). The researcher will focus on the group level of analysis, and how the African American community as a social group attempts to circumvent institutional factors that promote silence on the topic of

HIV/AIDS. This circumvention occurs through the creation of virtual online third places, and seeks to rebuild communicative aspects of community that have been deteriorated or destroyed in “real-world” African American communities.

### *Communities*

A community has been defined as “the interconnected relationships among people who share a common goal, neighborhood, and/or relationship” (Kurpius 2000). Another definition presented by Bellah et al, states “A community is a group of people who are socially interdependent, who participate together in discussion and decision making, and who share certain practices...it almost always has a history, and so is also a community of memory, defined in part by its past and its memory of its past” (Bellah et al, 1996).

There are typically two types of communities referenced in literature, namely: 1) Location communities, where groups live in close proximity (municipalities, neighborhoods, etc), and 2) Identity communities, which refers to groups of people who have a common identity other than location, and tend to interact regularly (professional communities, virtual communities etc.). This dissertation centers upon identity communities.

“Sense of Community” as defined by McMillan and Chavis (1996) is “a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members’ needs will be met through their commitment to be together.” Chavis et al (1996) posit that there are four elements to the “Sense of Community” that are listed as:

1. Membership

- a. Boundaries

- b. Emotional safety
  - c. A sense of belonging and identification
  - d. Personal investment
  - e. A common symbol system
2. Influence
  3. Integration and fulfillment of needs
  4. Shared emotional connection

### *Membership and Boundaries*

The term “membership” as used by Chavis et al (1996), denotes a type of boundary setting, that delimits “us” (members) from “them” (non-members), and this boundary establishes a sense of emotional safety and wellbeing that promotes self-disclosure and intimacy. Boundaries are things that are marked, and noticeable by members of a group, indicating who belongs and who does not. These markings may include dress, rituals, and languages, and allay fears by identifying who can be trusted as “one of us” (McMillan 1996). In cases where boundaries may not be lucid, outsiders may be held in contempt or lower regard (Chavis, Hogge et al. 1986). African Americans are an ethnic group based on shared history, traditions, aesthetics, religion, identity, and values that create in-group/out-group distinctions (Hecht, Collier et al. 1993). For African-Americans, group membership or identity is developed from a longstanding struggle against White domination. This historic struggle is marked by slavery, segregation, the great migration, the civil rights movement, and the Black power movement. This struggle lends itself to feelings of belonging, due to emotional investment and participation in “the struggle”, whether by direct involvement or by proxy.

### *Emotional Safety and Sense of Belonging*

The community must provide an atmosphere where individual members feel safe to speak the truth about how they feel, which is manifested as statements of his or her own internal experience. This “truth” is entirely subjective, because it is based on the honest representation of the person’s emotions, whether anyone else in the community agrees with it or not (McMillan 1996).

McMillan and Chavis (1986) denote an element of “sense of belonging” as an “expectation of belonging”, or “faith that I will belong”, which originates from within the individual member. This faith of belonging can be succinctly summed up by saying people bond with those whom they think want and receive them, and with this belief of welcome and fitting, comes a stronger attraction to that specific community of interest (McMillan 1996).

### *Paying Dues or Cognitive Dissonance*

Communities do not simply accept members without first determining their level of commitment and loyalty. The test of commitment level is labeled as “cognitive dissonance” by McMillan and Chavis (1986), and can be thought of as “paying dues” to the group. This “dues” paying enhances member confidence, as well as creating a sense of entitlement for the member, while simultaneously building loyalty to the group (McMillan 1996). Examples of “dues paying” can be found in church congregations, where sharing of personal testimony enhances ones status within the church community (Ingram 1986).

### *Influence*

McMillan and Chavis (1986) state that a community must be able to influence its members and its members must be able to influence the community in a symbiotic manner. This influence develops through trust, and trust is developed through the use of power, and knowledge of who has the power, when they use it, and why certain members do not have this power (McMillan 1996). This power dynamic must be settled within the community before it can grow, so that members know what to expect from each other, and order be established. This necessitates the development of community rules, norms, or laws, which subsequently enable members to predict plan and commit according to rule of order (McMillan 1996). Once order has been established, there needs to be authority allocated over members so that they know who is in charge, and order be maintained.

### *Reinforcement: Integration of Needs*

Reinforcement revolves around the premise that if people associate together, then it must be reinforcing to do so (McMillan 1996). In order for this group, or community, to remain stable there must be benefits that outweigh the cost of participation, which can be stated in colloquial terms as “getting something out of it” (Fine and Holyfield 1996). Groups of people who come together through common interests, magnify the pleasure derived from doing that activity, as opposed to individual engagement in the activity (Fine and Holyfield 1996). McMillan (1996) states that community rewards include status, competence, success, or member honor, but individuals mostly seek social settings where they can be themselves and free from shame. That being the case, he states that the greatest reward for joining a community is protection from shame (McMillan 1996).

Shame has been described as a primitive response to the breakdown of one's social presentation (Tantum 1990), and effective communities protect their members from shame in their social exchanges (McMillan 1996). Individuals seek out communities with people who they share similar traits, such as looking, feeling, or being, and it is then assumed by the individual that they can safely be themselves. Voluntary participation in such communities demands a sense of belonging, which is also referred to as group cohesion (Fine and Holyfield 1996).

#### *Shared Emotional Connection*

McMillan and Chavis (1986) state that shared emotional connection “seems to be the definitive element for true community”, and McMillan (1996) adds that “shared history becomes the community's story symbolized in art”. This “art” is provided by the community as a common symbol system to create boundaries between it and society at large. These symbols can be collective myths, symbols, rituals, rites, ceremonies, or holidays. A great example used by (Bernard 1973) and cited by McMillan (1996), are the symbols of “black power” such as the clenched black fist used by black leaders to unify the black community and defy white authority. Symbols such as this create a sense of belonging, and being part of something significant and important. In addition, members of the community must have a shared event, and not only shared, it must have a dramatic impact. Dramatic moments of tragedy that are redeemed by valor are events that are eligible to become community stories, which embody the community's ideals and customs (McMillan 1996). Examples of such dramatic events found within African American history are the civil rights marches during the 1960's, and the more contemporary September 2007 marches in Jena, Louisiana by tens of thousands of

African Americans, to protest the perceived judicial discrimination against 6 African American males.

### *Virtual Communities*

With the advent of the internet, we are seeing a movement away from the traditional depiction of communities build around geographic lines, and are seeing the emergence of “communities of interest”, or self-organizing virtual communities<sup>5</sup> that are borne of individuals who share similar interests on a topic, or topics, that is independent of their geographic location. Being that the World Wide Web is a global phenomenon, local issues are often deemed less relevant or interesting to larger society by definition. The result is that the majority of web communities that engage in activities, such as blogging, often do not cover local issues, because the physical location that used to be a constraint in pre-internet days, is now of no consequence (Milne 2004). In fact, physical locations are rarely mentioned because this may estrange individuals who are not in that particular area. As stated by Weinberger, “what holds the Web together isn’t a carpet of rocks [i.e., the physical Earth], but the worlds collective passion (Weinberger 2002). With this statement in mind, Milne (2004) provided a germane and useful working “technological” definition of community that suits the needs of this dissertation. According to Milne, “Community is a social technology for bonding people together through shared characteristics that leads to a sense of belonging”. Milne goes on to say that “community” also encompasses the people who are so bonded [technologically], and forming a community is a way to foster a sense of belonging, which serves a wide range

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<sup>5</sup> Also referred to as “On-line”, “Non-place based”, “Electronic”, “Computer Mediated Communication” (CMC), or “Chosen” communities.

of human needs and is the basic survival strategy for individuals and groups (Milne 2004).

Virtual communities are similar to physical communities in a spatial aspect, and like all communities they are socially constructed. These communities have their own collective sense, or cultural make-up, and possess the “substance” that enables shared experience and shared meaning among its members (Fernback 1999). It is important to note that the development and identity of virtual communities arises through interaction between the various participants themselves, with the logic being that a true “member” actively engages in dialogue with other members of the online community. Within this context of virtual communities, we find the aforementioned blogs, blogging, and the blogger, which are terms that can be used interchangeably as verbs or pronouns, and in the present or past tense, and refer to an individual(s) who helps maintain a site by adding commentary and links to a page (Bausch, Haughey et al. 2002).

### *Weblogs and Community*

Weblogs have been characterized as having a “community-like” nature to it, due to the inherent interactiveness of the posts, which allow readers to respond to individual entries, which fosters “conversational” exchanges on the blog site itself. Marlow (2004) states that “The weblog medium, while fundamentally an innovation in personal publishing, has also come to engender a new form of social interaction on the web: a massively distributed but completely connected conversation covering every imaginable topic of interest” [emphasis added] (Marlow 2004; Herring, Kouper et al. 2005). In reference to the aforementioned point, it is common for blog users to have full blown public conversations on a given subject, referencing one another’s positions in concurrence or



refutation. Readers and posters will often click between different conversation posts on a given subject, and formulate their own conclusions of the matter being discussed. This type of analysis requires the user to question the merits of what is being said and begin a journey of self-discovery and intellectual independence (Blood October 2006). Graham (Graham 1999) describes blogs as “a community, of sorts, a small town sharing gossip and news, recreation and sport, laughter and tears, all for the commonwealth.” The power of real social bonds of virtual communities was captured by one blog participant when he stated that “Weblogs are the first example I’ve encountered where people are meeting each other in masses, and forming real social bonds, the type of relation you’d call your friend...There’s a real sense of solidarity in the relationships we’re forming.”<sup>6</sup> (Bausch, Haughey et al. 2002). These virtual relationships may prove handy when individuals are faced with a myriad of pressures that may go unabated, with no source of social support systems upon which to lean, as evidenced by the HIV/AIDS epidemic, and its minimal discussion by African Americans in “the real world”.

### *Oldenburg’s “Third Places”*

The silence associated with HIV/AIDS by traditional African American institutions created a need to form social bonds in other arenas. This need provided fertile conditions for the rise of an alternate place to gather and discuss transcendent issues; such places are typically born out of a need, and can be labeled as “third places”. Every *stable* community is comprised of a first place (home), a second place (work), and a third place (informal gathering location). If one of these components is missing, it affects the stability of the community (Baker-Eveleth, Eveleth et al. 2005). The third place (bars,

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<sup>6</sup> Comments made by Cameron Marlow (Milne; Bausch)

cafes, barbershops, etc.) provides a context for sociability, spontaneity, community building and emotional expressiveness” (Oldenburg and Brissett 1982).



**Figure 5: A Neighborhood Bar, an Example of a Traditional Third Place**

Ray Oldenburg states that third places are sought out by individuals because the function it serves is missing from their lives; more specifically, a lack of community poisons an individual’s sense of well being (Baker-Eveleth, Eveleth et al. 2005), and people will seek an exogenous source to fill that void if needed. Within the framework of computer mediated communication there has been a realization that cyberspace (such as blogs, chatrooms, etc.) resemble types of social settings described by Oldenburg, providing an informal place where individuals gather to rebuild communicative aspects of community that may be lost (Soukup 2006).

*The African American Church: A Historic “Third Place”*

The black Church is the oldest, wealthiest, and most powerful institution in the black community, as well as being the first community or public organization that was completely controlled and owned by black people (Sernett 1999). According to W. E. B. DuBois, “The Negro church of today is the social center of Negro life in the United States, and the most characteristic expression of African character”(DuBois 1903). This position was affirmed by Booker T. Washington when he stated “The Negro Church

represents the masses of the Negro people. It was the first institution to develop out of the life of the Negro masses and it still retains the strongest hold upon them”(Washington 1909).



**Figure 6: First Black Baptist Church Founded in the Americas (1773)**

The black church was the first place to give members of the race opportunities to attain positions of recognition and be “somebody”, appreciated by their peers although they may be beaten down by life. Mays and Nicholson (1999) provide a narrative that illustrates the unique power of the Church in the black community:

*“A truck driver of average or more than ordinary qualities becomes the chairman of the Deacon Board. A hotel man of some ability is the superintendent of the Sunday church school of a rather important church. A woman who would be hardly noticed, socially or otherwise, becomes a leading woman in the missionary society. A girl of little training and less opportunity for training gets the chance to become the leading soprano in the choir of a great church. These people receive little or no recognition on their daily job. There is nothing to make them feel that they are “somebody”. Frequently their souls are crushed and their personalities disregarded...But in the church on X Street, **she** [emphasis] is Mrs.*

*Johnson, the Church Clerk, and **he** [emphasis] is Mr. Jones, the chairman of the Deacon Board.”(Mays and Nicholson 1999)*



**Figure 7: Mrs. Juliann Jane Tillman, Preacher in the Early A.M.E. Church**

In the past, the social conditions that Blacks found themselves under forced the black Church to become all things to all people, meaning it had to function as a social center, political forum, schoolhouse, mutual aid society, refuge from racism and violence, social support, and place of worship (Baker 1999; Mays and Nicholson 1999). In modern times, the African American Church continues to be actively engaged in education, social welfare, civic duties, business enterprises, in addition to being an outlet for social expression and social protest (Becker, Gates et al. 2004).



**Figure 8: Church Member Teaching African American Youth**

The African American church has been a place where African Americans gather for a sense of belonging, even if they are not religious. The African American Church within America was developed in rejection of the hypocrisy of White Christianity, and for the survival and advancement of African Americans who were denied access to White institutional way of life (Jones 1982; Becker, Gates et al. 2004). The African American Church has historically been a buffering force in combating feelings of nihilism, by helping African Americans create meaning and hope in adverse New World conditions (West 1993). During slavery, Church leaders were highly respected and often community leaders, using their church to bring the community together and bonding extended slave families, although it was forbidden by law at the time (Boyle 2002).



**Figure 9: Richard Allen (Center) Founder of A.M.E. Church. Surrounded by the Ten Bishops of the Church**

A recent study showed that African Americans are far more likely than other American social groups to believe in God, pray and attend religious services frequently.

Some of the results of the study are listed below (Engle 2005):

- 95 percent of African Americans believe in God, compared to 84 percent of Latinos, 78 percent of whites and 65 percent of Asian Americans.
- 91 percent of African Americans pray, compared to 75 percent of Latinos and 67 percent of whites.
- 53 percent of African Americans attend religious services frequently, compared to 42 percent of whites, 39 percent of Latinos and 35 percent of Asian Americans.
- 47 percent of African Americans have a high level of religious commitment, compared to 25 percent of whites and 22 percent of Asian Americans.

- 32 percent of African Americans have high levels of religious engagement, compared to 16 percent of Latinos and 19 percent of whites.

See Appendix E for a more complete breakdown of African American Church membership and involvement.

There are cultural factors that affect the nature and availability of social support systems, and consequently affect the psychological well-being of members of the African American community (Green 1993). Extant literature shows that relative to their White counterparts, African Americans tend to have more informal, communal and familial social networks (Neighbors 1985; Neighbors and Jackson 1987). However, when it pertains to HIV/AIDS, African Americans are less satisfied with the social support they receive, in contrast to their Caucasian counterparts. This lack of social support has been shown to have a positive association with greater levels of anxiety/tension, depression, and psychological stress (Gant and Ostrow 1995) suggesting that social support systems, or the lack thereof, provide independent negative contributions to psychological well-being.

*The African American Church: Failure of a Traditional Support System*

The church has traditionally encouraged members of their congregation to educate themselves, pushing the idea that education is a panacea that can cure all ills (Mays and Nicholson 1999). However, when it comes to HIV/AIDS education the church is silent and reluctant to respond (Smith, Simmons et al. 2005), even in the face of sharp criticism of the institution and its leaders (Baker 1999; Robinson-Jacobs February 21, 1998; Broadway May 27, 1995). As stated earlier in this dissertation, black churches have traditionally served as social support systems for black Americans in need, but many of

these churches refuse to discuss or provide social support for HIV/AIDS programs because they view it as a conflict of church values.

Oldenburg states that “to the extent that people live within the web of society, their environment is occupied and controlled by others, and the quality of relations with them reflects the health of individuals and society....social systems are also moral systems, which control, repress, and to a degree, oppress their members.” With this being the case, it becomes clearer that the silence of the church (with regards to HIV/AIDS) reflects an unhealthy position, because the dialogue elements of community and social support remain vital necessities, because humans by nature are social beings.

#### *Unsupportive Social Systems*

For the purposes of this dissertation, an unsupportive social interaction follows the definition put forth by Ingram et al as being “an unhelpful or upsetting response an individual receives from other people” (Ingram, Jones et al. 1999). Following Song et al we define four types of unsupportive responses that can be received from other people (Song and Ingram 2002):

1. Disconnecting, which is described as emotional or behavioral disengagement
2. Insensitivity, which is described as unsupportive behaviors of discomfort, avoidance, and lack of empathy
3. Blaming, which pertains to fault-finding and disapproval
4. Forced optimism, which are efforts of another person to impose a focus on the positive, and ignore or downplay the effects of HIV/AIDS.



### *Supportive Social Systems*

In order to arrive at workable categories of what would be considered “supportive social systems”, it was necessary to review the categories formulated by other authors, who had subjects that had challenging life experiences. The goal was to isolate social support categories that were germane to HIV/AIDS, and would serve as a practical guide to determine what forms of social support may be present online. The categories that were identified as evidence of social support were presented by Hays and Magee and include (Hays and Magee 1994):

1. Expressing love or concern, which is the most cited and valuable resource according to Hays and Magee. This construct pertains to expressing love, concern or other positive feelings for the individual through physical, verbal or behavioral gestures.
2. Providing encouragement, which pertains to positive or optimistic attitudes with ability to cope, or prospect of a brighter future.
3. Acting as a role model, which pertains to inspiring behaviors of individuals within the community, who motivate through leading by example.
4. Providing a philosophical or spiritual perspective, which pertains to adjusting the point of view from which an individual sees a situation, or putting the control of past, present, or future events in the hands of powerful, external others.
5. Providing information or advice, which pertains to discussing the ramifications or options available to an individual as it pertains to a given

situation, which may take the form of medical, physiological, spiritual, legal, economic, etc.

*Rise of Blogs as a Means of Communal Discussion and Support*

The aforementioned silence and lack of support systems drove the researcher to focus on unorthodox forms of media and community that was borne from resistance to the conventional media (print: books, magazines, and newspapers; electronic: sound recordings, radio and television; and chemical: film) (Vivian 1995; Vivian 1997). This media form presented itself in the form of the World Wide Web, more specifically blogs, which are often viewed as a means of resistance to the traditional, or mainstream, outlets (Downing 1990).

It is necessary here to note that third places bring together individuals in times of crisis, where the members find it necessary to help themselves beyond the help they receive from existing power brokers. HIV/AIDS serves as a particularly salient domain of concern for African-Americans, because this group is disproportionately impacted within American society. The figures stated in earlier portions of this dissertation bear repeating, in that black women account for 75% of new HIV cases within the African-American population (Phillips 2005), and 60% of new HIV infections among all women in the US (Centers for Disease Control, 2006). AIDS is the fourth leading cause of death for African-American women aged 25–54 years, and has been the leading cause of death for African-American women aged 25–34 years (CDC 2006). However, there is inadequate discussion of the disease by traditional or established African American power structures, which lends itself to the aforementioned functional value of blogs in

bypassing these power structures, and is preliminary evidence of the occurrence of some form of community mobilization taking place by African Americans at large.

*Black America Web: An African American Third Place on the Web*

The third place community that was studied for this dissertation can be found at [www.blackamericaweb.com](http://www.blackamericaweb.com). Black America Web was selected as a site of interest because of its close ties to the daily morning radio program, The Tom Joyner Morning Show, which in turn created the site to “develop, acquire and partner in quality media and marketing opportunities targeting the African American community”. According to the site, it seeks to "inform, entertain and empower" African-Americans through timely and credible news and information covering all aspects of daily life.

The Tom Joyner Morning Show is the centerpiece of REACH Media, and reaches more than 8 million listeners each week in more than 115 markets. Its online counterpart, [www.blackamericaweb.com](http://www.blackamericaweb.com), has more than 750,000 members and continues to see growth. These large numbers seen online are a consequence of the phenomenal success of the radio show, and have resulted in one of the largest virtual collection of African Americans on a daily basis.

*Online Anonymity*

When it comes to the subject of HIV/AIDS and the African American community, the web provides features that facilitate the process of third place building, not the least of which is the anonymity that it affords. Anonymity generally means that the real author of any message (weblog, email, rumor, book, etc.) is not shown, which can make it difficult to discern who the real author of the communication is. It is impossible to achieve complete anonymity in on-line or offline transactions, rather it is better framed within the

context of situations where it is more or less difficult to identify individuals (Johnson and Miller 1998). A variant of anonymity that is germane to this study is pseudonymity, where another name other than the author's is shown. The advantage of using a pseudonym is that it allows others to recognize different messages written by the same author, as opposed to "complete" anonymity (Palme and Berglund 2004).

Anonymity, or pseudonymity, allows individuals to vent their opinions without fear of retribution, and openly discuss personal issues that may be considered embarrassing in the physical world. In a seeming contradiction, individuals need a great deal of immunity from people they like the best and consider friends, and often only meet if they can easily enter and depart one another's presence (Oldenburg 1999). Virtual interactions prove to be the ideal setting for which this "ease of escape" may take place. Research also shows that anonymous individuals tend to divulge significantly more personal information about themselves (Joinson 2001), and receive more objective evaluation of their messages compared to when their real identity is revealed (Palme and Berglund 2004). This relative anonymity takes on added desirability and necessity as the world becomes evermore virtual and interconnected through the use of the internet and ICT's. As it pertains to HIV/AIDS, the ability to seek preventive or coping information is greatly enhanced and implicitly encouraged when there is no fear of public ridicule attached with it. Individuals may be able to provide real world scenarios that directly impact them, and can be relatively certain that the stigma found in the real world is greatly diminished or negatively present in the virtual world.

### *Social Identification*

Soukup (2006) describes the internet as a place where individuals go to take a “break” during their regular workday. Due to the relative anonymity afforded by the internet, these internet places allow individuals to construct and enact many different identities. Self and Identity have been classified as two separate but related constructs, which participate in social life through self presentation. “Self presentation” is defined as attempts by individuals to convey information about, and images of, the self and its identities to others (Valkenburg, Schouten et al. 2005), while “social identity construction” deals with how people define themselves in regards to the characteristics of the social group that they belong to (Kretchmer and Carveth 2001). A seminal history of internet identity research can be found in Turkle’s *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet* (Turkle 1995), and in this work she argues that in anonymous Multi-User Domains (MUD’s) people can disguise perceived marginal aspects of their identity that can lead to discrimination. These may include race, status, gender, or sexual orientation, and the user may find empowerment under the cloak of anonymity (Palme and Berglund 2004; Kennedy 2006).

### *Identity, Self, and HIV/AIDS Transmission*

To provide full context to the study, it is important to note that the author of this dissertation adheres to the belief that it is not simply sexual contact that causes HIV/AIDS, rather it is the absence of barriers and the presence of breaks in the skin during sex that facilitates the promulgation of the HIV/AIDS virus (Phillips 2005). However, there is also the belief that there are several underlying factors that are complicit, and in some cases enablers, of behaviors that place the individual at risk.

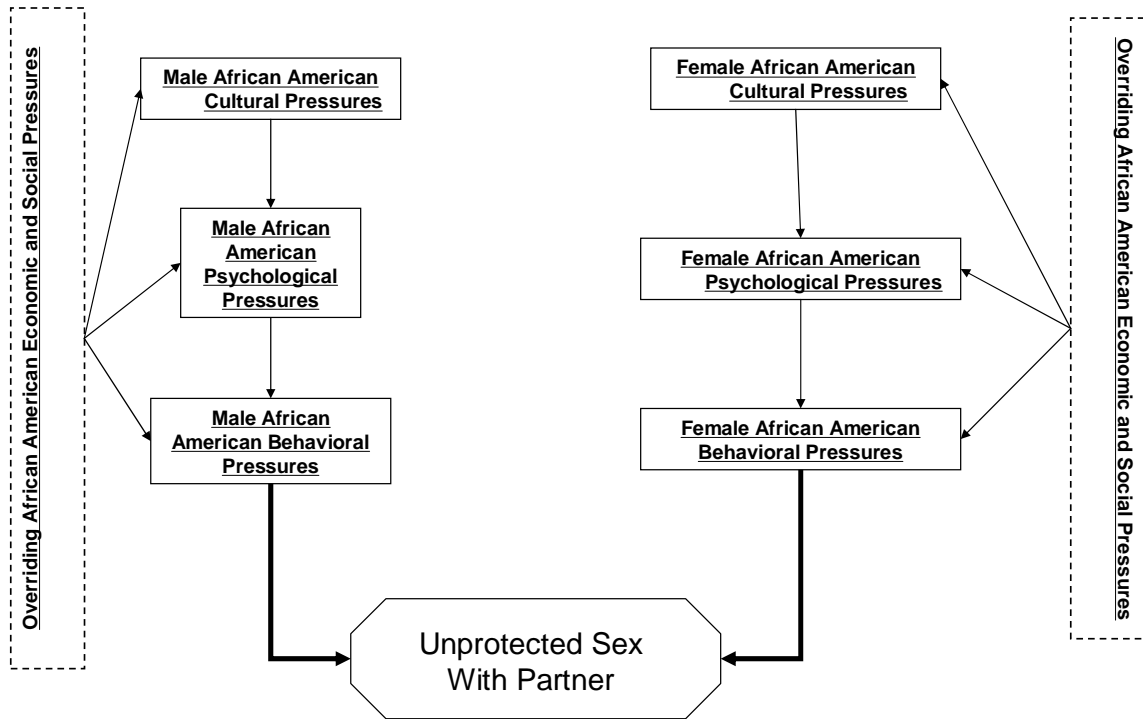
These factors take root and ultimately act upon an individual within that person's unique "self", and the effects may not be readily noticeable to people on the outside. Individuals are assumed to have one self, but many different identities. These identities are dynamic in nature, are under constant transformation, and vary across relational contexts (Kennedy 2006). Finkenauer et al (Finkenauer, Engels et al. 2002) state that: "Identity represents the aspect of the self that is accessible and salient in a particular context and that interacts with the environment" (Valkenburg, Schouten et al. 2005). While an individual may be able to hide elements of "identity" depending on the situation, the "self" is an inescapable state of being, where all factors, including psychological pressures or cultural influences, are laid bare in their purest form and may influence core behaviors, such as high-risk sex.

As research shows, the preponderance of new HIV/AIDS cases occur through careless interactions involving swapped body fluids, but a more nuanced analysis of the population most vulnerable to the disease shows that they are often victims of ambient factors that are beyond their control. The researcher has constructed a High-Risk Sexual Encounter Framework that details the cultural, psychological, cultural, economic, and social pressures faced by a significant number of African Americans, and acknowledged to exist by others, that leads many individuals from this community to engage in unprotected sexual activity.

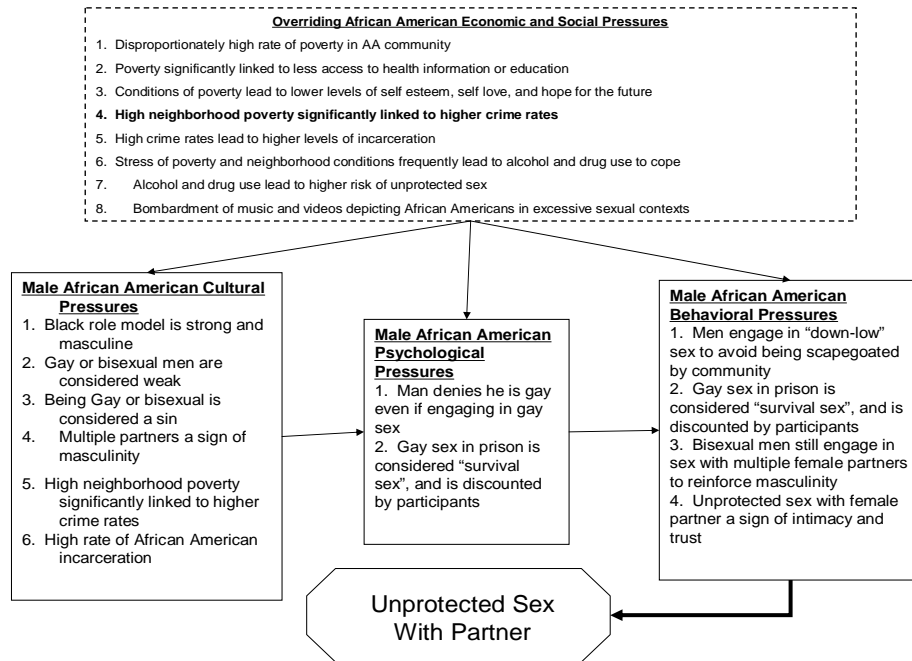
#### *Framing Real World HIV/AIDS Promulgation Factors*

The developed High-Risk Sexual Encounter Framework discusses the factors that are thought to be enablers in HIV/AIDS promulgation among both African American men and women as found in extant literature, and serves as an orienting and grounding

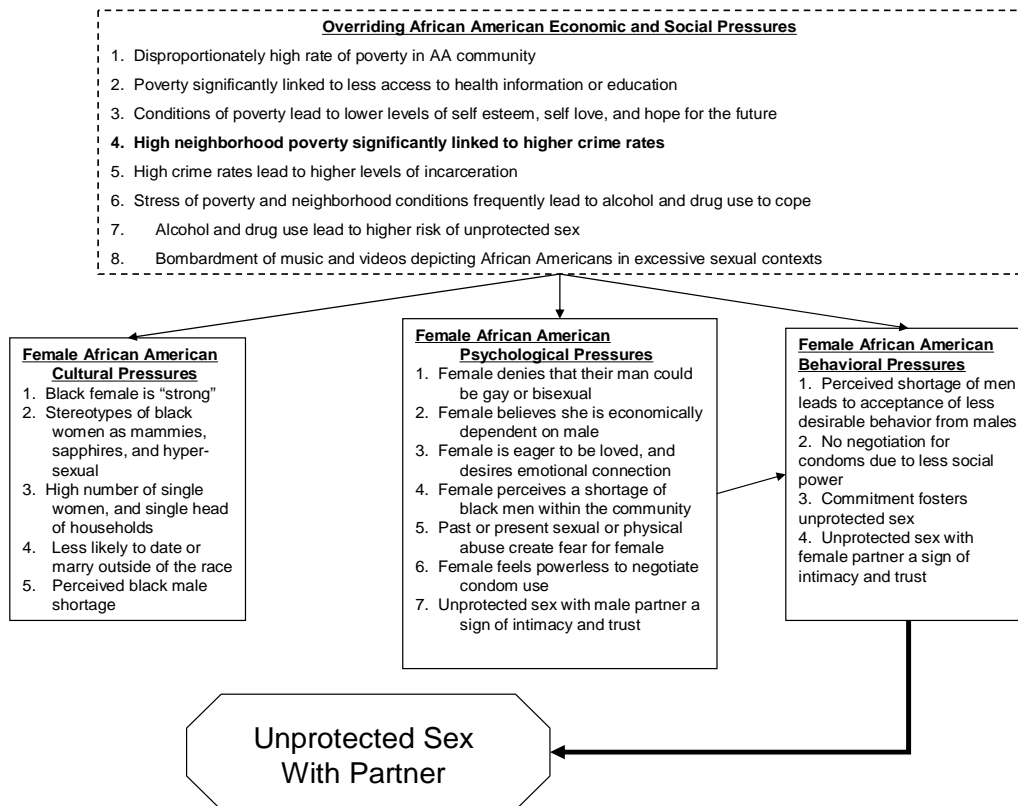
framework/context upon which to build. Figure 10 presents the framework in a macro-fashion, while Figures 11 and 12 present the same framework in more detail for males and females respectively.



**Figure 10: Factor Relationships (Macro Analysis)**



**Figure 11: Male Factor Relations (Micro Analysis)**



**Figure 12: Female Factor Relations (Micro Analysis)**



The framework postulates that individuals within the study population are bombarded by a host of overriding economic and social pressures that color the way in which they view the world and how they react to it. One could think of these socio-economic factors as constant sources of stress or tension within the lives of the subjects, exerting more or less pressure at any given time. Within these environmental factors lie the psychological and behavioral pressures, with the psychological being a driving force behind the behavioral. These factors shall be discussed in more detail in subsequent sections. The culmination of these pressures on the individual contributes to them succumbing to pressures of having unprotected sex with their partner, and thus leaving them susceptible to the HIV/AIDS virus.

### ***Environmental Contextualization: Economic and Social Pressures***

#### *Poverty*

It has been said that the root of the HIV/AIDS problem is poverty and the neglect that comes with it, because if an individual is focused on day-to-day survival, they may not place high premiums on activities that appear secondary. According to Phillips (2005), poverty is the number one “social address” factor associated with HIV/AIDS. She states that poor people contract HIV/AIDS at far greater rates than people who are economically privileged, and other studies corroborate this assertion, finding a significant association between higher AIDS incidence and lower income (CDC 2006).

#### *African American Interactions Spanning Socioeconomic Class*

In order to provide meaning to this dissertation, it behooves us first to define what it means to be “poor” or in “poverty”. Poverty is widely acknowledged to be a measure of *income* that indicates “inadequate” control over material resources (Fuchs 1993). In the

United States, this measure of income is commonly referred to as the “poverty” line, and in 2006 almost a quarter of African Americans were living in poverty (Harris 2006). See Appendix D for poverty statistics within the continental United States. The socioeconomic problems associated with poverty, including limited access to high-quality health care and HIV prevention education, which directly or indirectly increases HIV risk.

### *African American Poverty*

African Americans are disproportionately poor within the context of American society, with the median net worth of African Americans being \$5,988 compared to the net median net worth of \$88,651 for their white counterparts. Furthermore, 32% of African Americans have zero or negative net worth (Bailey 2005; Morial 2006). More telling of the widespread poverty within America is the fact that while African Americans constitute 13% of the population, they account for only 1.2% of the total net worth of the nation, a figure that has not changed since the end of the American Civil War of 1865 (Alford 1999; Morial 2006). The widespread poverty within the African American community proves to be an interesting intersection of the two issues that are negatively correlated with seeking healthcare services: race and income.

Research has shown that for both Black/White men and women, income is a strong indicator of health variance, with individuals that fall below the federal poverty line 4 to 7 more likely to have ill health than their high income peers. (Williams and Collins 2004). Poverty is highly correlated to race, needle sharing, unprotected sexual contact, lack of access to appropriate medical care, and lack of access to prevention and intervention (Phillips 2005). A North Carolina study of African American women found

that those infected with HIV/AIDS were more likely than non-infected women to be unemployed; receive public assistance; have had 20 or more lifetime sexual partners; have a lifetime history of genital herpes infection; have used crack or cocaine; or have traded sex for drugs, money or shelter (Andriote 2005; CDC 2005). Analysis of economic and health data between Whites and African Americans has shown a strong and parallel correlation between the widening or narrowing of economic status with the widening or narrowing of health status (Williams 2001; Williams and Collins 2004).

The black middle class take on the definition put forth by Pattillo-McCoy (2000), which qualifies it in two parts, the first using white collar employment as a marker, and the second being a median family income above a city's median income (Patillo-McCoy 2000). Noting the effects of the digital divide, and the increased likelihood that poorer African Americans will not have access to computers, and thus access to virtual third place sites, one may be tempted to believe that this research is germane only to middle and upper-middle class African Americans. However, this assumption would be false, because research has shown that interactions between African Americans spans class, with upper and middle income members of the community in frequent contact with poorer friends and family. The socioeconomic web of African Americans transcends the nuclear family that they themselves create, and reaches back to the families to which they were born, including siblings, extended family and friends (Pattillo 2006).

The accomplishments of an individual are comprised of the work and effort put forth by an individual, as well as the success or failures of those that surround the individual (Pattillo 2006). As such, if there are extended members of family that are struggling in a particular area, it adds strain to more successful family members who may

have achieved middle or upper-class status. While this class difference may threaten racial solidarity, they are mitigated by the “tie that binds” most African Americans, and that is of being black in America, with a shared history of oppression and racism (Pattillo 2006).

Although poverty is an important factor analyzed in this dissertation, it is studied in tandem with neighborhood effects and race, because research shows that there is a strong correlation between residential segregation and poverty, and an equally strong correlation between poverty and poor health, including HIV/AIDS transmission rates.

#### *Media Effects, Health, and Coping Mechanisms Within Low Income Neighborhoods*

A neighborhood has been defined as “*a subsection of a larger community- a collection of both people and institutions occupying a spatially defined area influenced by ecological, cultural, and sometimes political forces*” (Park 1916; Sampson, Morenoff et al. 2002). However, compared to other communities, poor and minority neighborhoods are under more constant bombardment from advertisements from the alcohol and tobacco industries as they attempt to sell their products (Williams and Collins 2004).

Studies have shown that there is indeed a relationship between lower socioeconomic status and poor mental and physical health (Turner, Donald et al. 1999; Latkin and Curry 2003) due in part to the chronic or “ambient” stress that occur from living in poverty or in neighborhoods where there is a constant threat of violent crime. These stresses are also significant causal factors for increased cases of depression (Ross 2000). This association has been linked to a concentration and uncontrollability of social stresses that are typical in impoverished neighborhoods, where individuals of lower socioeconomic status tend to reside. These stressors include homicide, suicide,

vandalism, graffiti, litter or trash, vacant housing, single parent families, public drunkenness, teenagers hanging out, burglary, illicit drug selling and use, and robbery (Sampson, Morenoff et al. 2002; Latkin and Curry 2003).

These stressful neighborhoods create a vicious cycle where the depression of individuals fosters more neighborhood disorder (illicit sex, more drug or alcohol use, violence, etc.), which in turn creates more depression. The lack of social control in these neighborhood may lead to feelings of hopelessness, which affects willingness of community inhabitants to rectify the neighborhood conditions (Latkin and Curry 2003). These feelings of hopelessness, meaninglessness, and lovelessness constitute a concept of “nihilism” developed by Cornel West, which results in numbing detachment from others and a self destructive disposition toward the world (West 1993). According to West, nihilism feeds on poverty, because the poor have limited capacity to ward off feelings of self contempt and self hatred, resulting in lack of caring for personal health among others (West 1993). As these feelings grow, individuals within these communities turn to substance abuse (such as alcohol) to cope. Studies have shown that individuals are more likely to have unprotected sex while under the influence of alcohol, leaving them more susceptible to HIV/AIDS infection (Frederick and Swofford 2006).

***Environmental Contextualization: Psychological, Behavioral and Cultural Pressures***

The High-risk Sexual Encounter Framework posits that the psychological pressures facing African Americans are a driving force behind the behavioral pressures that they subsequently face. These psychological and behavioral pressures present themselves in a myriad of forms, including:

- Denial of gay or bisexual tendencies of the male partner

- Economic dependence on the male partner
- Desire to be loved and need for emotional connection
- Perceived shortage of eligible black men within the community
- Fear created from past or present sexual or physical abuse
- Feelings of powerlessness to negotiate condom use
- Unprotected sex with male partner to signal intimacy and trust

### *Denial of Gay or Bisexual Tendencies*

The stereotypical role model and symbol of strength within the African American community is the male who appears big, strong and masculine, while being gay or bisexual, on the other hand, is considered weak. This social dynamic presents a formidable force, driving black males to secretly indulge in homosexual behavior while keeping up the appearance of being straight, which often entails sleeping with their girlfriends and wives without protection. However, denials not only occur on the male end of the spectrum, but also on the female end, stemming from aforementioned stereotypical physical factors, such as males who look masculine, and talk the part of being straight. There is also the troubling fact that 80% of women who are newly infected with HIV/AIDS are practicing monogamy within a long-term relationship or marriage, and as such deny the possibility that their significant other is unfaithful in any way, shape, or form to them. This belief that sanctuary can be found in an exclusive relationship can place partners in a high risk position. Furthermore, there are also community pressures that may weigh on denial, because HIV/AIDS within the African American community is thought by many to be extremely distasteful or discomfoting.

This taboo subject is excluded from most discussions, only appearing when the damage has already occurred.

#### *Economic Dependence on Partner*

Due to the societal norms and power constructs of relationships between females and their male partners, there is a prevailing tendency of poor women to enter and stay in risky relationships to achieve financial security. Females desperate to achieve financial security through finding a man to support them and their children can find themselves in a state of economic dependence that may cripple any hope of escaping the relationship if it becomes abusive. It is not a rare occurrence to find economically challenged females trying to support themselves and their families by engaging in sex for money, which limits the conditions under which they have sex, leaving them at a higher risk of contacting HIV/AIDS.

#### *Unprotected Sex with Partner to Signal Intimacy and Trust*

There is also an emotional and physical dimension to sex that is too powerful to deny. In colloquial terms, it is the closest one can be to another person physically, and some say emotionally. Within this context we find that partners engage in barrier-less intercourse to heighten the sense of intimacy, believing that this act of unprotected sex is a supreme sign of trust (Frederick and Swofford 2006). There are often also underlying issues of low self esteem, where partners, eager to be loved, view unprotected sex as a way to convince their partner that they love him or her. However, in a pragmatic sense, this desire to have sexual and emotional closeness, while trusting in another's fidelity, can be an exercise in folly, and again leaves the partner disposed to a higher risk of HIV/AIDS infection.

### *Gender Roles and Abuse*

There is also the issue of harmful gender roles and stereotypes that lead to unequal power dynamics and dominance when it comes to influencing sexual choices. In a male dominated society such as America, there is the perception that prevailing societal norms do not give women the right to control their bodies and make sexual decisions, such as when and how to have sex. The result of this has been millions of women who have suffered sexual coercion, which correlates highly to earlier sexual experiences with more individuals, and consequent higher risks of contracting HIV/AIDS. In the US, it is reported that one in six women is a rape survivor, and these survivors are more likely to engage in unprotected sex as adults in abusive relationships with partners that have multiple sex partners and refuse to wear condoms (Frederick and Swofford 2006). The threat of violence often translates into the woman being fearful to negotiate condom use during intercourse, and as such they are more susceptible to HIV/AIDS transmission.

### *Perceived Shortage of Men in the Community*

Although this dissertation is not concerned with business concepts such as macro, or micro, economics, the metaphor of supply and demand serves as a good point of reference for this section. Within the African American community there is a perceived shortage of eligible black men due to the disproportionate number of African American males incarcerated, addicted to drugs, victims of homicide, or who choose mates of other ethnicities. As learned in economics, when a good or product is scarce, the demand and value of the product goes up. The same principle applies here. With women outnumbering men within the African American community, the cultural norm allows and encourages males to seek multiple sexual partners to reaffirm their masculinity. If a



man becomes infected with HIV/AIDS due to his infidelity, their wives or significant others are often unable to negotiate protected sex due to societal norms that women should submit to the sexual desires of their husbands, even if it is unsafe (Frederick and Swofford 2006).

### *The “Down-Low” Phenomenon*

The significant disparity in infection rates between African American men and African American women found an explanatory foothold with the development of “Bridge Theory” that tied the responsibility to bisexual men in relationships with unsuspecting women (Denizet-Lewis April 3, 2003). The convergence of this theory and gay men led to the coining of the term “down-low”, which described the behavior of men who secretly have sex with other men as well as heterosexual women, but who do not openly identify themselves as being gay or bisexual. This propensity of secrecy within the African American male population was vividly illustrated in a study of HIV-infected persons, where 34% of African American men who have sex with men (MSM) reported having had sex with women, even though only 6% of African American women reported having had sex with a bisexual man (CDC 2006). The rates of HIV/AIDS infection stemming from bisexual women to heterosexual men have not been significant enough to precipitate an opposite running bridge theory, with conventional assumptions being that the HIV virus passes more easily from a man to woman due to physiological factors, and thus women are viewed as less likely to “cause” HIV in men (Phillips 2005).

### *Chapter Summary*

This chapter gave the conceptualizations of technology, information, and people for the purposes of this dissertation. It also gave the background on the phenomenon known as

the digital divide, and established the focus of the study being African American individuals on the positive side of this divide. Thirdly, it discussed the concept of communities, and the means to determine the “Sense of Community” as defined by McMillan and Chavis (1996). This community cohesion is measured along the lines of: Membership (which includes: boundaries, emotional safety, a sense of belonging and identification, personal investment and a common symbol system), Influence, Integration and fulfillment of needs, and Shared emotional connection.

It then discussed the concept of weblogs and how they facilitate the creation of virtual communities and virtual third place that share characteristics of physical communities and third places as described by Ray Oldenburg. It also established Black America Web ([www.blackamericaweb.com](http://www.blackamericaweb.com)) as the virtual third place to be studied, as well as a description of the value of pseudonymity and anonymity afforded by the internet, and how these factors allow users to develop numerous identities for different relational contexts. This relative anonymity has helped to circumvent the institutional silence of the African American Church in regards to the discussion of the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

Finally, the chapter details the psychological, behavioral, and cultural pressures faced by many African Americans who are most susceptible to HIV/AIDS. The developed framework highlights the need for the establishment of a third place (virtual or otherwise) by members of this community due to the ambient stresses faced by many through everyday living.

### CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

This chapter discusses the concept of Oldenburg's third places, and provides the theoretical constructs that define exactly what constitutes a third place. These third place constructs, or characteristics, are the lens through which the researcher will analyze the collected data, to determine whether or not the chosen weblog qualifies as such. The final sections of the chapter will provide critiques of third places in literature, and how these critiques are mitigated.

#### *Oldenburg's "Third Places"*

The term "third places", or "great good places" was coined by the sociologist Ray Oldenburg, and is used to denote public spaces that are used for informal social interaction outside of the home or office (Soukup 2006). It should be noted that there is a fundamental difference between what is considered "space" and what is considered "place". According to Harrison and Dourish (1996), a "place" is a valued "space" that is invested with understanding of behavioral appropriateness, social meaning, and cultural expectations. They state that *"These understandings develop within cultures, and learning them is part of our assimilation and socialization. Like new members to any culture, new arrivals in our media spaces learn the cultural norms and mores of the media space environments, as part of their enculturation into the workplaces and organizations where they are situated. These norms vary from place to place"* (Harrison and Dourish 1996). A space is analogous to a "house" that keeps out wind and rain, while place is analogous to a "home" where we live. A sense of "place" transforms a "space" from an "opportunity, into the understood reality", and this sense of "place" can only be

achieved after sustained patterns of use as users ascribe new social meanings to technology (Harrison and Dourish 1996).

According to Oldenburg and Brissett (1982), “*Traditionally, third places such as pubs, cafes, coffee houses, barber shops and beauty salons have functioned as unique public spaces for social interaction. The third place provided a context for sociability, spontaneity, community building and emotional expressiveness*” (Oldenburg and Brissett 1982). Within the framework of computer mediated communication there has been a realization that cyberspace (such as blogs, chatrooms, etc.) resemble types of social settings described by Oldenburg, providing an informal place where individuals gather to rebuild communicative aspects of community that may be lost (Soukup 2006).



**Figure 13: Barber Shops, Traditional Third Places**

### *The Nature of Third Places*

The most important characteristic of third places is that they unite a neighborhood, and act as a “mixer”. They bring together a wide range of individuals from various backgrounds, and within this mix individuals find others who share their same interest, or find others who do not share their interests but are still considered interesting, and viable candidates for future associations later on. Third places are places where members

discuss politics, philosophy, geography, urban development, psychology, history and many other topics, and these dialogs offer an opportunity to flesh questions out, sound out protests, and to form opinions (Baker-Eveleth, Eveleth et al. 2005).

Third places are a political force to be reckoned with, and in times of crisis or of social upheavals, the seeds are often planted and watered in third place locales. Examples include the anti-labor segregation laws in the 1960's, which were the result of assembly of blacks in churches all over the south. Other examples include labor solidarity which emerged in many communities after workers met in local cafés, discussed their common problems, and realized their collective strength, which enabled them to effectively plan strikes and other strategies (Oldenburg 1999).

Membership in third places includes coming to terms with other individuals who the group may have a disagreements with, or may consider “out of their minds” on certain topics. However, these disagreements of opinions do not cost the outlying member anything, because membership is not based on scapegoating or political correctness, rather, it is based on one's character and ability to liven the group.

Oldenburg describes the essential characteristics of third places as (Oldenburg 1999; Soukup 2006)<sup>7</sup>:

1. Being on neutral ground
2. Being levelers
3. Conversation being the main activity, with the mood being playful
4. Accessible
5. Are a home away from home, and have “regulars”

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<sup>7</sup> See Oldenburg (1999) for a comprehensive review of Third Places

### *Neutral Ground*

Neutrality is not used in a political or position-taking sense, rather it is used to denote that within third places nobody is burdened with the role of being a host or a visitor. This freedom gives individuals in these settings the ability to come and go as they please, easing the task of association, essential to community life. Neutral ground allows for more informal and intimate relationships among people, which cannot necessarily be found in the home (Oldenburg 1999).

### *Levelers*

The term “leveler” originated under the rule of Charles I in the 17<sup>th</sup> century from an extreme left wing political party, expiring under the rule of Cromwell. The goal of the party was to eliminate various positions of power or rank among men, and soon became widely applied all over England to refer to anything “which reduces men to an equality” (Oldenburg 1999). Places that are considered “levelers” are inclusive places that do not have any formal rules for membership and exclusion, and are accessible to the public at large. These places stand in stark contrast with more formal associations that are considered more restrictive and narrowing, and serve as a place where individuals can get to know others in different and fuller aspects (Oldenburg 1999). In locations that are levelers, worldly status claims do not carry as much weight, and there is a realization that there is more to a person than his or her status may indicate. The nature of online environments make physical attributes or material wealth moot in regards to the ability to interact with other members of the community (Baker-Eveleth, Eveleth et al. 2005).

### *Conversation/Fun*

Third places provide a fun atmosphere, due in part to the fact that friends gathered in numbers create a festive mood, and burden to contribute to the conversation is spread out over many people, making individual interaction easy. This “fun” is created by the members of the community themselves, with the sustaining activity being conversation, which covers the entire range of being passionate and light-hearted, serious and witty, informative and silly. Everyone who is part of these communities is expected to understand that it is in good fun, and expected to give-and-take with civility and humor.

In third places, style of conversation is emphasized over vocabulary, and conversation is engrossing, spirited, less inhibited and greatly pursued. The conversation in third places often plays on impoliteness, which in fact is a form of endearment and meant to convey affection. For example, someone may see a friend and exclaim “Why are you always in here?!” or “Can’t you find someone else to bother!”, but it is all said in love, knowing that their friendship is not fragile, showcasing the strength of their bond (Oldenburg 1999).

### *Accessible*

Third places are places where individuals can go to at almost anytime of the day or night and be reasonably sure that acquaintances will be there to relieve loneliness, boredom or frustrations of the day. Accessibility should be qualified more specifically as “easy accessibility” in order for the third place to survive and serve. This easy accessibility is in response to the loose and fluid timing of visitors, which even in the case of “regulars”, is fluid. Some days visits may be late, brief, or missed, which leads to the unorganized, unscheduled, and unstructured charm, allure and character of third places, offering a

significant departure from work or home routines (Oldenburg 1999). The nature of online conversations make it available to anybody who has access to a web browser and an internet connection, making it accessible twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week (Baker-Eveleth, Eveleth et al. 2005).

### *The Regulars*

Third places are often considered more homelike than home, with the definition of a “home” conforming to the notion that it provides a “congenial environment”. This environment is more often found in third places than in average family residences, which may exhibit intimacy without civility (Oldenburg 1999). However, third places will remain simply a “space” without the right people who can transform it into a “place” (Harrison and Dourish 1996). The people who make this transformation possible are the “regulars”, who assure that on most visits a member of the core “gang” is there. It is the approval of the regulars and not the host that is critical for welcome and acceptance. Regulars are formed by reappearances and fairly decent game play. This person is able to give and take according to the group norms, and is considered an overall decent person (Oldenburg 1999). Regulars are also the public characters that are considered the gatekeepers of the community. They usually know everyone in the community, and “keep an eye” on what is happening within the aforementioned community. These are the people who are more likely to be the first to welcome newcomers to the area (Oldenburg 1999).

### *Critiques of Third Place Framework*

Critiques of Oldenburg’s third place framework stem from the tension that arises when one considers his assessment of contemporary media and technology being the root cause



of the decline in civic and social life in America, as opposed to accounting for its revival and restoration. This dissertation argues that technology has enabled the building of new forms of third places, but Oldenburg argues the opposite, believing that technology is acting as a substitute to direct involvement in the community (Steinkuehler and Williams 2006):

*“The home entertainment industry thrives in the dearth of the informal public life among the American middle class...Demand for all manner of electronic gadgetry to substitute vicarious watching and listening for more direct involvement is high”* (Oldenburg 1999).

However one could argue, as Steinkuehler and Williams (2006) do, that interaction via an electronic medium is not an isolated or solitary action between a person and a computer screen, rather it is akin to being involved in a conversation(s) in a neighborhood bar/café/barbershop, etc, that is accessible from your own living room. Furthermore, engaging in arguments of whether the fall of civic or social life by means of a decline in traditional third places, invites a “chicken or the egg” argument, where one may wonder if contemporary media has led to the aforementioned decline, or was the decline already in progress, necessitating retribalization via contemporary media (McLuhan 1964; Steinkuehler and Williams 2006).

Oldenburg also presumes that “neighborhoods without [third] places can be difficult for outsiders to negotiate”, but some may argue that third places may actually hinder the ability of outsiders to negotiate a neighborhood, due to their implicit “clannish” nature, and opposition to accepting others who may appear “different”. One may have to accept Oldenburg’s argument on a more broad level, treating third places as

a *resource* that has the potential to aid in the effective navigation of a neighborhood or community, whether physical or virtual. Of course, this assertion presently holds more weight in the virtual world, due to the networked, wi-fi Information Age in which we presently reside, with most individuals being able to gather information about any community with just a few clicks of a mouse.

A final critique of third places is the concept of it being a leveler. One could make a plausible argument that social stratification exists in the virtual world as it exists in the physical world. The most obvious example of stratification presents itself in the concept of “regulars” as discussed by Oldenburg. According to the third place framework, these are the members who often decide who is accepted and who is not, which indicates individuals operating from a position of strength. However, the defining detail of leveling is that any individual can expect an equal distribution of *opportunity* to become a member of the community regardless of their real world status or roles (Steinkuehler and Williams 2006).

### *Research Questions*

Given the researchers perspective of technology, and the objectives presented, the dissertation seeks to determine how a *Third Place* framework accounts for African American utilization of ICT (and subsequently blog sites) as it pertains to rebuilding communicative elements of community in a virtual world. The researcher formally seeks to answer the following question(s):

***RQ:*** *Does the Weblog under study exhibit characteristics of “third places” as conceptualized by Oldenburg (1999)?*

1. How is the blog conceptualized as being on “*neutral ground*”?

2. How is the blog conceptualized as being a “*leveler*”?
3. Is “*conversation a main activity*” of the blog?
4. Is the blog considered “*accessible*”?
5. Does the blog *have “regulars”*?
6. Is the “*mood playful*”?

### *Chapter Summary*

This chapter provided the theoretical framework through which this study will be conducted. It discussed third places and their uniting influence on a neighborhood, bringing together a wide range of individuals from various backgrounds to discuss politics, philosophy, psychology, history, etc. Within these conversations, disparate individuals are given the opportunity to flesh questions out, sound out protests, and to form opinions. The characteristics of third places were also discussed, namely: that they are on neutral ground, they are levelers, conversation is the main activity, they are accessible, they are a home away from home, they have “regulars”, and the mood is playful. Finally, the researcher offered some critiques of the third place framework, and presented the research questions for the study.

## CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

### *Research Philosophy: Interpretivist vs. Positivist Research*

When undertaking qualitative or quantitative research, it is necessary to make a decision on which epistemological method to pursue, because the method chosen can directly influence (if not determine) the data collection methodology. Positivist research studies are usually based on the assumption that there are *a priori* causal factors and relationships that can be used to explain a given phenomena. This school of research thought is dominant in Information Systems (IS) literature, but it is primarily used to test existing theory, mainly because methods and results are viewed to be factual and objective (Orlikowski and Baroudi 1991). This research method may lack understanding of the historical and contextual influences that affect the data and its collection, which in turn may result in an inaccurate depiction of events and factor relationships. Using this research method may result in response bias, because subjects can only respond to questions that are posed to them. These questions may be incomplete, inaccurate, or contain leading or biased statements from the questioner.

Interpretive studies are a minority in IS literature, and are built on the belief that individuals build and associate their own subjective meanings of the world as they move and interact within it. This is consistent with the dissertation's conceptual orientation that leans towards a "tool" view of technology, which states that technology acts as an information processing tool, to be used in ways that support the cultural and social practices and beliefs of the user community. Interpretive studies are premised on the epistemological position that the world cannot be broken down into objective or factual causal factors with set relationships governing these various factors, rather interpretivists

seek the deeper understanding of phenomena from a generalization of a setting (Orlikowski and Baroudi 1991). The research in this dissertation set out to understand user patterns and behaviors in online communities via their blog personae, and as such, the epistemological approach chosen was interpretivist.

### *Methodology*

The research methodology that was chosen for this dissertation took the form of “virtual” ethnography informed by the concept of third place community development. Virtual ethnography is an extension of the traditional ethnography that is found in the social sciences, and helps provide a rich description of the community under study. Traditional ethnographic studies typically entail travel to physical location, with face-to-face communication and interaction with participants. The physical presence of the researcher, and data collection methods (i.e., participant observation, interviews, etc.) forces him/her to be a participant in events and interactions (Hines 2000). Virtual ethnography on the other hand, does not typically involve physical displacement, but rather an experiential displacement as one visits various internet locations (Hines 2000), using content analysis to analyze textual data.

An ethnographic study in general, and virtual ethnography in particular, was preferred over other methodologies because every community, whether traditional or online, is different with its own culture and norms. The researcher believes that the only way to get an accurate and rich understanding of these communities, as well as the shared values that hold the community together, is to actually engage in observation and examination of such communities, and virtual ethnography allows this to occur.

More specifically, the use of virtual ethnography allows the researcher to more fully understand the constructs of interest by actual exposure and observation of community members on the specific blog site, both from a technological standpoint and a community standpoint. This methodology was also chosen because the researcher believed that the underlying technological and community factors that influence the creation and adoption of technology cannot be identified or understood if the study was quantitative using positivist methods. By undertaking a virtual ethnographical study, the factors and their requisite relationships are allowed to materialize and present themselves in a meaningful and accurate manner through careful observation. In addition, when we dismiss the notion of constructing factors and relationship patterns *a priori*, we may be able to have a greater impact of knowledge elicitation by having the people and constructs fall into “natural” categories of their own making, and not categories or questions manufactured by the researcher.

This research was conducted with the belief that it adds context and content to the relationship between technology, HIV/AIDS discussion, and the African American community. The researcher’s intention was to conduct a rigorous study to capture richer insights into this domain, which allows for better analysis of the issue. Since the researcher decided to use an interpretive lens to look at the social phenomenon, qualitative methods seemed to be a reasonable choice to use. The author’s ontological assumption about the phenomenon, namely that African Americans are congregating in virtual third places to discuss critical issues such as HIV/AIDS, also entailed the use qualitative methods. The thesis is that these virtual locations share similar characteristics of traditional third places found in the physical world, and these virtual communities are

being used as a means to rebuild aspects of community in regards to HIV/AIDS discussion.

### *Method*

The research method chosen for this dissertation is qualitative in nature, and took the form of content analysis. Content analysis has been defined as a systematic, replicable technique for reducing a corpus of texts into fewer categories based on explicit rules of coding (Krippendorff 1980), and also as “an analysis of the manifest and latent content of a body of communicated material (as a book or film) through classification, tabulation, and evaluation of its key symbols and themes in order to ascertain its meaning and probable effect”. In everyday terms, content analysis seeks to determine the different meanings that data, printed matter, images, or sounds have to different people within the context of its use. Context is someone’s construction stemming from the environment from which a text arises, and it is the job of the content analyst to apply all available knowledge to decipher what is meant by the text through scientific theories, empirical evidence, grounded intuitions, knowledge of reading habits, or plausibly argued propositions (Krippendorff 2004)<sup>8</sup>.

### *African American Weblog Studied*

To examine how African-Americans are using the internet to create virtual third places, the researcher examined [www.blackamericaweb.com](http://www.blackamericaweb.com), an African American weblog community. Unlike traditional journals, weblogs are public, contain links to other websites, and support a wide array of interactive media such as video, images, discussion forums and polls. Entries are generally public because they are published on the web, and audiences are no longer passive because they can respond to individual entries and foster

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<sup>8</sup> See Krippendorff (2004) for a comprehensive review of Content Analysis

conversational exchanges on the weblog site. The increased popularity of blogging as well as the communicative practices that weblogs support and foster makes this a germane means of studying use of ICT by African-Americans to form virtual third places.

#### *Justification for Using Blogs for Study*

The use of the internet as a place of study is justified through the understanding that it is a global socio-cultural phenomena, so it is an ideal 1) research site and lab, and 2) research object and context, with the focus only limited by the researcher's imagination (Milne 2004). Research using blogs is preferred by the author because user engagement in online communication is voluntary, and the statements provided preclude the researcher from transforming "reality into text"(Loft 2004), and "analysis can begin from data which are not already colored by the researcher's theoretical and methodological choice...which can construct a different version of events" (Kendall 1999; Loft 2004).

#### *Blog Selection*

In determining which blog to view and study, the name given was a critical deciding factor, because identity naming and construction must be captured in some type of moniker that will attract a certain sub-group of the population. The name given to blogs is an important aspect of their identity, because it conveys a lot of information on what the site is about, what social members are likely to be involved in the conversations, and what their world-view is likely to be (Milne 2004). In short, with a bad name a blog site will not attract views, and with a incorrect name the blog site will attract viewers who will be discontented when they view the site (Milne 2004).

Blogs acquire their meanings through cultural construction given through cultural conditions, and the body of norms or practices which gave rise to them (Milne 2004).



Nardi, Schiano and Grumbrecht (Nardi, Schiano et al. 2004) suggest that weblogs create the audience, but the audience also creates the weblog. This linkage happens in a number of ways: friends urging friends to blog, readers letting authors know they were waiting for posts, authors crafting posts with their audience in mind, and authors continuing discussions with readers in other media outside the blog.

In the initial stages of this study, once a blog site was selected, it was necessary to read through it carefully to familiarize myself with the content and the bloggers (as much as possible without actually interacting with members). It was also necessary to read the blog's statement of purpose, which is an explicit statement that the creator of the blog releases to the public to define the community or environment that he (or she) expects to get out of blogging.

#### *Data Analysis*

The researcher chose to use community style blogs as the site to conduct research, which allowed observation of behavioral and linguistical dynamics, which are also used to establish tone and feel of the site. The researcher developed a systematic approach for coding comments in response to blog postings pertaining to HIV/AIDS in the African-American community. During the data collection process the researcher carefully examined the text posted to the blogs, and specifically looked for contextual cues, vocabularies, people, etc., that pertain to the topic of HIV/AIDS and the explicit, or implicit, elements of third place community revealed.

The data was collected from [www.blackamericaweb.com](http://www.blackamericaweb.com) over the course of a week (June 13-20<sup>th</sup> 2007), and was historical in nature, spanning from October 7<sup>th</sup> 2004 to February 7<sup>th</sup> 2007. In sum, there were a total of 1,028 posts, which generated 1,222

total codes (not categories) for the entire body of text. The discrepancy between the two figures stems from the fact that several bodies of analyzed text had double, triple, or quadruple codes that pertained to them. The researcher uncovered 8 different categories of codes, namely: 1) Discussing issues/Information sharing, 2) Off topic discussions, 3) Sarcastic wit, 4) Regulars, 5) Cosigning, 6) Repeated posts, 7) Levelers, 8) Incomplete posts.

Again, there were 1,028 total posts, with 56 of them representing repeated posts, and 6 representing incomplete posts due to human or computer error. The final total *usable* posts were thus 966 in number. Overall, 509 of the comments focused on discussing HIV/AIDS issues, or sharing of information pertaining to HIV/AIDS, 346 of the comments were sidebars, or topics not focused on HIV/AIDS. Good natured humor and sarcastic wit were displayed in 120 of the comments, and 97 of the comments exhibited evidence that the posters were regulars to the site. Finally, 68 of the comments cosigned comments made by others, and 20 of the comments revealed some type of real world occupation, or vocation, which was used to evaluate the leveling attributes of the site.

Some of the comments were edited for punctuation or syntax, and some were amended for brevity, but all were done in a manner that remained faithful to the original nature of the posting. The analysis focused on the content of the conversation, and the researcher began identifying emergent themes as they were introduced in the texts. There were many individuals that posted more than once in an exchange, with some responding directly to an original poster, while others did not respond directly to the original poster

(this shall be indicated in the post labeling). In addition, for the sake of the dissertation, any profanity or expletives were removed from the postings.

### *Identifying Characteristics of African American Language*

While examining the blog text, it was important to keep in mind the ethnic identification that the community members held. This was necessary because identification as a member of an ethnic group involves adaptation of the cultural codes such as learning the language and associating with the community (Hecht, Collier et al. 1993). Giles and Johnson (Giles and Johnson 1981) contend that language is vital to any group's identity and is particularly salient for ethnic groups, because discourse both exchanges and reinforces cultural values. African-Americans have their own language and communication systems that they use to interpret the meanings of symbols, artifacts, and behaviors (Dandy 1991). This language both constructs and limits the African American world, as it serves as a mediator between what the senses tell us of data, and how (through learned behavior) this data is interpreted. According to Brock:

*“Black identity operates in a creative, critical and often-subversive discursive framework. Denied from participating in mainstream American discourse for hundreds of years, Blacks came up with creative uses of language, style, musical, artistic, and religious forms, as well as independent press. These discourses help form a complex Black identity.”(Brock 2007)*

Hoover (Hoover 1985) and Hecht, Jackson and Ribeau (Hecht, Collier et al. 1993) argue that the African-American system of communication includes a number of identifying characteristics:

1. Nonverbal behaviors that send messages through bodily movement, expressions and gestures (Black Kinesics) such as eye rolling to indicate disgust, or aggression signified through hands on hips
2. Sociolinguistic rules for speaking (i.e. “code switching” or using Black Communication only when speaking with an entirely African-American audience)
3. Special speaking behaviors such as personal talk used by people who are familiar with and trust one another (i.e. use of the term “girl” among black women)
4. Audience involvement through call and response
5. Rituals such as slang, non-verbal communication, teasing, improvisation
6. Uniqueness expressed through body movement, styling, and individuality
7. Emotional intensity exhibited through highly expressive talk and loudness,
8. Positivity that demonstrates resilience, calls for religion and spirituality
9. Realism or “telling it like it is”, “keeping it real”, telling stories grounded in reality
10. Assertiveness that calls for outspokenness and standing up for one’s rights,
11. Signifying by introducing new lexical items (i.e., “crunk” as a term that combines crazy and drunk) and double meaning (i.e., “tight” or “off the chain” to mean something that is very good)

It is believed that these aspects of African-American communication and identity would carry over into virtual communities where members possess predetermined knowledge of the culture and feel motivated to discuss culturally salient issues such as

HIV/AIDS. In addition, these rhetorical devices are thought to aid in providing the virtual third place community with its conversational “character”, or ambiance, due to the makeup of people found on the site. Members of the community understand the rituals associated with the culture, and thus simultaneously possess the ability to decipher the playfulness often found in the carping, innuendo or double speak that originate and circulate within the cultural social network. This plays a significant role towards maintaining the lighthearted mood of the site, a key feature of third places.

#### *Conceptual Framework for Conducting Content Analysis Studies*

The primary benefit for using content analysis is to recognize meanings in text, which is a benefit that this particular investigative method has over other methods. Krippendorff (2004) presents a conceptual framework that provides prescriptive, analytical, and methodological purpose for content analysis. The conceptual components of the framework are shown in Figure 14 and include (Krippendorff 2004):

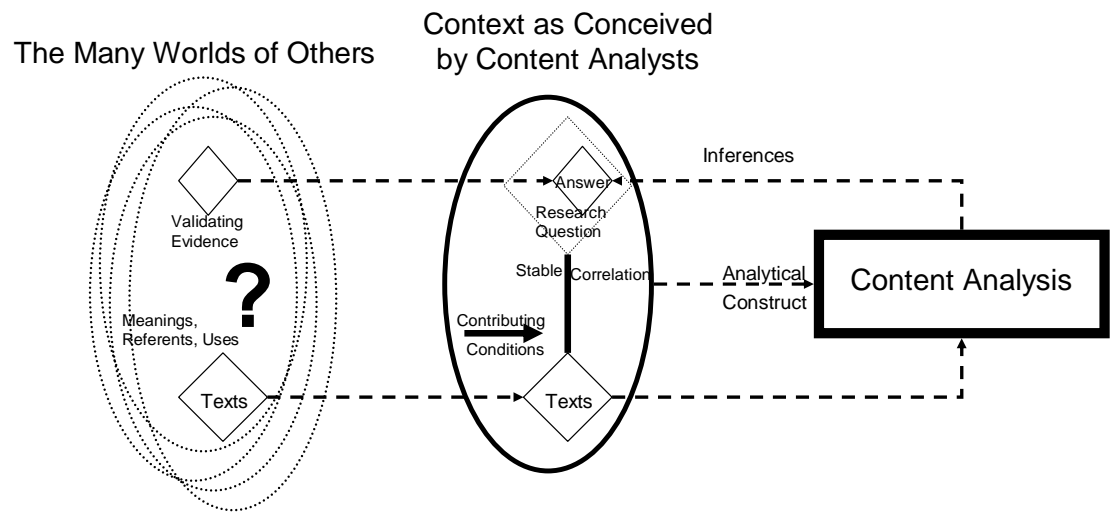
1. A body of text, the data that a content analyst has available to begin an analytical effort. For this dissertation, the data was found in historical text conversations found on [www.blackamericaweb.com](http://www.blackamericaweb.com), an African American weblog.
2. A research question that the analyst seeks to answer by examining the body of text. The research question for this dissertation is as follows: *Does the Weblog under study exhibit characteristics of “third places” as conceptualized by Oldenburg (1999)?*
3. A context of the analyst’s choice within which to make sense of the body of text. According to Krippendorff the context “embraces all the knowledge that

analyst applies to the text, which can be in the form of scientific theories, plausibly argued propositions, empirical evidence, grounded intuitions” (Krippendorff 2004). For this dissertation, the context is the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the African American community, enabled by a myriad of cultural, behavior, and psychological factors. The silence perpetuated by traditional African American institutions contributed to the need for a neutral, available, and accessible place to discuss the issue. Oldenburg’s conceptualization of third places is used as a framework to determine if African American blog communities provide this location.

4. An analytical construct that operationalizes what the analyst knows about the context, specifically the network of correlations that are assumed to explain how the available texts are connected to the answers to the analysts question. For this dissertation, the operationalized third place constructs take the form of: 1) Being on neutral ground, 2) Being levelers, 3) Conversation being the main activity, and the mood is playful, 4) Accessible, 5) Have “regulars”.
5. Inferences that are intended to answer the research question, which constitute the basic accomplishment of the content analysis. These inferences are made by taking the assumptive analytical construct (research hypothesis), the researcher’s knowledge of the problem context in which the text is interpreted (supplied in this dissertation’s literature review section), coupled with the assurance that the analysis has been performed reliably, and serves to explain the data. By being able to explain the data, the hypothesis lends itself to the

belief that it is true, and can be used to deduce other entailments, i.e., the posed research question (Krippendorff 2004).

6. The content analysis should be “validatable in principle”, meaning that found results are not merely abstractions of a researchers programming, but also have some form of independently observable reality. Through this validity, results gain or lose creditability from future content analyses of similar texts in similar contexts, as they are weighted against each other.



**Figure 14: Krippendorff Framework for Content Analysis**

### *Data Collection*

Qualitative research typically works with small samples that are theoretically based and driven by conceptual questions. However, within this genre of research, the concern is not the “representativeness” of the sample size, but whether or not the analysis captures the essence of what is under study. The weblog under investigation is part of a vibrant

community of Black bloggers (Poole 2005) that is known as the “Blackosphere”. Francis Hollander (2007) states,

*These blogs are by and principally for Black people, focusing not only upon Black people but upon people and issues deemed relevant to the Black people who write these blogs and post comments. At Black blogs, we comment on the issues of the day raised in white newspapers and blogs, but we also highlight issues that whites mostly ignore, such as the unfair criminal prosecution of individual humble and unknown Blacks. Our commentary and the relative importance that we give news are informed by our unique historical perspective on and position in America. From our vantage point, we share with each other a distinct perspective and critique that white people, including white progressives, cannot have and generally do not want.*

As stated earlier, the data was collected from [www.blackamericaweb.com](http://www.blackamericaweb.com) over the course of a week (June 13-20<sup>th</sup> 2007), and were historical in nature due to the website’s content archive, which allowed for the preservation of posts in their original published format.

#### *Conversation Coding and Categorization*

The researcher developed data categories using an emergent coding protocol, which was established through iterative readings of the data by the author. More specifically, the researcher analyzed direct quotations, and threads of conversations and their follow-ups from members of the community. These quotations are the units of analysis for this study, and were coded and analyzed according to operationalized themes that they represented.



The categories for analysis that guided this study were derived from the conceptualization of “third places” developed by Oldenburg (1999). This was necessary because it forces the analyst to tie research interests directly into the data (Loft 2004). The blog was examined to discover if it exhibited the following characteristics:

1. Being on neutral ground
2. Being levelers
3. Conversation being the main activity, and the mood is playful
4. Accessible
5. Have “regulars”

These characteristics have been discussed in previous sections of this paper, and constitute the major research objective to be analyzed in the dissertation. The approach to content analysis proceeded in a top-down fashion in which the author iteratively read the comments to construct a comprehensive rhetorical view of the texts. The researcher coded the various candidate codes from the blog sites in raw form, and sought to determine if there were matches between these codes and the codes presented in the Oldenburg third place framework.

#### *Soft and Hard Measures*

The researcher took the five factors detailed as being characteristic of third places, and subdivided them into two meta-categories, labeled “soft variables” and “hard variables”. Soft variables are those factors that are not able to be coded by the use of content analysis software alone, in that the software program will not be able to use strict word counts, or researcher generated categorization of text, to assign numeric values in absolute units to those factors. For example, how would the researcher be able to evaluate the twenty-four

hour accessibility of a website through the use of text coding software? This information must be ascertained through alternative means, such as multiple postings on the website, every hour, over the course of a twenty-four hour period. This may provide a measure of corroboration that a website is available at all hours of the day or night (although not a perfect measure), while simultaneously providing a basis to reject the notion if shown to be false.

Hard variables, on the other hand, can be assigned strict values by content analysis software as a percentage of total posts on the site. These values can be determined through direct textual analysis, with the content or intent of the post being apparent. For example, a researcher can objectively diagnose the number of comments that discuss HIV/AIDS, or the number of comments that display a measure of sarcasm or wit, with the conclusion being verifiable by future third parties. For this dissertation, the factor that was assigned a soft variable category was Accessibility, or the freedom for individuals to come and go as they please. The four factors assigned to the hard variable category were 1) Conversation/Fun, the sustaining activity of third places, 2) Neutral ground, meaning no individual is placed with the burden of being a host or hostess, 3) Levelers, where all posters are regarded as equals, and 4) Regulars, or the gatekeepers of the community.

#### *Coding of Variables*

The hard variables were analyzed and evaluated using the software program Atlas.ti. The stated purpose of the software is to “help researchers uncover and systematically analyze complex phenomena hidden in text and multimedia data”. The program has several useful features such as tools that allow the researcher to identify, code, and annotate findings in

primary data material, as well as providing the means to weigh and evaluate their relative importance.

Within the context of content analysis and the research objectives of this dissertation, Atlas.ti served as a tool to employ, due to its ability to consolidate the large volume of primary blog postings under study. More specifically, the program allowed the researcher to break down and segment texts, and effectively keep track of all notes, annotations, codes and memos in all fields that pertained to virtual online third places. Retrieval, filtering and indexing of various coded text was also facilitated and streamlined by use of Atlas.ti. The researcher coded the data over the course of approximately one month (June 20<sup>th</sup>- July 18<sup>th</sup>, 2007). Figure 15 illustrates a typical Atlas.ti interface once the text has been fully coded. It shows the primary text in the left hand frame and the keywords/codes in the right frame. The bracket next to the codes show the length of the text coded, and this text is highlighted whenever the keyword/code is selected.

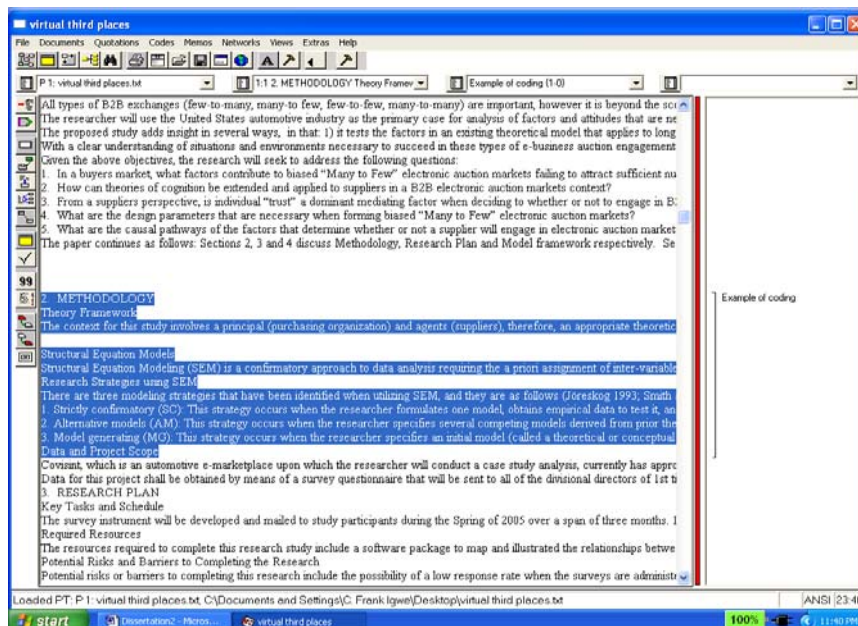
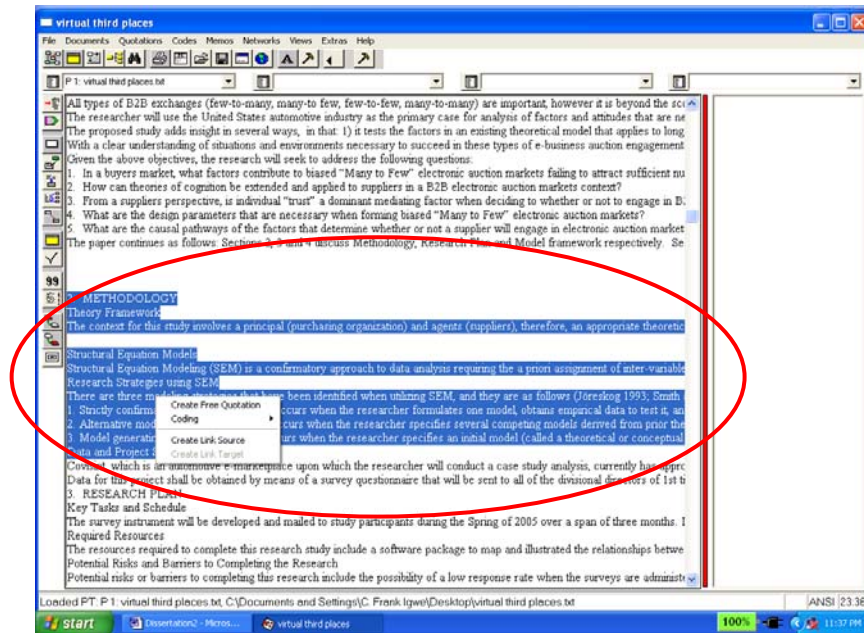


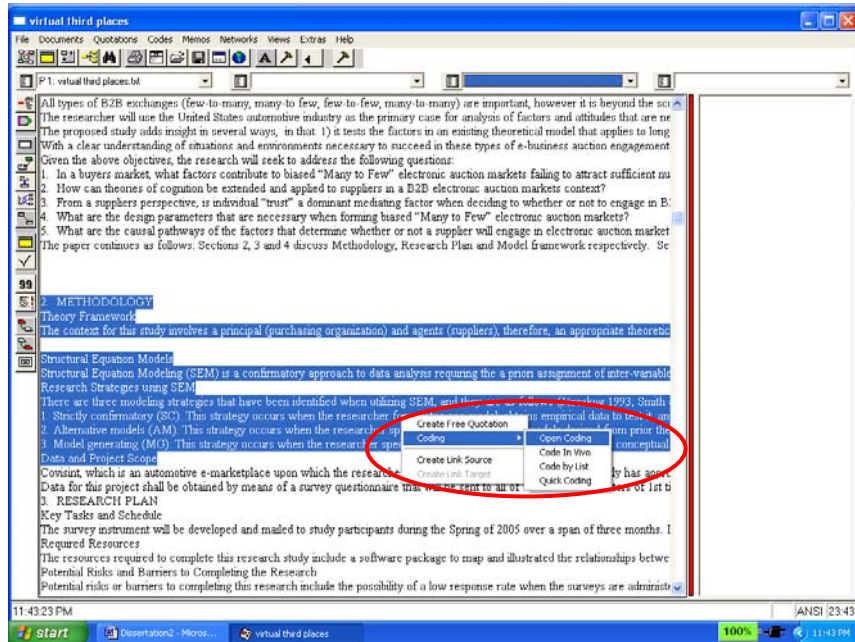
Figure 15: Example of Coded Text

Individual, or passages, of text were coded by highlighting the text of interest, and selecting “coding” from the pop-up window. See illustration in Figure 16.



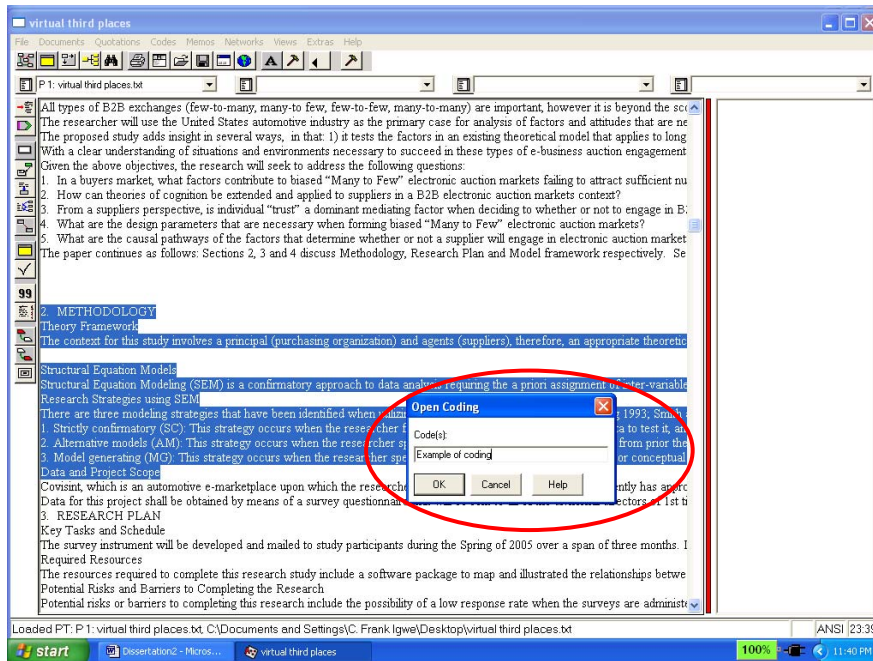
**Figure 16: Selecting Text to Code**

This opened up another pop-up window with the option to choose codes from an existing code list (labeled as “code by list”), code by vivo, quick code (which automatically selects the last code used) or create a new code germane to one’s present need (labeled as “open-coding”). See illustration in Figure 17.



**Figure 17: Different Coding Options**

Once a new code is created, it is added to the running list of codes, and automatically appears when the “code by list” option is selected (found in the upper rightmost drop-down window). The coding for this dissertation was done strictly by using the “open coding” option of Atlas.ti, and once created it was again referenced through the “code by list” option. See illustration in Figure 18.



**Figure 18: Creating New Codes via Open Coding Option**

### *Content Analysis Ethical Issues*

The issue of perceived privacy of Internet users was addressed by Cousineau and Rancourt (Cousineau and Rancourt 2006), in which users who participate in online communications, such as blog sites or message boards, assume that their correspondence will be kept in confidence. However, due to their public availability, the archives of the messages are sometimes used for study, which could potentially pose a human subjects problem. To address this problem, Cousineau and Rancourt follow the guidelines of online psychological research put forth by Kraut et al (Kraut, Olson et al. 2004), which posits that research of this type is exempt from federal regulations protecting human subjects if “research involves the collection or study of existing data, documents, records...if these sources are publicly available or if the information is recorded by the investigator so that subjects cannot be identified” (p110) (Cousineau and Rancourt 2006).

For this dissertation, the names of the real users and their user names were

changed in order to protect their anonymity, following the precedent set by Kendall (1999) and Turkle (Turkle 1995), where all online names and pseudonyms were changed to maintain confidentiality. More specifically, the researcher renamed all aliases with the designation of Poster “X”, with the “X” denoting the order of the poster’s appearance within that conversation segment. For example, Poster 1 posted first in that particular segment, Poster 2 posted second, Poster 3 posted third, etc. A segment, as it is used here, represents a conversation thread, or conversation stream. Once that conversation thread has run its course, a new segment begins with the designation of Poster 1, because he or she was the first to post. However, Poster 1 in this new segment is not necessarily the same as the Poster 1 in the preceding or following segments. Again, the corresponding aliases are known only by the coder, and remain confidential.

#### *Validity and Reliability Issues*

The validity and reliability of the study was achieved by providing grounding in an extensive literature review of the relevant conceptual imperatives of technology, community, social support, third places, and the context as it pertains to the study population. This serves as an analysis framework that the researcher feels is both valid and logical, which can be referenced and re-examined to determine if there are any glaring omissions or inaccuracies that could compromise the study.

The data was analyzed in iterative fashion, and direct quotes were used to support any claims made, which also increased validity. The researcher also provided actual text from which inferences were drawn, so that any future researcher who wishes to replicate the study in the future will be able to do so. To gain a more complete understanding of the blog norms, practices, and community rebuilding mechanisms, the researcher

engaged in “reflexivity”, or critical reflection of the research contribution, understanding that it is impossible to separate the researcher from the researched subject matter. This reflexivity was attainable through immersion and active participation/dialogue in real world African American networks, and believing that these cultural norms replicate themselves somewhat in virtual African American communities. This real world orientation serves as a foundation towards understanding what is implicitly considered acceptable online behavior, and noting the verbal sanctions or collective reprimands for behavior that is considered offensive. This will provide a deeper understanding of how the bloggers view their own individual online interactions and practices, and how they create meaning through virtual discussions, and utilize technology to suit their communal needs.

### *Chapter Summary*

This chapter specified the research philosophy and methodology of the study. More specifically, that the study was conducted interpretively through virtual ethnography, while utilizing content analysis. It also provides reasoning for using the internet as a research setting, as well as the necessity of carefully choosing blogs based in part on the blog name, to ensure that the study correctly reaches and studies its intended target population. The chapter also details the language characteristics of African Americans, which is the population that this dissertation studies, and presents the Krippendorff (2004) conceptual framework for prescriptive, analytical, and methodological content analysis. The chapter also gives overview of the categorization and coding schema that was used, in accordance with community, and third place measures. Finally, the chapter



discusses ethical, validity and reliability issues, and how these factors were mitigated and navigated.

## CHAPTER 5: RESULTS

The first thing that you notice is the abundance of welcoming, smiling, black faces in the location. Whether the first face you see is that of Tom Joyner, or a seemingly random couple promoting love and dating, or displays prominently featuring books by Bishop T.D. Jakes, or Clarence Thomas, the common thread is that this a place where people of African descent are celebrated. The color scheme of the place is easy on the eyes, and conveys a sense of homeliness, without any stark or overly bright colors distracting from the overall mood. Upon entering, one's attention is soon called to the various "stations" set up, with signs dividing these stations into categories of "Life", "Work", and "Play". Also prominent are the stations that display relevant news stories of the day that are deemed to be of interest to visitors entering the location, as well as various individuals espousing their commentaries on this aforementioned news. At each step of the journey through this world, you are given the opportunity to discuss your feelings of the subject at hand, or the views expressed by those who have already articulated their views (whether in agreement/disagreement, bolstering or rendering points moot). There are virtually no subjects that cannot be brought to bear, and visitors have the freedom to discuss any, and everything on their mind with whoever is within the place at the time, with others being sure to hear of your position in the not too distant future.

Once a discussion is initiated and people begin to mix, it is easy to see relationally "who is who" in the place, with tones and emphasis betraying those that have been acquainted for a relatively extended period of time, those who are somewhat tepid, those that are more bold, those who take the issue at hand passionately, and those who are engaging in conversation just to pass the time. Conversations tend to be characterized

with rifts of humorous and effortless banter of the subject under discussion, seasoned with good natured teasing of participants from time to time. Sometimes passions in the room flare over issues, resulting in the drawing of battle-lines, and sometimes groups of individuals verbally gang-up on someone who “just doesn’t get it”, but usually no grudges are held after the moment has passed, and the overall mood returns to one of jocularity, community, and a place where apparent friends gather to discuss issues of the day that affect their lives both directly and indirectly.

One may think that the place being described is in a physical location, but in actuality this place is virtual in nature, and can be found online at [www.blackamericaweb.com](http://www.blackamericaweb.com). However, it should be noted that as one becomes emerged in the atmosphere and “feel” of the site, the line dividing the physical and virtual worlds become blurred, as one navigates through the different “stations”, exploring everything from news, leisure/fun, health, family, to career/finance. Each topic and section of the website is crowned with a “discuss in forum” link which opens an avenue for members of the community to gather and discuss what they have just read, seen, or whatever else is on their mind at the time. The descriptions and accounts presented are based on my own subjective observations and feelings whenever I log onto the site, but a more robust and rigorous analytical process must be undertaken to determine whether or not the site can be characterized as a third place, which is detailed in this chapter of the dissertation.

### *Findings Overview*

This study was informed by Oldenburg’s framework of third places. Third places are needed to help individuals feel part of a community, and their existence provides forums for dialog, cushions against hardships, and outlets for frustration (Schuler 1996). A cross

section of five factors that define third places (as listed by Oldenburg) were used for the analysis of findings. These factors are: 1) Being on neutral ground, 2) Being levelers, 3) Conversation being the main activity, with the mood being playful, 4) Accessible, 5) Are a home away from home, and have “regulars”. Oldenburg believes that these factors embody the essential characteristics of third places because they illustrate the unique communication experiences and sociological benefits associated with the “great good places” (Soukup 2006).

As previously stated in the Methodology section of this dissertation, 509 of the comments focused on discussing HIV/AIDS issues, or sharing of information pertaining to HIV/AIDS, 346 of the comments were sidebars, or topics not focused on HIV/AIDS. Good natured humor and sarcastic wit were displayed in 120 of the comments, and 97 of the comments exhibited evidence that the posters were regulars to the site. Finally, 68 of the comments cosigned comments made by others, and 20 of the comments revealed some type of occupation that was used to evaluate the leveling attributes of the site. All of the comments on the website fell into one or more of the seven coded categories, i.e., there were no comments that were unaccounted for. These codes and their counts are shown in Table 2 below.

**Table 2: Analyzed codes and their counts**

<b>Code</b>	<b>Number of Posts</b>	<b>Cumulative Number of Posts</b>	<b>% of total Coded Texts</b>	<b>Cumulative Percentage</b>
HIV/AIDS Related Conversations	509	509	44	44
Off topic Conversations	346	855	30	74
Humor/Sarcastic Wit	120	975	10	84
Regulars	97	1,072	8	92.5
Reiterating or Cosigning Comments of Others	68	1,140	6	98
Vocational/Leveling	20	1,160	2	100

A note should be made here that in the interest of parsimony, selected posts in this section of the dissertation represent only a small glimpse into the length (time-wise) and breadth (post and response) of the total conversations that took place. However, the samplings of quotes were carefully chosen due to their representative nature, reflecting all of the broader discussions undertaken on the website.

### *Accessibility*

Oldenburg states that third places are those that “one may go alone at almost any time of the day or evening with assurances that acquaintances will be there.” Agren (Agren 1998) states that virtual places are always accessible, open, and crowded due to the globality of its participants, and the worldwide nature of the internet (Agren 1998; Soukup 2006). This statement is made with the understanding that due to digital divide effects (expounded upon in previous sections), not everyone has the requisite technology and skills to connect to the internet. However, those with the ability to connect to the internet should be able to enter the virtual third place at any time with no problems.

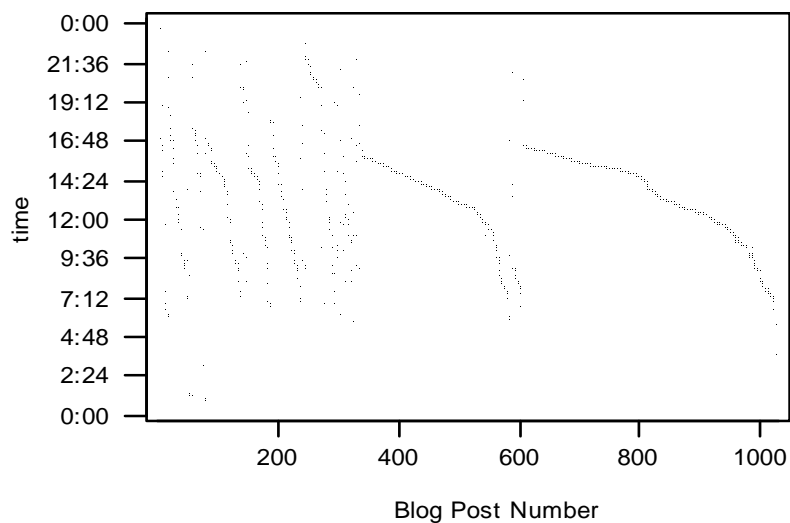
To determine the accessibility of the website, the researcher observed conversations for a period of 2 months. This was done to see if the online conversations could be observed without formally setting up an account, and added to the belief that there is the potential for online “lurking”, where individuals observe, but do not participate in the conversations. At times the posters showed that they were cognizant that whatever they posted was for public consumption, and such open conversations (however serious and well intentioned) may be subject to ridicule by other members who had opposing viewpoints. A poignant example occurred when one member reached out

to another to discuss the issue of the Church, and both decided that the online forum was too open, and a more private venue would be more appropriate.

*Post 1: If not for the fact that this is **a public discussion board** (emphasis added by researcher) I would have you to speak directly with my father, because you have been hurt so bad by the church and I feel really sorry for you.*

*Post 2: I think you've misunderstood me. Can you give me your email address so we can dialog away from BAW. I do have MUCH sense. Also, as far as the church goes, I'm probably more toward agnostic. Let's chat, shall we?*

The researcher examined the time stamp of each blog post, plotting the time of their posting on a 24-hour continuum (see Figure 19 below). The results showed that posts were made everyday of the week, and almost every hour of the day, with the majority of postings occurred somewhere between 7 a.m. (EST) in the morning and 7 p.m. (EST) in the evening.



**Figure 19: Time of each post on BAW**

The researcher then personally set up an account, and joined the online conversations already in progress. To join the site, it was necessary to choose a pseudonym, and a password to verify user authenticity. The user then proceeded to the

“Tell Us About Yourself” section, and was asked for first name, last name, and functioning email address, with the disclaimer that:

*“We won't share your personally identifiable information with a third party without your permission. This means you won't receive e-mails from anyone other than BlackAmericaWeb and Tom Joyner as a result of registering.”*

The user then had to fill out demographic information, including city, state, country, zip code, gender, and birth date, with the disclaimer that it would be used to:

*“Help potential advertisers better understand our audience by sharing aggregate demographic information (which does not identify you individually).”*

The account setup process took approximately 3 minutes. To definitively determine the 24 hour availability and accessibility of the site, the author embarked on the task of posting on the site every hour during a 24 hour period. The first post was placed on Sunday, July 15<sup>th</sup> 2007 at 6:03 p.m. Eastern Standard Time (EST), and the last post was place on Monday, July 16<sup>th</sup> 2007 at 6:09 p.m. EST. This task showed that indeed the website was open and easily accessed 24 hours a day by members of the community, and also acted as a means to facilitate full immersion into the community, and to personally experience the value found in collective discussion of community issues.

### *Conversation is Main Activity*

Conversations are fundamental elements of any community. On an individual level of analysis, conversations in third places provides a place to escape the stressful demands of work and home life, while experiencing the feeling of inclusiveness and belonging by being a participant in group norms and social activities. On a group level of analysis, third places use social interaction to strengthen community ties, and “fosters commitment

to local politics via informed public discourse and promotes safety and security through open and visible interaction” (Soukup 2006).

While the simultaneity of conversations in third places are not necessarily central for community, there does exist a variation of conversation types between traditional third places (such as cafes, barbershops, etc), and virtual third places (such as BAW). In traditional third places the conversations are synchronous, in that the conversations are interwoven in real time, with rarely a lag or drop off in conversation. In virtual third places, the conversations play out asynchronously, over the course of days, months or years (Schuler 1996). A useful example illustrating synchronous versus asynchronous conversations was given by Schuler:

*“Typically, a person will log-on to a community network, read his or her mail, and read the postings in some forums. Each piece of mail and each forum posting offers, in fact, an opportunity to respond, to participate in the conversation. If a person is involved in many conversations using e-mail and participates in many forums, his or her “conversation” can be more schizophrenic, like an extreme sort of mingling at a cocktail party where a party-goer goes from person to person or group of people, listens, then either says something or doesn’t, then leaves the person or group without waiting for a reply going to join another conversation in progress.”(Schuler 1996)*

The coding of the BAW blog posts revealed that 100% of the posts on the site were inherently conversational, staying true to the intent of the forum which requires users to explicitly click on a “*discuss*” link to gain access to other community members conversing about issues. Upon entering, it was seen that the most popular category for discussion was HIV/AIDS (509 out of 966 total usable posts), due in part to conversations being centered around editorial articles that highlighted the devastation of HIV/AIDS within the African American community. Many posters were incredulous on the devastation HIV/AIDS had inflicted on African Americans, and engaged the site for



answers or explanations on why and how the epidemic had exploded and grown out of control, particularly among African American females.

*Post 1: 18 times that of Caucasian women? Is that right? Got damn!!*

*Post 2: Who are Black women getting HIV/AIDS from? Black women lead the HIV/AIDS cases currently. Can someone please enlighten me on how? As women we cannot engage in sexual intercourse with each other, it is impossible. So sexually transmission of the virus can only come from a man. Therefore how are we leading in the virus when we are getting it from men? Are we subject to obtaining the virus quicker than a man? Are our odds increased vs. a man if we are to engage in sex with someone who is infected? Someone please shed light on this issue for me because I am confused.*

The inquiries of how HIV/AIDS grew to epidemic proportions within the African American community elicited a flood of explanations, responses and counter responses from others that ranged from the perceived promiscuity of men, to the down low phenomenon, to socioeconomic class, to the lack of government and Church action in minority communities. The results were rich discussions of HIV/AIDS among community participants, which also served as a means to disseminate information about HIV/AIDS, both preventative and reactionary.

### **Alleged Promiscuity of Black Men**

The perceived promiscuity of black men was alluded to on the weblog, and can be attributed to the belief that there is a shortage of eligible black men in the African American populous. This perceived shortage stems from the disproportionate number of African American males incarcerated, addicted to drugs, victims of homicide, or who choose mates of other ethnicities. With this being the case, eligible African American women outnumber eligible African American men, enabling a cultural norm that allows and encourages males to seek multiple sexual partners to reaffirm their masculinity. This

communal dynamic was revealed in many of the conversations found on the website, and was listed as a reason for the spread of HIV/AIDS within the community.

*Post 1: Women tend not to have as many sexual partners as men. There for [sic] if one man has sex with 5 women you have 5 women with HIV to that 1 man with HIV!*

While males were seen as promiscuous, black women were seen as complicit partners in this behavior.

*Post 2: HIV/AIDS can't just be blamed on our black men using sex as a way to feel like a man. Sure they are to blame to some degree but what about our black women. Those who would never insist that their man use a condom b/c they're gullible to believe all skin is better. The black woman who says it's OK for him to sleep around as long as he knows where home is. This crisis is not just the fault of the black man but our community as a whole.*

### **Socioeconomic Class**

There were also discussion on the website that referred to the difference in medical care and treatment between rich and poor, with members of the community seeming to realize that poverty was more widespread in the African American community relative to the white community. This belies the belief that while some wealthy African Americans living with HIV/AIDS (such as the former basketball player, Magic Johnson) could afford proper medical care, the vast majority of African Americans could not. These assertions hold merit, because pertaining to healthcare, an Institute of Medicine report documented that African Americans receive poorer and less intensive care than Whites in every area of medicine (Smedley, Stith et al. 2003; Becker, Gates et al. 2004; Williams and Collins 2004). Another report revealed that mainstream medical staff are wary of the black community, and are fearful of criticism when interactions are made (Keating and Robertson 2004). In addition, when blacks are within the healthcare system, they are more likely than their white counterparts to be subjected to more restrictive and punitive

forms of treatment (Keating and Robertson 2004). These concerns played themselves out in the online conversations, shown below.

*Post 1: I think Magic Johnson has a huge impact on the view of HIV. It doesn't appear as if the disease has affected him at all. While we know his money gives him access to better care than most, I think some people look at him and think, "he's doing ok, surely I'll be fine".*

*Post 2: It is dangerous. You must read everything about it. Remember Magic Johnson does have AIDS, but he is rich too. He can afford the best care money can buy. For the rest of us, we have to be careful. We cannot afford to get AIDS on our meager budgets and high positions, it is something to avoid with common sense and education.*

*Post 3: I've said before, on another string, that Magic may be of more harm than good as it relates to HIV. People see him and think, he's ok so they'll be ok too. But there are more infected people who can't afford the medical care that Magic cans. That makes a difference.*

### **Inaction by the African American Church**

As stated earlier in this dissertation, the African American Church has traditionally served as the community support center for black Americans in need. However, many black churches refuse to discuss or provide support for HIV/AIDS programs because they view it as a conflict of church values. These churches view the contraction of the HIV virus as a consequence of behaviors that are stigmatized within their religious communities, framed within the context of sin and immorality. This stance of the African American Church was often a source of frustration for members of the weblog community, exemplified in a post below.

*The African American churches are afraid to discuss this disease that is killing our people. It's like many other issues that plague our people. I heard a leader of the church, a mother who is over every youth organization state, "she rather put her child on birth control than nurse a baby." I felt first of all she basically gave her the ok to have sex, and nurse a baby is the least of her worries; a birth control pill will not protect her daughter from a disease that she will have to nurse her daughter to her death. Discussing it is like admitting there is a problem.*

The salient question that arises after the discussion of religious institutions is “why don’t African Americans seek help from other existent government institutions?” The answer may be found in the sordid history of African American treatment by these “other” government institutions (i.e., the notorious Tuskegee study), and denotes an “us versus them” mindset, with African American membership and identity comprising the “in-group”, and other ethnicities that perpetuate the status quo comprising the “out-group”.

### **Distrust of Government**

African American distrust of government social agencies and institutions (such as the police department or prisons) is also grounded in the belief that they are inherently racist and heavy handed with African Americans, (Sivanandan 1991; Keating and Robertson 2004), replicating wider social racism and discrimination of black people (Keating and Robertson 2004). Echoes of this sentiment were found on the weblog, and stances of “us” versus “them”, or “our people” versus “them” are evident in the language usage of many posts, as shown below.

*Post 1: I get that the government can't do anything about preventing the spread of HIV (safe sex or no sex can), but they can put out more public messages about prevention cause folks are forgetting things, us older folks know, but the kids don't appear to, and we need to address the problem of the people that are infected, so they don't spread it to others. Either spend money on this now or spend more money later, cause the problem ain't going away.*

*Post 2: stop the war<sup>9</sup> ....spend the money the government is throwing away on the war to the tune of 250 hundred million dollars a day and there will be plenty of money to provide Massive AIDS Education PREVENTION, Testing, research and treatment.*

While there were pleas for the government to do more to mitigate the spread of the disease, further analysis of the conversations revealed that there were many

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<sup>9</sup> Referring to the 2002 Iraq Gulf war

conspiracy theories within the community. These theories are hard to repudiate or falsify due to their inherent nature, but they suggested a distrust of government institutions that were thought to be in on “the fix”. This “fix” included a belief that HIV/AIDS was created in a laboratory with the sole purpose of military warfare, and the government was intentionally engaging in misinformation. Extant literature cites examples of such conspiracy theories held by African Americans, which include (Simmons and Parsons 2005):

- A widespread belief in the African American community that HIV/AIDS was created in a laboratory with the sole purpose of eliminating African Americans.
- The government intentionally mis-educates African Americans

Members of the weblog community seemed to agree with the notion of a government conspiracy and cover-up in regards to HIV/AIDS. There were individuals who went great lengths to conduct research on the subject of the disease, and reported the results of their efforts back to the community. An example of the discussion of HIV/AIDS conspiracy theory is illustrated in the conversations below.

*Post 1: I'm convinced AIDS is a military weapon that went real wrong. I've heard and I'm not in the field of science so I could be wrong, that it mutates a lot faster than other viruses in nature. Don't know if it's true but if so perhaps it was engineered to do that.*

*Post 2: INFORMATION IS OUT THERE... On the Board I posted the following books for reference: (i) "A Survey of Chemical and Biological Warfare" by John Cookson & Judith Nottingham (1969); (2) "A Higher Form of Killing" (The Secret Story of Chemical and Biological Warfare" by Robert Harris & Jeremy Paxman (1982); (3) "The Nazi Doctors- Medical Killing & The Psychology of Genocide" by Robert Jay Lifton (1986); and (4) "AIDS and the Doctors of Death" by Alan Cantwell, Jr (1988). The above books were written by white scientists and biochemists renowned in their fields of study and research. AIDS WAS MANUFACTURED IN THE RUSSIAN LAB AS A TOOL FOR BIOLOGICAL WARFARE. The name AIDS was originally called the Vervet Monkey Disease. I hate to ruin your day but governments do kill!*

Not all of the posters were eager to uncover the depths of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, for fear of the response from the public at large, and the stigma of the disease being labeled a “black disease”. The reasoning centered around eliminating excuses by other ethnic groups to further exclude and discriminate against African Americans. This assertion ignited a lively debate, with others offering dissenting opinions, which again enabled the site to live up to its major function of being a place where conversation flourishes. In the exchange below, the researcher emphasized (via bold text) the strong black identity and membership claims that denoted an “us versus them” mindset that was prevalent throughout the weblog postings.

*Poster 1: But what happens when more of the public is aware. This will give **others** reasons to keep **us** OUT. NO one wants to be around a person or race of people whose body-fluids can kill you. People are not going to want **their** children around **our** children, since kids tend to play and get cuts that bleed. I can see parents going to school boards to force TESTING incase the black boy - bleeds... Black people have not seen the worst yet, watch how other people start treating **us** - because they're afraid of being infected.*

*Poster 2: I'm not attacking you Poster 1, but it's fears like yours that keep people from talking about HIV and this lack of conversation is what has led to its spread. **We** have to change the way people think. **We** have to educate. Someone bleeding on you will not necessarily give you HIV (you would have to have an open wound that comes in contact with blood from the infected person). HIV can only be spread in a few ways. **Let's** educate **ourselves** and **others**. I applaud people who are HIV positive and who are candid about their status. These people change (for the better) the way some people look at HIV.*

*Poster 3: I just don't like the fact that **SOME** people are "labeling" AIDS as a "BLACK DISEASE"...**Other** races (ESPECIALLY **SOME** yt's<sup>10</sup>) have the disease too...But **WE'LL NEVER** hear about that!*

*Poster4: You know I do not like either how they put everything on blacks.*

*Poster 5: Far be it from me to ignore the stats, or to pretend that they have motivation other than providing information. **HOWEVER**, as an "older" person, I have seen the progression of AIDS across the last 25 years as it became*

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<sup>10</sup> yt=whites

*successively, a Gay Disease, and then, at warp speed, a BLACK disease. How many of you recall the early days when "scientists" said that the disease originated in Africa, from natives having sex with Green Monkeys? Now, every time you turn around, there is some new connection to AIDS and the Black Community. As Benjamin Disraeli said: "There are 3 kinds of LIES, Lies, Damned Lies and STATISTICS!" JMHO<sup>11</sup>*

It has been stated that disadvantaged groups, such as African Americans, live in information “silos”, meaning that they live in a closed information system, where contact from the outside usually occurs via a one way flow of information (media for example). This usually results in widespread misinformation, and internally generated information is easily accepted and disseminated through the community and communities that are similar (Freimuth, Stein et al. 1989). However, the ensuing conversations on the site served as a means to enrich personal networks through the establishment of weak ties.

Weak ties, or casual acquaintances, are necessary for a community, or individuals within that community, to “reach up” beyond their established social networks to access other networks that may be more information rich. Social networks, as it is used in this context, is defined as “*a pattern of social linkages among people, such as friendships, acquaintances, kinship relations, and more formal relationships such as those with teachers or workplace supervisors*”(Friedman, Curtis et al. 1999). A linkage is some type of social tie between two persons, and a network is formed through the building of larger patterns of relationships out of dyadic linkages between two of the people involved. The plea to break out of these information ghettos was passionately presented by an attorney on the website, providing other members of the community an alternative perspective on HIV/AIDS that he had gleaned from another social network of which he was a part.

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<sup>11</sup> JMHO=Just my humble opinion

*There is a popular misconception in the black community that HIV is a homosexual disease. That it is somehow God's curse on gay people. This misconception has led to denial and a lack of discussion which has, in turn, fueled the spread of HIV in our community. I volunteer as an attorney at an organization that provides legal counsel to people living with HIV/AIDS and 90% of my clients have been black women. We need to raise awareness. We need to talk about this. Too many of us are dying.*

Evidence of the conversations being used to foster a transfer of information via weak ties became evident as members of the site posted with the purpose of increasing information awareness. This was done by transferring knowledge circulating in their various individual social networks, to reach others in different networks that may not have access to the same information.

*Post 1: For my fellow Detroiters, Detroit Department of Health located at 1151 Taylor (use the Byron street lobby) is giving FREE HIV COUNSELING AND TESTING (with results in 20 minutes) on Saturday at 12:00 noon. For folks in Detroit that don't have health insurance, you can go here to get tested, there is no excuse not to.*

*Post 2: Thanks for putting that out there. I don't live in Detroit but that is some beneficial information and for those of us who chat in other forums we can pass the word on.*

*Post 3: you can get a map from the CDC of your metropolitan area and it breaks down how many reported HIV/AIDS cases per ZIP CODE..... you wouldn't believe the numbers... and for every case that is reported I'm sure there is 4 that are not .... it makes you think..*

*Post 4: I printed out your post so I could share it with my sisters and niece (for the good it will do her young butt).*

The analysis of the conversations gave valuable insight into how serious members of the community took the HIV/AIDS epidemic. It highlighted what they personally perceived as factors that aided in the spread of the disease, offered preventative tips to others online, gave expectations on what they believed the future held for community, and posted germane articles on myths and realities in the spread of HIV/AIDS. However,



the posts that stood out from the rest were the ones that gave personal testimony on how the disease had personally affected them or people close to them. The site provided an outlet for them to communicate and discuss their own experiences, and served as a spring board for further conversation on the subject.

*Post 1: Our family was affected too by this: We lost my baby brother to this disease in 12/02 and we look at life in a whole new realm. You never know the effects until this (affects of) disease kills a loved one. We as black need to change our lifestyle.*

*Post 2: u bring up a very very valid point.... My aunt died in 1992 from complications from AIDS she had her master's degree and worked for XXXXXX<sup>12</sup> ... her husband had infected her with the virus... and out lived her by three years.....*

*Post 3: I gave birth to twins at the time my ex was going out little did I know that he was going to the "Gay" clubs only after I had him followed, then there was no "DOWN LOW" to relate to only that I wanted to kill him, debated on physical harm to him, was god going to punish me if I divorced, what to do??? I had to deal with it all alone -- GOD gave me twin sons, so they took up most of my time and I did not have to dwell on it because I had to raise them and focus on them. Of course the "Gay" movement was there but little was know about "brothers" on the down low, e.g. married only through GOD, friends and my sons were I able to make it through. We divorced in 1991 and he contracted AIDS in 1996.*

*Post 4: My beautiful intelligent sistas. All I can do is share truth. In December of 1995, my wife lost her cousin to AIDS at the tender age of 33. She was a beautiful woman, and had just graduated from college. She had sex with guy who was bisexual.*

## **The Down Low**

The last two posts in the preceding paragraphs give an appropriate segue into the factor that most of the members of the community placed majority of blame for the spread of HIV/AIDS. This factor is black men being on the down low, and cheating on their female counterparts, contracting HIV/AIDS, and bringing it back to their significant others. There was palpable anger on the site towards these men, and a sense of despair,

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<sup>12</sup> The name was removed to maintain the privacy of the company

because they could not be readily identified. Again, the act of conversation seemed to be cathartic, understanding that they were not alone in having these concerns.

*Post 1: the problem is that there are so many men who are on the DL<sup>13</sup>...how is a woman to truly know? These men are professionals and very masculine. They say they are waiting on the perfect woman...more like the woman whom be most easily manipulated.*

*Post 2: I believe that more African American women are being diagnosed with this disease because of the down low man. Especially the DL Brothas that are in the prison system, where there are no condoms being issued. These men come out of prison and continue their relationships with their black women and so an epidemic is unleashed.*

*Post 3: The D.L. Brotha's Need to have their @\$\$'s kicked...*

*Post 4: Yeah I agree the DL brothers need to have their @\$\$'s kicked but we sisters need to take some blame here. Like a poster stated, we need to take some responsibility and take care of ourselves.*

*Post 5: I agree that the "down lo" brotha's need more than a harsh word for indulging in unsafe sex while knowing his need lies with other than a woman.*

The conversations eventually reached a consensus that the only way to fully protect oneself from HIV/AIDS was to either to abstain from sex, or to take personal responsibility in protecting oneself from the disease by refusing to engage in barrier-less sex. The posters emphasized the value of being thoroughly informed on HIV/AIDS, and spoke to the community in general, but often directed their comments to women in particular.

*Post 1: Being Informed...Getting people educated about HIV/AIDS is the key to combating this epidemic. Men as well as Women should protect themselves at all times. The last stats that I read stated that AIDS was spreading most among African America Women, that is horrifying. Women need to know that they must protect themselves at all times, especially with all the reports coming out about Down low Men.*

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<sup>13</sup> DL stands for Down-Low, or men who secretly have sex with other men, while presenting a heterosexual public persona

*Post 2: First, the woman must be more concerned with her own health. No man can get what you don't give or vice versa! Remember, the sex act is a two way street...unfortunately, only one gender has the opening for filling with some digit that may not be healthy. This applies to STD, HIV and babies out of wedlock. Men, too, have the responsibility of being checked for the AIDS antibodies and making sure they don't function in high risk behavior.*

The preceding posts reveal elements of community and black identity, urging other members of the community to put HIV/AIDS health and awareness as an overriding priority in their lives. It seems that the urgency and priority of protecting oneself from HIV/AIDS is viewed as a counter-balance against the economic (i.e., disproportionate rates of poverty within the African American community), and social (i.e., media effects, coping mechanisms) risk factors faced by a significant portion of disadvantaged African Americans. The exhortation of community members to protect themselves sexually even superceded the stance of the African American Church, and can be viewed as defying Church dogma in favor of more practical, and life saving, measures.

In conclusion, the analysis showed that the website was a place where members could indeed converse about issues of the day, and both sympathize or empathize with one another through sharing of concern, pain, and hope for the future. The posts were personal, insightful, critical and supportive. This was all facilitated through a textual medium, and show that the site upheld its quintessential purpose of communication, which is one of the primary reasons that members continued to frequent the site.

### *The Mood is Playful*

It has been argued by Danet (Danet 2001) that the interactivity and identity concealment associated with CMC environments promotes a playful form of interaction, however, as stated earlier in this dissertation, playfulness and teasing are also some of the distinguishing trademarks of Black communication. This playful atmosphere was

observed and coded in 121 of the 966 posts, which represented the third largest coded category. The anonymity and pseudonymity of such textual mediums allow users to feel less inhibited, and the online conversations are often jocular, energetic, spirited and lively (Soukup 2006). These conversations may play on impoliteness, but this in fact is a form of endearment meant to convey affection, as shown in an exchange between two posters discussing on the site.

*Poster 1 (directed to another poster): Thank you for admitting that. You're a good guy, I don't care what they say about you.*

Further evidence of the jocularity of the site was illustrated as one poster (Poster 1) jokingly confronts another poster (Poster 2) who frequently discusses religious issues on the site. Poster 1 was responding to a comment made by Poster 2, which contained a statement that proved to be a double entendre, and taken as a Freudian slip by other members of the community.

*Poster 1: Gosh, and I thought you were the typical, closed minded, read the bible all the way through 10 times, think that your religion is the chosen religion, living with mom at age 40, waiting for a husband that will never come 'cause black men really don't want a bible thumpin' female who sucks up to pastor, overweight, overmedicated, overchurched black female...but I could be wrong.....gosh you can actually converse on other subjects Gosh what would Reverend Tithes say????Oh my Lord, she is gone worldly...lolololol<sup>14</sup>...just messing with you. lolololololol*

*Poster 2: You are nuts. That was a backhanded compliment, but I'm learning that's just you.*

*Poster 1: LOLOLOLOLOL I AM LAUGHING SO HARD I CANNOT EVEN TYPE LOLOLOLOLOLOLL*

The conversations in third places cover the entire range of being passionate and light-hearted, serious and witty, informative and silly. However, everyone who is part of the community is expected not to take themselves too seriously, to understand that the

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<sup>14</sup> Lol means “laughing out loud”

conversations are in good fun, and to give-and-take with civility and humor. The same poster that had been the object of humor in the previous section responds with posts that indicate she is able to take the jokes in stride. Another member of the community later encourages the aforementioned poster, by assuring her that her post had merit, and that she should not take what others say on the site personally.

*Poster 2 again: O.K. ha,ha. I'm glad you had some fun at my expense.*

*Poster 2 again: Now I get it. I had to go back and see what I said that was so funny to you. And now I see I had a couple of freudian use of words and phrases. It was merely accidental. I was not trying to have a cute play on words believe it or not they just came out that way. So have your laugh, now I get it.*

*Poster 3: Smile gurl, you had some very good points. Don't take what others say to heart, as you post here more.. you will understand that some nuts should be left uncracked. You had some very good points about teaching youth to use condoms for protection. Yes we would love to preach abstinence all day but we do realize that its [sic] not going to always happen, so its [sic] important to teach our children how to protect themselves.*

The playful atmosphere of third places must be maintained, because if they are perceived as being strictly “serious”, interaction may be seen as a chore, and usage may deteriorate (Schuler 1996). A dampened period was noted as members dealt with the breaking news of the death of Anna Nicole Smith, and posts became increasingly subdued and melancholy.

*Poster 1: OK, now I know us black folks don't care about this woman, but Anna Nicole Smith is dead, you see all of that money doesn't matter in the end.*

*Poster 2: What??? Is this some joke?*

*Poster 3: Did Someone Mention Ann Nicole Smith's Death ? Are you sure I just like looking at her on television that is it. She acts a little goofy, but I hope she is not dead. She just had a baby didn't she ? She is not that old ? Are you guys sure.???...I will check CNN right now.*

*Poster 2 again: Yes She is. It is on MSNBC.*

*Poster 4: OMG (Oh My God)...It's on CNN.com...Anna Nicole Smith. Her REAL name is Vicky*

*Poster 5: She is dead. AS per yahoo...*

*Smith, 39, collapsed and was unresponsive while staying at the Seminole Hard Rock Cafe Hotel and Casino, said the attorney, Ron Rale. She was rushed to a hospital.*

*Poster 6: Com'n doc, she just had a baby...Now he's motherless...*

*Poster 3 again: Ann Nicole Is Dead... DANG...I always thought she was a little goofy, had a good heart, very pretty. She is dead...dang. It is on CNN right. Heart failure ?*

*Poster 3 again: Bye Anna Nicole Smith.....*

Soon thereafter, the same person who broke the news of her death attempted to change the subject matter, and reestablish the light heartedness and levity of the site by discussing the upcoming court appearance of R&B<sup>15</sup> singer Robert Kelly, and his seeming attempts to avoid showing up for trial.

*Poster 1 again: OK, more breaking news, this time it's about "R Kelly": R. Kelly missed a court appearance on child pornography charges this week after undergoing surgery for a burst appendix, his lawyer said.*

*Dude gonna do anything to stay out of court!!!! OK, just kidding!!!*

When using a textual medium, it is often difficult to convey playful facial moods timing, or body language. This limitation is mitigated through use of “stage directions” to indicate a deviation from normal protocol, such as “Tamara tussles hair in disgust”, or typographical characters (emoticons), such as smiley face to communicate that a comment was meant to be humorous (Schuler 1996). Emoticons are derived from a combination of the word emotion and icon, and are a combination of keystrokes which form a picture relating to a feeling. A list of some of the most common emoticons follows in Table 3 below.

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<sup>15</sup> R&B is short for Rhythm and Blues

**Table 3: Common Emoticons And Their Meanings**

<b>Emoticon</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
:o)	Happy face
:o(	Sad face
;o)	Winking face
8o(	Sad bespectacled person
:oD	Laughing face
(*^_^*)	Shy
(*_*)	In love
(-.-)Zzz...	Sleeping (
(-_-)	Secret; Sad or sleeping face
(^_^)	Happy face; Ear-to-ear smile
:-Q	Person smoking
:oP	Smile with tongue out

While some of these emoticons were used, the most common form of expressing amusement or a light spirit was to replace the smiley face such as :o) with the expression lol, which stands for “laughing out loud.” Lol was used a total of 215 times in the blog postings, meaning that they were used in 1 out of every 4.5 posts, which testifies to the fun atmosphere found on the site. There were also episodes where the poster would use aforementioned stage directions to spell out exactly what they were doing, for example smiling.

*Post 1: You ponder why you return to this website often, even when you tell yourself not to do so (smile). I think it's because you have a "sharing" Spirit. To share is to care.*

*Post 2: Your point about people needing to be more responsible (for self & others) is absolutely valid (smile).*

Within the extremely serious conversations pertaining to HIV/AIDS, there were also witty analogies, jokes and metaphors that served as a means to delivering pertinent information in the guise of humor. This could be likened to “an iron hammer covered

with a velvet glove”, in that serious tones can only be carried on for a finite amount of time before associations on the site become a burden. Incorporating humor into the interactions served as a means to extend conversations beyond the shelf-life they would have under more serious venues. An example was seen when an individual responded to a poster who wondered when heterosexual males would begin to worry more about HIV/AIDS, due to the rapid infection rate of females.

*Poster 1: Correct me if I'm wrong....contracting of the HIV virus tends to fall on DL men and IV drug users because it involves tearing of the skin as in anal sex or infected needle sharing with junkies, but you're quite correct Poster X, hetro males need to wake up and start getting worried because if the women are infected who is gonna be left to kick it with?*

*Poster 2: I guess sheep! ;-} BAA BAA Black sheep of course! LOL*

The following example of humor being inserted into conversation occurred as one poster was trying to explain the rationale behind his/her belief that HIV/AIDS stemmed from the mixing of body fluids between human beings and other animals. This resulted in another poster creating an analogy with Spiderman, and how he came to be. Again, a serious conversation dealing with the genesis of the disease is made more palatable to readers through the use of wit.

*Poster 1: Different species have different body chemistry and different chemical reactions to things. Humans and animals mixing the chemistry can make things go wrong, such as AIDS...do you see now?*

*Poster 2: AHH...So this would be kinda like how Spiderman came to be then?*

*Poster 1: Right, so you see, Poster 2, there is the animated version of what I have been trying to say this whole time.*

These posts show the levity and light hearted nature of the site, which is a defining characteristic of third places. The conversations within this community rarely continue for too long without a quip or comment that has an element of wit to it. This



allows the site to live up to its third place calling of being a place to gather for fun conversation that enables one to forget their cares of home, or work, and talk freely amongst familiar associates.

### *Neutrality*

Neutrality is not used in a political or position-taking sense, rather it denotes the ability to come and go as one pleases without the burden of hosting or being a guest. This freedom also implies that online visitors have the liberty to discuss any and all issues that cross their mind, without fear of being censored or barred from the site by an overseer. Conversely, non-neutral ground denotes that any and all transactions between community members are regulated, and within that paradigm some are left with the burden of being moderators, while others are considered their guests.

The neutrality of online third places was measured by the moderation, or lack thereof, of conversations to determine if there were any individuals operating from a position of power relative to others on the site. There were no members of the community that were immediately recognized as moderators, and so the researcher focused on the posts coded as “*off-topic*” discussions, to see how often “topic switching” occurred. The reason for focusing on these topic switches was to observe how often the subject matter deviated from the primary topic of HIV/AIDS, and if there were any moderators that attempted to steer the conversation this way or that. It should be noted that there were 346 posts that were deemed to be *off-topic*, and this represented the second largest category of the 8 total coded categories.

The *off topic* posts could be grouped on a macro level as social commentary, personal commentary, religious philosophy, sports and entertainment. An example of

social commentary included one poster sarcastically discussing social taboos, and the appropriate dress codes for school children, and disapproval of the way the child's parents had raised him or her, ultimately cumulating in the parents being arrested.

*Poster: Just GETTO...Yesterday in an Urban School district at a middle school on the far east side of a submajor city a young female student decided to wear her pajamas to school. Now I have seen some college students in my city go to class similarly, this is inappropriate. There is a dress code established throughout the district. The teacher sent the student to the office. The administration called the parents. Four adults ended up being carted away in handcuffs. I would just like to thank those parents for raising their daughter to be responsible and being a good role model for other students...no peace here*

While most of the posts on the site focused on HIV/AIDS within the black community, the conversations frequently shifted to peripheral issues afflicting the community, such as black on black crime, gun manufacturing, mindsets, and drug dealing. Again, the spectrum of these topics illustrates that there was no limit on what could be discussed on the site, and segments of some of these topic shifts are seen below.

*Post 1 (**Black on Black crime**): First Kill...I was a preschooler in the early 50s. I saw a Negro man shoot another Negro man, and kill him. We have become the Black Death for Black people in America.*

*Post 2 (**Guns**): If the truth about the origin of the gun in our community were told, we would cut down on black on black crime(deaths). These weapons are purposely being put in the community expressly for us to commit genocide among ourselves. The origin is obvious as to where the weapons are coming from. Do you know any black gunmakers?*

*Post 3 (**mind sets**): You can outlaw guns, and remove them from every citizen, from every street corner and from every thug...And a brother will still find a way to kill you because all you did was took away a weapon, but you have yet to affect change were it matters the most - in the heart!*

*Post 4 (**Drugs**): Drugs will NEVER be stopped from coming into this country. It helps the economy. If you cut the flow of drugs into the country, don't think that means drug dealers will now hit the pavement looking for a nine-to-five. Oh no, it will create more a more violent atmosphere for folks to make money.*

Many of the conversations and topic switches found on the website were inspired in real time by real-world conditions. An example of such spontaneous topic switching occurred when one community member inquired of another about their plans for the day, given the apparent severe weather conditions in their current location.

*Poster 1: stayin' in today or must you go face the wrath of Global Warming?*

*Poster 2: TRYING to stay warm...The WC is -11...the Temp is -5...*

*Poster 1: Damn!!! -5?! I gots ta tell ya sis, I'd be in with a blanket and some Crown laughing at those fools on Maury!<sup>16</sup>*

*Poster 3: I am sick of this damn cold!!! Damn 7 degrees is getting on my nerves.*

Conversations not only swung on environmental or social conditions, but they were also guided by the personal internal pressures felt by some of the posters. It soon became clear that the site was a place where people felt they could vent and receive a sympathetic ear from others online as illustrated below.

*Poster 1: Went to Crocker Barrel yesterday, me and Uncle Herhsel had a Helluva time! I've got no motivation today, got a lot on my mind. Think I'm in need of a vacation.*

*Poster 2: I understand you when you say you need a vacation and you have too much on your mind. I think it is about time for me also.*

Again, there were no objections from “moderators” on what conversations could be carried on, whether personal or professional in nature. However, there were instances when community members attempted to self moderate when they felt that the conversation had veered too much off topic:

*Post: I guess we should get back to the topic, huh?*

However, as if to answer his/her own question, the same poster responds shortly thereafter:

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<sup>16</sup> Maury refers to the “Maury Povich” daily talk-show, on daytime television

*Post: Hell I'd rather keep talking about this subject (the off topic conversation), I KNOW something about that!! Damned if I know how to solve the problem this topic covers (HIV/AIDS).*

Sometimes the posters were aware that they were veering off subject, and added disclaimers in their posts

*Post: Off Subject...Eeewwww!!! Monique<sup>17</sup> looks like my boss. I got queen kong in my office. Yuck!*

The conversations often took a more reverent and philosophical tone when religion was implicitly or explicitly brought into the conversation. Interestingly enough, when the term God was invoked in a religious or spiritual argument, there was no profanity associated with that particular post. Religious postings were one of the topics in which there was near unanimity in belief that there was a powerful “Other” who was in control of whatever community members may face on a day to day basis. The wide range of conversations that were intertwined with religion again showcased the ease with which topic switching occurred.

In regards to relationships:

*Post 1: That's why it is always best to wait on God to send you your man... One key, God will never send you your husband before you are ready...And that goes for all sista's...Dedicate yourselves to him first and express to him your hearts desire...If it is your desire to have a husband, then petition the Lord - and in his time he will grant your request...I will keep you sista's in prayer that God continue to make you strong and that if it is your desire to be married, that he would send your husband...A man that will be free of diseases and that will love you until the end of time...*

In regards to HIV/AIDS and human extinction:

*Post 2: God certainly does exist but like all dominate species on the planet at some point our time will be up. We will respond like the last dominate species. We have faith and that will help us to accept it.*

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<sup>17</sup> Monique is a female African American comedian and actress, considered by some to have a heavy-set body build.

In regards to natural forces:

*Post 3: God is in control of the elements. Do not fool yourselves.*

In regards to God's existence:

*Post 4: I'll take it a step even further...Who or what sustains the life force in man and all the animals??? Were did this life force come from, and were does it go when it departs from the body??? Or do you believe this life force created itself??? The mind, emotion, will, the thinking part of you...Were did that come from???*

Sports teams and musical/movie stars were also common subjects on the website.

With regards to sports, community members often boasted on their teams past performance, and pontificated on how they thought their team (and others) would perform in the upcoming year.

*Post 1: SUPER BOWL XXXIX CHAMPIONS...YOUR NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS*

*Post 2: Go Colts...we are re-tooling for next year. I think our window is still open. The new rival CHICAGO. It will be interesting to note where the game will be. I hope it is in Chicago. Cincy ? They are like the Pacers, they like jail time. New England, them Negroes are getting ready too. N.O.? There are going to get wiser and more dangerous... San Diego? If they let someone else call the plays they can win it all, but they do stupid stuff at the wrong time.*

As has been illustrated, the conversations on the site were unmoderated, unrestricted, and meandered seamlessly from the serious to the humorous and everywhere in-between. The objective of noting the wide range of discussion topics was to observe if there were any restrictions on what could be discussed, and the results show that there were no formal rules of engagement, and anything that was on anyone's mind could be discussed.

*Leveler*

A leveler, as used by Oldenburg, is anything that acts to minimize differences between people, especially along economic lines. Virtual third places serve as social levelers, in that users possess the ability to freely construct their online identity, whether true or false, eliminating social status, because their true identity is uncertain and unverifiable through text alone (Agren 1998; Soukup 2006). As such, one can be of any gender, race, or physical attractiveness, but will be accepted as equals online (Schuler 1996). This concept was humorously illustrated by a famous New Yorker cartoon in which one dog states to another dog “On the Internet, nobody knows you’re a dog” (See Figure 20 below).



**Figure 20:** Cartoon by Peter Steiner. *The New Yorker*. July 5, 1993 issue (Vol. 69 (LXIX) no. 20)  
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To determine the leveling nature of the virtual third place, the task turned to establishing what percentage of posts gave insight into a person's real world identity, even though the information could not be independently verified. The thought process being that in a leveling venue, identities should not be discernible, and if they are discernable this information should not be used to hold one member in higher esteem or convey greater status relative to other members. One poster gently reinforces the *equality* of everyone's opinion on the blog site after another poster muses on the value of his/her opinion and why he/she continually comes to the site to post.

*You ponder why you return to this website often, even when you tell yourself not to do so (smile). I think it's because you have a "sharing" Spirit. To share is to care. Whether people agree with you or not, should never be an issue. I think it is important to document, read & listen to other viewpoints. If this website does nothing else, it PROVIDES a forum for us ALL to have our say. I'm glad that you contribute posts. I hope that you continue to do so. Do enjoy your weekend. Peace.*

The results of the analysis showed that of the 966 total usable posts, only 21 (2.2%) of the posts contained information that revealed insight into the real world identities of the posters, whether factual or fabricated. This small fraction of real world identifiers testifies to the leveling nature of the online site, as members realize the futility of posting information about themselves that cannot be confirmed. As actual real world identities become more impressive, online representation of this may lead to loss of public face, because other community members may become incredulous, believing this person is fabricating information to appear to be someone they are not.

Of the 21 posts that indicated real world status, none were done frivolously in order to gain added prestige with other members. Rather, they were used to add context to the subject matter presented, and to add situated (not permanent) credibility to what

had been stated by the poster. An illustration of this occurrence was when an attorney discussed raising awareness of HIV/AIDS not being a “gay” disease, and a former HIV/AIDS educator sounding off on the discrepancy between perceptions of females and males who are dealing with HIV/AIDS.

*Post 1: There is a popular misconception in the black community that HIV is a homosexual disease. That it is somehow God's curse on gay people. This misconception has led to denial and a lack of discussion which has, in turn, fueled the spread of HIV in our community. I volunteer as an attorney at an organization that provides legal counsel to people living with HIV/AIDS and 90% of my clients have been black women. We need to raise awareness. We need to talk about this. Too many of us are dying.*

*Post 2: I'm losing my freakin mind...okay let me state up front from 1996 until 2000 I worked as a HIV/AIDS educator in the black community for the only AIDS service agency in Boston that had the balls to put the word AIDS in it's title (the Multicultural AIDS Coalition) I am sick and dammed tureddddddddd<sup>18</sup> of the fact that heterosexual (straight) black men keep getting a freakin pass on this one. TO OUR KNOWLEDGE IS MAGIC JOHNSON ON THE DL<sup>19</sup> HELLLLLLLLLL NO. But when Magic came out and said he had HIV THE WORLD CALLED HIM A FREAKIN HERO. Only one woman, white tennis star Martina Naratova (yeah I butchered her last name) said why is he a hero? if a woman had said the same thing (she got infected by sleeping around) she would have been called a slut.*

As already stated, of the 966 usable posts, 21 of them possessed some insight into the identities of the real life occupations of the posters. However it was noted that most of the posts revealing facets of identity were germane to the healthcare field, more specifically, to the HIV/AIDS domain. This fact should not be overlooked, or dismissed lightly, because these posts were not of a boastful nature, or meant to create a hierarchy amongst the community members. Rather, they were done to add context, authenticity, and believability to others who may be reading the post. One post dealt with a former nurse recounting her experience with two young patients infected with HIV/AIDS, and

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<sup>18</sup> Slang for extremely tired or fed up

<sup>19</sup> DL= Down Low



another post dealt with a healthcare worker emphasizing that HIV/AIDS cannot be transmitted through casual contact.

*Post 1: I'm a former nurse and seared in my memory are a couple of black male patients I took care when I started in the late 80s. Both were young (30s). One had been involved with a woman and after the relationship went bad for him he turned to men and became infected with AIDS. He was skin and bones and did eventually die but I can still see him struggling for every breath (pneumonia was the culprit). The other patient was also a black man. He was a professional man who was pretty wealthy. He also died but had infected his girlfriend – a black woman. He married her on his death bed and left everything to her (small consolation I suppose). I don't know when she died or if she is still living – I doubt it.*

*Post 2: YOU CAN NOT CATCH HIV FROM CASUAL CONTACT. AND YES IF HAVE EATEN AT THE SAME TABLE WITH SOMEONE WITH HIV. AND 99 0/0 OF THOSE WHO HAVE HIV ARE VERY AWARE OF THE RISKS AND THEY ARE RESPECTFUL OF OTHERS AND WOULD NOT DO THAT. I WORKED IN HEALTH CARE FOR 15 YEARS AND SOME OF THE RESIDENTS HAD HIV AND NONE OF THEM DID SUCH A THING.*

As if to crystallize that online identities did not carry as much weight as real world identities, it should be noted here that nobody acknowledged or responded to the revelations of who these people were, or what they did. The conversations continued as if their occupations had not even been referenced. However, there was one notable exception with a humorous exchange occurring when race was introduced, and one poster revealed that he/she was white. Again, race is a factor that affects leveling and status in the real world, and as the exchange shows, it carried over somewhat online, albeit briefly.

*Poster 1: hey I am so cool with that like I said...you like what you like. It is all good. As for me I am white...*

*Poster 2: You are white?*

*Poster 3: oooppsss a revelation, you didn't know?*

*Poster 1: yes. It is a genetic defect I have had to deal with all my life. lol<sup>20</sup>*

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<sup>20</sup> laughing out loud

*Poster 4: She comes out (Caucasian) in BAW<sup>21</sup> ...AWK-WARD.....*

*Poster 1: no I was up front from the start. You missed it that's all*

As has been shown, conveying status attributes was done primarily for the sake of providing context to a statement, with the exception of the introduction race. However, the revelation that the user was white did not carry any form of social sanction with it. It simply surprised other members of the community who wondered why a member of an “out-group” would opt to engage in conversations with a disadvantaged minority group. There were no calls for the user to leave the site, and no negative posts directed towards her, indicating that the site was indeed open to all, but when “outsiders” elect to take advantage of the openness of the site, it generates surprise and some may say admiration for the boldness of the gesture.

The small number of posts that directly or indirectly acted as proxies for the leveling construct shows how little value status has in an online setting. If it indeed carried significant weight, one would expect to see it in play a lot more often than 2% of time. With respect to leveling and race, we see that it is used as a defining characteristic of community members in less than 1% of the post found on the site, again indicating its negligible effects. With 98% of the posted texts being completely status neutral, it would be accurate to hold on to the claim that the web site is indeed a leveler, where everyone is reduced to relatively equal standing, and one opinion is just as welcome as any other.

### *Regulars*

According to Oldenburg, people are not attracted to third places by management, but rather, they are attracted by the people that they find there. In essence, users become accustomed to seeing certain people, or their names, as they post and “converse”. The

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<sup>21</sup> Black America Web

mystery of the attraction to third places was articulated by one poster, as he/she mused on what it was that kept drawing them back. The response from another implied that the daily conversations found at the site played a critical part in the passage of their day.

*Post 1: I try to stay away from this site yet, for some strange reason, I find myself drawn back again and again.*

*Post 2: You know you can't stay away from **all of this** for too long. If they ever got rid of this site, we all will be sitting around twiddling our thumbs.*

As analysis of the blog posts progressed, it was noticed that there were 17 core pseudonyms that appeared almost daily on the site, indicating a strong commitment to continuous contact. These names were familiar with other members of the community, and often served as greeters when a familiar face posted for the first time at the start of the day. The same characteristic of a tightly-knit group of users, who consistently return to a site to partake in the spirited and spontaneous conversation, is true for both traditional and virtual third places. This group of individuals is known as the “regulars”, and they are familiar with other members who are regulars, and likewise, others who frequent the site know their name (Browne 1997; Soukup 2006).

Determining who the regulars were progressed in a snowball fashion, taking note of who greeted whom. This was important because it revealed a certain level of familiarity between the greeter and the person being greeted, a familiarity or comfortability borne of past exposure to the person over an extensive period of time. It should be noted that there were thousands of unique posters throughout the site, but the core 17 posters were consistently acknowledged and greeted by other regulars, signifying an understanding that they were the cornerstones of the site.

More often than not, there was no accompanying text associated with a greeting post, meaning that there was a salutation to an individual in the “subject line”, with the sender waiting from a response for the aforementioned person. What follows is one of the regulars who systematically greeted other regulars as she recognized their user name. This poster was one of the most enthusiastic on the site, and epitomized the notion of a regular, recognizing other regulars and reaching out to say hello. The names of the posters have been replaced by the order of their post, with the greeter being Poster 1.

*Poster 1: POSTER 2!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! How have you been?*

*Poster 1: POSTER 3!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!*

*Poster 1: POSTER 4!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!*

*Poster 1: POSTER 5!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!*

*Poster 1: POSTER 6!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!*

*Poster 1: POSTER 7!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! hey, hey, hey...*

*Poster 1: POSTER 8!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!*

A regular is rarely alone, and the nature of being a regular entails call and response between other regulars. As such, given the call of Poster 1 above, the other regulars began trickling in with responses and reciprocal inquiries of well-being (listed below). This manner of greeting and response was prevalent throughout the entire blog postings, primarily between the 17 core regulars.

*Poster2: Hey girl. How are you?*

*Poster 3: Poster 1!!!!*

*Poster 4: Poster 1, HOW YOU BE?*

*Poster 5: Poster 1, Staying warm?*

*Poster 6: Poster 1!!!!!!! you stayin in today or are you out in the weather?*

*Poster 7: Poster 1!!!!!!!!!!!!!! Backatcha! Been awhile!*

*Poster 8: I am fine. How about yourself? I guess I was acting very unlady like and unchristian yesterday, huh?*

The fact that individuals greeted one another as cordial friends, and asked questions of a personal nature, indicated that they had frequented the site enough to become comfortable and familiar enough with other members to ask such questions. This is not inconsistent with the nature of “regulars”, in that a core group of individuals tends to emerge as being more visible and active within the community.

The regulars are also the people who newcomers must win over for full welcome and acceptance into the community (Oldenburg 1999). These characters are considered the gatekeepers of the community, and help determine who gets to be included in the core group as a regular. This process was vividly captured as one regular grafted in a new “regular” by informing the person of the informal rules of “belonging” and remaining in the good graces of the community members. What was amazing was the discovery that the relationships fostered online spilled over into the real world, with some of the posters talking on the phone and meeting up in different cities to continue their online fellowship.

*Post: I take it that you are European ? I guess you are in the family. Now we have rules...lololol.<sup>22</sup> We do argue a lot and fuss, which many times is started by me. Most of us talk on the phone, meet up in cities and spend the day. After all of the fussing and fighting at the end of the day we truly care about each other. I ask that of you.....thanks.*

As already stated in this paper, third places are a function of the people that frequent the site, and they play a hand in transforming the “space” into a “place”. This “place” is continuously monitored by the regulars, who act as aforementioned

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<sup>22</sup> Laughing out loud repeatedly.

gatekeepers, keeping an eye on what is happening in the community, and ensuring that other members comply with the underlying values of the community. One such episode of a regular regaining decorum on the site occurred after the death of actress Anna Nichole Smith, and a community member made a derisive joke about blonde haired women; a not so subtle jab at the deceased actress. The deference to the person recognized as a regular on the site was almost immediate.

*Poster 1: How do you know a blonde has been using a computer? There's white out on the screen.*

*Poster 2 (A Regular): old joke.....hey we should be a little respectful. I know she was goofy and a gold-digger, but let her go in her own way. I know she does not matter to many of us, she is a death. So be respectful...Stop bashing the chick*

*Poster 2 again: ok I will stop bashing the departed. It is in bad form. lol*

This family atmosphere of the site was noticed in the way members referred to the BAW community as a whole. It became evident that the website served a greater purpose than just a place where people gathered to pass the day away. True to its calling, the site served as a place where strangers spent time together and became friends, and eventually, through regular contact, these friendships progressed to a point where the community served as a substitute family, helping members make it through tough times. The warm, familial feelings between individuals and the community itself could only be fostered through regular interaction with the website, and is illustrated in the comments below.

*Post 1: My friends...thanks for helping a brother through a very tough day. I'm out today. I'll holla<sup>23</sup> tomorrow. Peace and be safe.*

*Post 2: I'm out folks. Be safe.....*

*Post 3: BAW FAM I'm out. Much love*

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<sup>23</sup> Holla means talk with

*Post 4: OK, my BAW peeps...good evening to all...hopefully I won't be so damn busy tomorrow, see ya!!*

*Post 5: My friends have a good evening...I promised my little girl we'd go watch the sunset tonight, she gets a kick outta that. Be safe, you good folks up North stay warm and I'll holla tomorrow.*

*Post 6: See you Poster A, Poster B, Poster C, Poster D, Poster E, Poster F, Poster G, Poster H. If I missed someone Have a great day today.....love you alllllll peace*

The analysis showed that there are indeed regulars to the website, and these regulars play a vital role in creating and maintaining the overall feel of the website. These regulars are the ones that transform the website from simply being a “space” that people use to pass the time, into a “place” that has a comfortable and inviting atmosphere. Much like a house where one may seek asylum from the elements (space), versus a home where one actually lives (place), the website becomes alive with meaning as people invest time and energy into creating virtual friendships and memories with others that they meet there.

## CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

Chapter 6 presents the research findings of the study, which was undertaken to explore the third place qualities of weblogs in general, and African American community weblogs in particular. The research focused on one particular website geared towards the African American population, but a quick search on any internet search engine soon shows that there are numerous other websites that could have been used for the study (See Appendix C). The researcher believes that by choosing to focus on one website, it would provide depth to the study, rather than focusing on several websites that would have provided breadth. This approach was taken with the belief that this genre of research should be conducted with the intent to capture the essence, or the deeper meaning of a phenomenon, rather than necessarily achieving a representative sample size.

The analyzed site ([www.blackamericaweb.com](http://www.blackamericaweb.com)) is maintained as an online counterpart of the Tom Joyner Morning Show, a centerpiece of REACH Media that reaches more than 8 million listeners each week in more than 115 markets. The community blog states that it has an online population of more than 750,000 members and continues to see growth. The large numbers seen online are a consequence of the phenomenal success of the radio show, and have resulted in one of the largest virtual collection of African Americans on a daily basis. The research sought to contribute to the understanding of African American community blog use by utilizing the framework of third places, developed by the sociologist Ray Oldenburg. This frame work states that third places are characterized by: 1) Being on neutral ground, 2) Being levelers, 3) Conversation being the main activity, with the mood being playful, 4) Accessible, 5) Are a home away from home, and have “regulars”.



### *Major Findings*

The study showed that there are indeed a significant number of individuals within the African American community that utilize blog sites to discuss the crisis of HIV/AIDS within the African American community, as opposed to the lack of discussion or communal support found in traditional African American churches or “real world” community members. This use of technology, specifically blogs, to discuss HIV/AIDS served as a means to circumvent and release frustration directed towards the inactivity of established institutions. This medium was also used to try to make sense of the HIV/AIDS dilemma while discussing practical protective measures. The blog was a place where rich conversations took place, which helped increase community cohesiveness and emotional wellbeing as participants realized that they were not alone in dealing with the ramifications of the disease running rampant in the community.

The study found that there were 966 posts based around articles and threads that discussed HIV/AIDS, lending support to the belief that the African American community is indeed finding novel ways to discuss the issue of HIV/AIDS, and devising individual and collective plans to mitigate problems that threaten their survival. The core findings of this study also show that community blogs geared towards (and frequented by) African Americans share all of the characteristics of third places as put forth by Oldenburg.

The first level of inquiry finds that there is support for Oldenburg’s characterization of conversations being the major activity found in third places, and these conversations tend to have a witty or playful nature and are on neutral ground. These conversations have no restrictions on what they cover, with no person being burdened with playing the role of host or guest. Conversations are a fundamental pillar of any

functional community, and are necessary for its continued existence, because any danger that is not discussed threatens to damage the collective stability of the community, throwing it into a state of disarray.

The study has shown that third places, such as Black America Web, are ideally suited for social regeneration, meaning that it is able to restore lost or damaged aspects of community such as uninhibited conversations, emotional safety, sense of belonging, and positive reinforcement. This acceptance affords individuals the freedom to “be who they are”, and actively express their personality through joking, teasing, or other expressive behaviors. The anonymity of virtual interaction provides the ease necessary to do just that. Although the range of topics found on the site covered a wide spectrum, the object was the same: to converse with others in the aggregate and not in individual isolation. The conversations on the site were self sustaining, and were witty and interesting enough to elicit continued discussions from the group.

The second level of inquiry shows that there is support for Oldenburg’s characterization of third places being accessible and having regulars. The website archives revealed that the website was accessed every day of the week, and every hour of the day by members of the community. This accessibility allowed a core group of members, or “regulars”, to establish their presence. These regulars helped form and maintain the site’s norms and values, and other members looked to them to learn and emulate the rules of the community to avoid damage to the collective. There was evidence of regulars asserting themselves with others who did not frequent the site as often, and evidence of chastised members acknowledging that they would adhere to the sanctioning of the individual recognized as a regular.

A third level of inquiry showed that there was support for Oldenburg's characterization of leveling found on the website. There were only 2% of posts that revealed attributes of offline, real world, poster identities. This can be attributed to the belief that groups of people who engage in communal activities, such as conversation, often come together based on common goals, or interests. These diverse and unique goals or interests are the binding factors that hold the group together, and factors that serve to divide in the real world (such as gender, age, or race) are minimized.

Social forces have helped develop and shape sociological theory (feminism, capitalism, etc) over the course of time, and the advent of the Information Age and the internet now serves as a new social force that is poised to use knowledge application to replace labor and capital as a key resource to production and innovation (Trauth 2001). The internet is a relatively new phenomenon, and the application of a third place framework to an online setting is probably beyond the scope of what was initially envisioned by Oldenburg. This study extends that framework by direct application to a virtual site, as opposed to restrictive physical and geographical boundaries.

Further discoveries of the study center around the critiques of the third place framework, and the seeming tension between those that believe that technology is the root cause of the decline in community in America, as opposed to accounting for its revival and restoration. As stated earlier in this dissertation, such arguments invite a "chicken or the egg" argument, where one may wonder if contemporary media has led to the aforementioned decline, or was the decline already in progress, necessitating retribalization via contemporary media (McLuhan 1964; Steinkuehler and Williams 2006). However, the dissertation shows that this argument is neutralized when

technology is employed to discuss issues that have no established arena for public debate or discussion.

As has been established, when communication over a social relevant or salient issue is stifled or missing, elements of community are deteriorated. This implies that the failure of widespread discussion of HIV/AIDS within African American networks belied an existing failure of traditional community function. Therefore, discussions as to whether technology contributes to the demise of traditional African American community ties is rendered moot, because the communal ties in regards to HIV/AIDS were already destroyed, and had been since the discovery of the disease. This systematic failure to discuss the disease was in a sense “born into” the African American psyche, and technology simply stepped up into this void to provide a pressure outlet, in much the same way that air in a balloon migrates to an area of less pressure when squeezed.

Some argue that third places may hinder the ability of outsiders to negotiate a neighborhood (real or virtual), due to their implicit “clannish” nature, and opposition to accepting others who may appear “different”. The results of this dissertation have revealed a profound twist to this assertion. As was shown in the Results section, there was only one instance where the leveling nature of virtual third places was called into question, when a poster revealed that she was Caucasian on a website thought to be frequented primarily African Americans. As a review, the conversation went as follows:

*Poster 1: hey I am so cool with that like I said...you like what you like. It is all good. As for me I am white...*

*Poster 2: You are white?*

*Poster 3: oooppsss a revelation, you didn't know?*

*Poster 1: yes. It is a genetic defect I have had to deal with all my life. lol<sup>24</sup>*

*Poster 4: She comes out (Caucasian) in BAW<sup>25</sup> ...AWK-WARD.....*

*Poster 1: no I was up front from the start. You missed it that's all*

As stated, the revelation that the user was white did not carry any form of social sanction with it, no calls for the user to leave the site, and no negative posts directed towards her. In fact, a major finding of the dissertation is that virtual third places act as more of a social leveler than traditional third places, because traditional third places require the physical presence of an “outsider”. This physical presence may deny the outsider from receiving an opportunity to become a part of the community from the start. A stark (and maybe extreme) example could be a couple from Pakistan entering an American country western bar during peak hours, dressed in traditional Pakistani attire. The physical contrast may be so great, that they may not receive an equal distribution of opportunity to become a member of the community. However, in the third place example cited above (with the white community contributor), the individual had already established herself within the community as a “regular”, and had already defined an online identity among her peers as being outspoken, logical, as well as open minded. With that being the case, it appears that her social standing did not diminish, because community members judged her on the content of her posts, and not on the color of her skin. So in summary, virtual third places offer an equal distribution of opportunity to become members of the community, and provide individuals the FULL benefit of the

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<sup>24</sup> laughing out loud

<sup>25</sup> Black America Web

doubt to be judged on their logic, humor, intellect, or otherwise, regardless of their real world status or roles (Steinkuehler and Williams 2006).

### *Discussion Summary*

This chapter highlights and discusses the empirical findings of this dissertation. The research revealed evidence of characterizations of Oldenburg's third place framework in virtual world environments. The first level of inquiry finds that there is support for Oldenburg's characterization of conversations being the major activity found in third places, and these conversations tend to have a witty or playful nature and are on neutral ground. The second level of inquiry shows that there is support for Oldenburg's characterization of third places being accessible and having regulars. A third level of inquiry showed that there was support for Oldenburg's characterization of leveling found on the website. The website was a place where rich conversations took place, and the anonymity afforded by the internet allowed individuals to establish themselves based more on the content of their textual discourse, rather than real world physical characteristics. This may not necessarily be the case in traditional real world third places, and so in this regard, virtual third places are more of a leveling force than the former.

## CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

Chapter 7 presents the summary of contributions, recommendations, and limitations of the dissertation, along with areas for future research. The research was undertaken to explore the third place qualities of weblogs in general, and African American community weblogs in particular. There was a void in extant social and Information Systems research in this area, and this scholarship provides a strong foundation to continue further exploration of African American bloggers and their patterns of blogging. Research dealing with the social implications of weblogs is still relatively young, and it is expected that future studies on this subject will be even more encompassing and broader in the populations that they study, using different theoretical lens to examine ongoing conversations, and revised methods of textual analysis that may provide even deeper understandings of what is meant to be conveyed by the different community members.

### *Contributions of Research*

The research presented in this dissertation has shown that weblogs are indeed being used by the African American community to “heal” itself from the silence and stigma associated with the HIV/AIDS epidemic. The conversations found on these blogs have far reaching impacts when one realizes that although African American internet users may be primarily classified as middle, or upper-middle class, their interactions spans class, with upper and middle income members of the community in frequent contact with poorer friends and family (Pattillo 2006). This mitigates some of the effects of the digital divide phenomena, and increases the likelihood that poorer African Americans who do not have access to computers still have access to the information found on these virtual third place sites through proxy and weak tie associations. Having found empirical

evidence of third place characteristics, and use of technology as an enabler for rebuilding aspects of community, it is imperative that the call be sounded for government intervention in reducing or eliminating the digital divide. This drive towards eliminating the digital divide has tangible benefits, such as the improvement of health outcomes through preventative rather than reactive practices, and increased information for self-protection. The benefits of gathering of information from these virtual third place “information centers” include reduction of anxiety, frustration, confusion, or emotional distress, thereby increasing an individual’s sense of locus control regarding HIV/AIDS.

The concept of “locus of control” describes the expectations of control that individuals believe they had over any given situation. Individuals with an internal locus of control believe that positive outcomes or events are attributed to their own personal behaviors or skills. Individuals with external locus of control tend to attribute outcomes or events to forces outside of their control, such as fate, god(s), or powerful others (Rotter, Seeman et al. 1962; Amato and Bradshaw 1985; Ayalon and Young 2005). It should be noted that due to their membership in a historically persecuted minority group, with limited access to opportunities, disadvantaged communities, such as African Americans, tend to have a fatalistic predisposition, with a pervasive sense of helplessness, and an external locus of control (Freimuth, Stein et al. 1989; Galanos, Strauss et al. 1994; Alvidrez 1999; Ayalon and Young 2005).

#### *Recommendations & Future Research Paths: Health Information Seeking*

In keeping with the theme of health for this dissertation, it is noted that there are hundreds of thousands of individuals within the United States that suffer or die from diseases that can be prevented or detected at early stages, using information already in



existence which may help reduce their impact. Although information does not guarantee better health practices, it is an important step in health behavior change (Freimuth, Stein et al. 1989). Future research should investigate how conversations in virtual third places manifest themselves in real world action. For example, how do virtual third place HIV/AIDS conversations correspond to health information seeking from physical institutions? The concept of health information seeking is the “search and retrieval of messages that help to reduce uncertainty regarding health status and construct a social and personal (cognitive) sense of health” (Tardy and Hale 1998; Cotten and Gupta 2004). This statement implicitly entails that in order for individuals to engage in health information seeking, uncertainty must be experienced. This uncertainty may be experienced by the individuals physical symptoms, or external sources such as television, posters, friends, or computer technology (Freimuth, Stein et al. 1989). Further research should explore whether technology (via virtual third places), stimulates this uncertainty, and is this uncertainty enough to stimulate health information seeking among online African Americans?

However, caution should be taken, because this aforementioned information may be useless to average consumers, unless it is selectively filtered by overseers and gatekeepers, into a format that is understandable, and comprehensible to them. Therefore, future research should also study if virtual third places can be the place for individuals who are well versed in the nuances of a crisis to simplify complex concepts to others who may not be as sophisticated in that arena. More specifically, this situation presents an opportunity for healthcare professionals to participate in virtual third place

settings, in tandem with the more than 70,000 websites that contain health information, to aid in the progression of moving beyond communication to learning.

This participation of healthcare professionals may be helpful in eliminating some of the health disparities found in the African American community, through the proliferation of “reliable” and “vetted” information, coupled with the accessibility and availability of these online third place locales. This information propagation may be key to circumventing existing poverty silos, and may aid in tailoring messages specific to certain third place community cultures, which may foster some sort of stimulus generation. Stimulus generation within the online African American community may be initiated by placing “viral” web videos or links to aforementioned certified health oriented websites (such as [www.webmd.com](http://www.webmd.com), [www.healthweb.org](http://www.healthweb.org), [www.healthfinder.gov](http://www.healthfinder.gov), or [www.healthgate.com](http://www.healthgate.com)) throughout the virtual third place locations. This information may in turn be used to make medical decisions and help the consumers to make decisions about their own care (Wilkins 1999; Cline and Haynes 2001). This would also offer an opportunity to study how the presentation of information affects the information seeking process, i.e., what are the effects of having simple and straight forward sites versus information rich sites.

In addition to the data processing by the individual, attention should be paid to the position taken by Ceruzzi (Ceruzzi 2005), who states that people become slaves to technology, due to articulation and upgrades that become necessary as the technological artifact continuously outdates itself. The use of a technological medium to communicate lends itself to the examination of how technological determinism (TD) may affect the structure of the community blog and its content. Subsequent analysis done using TD

should be used to monitor “social impacts”, or social adjustments that occur as a result of “technological progress”(Williams 1997). Moreover, it should be noted if individuals using inferior technological tools experience higher levels of “blog fatigue”, which refers to members of a particular blog community losing enthusiasm and interest for the blog, and eventually abandoning that blog altogether.

In addition to blog fatigue, future TD studies should also examine if individuals with inferior technological tools tend to have higher levels of “blog churn”, which refers to the rate that individuals abandon blog sites and never post or participate again. These factors can be determined through the use of the blog directories, or stored IP addresses, to send out random surveys to members who are no longer active on the site. Finally, future research using TD should attempt to determine how long it takes to develop trust or openness with other community members on the site, and if the flux of constant technological upgrades aids or hinders this trust building by inhibiting some members from participating as fully as others (e.g., knowledge of uploading a gravatar<sup>26</sup>).

### *Study Limitations*

For the purposes of this dissertation, the researcher focused solely on HIV/AIDS in the African American populous. Although this is a serious concern within the community, there are other issues that would have made good candidates for a study (e.g. drugs, black on black crime, poverty, etc). The study also analyzed blog discussions that were sparked and centered around online articles discussing the HIV/AIDS epidemic within the African American community. This may have created an unnatural spike in HIV/AIDS discussion among the community members, and so it will be worthwhile to conduct a study of the blog discussion a few years later to see if comments were

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<sup>26</sup> A gravatar is a picture image associated with a pseudonym or online alias

sustained. The study is also limited by the fact that blog selection was based upon the search results returned by the Google search engine and the researcher's personal knowledge of African American community weblog sites. This leaves open the possibility that there may be other blogs in cyberspace that are just as good (or better), but were excluded from the study.

Further limitations of this proposed study include the fact that it focuses only on African Americans that are currently on the positive side of the digital divide, which means that the analysis will be of a self-selected sample of individuals. As such there may be a significant number of individuals that are not represented in the results garnered from the study, and the results may not necessarily be generalizable to the African American population at large. A final limitation is the researchers own personal experiences and background, which include family upbringing, culture, and education (both formal and informal). These factors are sure to bring a bias to the study, whether positive or negative, despite best efforts to minimize its effects. Readers of the study should bear this in mind, and make a note that all perspectives are embedded within the context of the researcher's subjective experiences in the world.

### *Conclusion*

The study presented in this dissertation makes a significant and novel contribution to the existing body of literature and knowledge within the Information Science domain. This contribution was accomplished by utilizing an existing framework to build a strong foundation for future studies of blogs, virtual third places, African Americans, and HIV/AIDS. This is a foundation that the author hopes will be built upon. This foundation further serves to aid in the understanding of factors that contribute to the utilization of

technology by African Americans to rebuild communicative aspects of community. Finally, it aids in the understanding of how blogs serve as virtual third place for those in need of a place to discuss, vent, or cope emotionally with the HIV/AIDS epidemic, and circumvent the silence and inaction from traditional institutional forces within the community.

## APPENDIX A: HIV/AIDS STATISTICS WITHIN THE USA

*Taken from 2005 HIV/AIDS Surveillance Report (Revised June 2007). Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*

**Table 4: Estimated numbers of AIDS cases, by year of diagnosis and selected characteristics, 2001-2005 and cumulative--United States and dependent areas (Revised June 2007)**

	Year of diagnosis					Cumulative <sup>a</sup>
	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	
<b>Data for 50 states and the District of Columbia</b>						
<b>Age at diagnosis (yrs)</b>						
<13	121	105	71	50	68	9,112
13-14	82	67	78	83	86	1,062
15-19	266	318	309	341	447	5,289
20-24	1,305	1,404	1,595	1,703	1,836	34,795
25-29	3,143	3,149	3,121	3,327	3,407	114,141
30-34	6,101	5,737	5,663	5,355	5,122	193,926
35-39	8,419	8,288	8,294	7,448	7,246	208,505
40-44	7,287	7,472	7,839	8,080	8,210	164,697
45-49	5,257	5,406	5,804	5,763	6,418	102,732
50-54	3,096	3,293	3,470	3,674	3,935	56,950
55-59	1,492	1,603	1,737	1,914	2,064	30,424
60-64	790	877	889	939	967	16,493
≥65	720	689	795	845	801	14,503
<b>Race/ethnicity</b>						
White, not Hispanic	11,001	11,274	11,254	11,520	11,780	385,537
Black, not Hispanic	19,465	19,559	20,224	19,983	20,187	397,548
Hispanic	6,847	6,711	7,291	7,099	7,676	155,179
Asian/Pacific Islander	374	427	461	471	483	7,659
American Indian/Alaska Native	166	181	186	188	182	3,238
<b>Transmission category</b>						
<b>Male adult or adolescent</b>						
Male-to-male sexual contact	15,294	15,764	16,448	16,660	17,230	452,111
Injection drug use	5,948	5,682	5,579	5,243	5,441	168,314
Male-to-male sexual contact and injection drug use	2,104	1,990	2,002	1,942	2,018	65,881
High-risk heterosexual contact <sup>b</sup>	4,293	4,567	4,616	4,707	4,797	61,438
Other <sup>c</sup>	269	272	246	265	280	13,978
Subtotal	27,908	28,276	28,891	28,617	29,766	761,723
<b>Female adult or adolescent</b>						
Injection drug use	3,099	2,911	2,971	2,961	2,940	73,050
High-risk heterosexual contact <sup>b</sup>	6,730	6,895	7,501	7,447	7,591	102,171
Other <sup>c</sup>	220	221	232	248	243	6,582
Subtotal	10,049	10,027	10,704	10,656	10,774	181,802
<b>Child (&lt;13 yrs at diagnosis)</b>						
Perinatal	118	103	71	50	67	8,460
Other <sup>d</sup>	3	2	1	0	1	641
Subtotal	121	105	71	50	68	9,101
<b>Region of residence</b>						
Northeast	11,273	10,292	10,955	10,452	11,529	300,963
Midwest	3,929	4,126	4,282	4,225	4,862	97,930
South	16,571	17,301	18,014	18,761	18,115	359,725
West	6,306	6,689	6,414	6,086	6,102	194,011
<b>Subtotal for 50 states and the District of Columbia</b>	<b>38,079</b>	<b>38,408</b>	<b>39,666</b>	<b>39,524</b>	<b>40,608</b>	<b>952,629</b>
<b>Data for U.S. dependent areas</b>	<b>1,189</b>	<b>1,046</b>	<b>1,060</b>	<b>923</b>	<b>982</b>	<b>30,386</b>
<b>Total<sup>e</sup></b>	<b>39,327</b>	<b>39,512</b>	<b>40,834</b>	<b>40,665</b>	<b>41,897</b>	<b>984,155</b>

*Note.* These numbers do not represent reported case counts. Rather, these numbers are point estimates, which result from adjustments of reported case counts. The reported case counts have been adjusted for reporting delays and for redistribution of cases in persons initially reported without an identified risk factor, but not for incomplete reporting.

<sup>a</sup> From the beginning of the epidemic through 2005.

<sup>b</sup> Heterosexual contact with a person known to have, or to be at high risk for, HIV infection.

<sup>c</sup> Includes hemophilia, blood transfusion, perinatal exposure, and risk factor not reported or not identified.

<sup>d</sup> Includes hemophilia, blood transfusion, and risk factor not reported or not identified.

<sup>e</sup> Includes persons of unknown race or multiple races and persons of unknown sex. Cumulative total includes 3,469 persons of unknown race or multiple races, 3 persons of unknown sex, 1,136 persons of unknown state of residence, and 3 persons who were residents of other areas. Because column totals were calculated independently of the values for the subpopulations, the values in each column may not sum to the column total.

**Table 5: Estimated numbers of AIDS cases in children <13 years of age, by year of diagnosis and selected characteristics, 2001-2005 and cumulative--50 states and the District of Columbia (Revised June 2007)**

	Year of diagnosis					Cumulative <sup>a</sup>
	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	
<b>Race/ethnicity</b>						
White, not Hispanic	13	14	12	6	6	1,613
Black, not Hispanic	85	72	46	31	46	5,631
Hispanic	23	16	11	9	13	1,738
Asian/Pacific Islander	1	1	0	1	1	54
American Indian/Alaska Native	0	1	0	1	0	32
<b>Transmission category</b>						
Hemophilia/coagulation disorder	0	0	0	0	0	226
Mother with documented HIV infection or 1 of the following risk factors	118	103	71	50	67	8,460
Injection drug use	14	11	8	6	4	3,198
Sex with injection drug user	10	4	6	2	1	1,388
Sex with bisexual male	4	2	0	2	1	203
Sex with person with hemophilia	1	0	0	0	0	36
Sex with HIV-infected transfusion recipient	0	0	0	0	0	22
Sex with HIV-infected person, risk factor not specified	40	36	20	20	29	1,508
Receipt of blood transfusion, blood components, or tissue	1	2	1	0	0	143
Has HIV infection, risk factor not specified	49	47	35	20	31	1,964
Receipt of blood transfusion, blood components, or tissue	0	2	0	0	0	372
Other/risk factor not reported or identified	3	0	0	0	1	42
<b>Total<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>121</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>9,101</b>

Note. These numbers do not represent reported case counts. Rather, these numbers are point estimates, which result from adjustments of reported case counts. The reported case counts have been adjusted for reporting delays and for redistribution of cases in persons initially reported without an identified risk factor, but not for incomplete reporting.

<sup>a</sup> From the beginning of the epidemic through 2005.

<sup>b</sup> Includes children of unknown race or multiple races. Cumulative total includes 33 children of unknown race or multiple races. Because column totals were calculated independently of the values for the subpopulations, the values in each column may not sum to the column total.

**Table 6: Estimated numbers of cases and rates (per 100,000 population) of AIDS, by race/ethnicity, age category, and sex, 2005--50 states and the District of Columbia (Revised June 2007)**

Race/ethnicity	Adults or adolescents									
	Males		Females		Total <sup>a</sup>		Children (<13 yrs)		Total <sup>a</sup>	
	No.	Rate	No.	Rate	No.	Rate	No.	Rate	No.	Rate
White, not Hispanic	10,027	12.1	1,747	2.0	11,773	6.9	6	0.0	11,780	5.9
Black, not Hispanic	13,048	95.1	7,093	45.5	20,141	68.7	46	0.6	20,187	54.1
Hispanic	5,949	36.0	1,714	11.2	7,662	24.0	13	0.1	7,676	18.0
Asian/Pacific Islander	389	7.2	92	1.6	481	4.3	1	0.1	483	3.6
American Indian/Alaska Native	137	14.3	45	4.4	182	9.3	0	0.0	182	7.4
<b>Total<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>29,766</b>	<b>24.9</b>	<b>10,774</b>	<b>8.6</b>	<b>40,540</b>	<b>16.6</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>0.1</b>	<b>40,608<sup>c</sup></b>	<b>13.7</b>

Note. These numbers do not represent reported case counts. Rather, these numbers are point estimates, which result from adjustments of reported case counts. The reported case counts have been adjusted for reporting delays, but not for incomplete reporting.

Data exclude cases in persons whose state or area of residence is unknown, as well as cases from U.S. dependent areas, for which census information about race and age categories is lacking.

<sup>a</sup> Because row totals were calculated independently of values for the subpopulations, the values in each row may not sum to the row total.

<sup>b</sup> Includes person of unknown race or multiple races. Because column totals were calculated independently of the values for the subpopulations, the values in each column may not sum to the column total.

<sup>c</sup> Includes 302 persons of unknown race or multiple races.

**Table 7: Estimated numbers of deaths of persons with AIDS, by year of death and selected characteristics, 2001-2005 and cumulative--United States and dependent areas**

	Year of death					Cumulative <sup>a</sup>
	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	
<b>Data for 50 states and the District of Columbia</b>						
<b>Age at death (yrs)</b>						
<13	47	25	23	15	7	4,865
13-14	3	9	7	14	14	271
15-19	44	38	38	38	42	1,061
20-24	206	152	163	188	157	8,555
25-29	612	555	531	509	457	43,157
30-34	1,672	1,451	1,328	1,208	1,102	94,260
35-39	3,145	2,922	2,889	2,604	2,129	114,833
40-44	3,714	3,527	3,682	3,655	3,371	101,420
45-49	3,035	3,231	3,355	3,479	3,261	69,832
50-54	2,082	2,279	2,480	2,634	2,635	41,897
55-59	1,098	1,174	1,371	1,508	1,529	23,600
60-64	624	602	732	755	805	13,497
≥65	698	675	805	845	808	13,511
<b>Race/ethnicity</b>						
White, not Hispanic	5,239	5,153	5,263	5,137	5,006	235,879
Black, not Hispanic	9,085	8,927	9,077	9,302	8,562	211,559
Hispanic	2,436	2,306	2,774	2,664	2,444	77,125
Asian/Pacific Islander	99	93	88	113	97	3,383
American Indian/Alaska Native	79	84	75	85	81	1,657
<b>Transmission category</b>						
<b>Male adult or adolescent</b>						
Male-to-male sexual contact	5,995	5,867	6,111	6,078	5,929	260,749
Injection drug use	3,749	3,662	3,759	3,570	3,159	104,450
Male-to-male sexual contact and injection drug use	1,342	1,273	1,354	1,314	1,364	39,920
High-risk heterosexual contact <sup>b</sup>	1,485	1,434	1,554	1,729	1,584	24,655
Other <sup>c</sup>	169	163	156	136	104	9,824
Subtotal	12,740	12,400	12,934	12,826	12,140	439,598
<b>Female adult or adolescent</b>						
Injection drug use	1,829	1,876	1,916	1,959	1,651	41,529
High-risk heterosexual contact <sup>b</sup>	2,258	2,225	2,400	2,531	2,413	40,233
Other <sup>c</sup>	86	84	94	77	64	4,082
Subtotal	4,172	4,185	4,411	4,567	4,128	85,844
<b>Child (&lt;13 yrs at diagnosis)</b>						
Perinatal	66	52	53	58	46	4,800
Other <sup>d</sup>	3	4	6	1	1	515
Subtotal	69	56	59	60	48	5,315



**Table 8: Estimated numbers of deaths of persons with AIDS, by year of death and selected characteristics, 2001-2005 and cumulative--United States and dependent areas (cont)**

	Year of death					Cumulative <sup>a</sup>
	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	
<b>Region of residence</b>						
Northeast	5,091	5,047	5,376	4,904	3,948	174,327
Midwest	1,682	1,675	1,655	1,619	1,541	52,933
South	7,469	7,361	7,776	8,353	8,240	191,845
West	2,738	2,559	2,597	2,577	2,588	111,652
<b>Subtotal for 50 states and the District of Columbia</b>	<b>16,980</b>	<b>16,641</b>	<b>17,404</b>	<b>17,453</b>	<b>16,316</b>	<b>530,756</b>
<b>Data for U.S. dependent areas</b>	<b>724</b>	<b>662</b>	<b>598</b>	<b>628</b>	<b>619</b>	<b>19,355</b>
<b>Total<sup>e</sup></b>	<b>17,726</b>	<b>17,318</b>	<b>18,020</b>	<b>18,099</b>	<b>17,011</b>	<b>550,394<sup>f</sup></b>

*Note.* These numbers do not represent reported case counts. Rather, these numbers are point estimates, which result from adjustments of reported case counts. The reported case counts have been adjusted for reporting delays and for redistribution of cases in persons initially reported without an identified risk factor, but not for incomplete reporting.

<sup>a</sup> From the beginning of the epidemic through 2005.

<sup>b</sup> Heterosexual contact with a person known to have, or to be at high risk for, HIV infection.

<sup>c</sup> Includes hemophilia, blood transfusion, perinatal exposure, and risk factor not reported or not identified.

<sup>d</sup> Includes hemophilia, blood transfusion, and risk factor not reported or not identified.

<sup>e</sup> Includes persons of unknown race or multiple races and persons of unknown sex. Because column totals were calculated independently of the values for the subpopulations, the values in each column may not sum to the column total.

<sup>f</sup> Includes 1,162 persons of unknown race or multiple races, 280 persons of unknown state of residence, and 2 persons who were residents of other areas.

**Table 9: Estimated numbers of persons living with AIDS, by year and selected characteristics, 2001-2005--United States and dependent areas (Revised June 2007)**

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
<b>Data for 50 states and the District of Columbia</b>					
<b>Age at end of year (yrs)</b>					
<13	2,541	2,303	1,998	1,670	1,393
13-14	620	689	753	802	793
15-19	1,266	1,493	1,722	2,002	2,301
20-24	3,765	3,926	4,334	4,727	5,261
25-29	13,036	12,739	12,805	13,195	13,924
30-34	37,342	35,669	34,017	32,335	30,573
35-39	71,123	70,411	68,521	65,598	63,441
40-44	75,036	80,881	86,788	91,981	95,415
45-49	58,853	65,334	71,992	78,130	85,572
50-54	36,042	41,706	47,343	53,921	60,374
55-59	17,042	20,416	24,484	28,739	34,167
60-64	8,166	9,833	11,451	13,474	15,642
≥65	6,651	7,851	9,304	11,009	13,018
<b>Race/ethnicity</b>					
White, not Hispanic	124,389	130,510	136,501	142,884	149,658
Black, not Hispanic	141,904	152,536	163,683	174,363	185,988
Hispanic	59,466	63,871	68,388	72,823	78,054
Asian/Pacific Islander	2,825	3,158	3,532	3,891	4,276
American Indian/Alaska Native	1,169	1,266	1,378	1,481	1,581
<b>Transmission category</b>					
<b>Male adult or adolescent</b>					
Male-to-male sexual contact	149,245	159,143	169,479	180,061	191,362
Injection drug use	56,070	58,089	59,909	61,582	63,864
Male-to-male sexual contact and injection drug use	23,313	24,030	24,678	25,307	25,961
High-risk heterosexual contact <sup>a</sup>	24,398	27,531	30,593	33,571	36,784
Other <sup>b</sup>	3,650	3,760	3,849	3,979	4,154
Subtotal	256,676	272,553	288,509	304,500	322,125
<b>Female adult or adolescent</b>					
Injection drug use	27,140	28,176	29,230	30,232	31,521
High-risk heterosexual contact <sup>a</sup>	42,074	46,743	51,884	56,760	61,938
Other <sup>b</sup>	1,875	2,012	2,149	2,321	2,500
Subtotal	71,089	76,930	83,224	89,313	95,959
<b>Child (&lt;13 yrs at diagnosis)</b>					
Perinatal	3,580	3,631	3,648	3,640	3,661
Other <sup>c</sup>	134	132	127	126	126
Subtotal	3,714	3,763	3,775	3,766	3,787
<b>Region of residence</b>					
Northeast	102,684	107,929	113,508	119,055	126,637
Midwest	33,992	36,443	39,070	41,675	44,997
South	127,418	137,359	147,597	158,005	167,880
West	67,389	71,519	75,337	78,845	82,360
<b>Subtotal for 50 states and the District of Columbia</b>	<b>331,482</b>	<b>353,249</b>	<b>375,511</b>	<b>397,582</b>	<b>421,873</b>
<b>Data for U.S dependent areas</b>	<b>9,528</b>	<b>9,911</b>	<b>10,374</b>	<b>10,669</b>	<b>11,031</b>
<b>Total<sup>d</sup></b>	<b>341,302</b>	<b>363,496</b>	<b>386,310</b>	<b>408,875</b>	<b>433,760</b>

Note. These numbers do not represent reported case counts. Rather, these numbers are point estimates, which result from adjustments of reported case counts. The reported case counts have been adjusted for reporting delays and for redistribution of cases in persons initially reported without an identified risk factor, but not for incomplete reporting.

<sup>a</sup> Heterosexual contact with a person known to have, or to be at high risk for, HIV infection.

<sup>b</sup> Includes hemophilia, blood transfusion, perinatal exposure, and risk factor not reported or not identified.

<sup>c</sup> Includes hemophilia, blood transfusion, and risk factor not reported or not identified.

<sup>d</sup> Includes persons of unknown race or multiple races and persons of unknown sex. Because column totals were calculated independently of the values for the subpopulations, the values in each column may not sum to the column total.

**Table 10: Estimated numbers of persons living with AIDS at the end of 2005, by race/ethnicity, sex, and transmission category--50 states and the District of Columbia (Revised June 2007)**

Transmission category	White, not Hispanic		Black, not Hispanic		Hispanic		Asian/Pacific Islander		American Indian/Alaska Native		Total <sup>a</sup>	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
<b>Male adult or adolescent</b>												
Male-to-male sexual contact	98,062	75	54,858	44	34,245	56	2,560	72	670	56	191,362	59
Injection drug use	13,194	10	34,680	28	15,125	25	325	9	205	17	63,864	20
Male-to-male sexual contact and injection drug use	11,757	9	9,625	8	4,041	7	174	5	202	17	25,961	8
High-risk heterosexual contact <sup>b</sup>	5,647	4	22,988	19	7,419	12	422	12	99	8	36,784	11
Other <sup>c</sup>	1,805	1	1,651	1	585	1	74	2	17	1	4,154	1
Subtotal	130,464	100	123,803	100	61,416	100	3,556	100	1,193	100	322,125	100
<b>Female adult or adolescent</b>												
Injection drug use	7,313	39	18,714	31	5,059	32	113	16	137	36	31,521	33
High-risk heterosexual contact <sup>b</sup>	10,801	58	39,495	66	10,482	66	539	77	225	60	61,938	65
Other <sup>c</sup>	526	3	1,479	2	412	3	48	7	14	4	2,500	3
Subtotal	18,641	100	59,689	100	15,953	100	700	100	375	100	95,959	100
<b>Child (&lt;13 yrs at diagnosis)</b>												
Perinatal	501	91	2,458	98	650	95	19	94	13	99	3,661	97
Other <sup>d</sup>	50	9	39	2	36	5	1	6	0	1	126	3
Subtotal	551	100	2,497	100	686	100	20	100	13	100	3,787	100
<b>Total<sup>e</sup></b>	<b>149,658</b>		<b>185,988</b>		<b>78,054</b>		<b>4,276</b>		<b>1,581</b>		<b>421,873</b>	

Note. These numbers do not represent reported case counts. Rather, these numbers are point estimates, which result from adjustments of reported case counts. The reported case counts have been adjusted for reporting delays and for redistribution of cases in persons initially reported without an identified risk factor, but not for incomplete reporting.

<sup>a</sup> Includes 2,316 persons of unknown race or multiple races.

<sup>b</sup> Heterosexual contact with a person known to have, or to be at high risk for, HIV infection.

<sup>c</sup> Includes hemophilia, blood transfusion, perinatal exposure, and risk factor not reported or not identified.

<sup>d</sup> Includes hemophilia, blood transfusion, and risk factor not reported or not identified.

<sup>e</sup> Includes 3 person of unknown sex. Because column totals were calculated independently of the values for the subpopulations, the values in each column may not sum to the column total.

**Table 11: Estimated numbers of persons living with HIV infection (not AIDS) or with AIDS at the end of 2005, by area of residence and age category--United States and dependent areas (Revised June 2007)**

Area of residence	Living with HIV infection (not AIDS) <sup>a</sup>			Living with AIDS		
	Adults or adolescents	Children (<13 years)	Total	Adults or adolescents	Children (<13 years)	Total
Alabama	5,256	25	5,282	3,148	13	3,161
Alaska	259	1	260	320	1	321
Arizona	5,591	59	5,649	4,619	7	4,626
Arkansas	2,281	7	2,288	2,026	9	2,035
California	—	—	—	58,788	118	58,906
Colorado	5,776	12	5,788	3,871	3	3,874
Connecticut	—	—	—	7,095	23	7,118
Delaware	—	—	—	1,673	9	1,682
District of Columbia	—	—	—	9,614	38	9,652
Florida <sup>b</sup>	33,988	265	34,254	44,566	246	44,812
Georgia	—	—	—	15,853	54	15,907
Hawaii	—	—	—	1,172	4	1,176
Idaho	346	0	346	281	0	281
Illinois	—	—	—	15,586	56	15,642
Indiana	3,632	23	3,655	3,824	17	3,841
Iowa	545	2	547	813	5	818
Kansas	1,179	8	1,187	1,210	2	1,212
Kentucky	—	—	—	2,455	8	2,463
Louisiana	7,305	104	7,409	7,643	33	7,676
Maine	—	—	—	468	2	470
Maryland	—	—	—	13,768	52	13,821
Massachusetts	—	—	—	8,538	24	8,562
Michigan	5,884	57	5,941	6,160	15	6,175
Minnesota	3,058	19	3,077	2,167	9	2,176
Mississippi	4,223	31	4,254	3,169	17	3,186
Missouri	4,784	34	4,818	5,164	8	5,172
Montana	—	—	—	184	0	184
Nebraska	629	7	636	691	2	693
Nevada	3,281	12	3,293	2,829	4	2,833
New Hampshire	—	—	—	559	3	562
New Jersey	14,659	247	14,905	17,498	74	17,572
New Mexico	872	0	872	1,205	3	1,208
New York	38,020	920	38,939	74,017	220	74,237
North Carolina	11,204	67	11,271	8,175	17	8,192
North Dakota	75	0	75	68	1	69
Ohio	8,008	49	8,057	6,983	35	7,018
Oklahoma	2,153	16	2,169	1,988	2	1,990
Oregon	—	—	—	2,610	5	2,615
Pennsylvania	—	—	—	16,559	88	16,646
Rhode Island	—	—	—	1,235	9	1,244
South Carolina	6,346	54	6,399	6,424	23	6,448
South Dakota	182	2	184	123	1	124
Tennessee	6,348	63	6,411	6,075	10	6,085
Texas	23,945	282	24,227	31,990	66	32,057
Utah	811	10	822	1,123	0	1,123
Vermont	—	—	—	223	2	225
Virginia	9,294	42	9,336	7,986	31	8,017
Washington	—	—	—	5,119	4	5,123
West Virginia	642	5	647	694	5	699
Wisconsin	2,239	17	2,256	2,044	13	2,057
Wyoming	89	1	90	87	1	88
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>212,904</b>	<b>2,442</b>	<b>215,346</b>	<b>420,481</b>	<b>1,393</b>	<b>421,873</b>

**Table 12: Estimated numbers of persons living with HIV infection (not AIDS) or with AIDS at the end of 2005, by area of residence and age category--United States and dependent areas (Revised June 2007) (cont)**

Area of residence	Living with HIV infection (not AIDS) <sup>a</sup>			Living with AIDS		
	Adults or adolescents	Children (<13 years)	Total	Adults or adolescents	Children (<13 years)	Total
<b>U.S. dependent areas</b>						
American Samoa	1	0	1	1	0	1
Guam	58	0	58	38	0	38
Northern Mariana Islands	5	0	5	3	0	3
Puerto Rico	—	—	—	10,653	32	10,685
Virgin Islands, U.S.	240	2	242	300	3	303
Other <sup>c</sup>	—	—	—	1	0	1
<b>Total<sup>d</sup></b>	<b>213,209</b>	<b>2,444</b>	<b>215,653</b>	<b>432,328</b>	<b>1,432</b>	<b>433,760</b>

Note. These numbers do not represent reported case counts. Rather, these numbers are point estimates, which result from adjustments of reported case counts. The reported case counts have been adjusted for reporting delays, but not for incomplete reporting.

<sup>a</sup> See Technical Notes for the list of areas that have had laws or regulations requiring confidential name-based HIV infection reporting since at least 2001.

<sup>b</sup> Florida has confidential name-based HIV infection reporting for only the diagnoses made during July 1997 or later.

<sup>c</sup> Persons reported from areas with confidential name-based AIDS reporting but who are residents of other areas.

<sup>d</sup> Total number of persons living with HIV infection (not AIDS) includes persons reported from areas with confidential name-based HIV infection reporting who were residents of other states or whose area of residence is unknown. Total number of persons living with AIDS includes persons whose area of residence is unknown. Because column totals were calculated independently of the values for the subpopulations, the values in each column may not sum to the column total.

**Table 13: Reported AIDS cases for male adults and adolescents, by transmission category and race/ethnicity, 2005 and cumulative--United States and dependent areas**

Transmission category	2005		Cumulative <sup>a</sup>	
	No.	%	No.	%
<b>White, not Hispanic</b>				
Male-to-male sexual contact	6,820	65	248,186	73
Injection drug use	831	8	31,275	9
Male-to-male sexual contact and injection drug use	799	8	30,401	9
Hemophilia/coagulation disorder	50	0	3,971	1
High-risk heterosexual contact <sup>b</sup>	344	3	7,454	2
Sex with injection drug user	68	1	2,249	1
Sex with person with hemophilia	0	0	35	0
Sex with HIV-infected transfusion recipient	1	0	177	0
Sex with HIV-infected person, risk factor not specified	275	3	4,993	1
Receipt of blood transfusion, blood components, or tissue	22	0	3,193	1
Other/risk factor not reported or identified	1,569	15	15,815	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>10,435</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>340,295</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Black, not Hispanic</b>				
Male-to-male sexual contact	4,731	36	99,269	37
Injection drug use	2,059	16	82,233	30
Male-to-male sexual contact and injection drug use	596	4	21,260	8
Hemophilia/coagulation disorder	11	0	598	0
High-risk heterosexual contact <sup>b</sup>	1,958	15	28,104	10
Sex with injection drug user	224	2	6,675	2
Sex with person with hemophilia	3	0	34	0
Sex with HIV-infected transfusion recipient	8	0	218	0
Sex with HIV-infected person, risk factor not specified	1,723	13	21,177	8
Receipt of blood transfusion, blood components, or tissue	37	0	1,210	0
Other/risk factor not reported or identified	3,868	29	38,097	14
<b>Total</b>	<b>13,260</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>270,771</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Hispanic</b>				
Male-to-male sexual contact	2,884	44	61,824	43
Injection drug use	1,213	19	45,068	32
Male-to-male sexual contact and injection drug use	293	4	10,390	7
Hemophilia/coagulation disorder	5	0	457	0
High-risk heterosexual contact <sup>b</sup>	740	11	10,301	7
Sex with injection drug user	93	1	2,325	2
Sex with person with hemophilia	0	0	11	0
Sex with HIV-infected transfusion recipient	4	0	119	0
Sex with HIV-infected person, risk factor not specified	643	10	7,846	6
Receipt of blood transfusion, blood components, or tissue	13	0	642	0
Other/risk factor not reported or identified	1,392	21	13,841	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,540</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>142,523</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 14: Reported AIDS cases for male adults and adolescents, by transmission category and race/ethnicity, 2005 and cumulative--United States and dependent areas (cont)**

Transmission category	2005		Cumulative <sup>a</sup>	
	No.	%	No.	%
<b>Asian/Pacific Islander</b>				
Male-to-male sexual contact	214	55	4,317	68
Injection drug use	18	5	312	5
Male-to-male sexual contact and injection drug use	12	3	261	4
Hemophilia/coagulation disorder	2	1	71	1
High-risk heterosexual contact <sup>b</sup>	44	11	356	6
Sex with injection drug user	0	0	55	1
Sex with person with hemophilia	0	0	1	0
Sex with HIV-infected transfusion recipient	0	0	9	0
Sex with HIV-infected person, risk factor not specified	44	11	291	5
Receipt of blood transfusion, blood components, or tissue	1	0	114	2
Other/risk factor not reported or identified	97	25	883	14
<b>Total</b>	<b>388</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>6,314</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>American Indian/Alaska Native</b>				
Male-to-male sexual contact	63	48	1,351	55
Injection drug use	20	15	388	16
Male-to-male sexual contact and injection drug use	19	15	426	17
Hemophilia/coagulation disorder	0	0	31	1
High-risk heterosexual contact <sup>b</sup>	11	8	109	4
Sex with injection drug user	4	3	34	1
Sex with person with hemophilia	0	0	0	0
Sex with HIV-infected transfusion recipient	0	0	3	0
Sex with HIV-infected person, risk factor not specified	7	5	72	3
Receipt of blood transfusion, blood components, or tissue	0	0	9	0
Other/risk factor not reported or identified	18	14	150	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>131</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>2,464</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Total cases</b>				
Male-to-male sexual contact	14,819	48	416,232	54
Injection drug use	4,168	13	159,676	21
Male-to-male sexual contact and injection drug use	1,742	6	62,940	8
Hemophilia/coagulation disorder	68	0	5,142	1
High-risk heterosexual contact <sup>b</sup>	3,110	10	46,533	6
Sex with injection drug user	389	1	11,371	1
Sex with person with hemophilia	3	0	81	0
Sex with HIV-infected transfusion recipient	13	0	529	0
Sex with HIV-infected person, risk factor not specified	2,705	9	34,552	5
Receipt of blood transfusion, blood components, or tissue	73	0	5,190	1
Other/risk factor not reported or identified	6,976	23	69,095	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>30,956<sup>c</sup></b>	<b>100</b>	<b>764,808<sup>d</sup></b>	<b>100</b>

<sup>a</sup> Reported from the beginning of the epidemic through 2005.

<sup>b</sup> Heterosexual contact with a person known to have, or to be at high risk for, HIV infection.

<sup>c</sup> Includes 202 males of unknown race or multiple races.

<sup>d</sup> Includes 2,441 males of unknown race or multiple races.

**Table 15: Reported AIDS cases for female adults and adolescents, by transmission category and race/ethnicity, 2005 and cumulative--United States and dependent areas**

Transmission category	2005		Cumulative <sup>a</sup>	
	No.	%	No.	%
<b>White, not Hispanic</b>				
Injection drug use	506	28	14,519	40
Hemophilia/coagulation disorder	2	0	119	0
High-risk heterosexual contact <sup>b</sup>	749	42	15,094	42
Sex with injection drug user	188	10	5,536	15
Sex with bisexual male	60	3	1,779	5
Sex with person with hemophilia	6	0	325	1
Sex with HIV-infected transfusion recipient	7	0	336	1
Sex with HIV-infected person, risk factor not specified	488	27	7,118	20
Receipt of blood transfusion, blood components, or tissue	20	1	1,871	5
Other/risk factor not reported or identified	517	29	4,653	13
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,794</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>36,256</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Black, not Hispanic</b>				
Injection drug use	1,130	16	37,977	35
Hemophilia/coagulation disorder	5	0	143	0
High-risk heterosexual contact <sup>b</sup>	3,079	44	46,642	43
Sex with injection drug user	367	5	13,184	12
Sex with bisexual male	115	2	2,190	2
Sex with person with hemophilia	6	0	117	0
Sex with HIV-infected transfusion recipient	12	0	266	0
Sex with HIV-infected person, risk factor not specified	2,579	37	30,885	28
Receipt of blood transfusion, blood components, or tissue	53	1	1,531	1
Other/risk factor not reported or identified	2,711	39	22,158	20
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,978</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>108,451</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Hispanic</b>				
Injection drug use	371	19	12,407	36
Hemophilia/coagulation disorder	3	0	65	0
High-risk heterosexual contact <sup>b</sup>	990	51	16,964	49
Sex with injection drug user	175	9	6,293	18
Sex with bisexual male	46	2	782	2
Sex with person with hemophilia	1	0	45	0
Sex with HIV-infected transfusion recipient	7	0	130	0
Sex with HIV-infected person, risk factor not specified	761	39	9,714	28
Receipt of blood transfusion, blood components, or tissue	9	0	608	2
Other/risk factor not reported or identified	578	30	4,570	13
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,951</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>34,614</b>	<b>100</b>



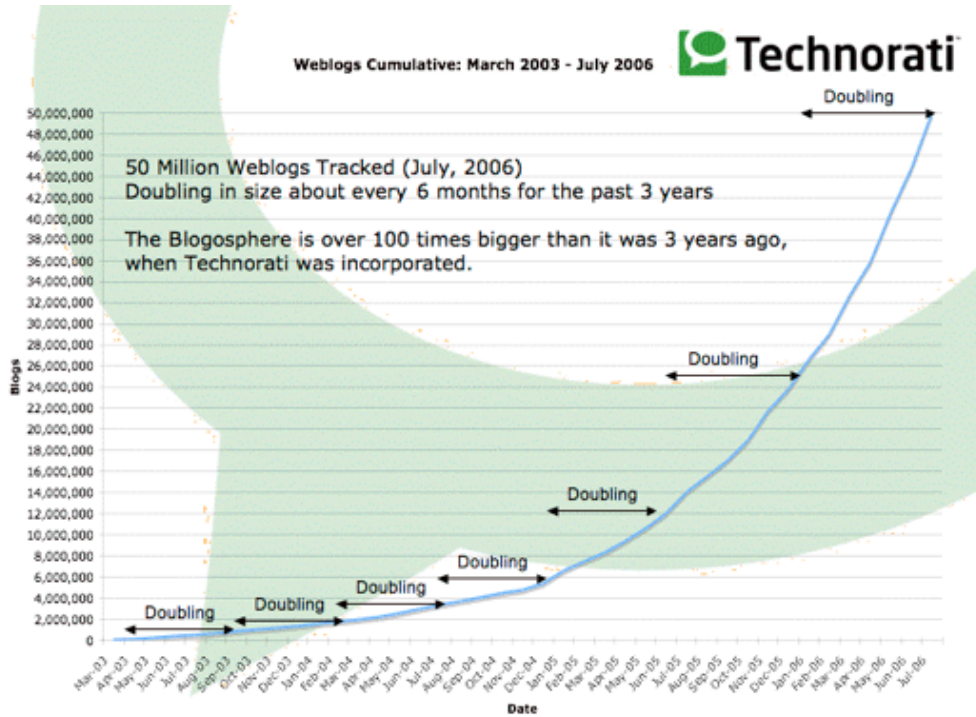
## APPENDIX B: BLOG GROWTH

*Taken From Technorati: State of the Blogosphere, August 2006*

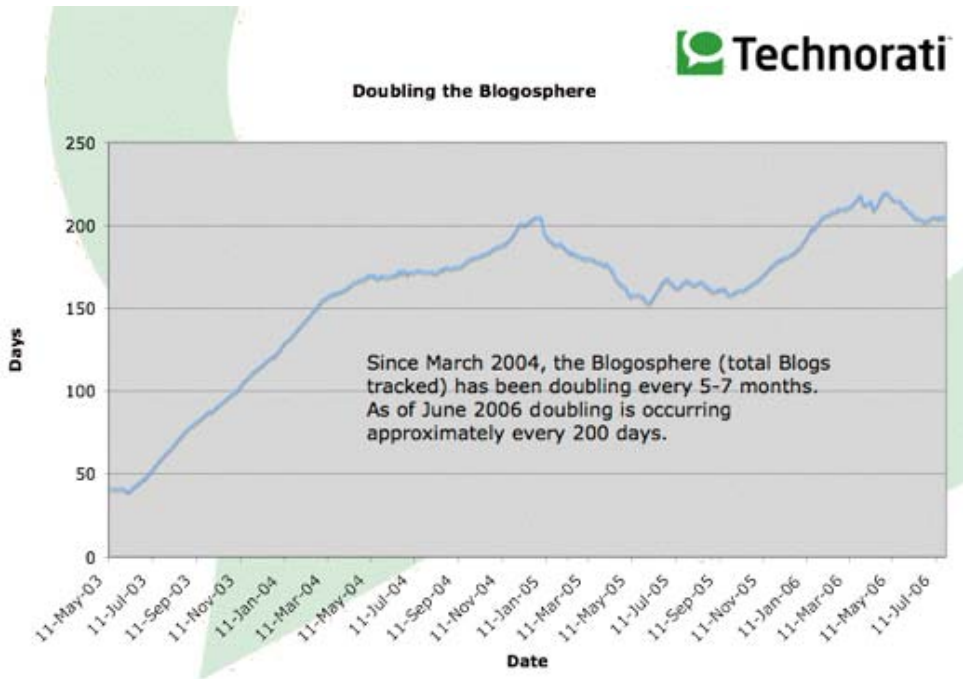
In summary:

- [Technorati](#) is now tracking over 50 Million Blogs.
- The Blogosphere is over 100 times bigger than it was just 3 years ago.
- Today, the blogosphere is doubling in size every 200 days, or about once every 6 and a half months.
- From January 2004 until July 2006, the number of blogs that Technorati tracks has continued to double every 5-7 months.
- About 175,000 new weblogs were created each day, which means that on average, there are more than 2 blogs created each second of each day.
- About 8% of new blogs get past Technorati's filters, even if it is only for a few hours or days.
- About 70% of the pings Technorati receives are from known spam sources, but we drop them before we have to send out a spider to go and index the splog.
- Total posting volume of the blogosphere continues to rise, showing about 1.6 Million postings per day, or about 18.6 posts per second.
- This is about double the volume of about a year ago.
- The most prevalent times for English-language posting is between the hours of 10AM and 2PM Pacific time, with an additional spike at around 5PM Pacific time

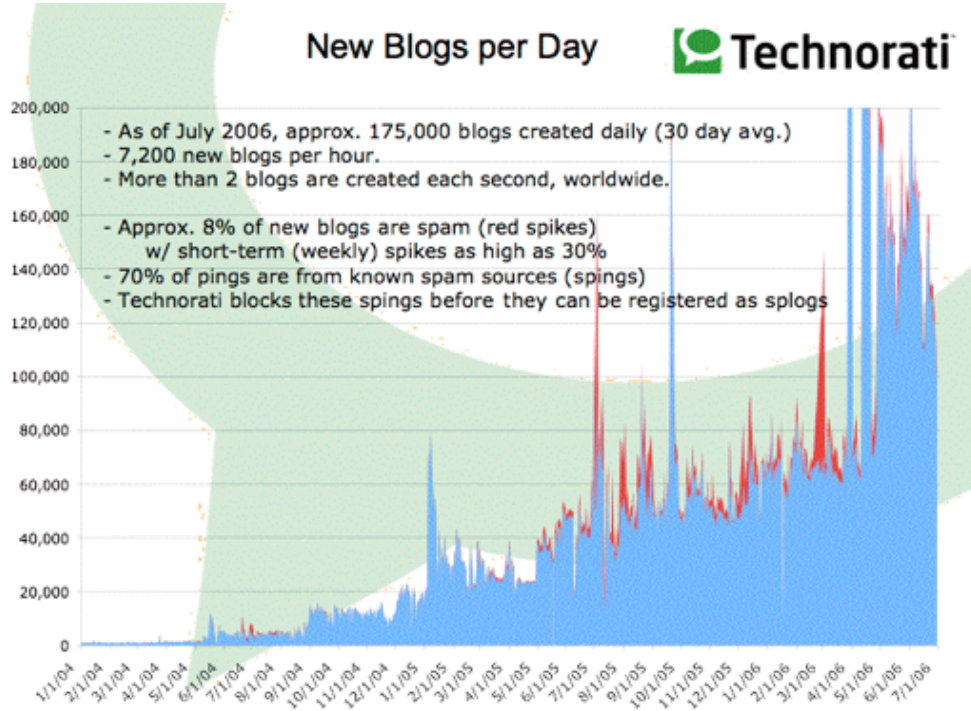
The blogosphere that Technorati tracks continues to show significant growth.



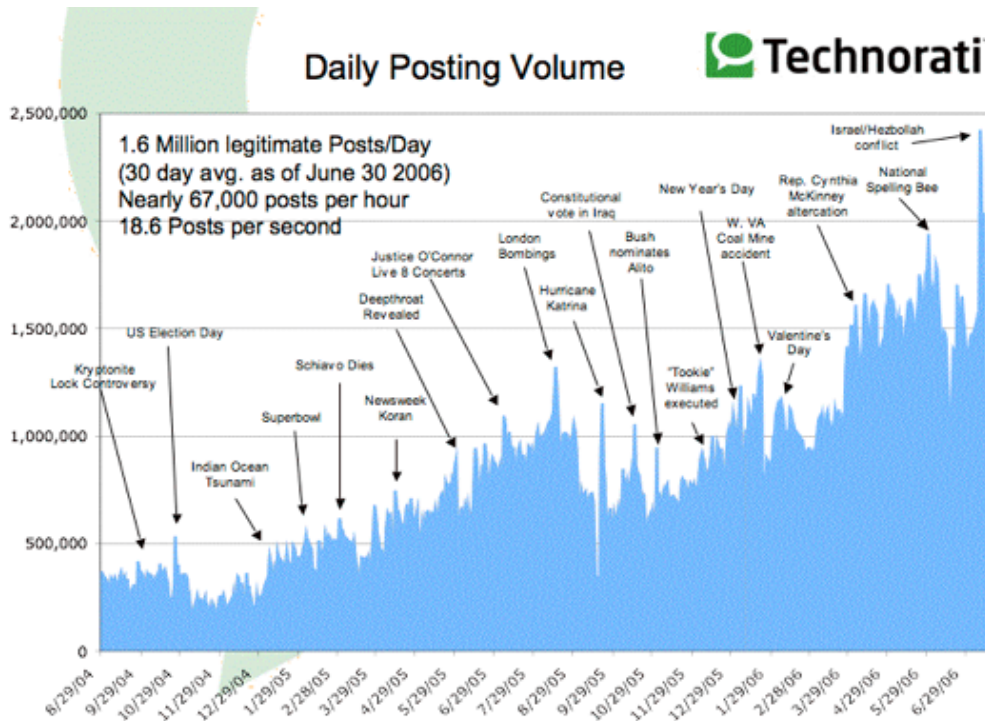
The rate at which the blogosphere has doubled over time, as shown in the chart below:



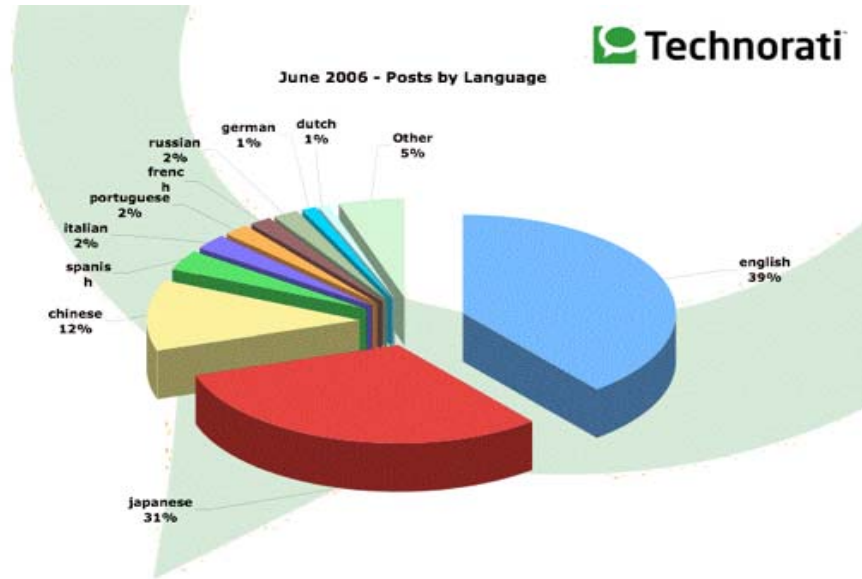
The number of new blogs tracked each day:



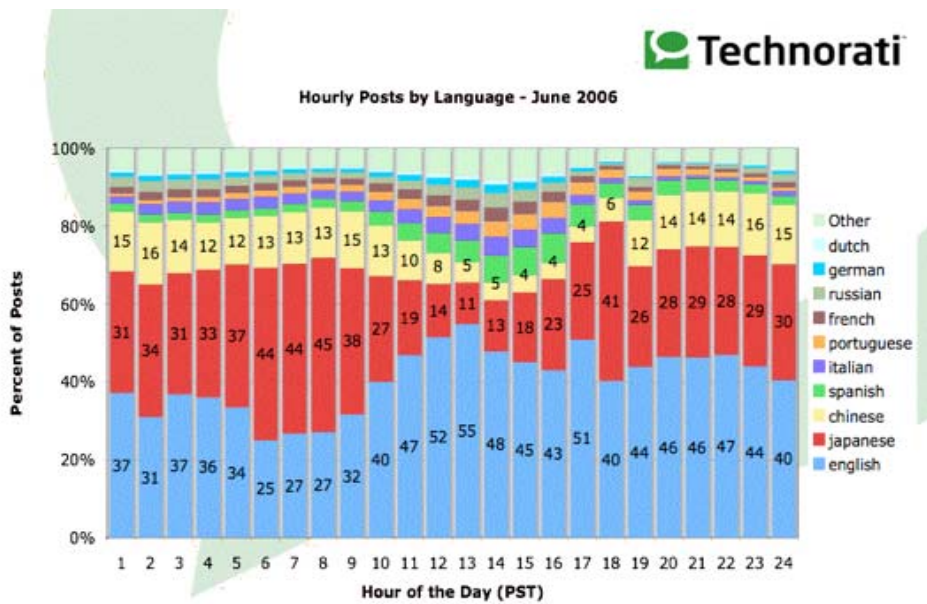
The daily posting volume in data that Technorati tracks:



In June, 39% of all postings tracked by Technorati were in English, 31% in Japanese, and 12% in Chinese.



A look at what times of day show significant posting volume by language. The chart below shows this information using Pacific time (Technorati is located in San Francisco, so we're biased towards that time zone) as our base:



## APPENDIX C: SITES WITH AFRICAN AMERICAN TARGET AUDIENCE

*Taken in part from Andre Brock 2007 Dissertation*

**Table 16: Other websites geared towards the African American population**

<i>URL Website</i>	<i>Name</i>
afronetizen.com	AfroNetizen
after-words.org	Grim Amusements
Allhiphop.com	All Hip Hop
andersonatlarge.typepad.com	Anderson At Large
angryblackbitch.blogspot.com	ANGRYBLACKBITCH
ballerstatus.net	BallerStatus
bet.com	BET.com
blackambition.blogspot.com	Black Ambition
blackamericaweb.com	BlackAmericaWeb
blackbooks.blogspot.com	Black Book Blog
blackcollegewire.org	Black College Wire
blackinformant.com	Blackinformant.com
blackink.blog.com	Black Ink
blackintrospection.blogspot.com	Black Perspective and Introspection
blacknewsweekly.com	Black News
blackpressusa.com	Black Press USA
blackpundit.com	Black Pundit Dot Com
blackrepublican.blogspot.com	Black Republican
bomanijones.com	BomaniJones.com
bookerrising.blogspot.com	Booker Rising
byroncrawford.com	ByronCrawford.com:The Mindset of a Champion
chicagodefender.com	Chicago Defender
claycane.blogspot.com	Clay Cane
Colorblind.typepad.com	The Colorblind Society
conyersblog.us	John Conyers, Jr - ConyersBlog
creativesoul.typepad.com	creative soul confessions
crunktastical.blogspot.com	Crunk & Disorderly
culturekitchen.com	culturekitchen
dats-hot.blogspot.com	The Heiress Diaries
daveyd.com	Davey D's Hip Hop Political Palace
dcthornton.com	D. C. Thornton
differentkitchen.blogspot.com	Notes from a Different Kitchen
essence.com	Essence
eurweb.com	Lee Bailey's EURweb
faraichideya.com	Farai Chideya
hiphopmusic.com	Hiphopmusic.com
homegirl.typepad.com	Home Girl
Inkblotter.blogsme.com	Ink Blotter

inmywritemind.blogsome.com	In My Write Mind
intrepidsoul22.blogspot.com	.....:life on da rock::.....
jacksongtickle.com	Jackson G. Tickle Enterprises Presents
journals.aol.com/allaboutgeorge	allaboutgeorge
keithboykin.com	Keithboykin.com
lainad.typepad.com	Writing is Fighting
lashawnbarber.com	La Shawn Barber's Corner
lindadominiquegrosvenor.com	Linda Dominique Grosvenor
majeeda.blogspot.com	Wang Dang Doodle
marian.typepad.com/marians_blog	Marian's Blog
mdcbowen.org	Cobb
monicajackson.com	the way there
nabjforums.blogspot.com	NABJ Forums
nakedcartwheels.blogspot.com	Naked Cartwheels
nappydiatribe.blogspot.com	Daily Views, Pop Culture, Rants, and News
negrophile.com	Negrophile
Negrorage.com	Negrorage.com
newblackman.blogspot.com	New Black Man
newblackthought.blogspot.com	New Black Thought
okayplayer.com	OkayPlayer
Pandagon.net	Pandagon
professorkim.blogspot.com	Professor Kim's News Notes
prometheus6.org	Prometheus6
raggedthots.blogspot.com	Ragged Thots
random-sense.blogspot.com	Random Sense
rashundatramble.com	RASHUNDATRAMPLE.COM
republicoft.com	The Republic of T.
rochellerobinson.com	Rochelle Robinson
ronntaylor.com	A Burst of Light
seeingblack.com	SeeingBlack.com
sharoncullars.blogspot.com	Sharon's Muse
sistahcraft.typepad.com	SistahCraft
Sohh.com	SOHH
stevegilliard.blogspot.com	The News Blog
theblacksaint.com	The Black Saint
thecynicalones.blogspot.com	The Cynical Ones
thelastnerve.blogspot.com	The Last Nerve
tradermike.net	Move the Crowd
transafricaforum.com	transAfrica forum
Tswe.blogspot.com	The Scott Wickham Experience
tuckergurl.typepad.com	Tuckergurl
Veronicas.org	Goddess Musings
Vibe.com	VIBE.com

## APPENDIX D: POVERTY STATISTICS WITHIN THE USA

*Taken from 2005 HIV/AIDS Surveillance Report, Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Revised 2007)*

**Table 17: Income and Earnings Summary Measures by Selected Characteristics: 2005 and 2006**

(Income in 2006 dollars. Households and people as of March of the following year)

Characteristic	2005			2006			Percentage change in real median income (2006 less 2005)	
	Number (thousands)	Median income (dollars)		Number (thousands)	Median income (dollars)		Estimate	90-percent confidence interval <sup>1</sup> (±)
		Estimate	90-percent confidence interval <sup>1</sup> (±)		Estimate	90-percent confidence interval <sup>1</sup> (±)		
<b>HOUSEHOLDS</b>								
All households.....	114,384	47,845	263	116,011	48,201	341	*0.7	0.73
<b>Type of Household</b>								
Family households.....	77,402	59,156	343	78,425	59,894	403	*1.2	0.73
Married-couple.....	58,179	68,233	415	58,945	69,716	559	* 2.2	0.84
Female householder, no husband present.....	14,093	31,655	445	14,416	31,818	433	0.5	1.59
Male householder, no wife present.....	5,130	48,289	1,065	5,063	47,078	1,026	*-2.5	2.44
Nonfamily households.....	36,982	28,222	275	37,587	29,083	368	*3.1	1.34
Female householder.....	20,230	23,432	426	20,249	23,876	411	1.9	2.06
Male householder.....	16,753	35,164	729	17,338	35,614	439	1.3	2.03
<b>Race<sup>2</sup> and Hispanic Origin of Householder</b>								
White.....	93,588	50,146	360	94,705	50,673	242	*1.1	0.72
White, not Hispanic.....	82,003	52,449	292	82,675	52,423	309	-	0.65
Black.....	14,002	31,870	511	14,354	31,969	396	0.3	1.65
Asian.....	4,273	63,097	1,210	4,454	64,238	2,754	1.8	4.11
Hispanic origin (any race).....	12,519	37,146	607	12,973	37,781	831	1.7	1.92
<b>Age of Householder</b>								
Under 65 years.....	90,926	54,001	250	92,282	54,726	426	*1.3	0.76
15 to 24 years.....	6,795	29,713	802	6,662	30,937	620	*4.1	2.85
25 to 34 years.....	19,120	48,932	590	19,435	49,164	735	0.5	1.57
35 to 44 years.....	23,016	59,988	914	22,779	60,405	528	0.7	1.48
45 to 54 years.....	23,731	64,471	748	24,140	64,874	781	0.6	1.36
55 to 64 years.....	18,264	53,973	705	19,266	54,592	821	1.1	1.63
65 years and older.....	23,459	26,890	297	23,729	27,798	332	*3.4	1.36
<b>Nativity of Householder</b>								
Native.....	99,579	48,435	280	100,603	49,074	375	*1.3	0.79
Foreign born.....	14,806	43,418	700	15,408	43,943	956	1.2	2.23
Naturalized citizen.....	6,990	51,670	1,385	7,210	51,440	948	-0.4	2.66
Not a citizen.....	7,815	37,945	804	8,198	39,497	1,061	*4.1	2.89
<b>Region</b>								
Northeast.....	21,054	52,550	630	21,261	52,057	568	-0.9	1.24
Midwest.....	26,351	47,457	598	26,508	47,836	643	0.8	1.46
South.....	41,805	43,520	360	42,587	43,884	549	0.8	1.25
West.....	25,174	51,641	629	25,656	52,249	540	1.2	1.35
<b>Metropolitan Status</b>								
Inside metropolitan statistical areas.....	95,107	50,063	372	96,739	50,616	240	*1.1	0.74
Inside principal cities.....	38,008	42,516	365	38,488	42,627	515	0.3	1.22
Outside principal cities.....	57,098	55,300	549	58,251	55,775	433	0.9	1.03
Outside metropolitan statistical areas <sup>3</sup> .....	19,278	38,796	705	19,272	38,293	767	-1.3	2.15
<b>Shares of Household Income Quintiles and Gini Index<sup>4</sup></b>								
Lowest quintile.....	22,877	3.4	0.04	23,202	3.4	0.04	-	1.27
Second quintile.....	22,877	8.6	0.10	23,202	8.6	0.10	-	1.27
Third quintile.....	22,877	14.6	0.16	23,202	14.5	0.16	-0.7	1.25
Fourth quintile.....	22,877	23.0	0.25	23,202	22.9	0.25	-0.4	1.25
Highest quintile.....	22,877	50.4	0.56	23,202	50.5	0.55	0.2	1.26
Gini index of income inequality.....	114,384	0.469	0.0047	116,011	0.470	0.0047	0.2	1.14

See footnotes at end of table.

**Table 18: Income and Earnings Summary Measures by Selected Characteristics: 2005 and 2006--  
Cont**

(Income in 2006 dollars. Households and people as of March of the following year)

Characteristic	2005			2006			Percentage change in real median income (2006 less 2005)	
	Number (thousands)	Median income (dollars)		Number (thousands)	Median income (dollars)		Estimate	90-percent confidence interval <sup>1</sup> (±)
		Estimate	90-percent confidence interval <sup>1</sup> (±)		Estimate	90-percent confidence interval <sup>1</sup> (±)		
<b>EARNINGS OF FULL-TIME, YEAR-ROUND WORKERS</b>								
Men with earnings.....	61,500	42,743	153	63,055	42,261	145	*-1.1	0.41
Women with earnings.....	43,351	32,903	138	44,663	32,515	304	*-1.2	0.89
<b>PER CAPITA INCOME<sup>5</sup></b>								
Total <sup>2</sup> .....	293,834	25,857	165	296,824	26,352	168	*1.9	0.77
White.....	235,903	27,365	194	237,892	27,821	192	*1.7	0.84
White, not Hispanic.....	195,893	29,895	226	196,252	30,431	224	*1.8	0.90
Black.....	36,965	17,427	313	37,369	17,902	357	*2.7	2.31
Asian.....	12,599	28,227	860	13,194	30,474	1,142	*8.0	4.38
Hispanic origin (any race).....	43,168	14,958	262	44,854	15,421	299	*3.1	2.00

– Represents or rounds to zero.

\* Statistically different from zero at the 90-percent confidence level.

<sup>1</sup> A 90-percent confidence interval is a measure of an estimate's variability. The larger the confidence interval in relation to the size of the estimate, the less reliable the estimate. For more information, see "Standard Errors and Their Use" at <[www.census.gov/hhes/www/p60\\_233sa.pdf](http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/p60_233sa.pdf)>.

<sup>2</sup> Federal surveys now give respondents the option of reporting more than one race. Therefore, two basic ways of defining a race group are possible. A group such as Asian may be defined as those who reported Asian and no other race (the race-alone or single-race concept) or as those who reported Asian regardless of whether they also reported another race (the race-alone-or-in-combination concept). This table shows data using the first approach (race alone). The use of the single-race population does not imply that it is the preferred method of presenting or analyzing data. The Census Bureau uses a variety of approaches. Information on people who reported more than one race, such as White *and* American Indian and Alaska Native or Asian *and* Black or African American, is available from Census 2000 through American FactFinder. About 2.6 percent of people reported more than one race in Census 2000. Data for American Indians and Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians and Other Pacific Islanders, and those reporting two or more races are not shown separately in this table.

<sup>3</sup> The "Outside metropolitan statistical areas" category includes both micropolitan statistical areas and territory outside of metropolitan and micropolitan statistical areas. For more information, see "About Metropolitan and Micropolitan Statistical Areas" at <[www.census.gov/population/www/estimates/aboutmetro.html](http://www.census.gov/population/www/estimates/aboutmetro.html)>.

<sup>4</sup> The data shown in this section are shares of aggregate household income, the Gini index, and their respective confidence intervals. See the article by Paul Alison, "Measures of Inequality," *American Sociological Review*, 43, December 1977, pp. 865–880, for an explanation of inequality measures.

<sup>5</sup> The data shown in this section are per capita incomes and their respective confidence intervals. Per capita income is the mean income computed for every man, woman, and child in a particular group. It is derived by dividing the total income of a particular group by the total population in that group (excluding patients or inmates in institutional quarters).

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2006 and 2007 Annual Social and Economic Supplements.



**Table 19: People and Families in Poverty by Selected Characteristics: 2005 and 2006**

(Numbers in thousands, confidence intervals (C.I.) in thousands or percentage points as appropriate. People as of March of the following year)

Characteristic	Below poverty in 2005				Below poverty in 2006				Change in poverty (2006 less 2005) <sup>2</sup>			
	Number	90-percent C.I. <sup>1</sup> (±)	Percentage	90-percent C.I. <sup>1</sup> (±)	Number	90-percent C.I. <sup>1</sup> (±)	Percentage	90-percent C.I. <sup>1</sup> (±)	Number	90-percent C.I. <sup>1</sup> (±)	Percentage	90-percent C.I. <sup>1</sup> (±)
<b>PEOPLE</b>												
Total	36,950	679	12.6	0.2	36,460	676	12.3	0.2	-490	711	*-0.3	0.2
<b>Family Status</b>												
In families	26,068	583	10.8	0.2	25,915	581	10.6	0.2	-153	610	-0.2	0.3
Householder	7,657	184	9.9	0.2	7,668	185	9.8	0.2	11	210	-0.1	0.3
Related children under 18	12,335	340	17.1	0.5	12,299	339	16.9	0.5	-37	356	-0.2	0.5
Related children under 6	4,784	220	20.0	1.0	4,830	221	20.0	1.0	46	232	-	1.0
In unrelated subfamilies	456	81	37.4	7.2	567	90	41.5	7.2	*111	90	4.1	7.6
Reference person	181	51	35.9	11.0	229	57	40.4	11.1	48	57	4.6	11.6
Children under 18	270	54	39.7	9.0	323	60	44.9	9.4	53	60	5.2	9.7
Unrelated individuals	10,425	224	21.1	0.5	9,977	218	20.0	0.5	*-448	252	*-1.1	0.5
Male	4,315	131	17.9	0.6	4,388	132	17.8	0.6	73	150	-0.1	0.6
Female	6,111	161	24.1	0.7	5,589	152	22.2	0.6	*-522	179	*-1.9	0.8
<b>Race<sup>3</sup> and Hispanic Origin</b>												
White	24,872	570	10.6	0.2	24,416	566	10.3	0.2	-456	648	*-0.3	0.3
White, not Hispanic	16,227	468	8.3	0.2	16,013	465	8.2	0.2	-214	532	-0.1	0.3
Black	9,168	332	24.9	0.9	9,048	331	24.3	0.9	-120	347	-0.7	0.9
Asian	1,402	137	11.1	1.1	1,353	135	10.3	1.0	-49	142	-0.9	1.1
Hispanic origin (any race)	9,368	324	21.8	0.8	9,243	324	20.6	0.7	-126	271	*-1.1	0.6
<b>Age</b>												
Under 18 years	12,896	346	17.6	0.5	12,827	345	17.4	0.5	-69	362	-0.2	0.5
18 to 64 years	20,450	516	11.1	0.3	20,239	515	10.8	0.3	-211	541	-0.3	0.3
65 years and older	3,603	132	10.1	0.4	3,394	129	9.4	0.4	*-210	137	*-0.7	0.4
<b>Nativity</b>												
Native	31,080	630	12.1	0.2	30,790	628	11.9	0.2	-290	660	-0.2	0.3
Foreign born	5,870	327	16.5	1.0	5,670	321	15.2	0.9	-200	340	*-1.3	1.0
Naturalized citizen	1,441	163	10.4	1.2	1,345	158	9.3	1.1	-96	168	-1.1	1.2
Not a citizen	4,429	285	20.4	1.4	4,324	281	19.0	1.3	-105	297	-1.3	1.4
<b>Region</b>												
Northeast	6,103	285	11.3	0.5	6,222	287	11.5	0.5	119	300	0.2	0.6
Midwest	7,419	311	11.4	0.5	7,324	309	11.2	0.5	-95	325	-0.2	0.5
South	14,854	444	14.0	0.4	14,882	445	13.8	0.4	28	466	-0.2	0.4
West	8,573	343	12.6	0.5	8,032	334	11.6	0.5	*-541	355	*-1.0	0.5
<b>Metropolitan Status</b>												
Inside metropolitan statistical areas	30,098	621	12.2	0.3	29,283	614	11.8	0.2	*-815	648	*-0.5	0.3
Inside principal cities	15,966	465	17.0	0.5	15,336	456	16.1	0.5	*-630	483	*-0.9	0.5
Outside principal cities	14,132	438	9.3	0.3	13,947	436	9.1	0.3	-185	458	-0.2	0.3
Outside metropolitan statistical areas <sup>4</sup>	6,852	379	14.5	0.8	7,177	387	15.2	0.8	325	402	0.6	0.9
<b>Work Experience</b>												
All workers (16 years and older)	9,340	358	6.0	0.2	9,181	355	5.8	0.2	-159	374	-0.2	0.2
Worked full-time, year-round	2,894	202	2.8	0.2	2,906	203	2.7	0.2	12	212	-0.1	0.2
Not full-time, year-round	6,446	299	12.8	0.6	6,275	296	12.6	0.6	-170	312	-0.2	0.6
Did not work at least 1 week	16,041	462	21.8	0.7	15,715	458	21.1	0.6	-327	482	-0.6	0.7
<b>FAMILIES</b>												
Total	7,657	184	9.9	0.2	7,668	185	9.8	0.2	11	210	-0.1	0.3
<b>Type of Family</b>												
Married-couple	2,944	105	5.1	0.2	2,910	105	4.9	0.2	-34	120	-0.1	0.2
Female householder, no husband present	4,044	126	28.7	1.0	4,087	127	28.3	1.0	43	144	-0.4	1.1
Male householder, no wife present	669	48	13.0	1.0	671	48	13.2	1.0	2	55	0.2	1.1

- Represents or rounds to zero.

\* Statistically different from zero at the 90-percent confidence level.

<sup>1</sup> A 90-percent confidence interval is a measure of an estimate's variability. The larger the confidence interval in relation to the size of the estimate, the less reliable the estimate. For more information, see "Standard Errors and Their Use" at <www.census.gov/hhes/www/p60\_233sa.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Details may not sum to totals because of rounding.

<sup>3</sup> Federal surveys now give respondents the option of reporting more than one race. Therefore, two basic ways of defining a race group are possible. A group such as Asian may be defined as those who reported Asian and no other race (the race-alone or single-race concept) or as those who reported Asian regardless of whether they also reported another race (the race-alone-or-in-combination concept). This table shows data using the first approach (race alone). The use of the single-race population does not imply that it is the preferred method of presenting or analyzing data. The Census Bureau uses a variety of approaches. Information on people who reported more than one race, such as White and American Indian and Alaska Native or Asian and Black or African American, is available from Census 2000 through American FactFinder. About 2.6 percent of people reported more than one race in Census 2000. Data for American Indians and Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians and Other Pacific Islanders, and those reporting two or more races are not shown separately.

<sup>4</sup> The "Outside metropolitan statistical areas" category includes both micropolitan statistical areas and territory outside of metropolitan and micropolitan statistical areas. For more information, see "About Metropolitan and Micropolitan Statistical Areas" at <www.census.gov/www/estimates/aboutmetro.html>.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2006 and 2007 Annual Social and Economic Supplements.

**Table 20: Poverty Status of People by Age, Race, and Hispanic Origin: 1959 to 2006**

(Numbers in thousands. People as of March of the following year)

Race, Hispanic origin, and year	Under 18 years						18 to 64 years			65 years and older		
	All people			Related children in families			Total	Below poverty		Total	Below poverty	
	Total	Below poverty		Total	Below poverty			Number	Percent		Number	Percent
		Number	Percent		Number	Percent						
<b>ALL RACES</b>												
2006.....	73,727	12,827	17.4	72,609	12,299	16.9	186,688	20,239	10.8	36,035	3,394	9.4
2005.....	73,285	12,896	17.6	72,095	12,335	17.1	184,345	20,450	11.1	35,505	3,603	10.1
2004 <sup>1</sup> .....	73,241	13,041	17.8	72,133	12,473	17.3	182,166	20,545	11.3	35,209	3,453	9.8
2003.....	72,999	12,866	17.6	71,907	12,340	17.2	180,041	19,443	10.8	34,659	3,552	10.2
2002.....	72,696	12,133	16.7	71,619	11,646	16.3	178,388	18,861	10.6	34,234	3,576	10.4
2001.....	72,021	11,733	16.3	70,950	11,175	15.8	175,685	17,760	10.1	33,769	3,414	10.1
2000 <sup>2</sup> .....	71,741	11,587	16.2	70,538	11,005	15.6	173,638	16,671	9.6	33,566	3,323	9.9
1999 <sup>3</sup> .....	71,685	12,280	17.1	70,424	11,678	16.6	171,146	17,289	10.1	33,377	3,222	9.7
1998.....	71,338	13,467	18.9	70,253	12,845	18.3	167,327	17,623	10.5	32,394	3,386	10.5
1997.....	71,069	14,113	19.9	69,844	13,422	19.2	165,329	18,085	10.9	32,082	3,376	10.5
1996.....	70,650	14,463	20.5	69,411	13,764	19.8	163,691	18,638	11.4	31,877	3,428	10.8
1995.....	70,566	14,665	20.8	69,425	13,999	20.2	161,508	18,442	11.4	31,658	3,318	10.5
1994.....	70,020	15,289	21.8	68,819	14,610	21.2	160,329	19,107	11.9	31,267	3,663	11.7
1993.....	69,292	15,727	22.7	68,040	14,961	22.0	159,208	19,781	12.4	30,779	3,755	12.2
1992 <sup>4</sup> .....	68,440	15,294	22.3	67,256	14,521	21.6	157,680	18,793	11.9	30,430	3,928	12.9
1991 <sup>5</sup> .....	65,918	14,341	21.8	64,800	13,658	21.1	154,684	17,586	11.4	30,590	3,781	12.4
1990.....	65,049	13,431	20.6	63,908	12,715	19.9	153,502	16,496	10.7	30,093	3,658	12.2
1989.....	64,144	12,590	19.6	63,225	12,001	19.0	152,282	15,575	10.2	29,566	3,363	11.4
1988 <sup>6</sup> .....	63,747	12,455	19.5	62,906	11,935	19.0	150,761	15,809	10.5	29,022	3,481	12.0
1987 <sup>6</sup> .....	63,294	12,843	20.3	62,423	12,275	19.7	149,201	15,815	10.6	28,487	3,563	12.5
1986.....	62,948	12,876	20.5	62,009	12,257	19.8	147,631	16,017	10.8	27,975	3,477	12.4
1985.....	62,876	13,010	20.7	62,019	12,483	20.1	146,396	16,598	11.3	27,322	3,456	12.6
1984.....	62,447	13,420	21.5	61,681	12,929	21.0	144,551	16,952	11.7	26,818	3,330	12.4
1983.....	62,334	13,911	22.3	61,578	13,427	21.8	143,052	17,767	12.4	26,313	3,625	13.8
1982.....	62,345	13,647	21.9	61,565	13,139	21.3	141,328	17,000	12.0	25,738	3,751	14.6
1981.....	62,449	12,505	20.0	61,756	12,068	19.5	139,477	15,464	11.1	25,231	3,853	15.3
1980.....	62,914	11,543	18.3	62,168	11,114	17.9	137,428	13,858	10.1	24,686	3,871	15.7
1979.....	63,375	10,377	16.4	62,646	9,993	16.0	135,333	12,014	8.9	24,194	3,682	15.2
1978.....	62,311	9,931	15.9	61,987	9,722	15.7	130,169	11,332	8.7	23,175	3,233	14.0
1977.....	63,137	10,288	16.2	62,823	10,028	16.0	128,262	11,316	8.8	22,468	3,177	14.1
1976.....	64,028	10,273	16.0	63,729	10,081	15.8	126,175	11,389	9.0	22,100	3,313	15.0
1975.....	65,079	11,104	17.1	64,750	10,882	16.8	124,122	11,456	9.2	21,662	3,317	15.3
1974.....	66,134	10,156	15.4	65,802	9,967	15.1	122,101	10,132	8.3	21,127	3,085	14.6
1973.....	66,959	9,642	14.4	66,626	9,453	14.2	120,060	9,977	8.3	20,602	3,354	16.3
1972.....	67,930	10,284	15.1	67,592	10,082	14.9	117,957	10,438	8.8	20,117	3,738	18.6
1971.....	68,816	10,551	15.3	68,474	10,344	15.1	115,911	10,735	9.3	19,827	4,273	21.6
1970.....	69,159	10,440	15.1	68,815	10,235	14.9	113,554	10,187	9.0	19,470	4,793	24.6
1969.....	69,090	9,691	14.0	68,746	9,501	13.8	111,528	9,669	8.7	18,899	4,787	25.3
1968.....	70,385	10,954	15.6	70,035	10,739	15.3	108,684	9,803	9.0	18,559	4,632	25.0
1967.....	70,408	11,656	16.6	70,058	11,427	16.3	107,024	10,725	10.0	18,240	5,388	29.5
1966.....	70,218	12,389	17.6	69,869	12,146	17.4	105,241	11,007	10.5	17,929	5,114	28.5
1965.....	69,986	14,676	21.0	69,638	14,388	20.7	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)
1964.....	69,711	16,051	23.0	69,364	15,736	22.7	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)
1963.....	69,181	16,005	23.1	68,837	15,691	22.8	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)
1962.....	67,722	16,963	25.0	67,385	16,630	24.7	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)
1961.....	66,121	16,909	25.6	65,792	16,577	25.2	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)
1960.....	65,601	17,634	26.9	65,275	17,288	26.5	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)
1959.....	64,315	17,552	27.3	63,995	17,208	26.9	96,685	16,457	17.0	15,557	5,481	35.2

See footnotes at end of table.

**Table 21: Poverty Status of People by Age, Race, and Hispanic Origin: 1959 to 2006—Cont**

(Numbers in thousands. People as of March of the following year)

Race, Hispanic origin, and year	Under 18 years						18 to 64 years			65 years and older		
	All people			Related children in families			Total	Below poverty		Total	Below poverty	
	Total	Below poverty		Total	Below poverty			Number	Percent		Number	Percent
		Number	Percent		Number	Percent						
<b>WHITE ALONE<sup>7</sup></b>												
2006.....	56,205	7,908	14.1	55,330	7,522	13.6	150,143	14,035	9.3	31,270	2,473	7.9
2005.....	56,075	8,085	14.4	55,152	7,652	13.9	148,450	14,086	9.5	30,905	2,700	8.7
2004 <sup>1</sup> .....	56,053	8,308	14.8	55,212	7,876	14.3	146,974	14,486	9.9	30,714	2,534	8.3
2003.....	55,779	7,985	14.3	54,989	7,624	13.9	145,783	13,622	9.3	30,303	2,666	8.8
2002.....	55,703	7,549	13.6	54,900	7,203	13.1	144,694	13,178	9.1	29,980	2,739	9.1
<b>WHITE<sup>8</sup></b>												
2001.....	56,089	7,527	13.4	55,238	7,086	12.8	143,796	12,555	8.7	29,790	2,656	8.9
2000 <sup>2</sup> .....	55,980	7,307	13.1	55,021	6,834	12.4	142,164	11,754	8.3	29,703	2,584	8.7
1999 <sup>3</sup> .....	55,833	7,639	13.7	54,873	7,194	13.1	139,974	12,085	8.6	29,553	2,446	8.3
1998.....	56,016	8,443	15.1	55,126	7,935	14.4	138,061	12,456	9.0	28,759	2,555	8.9
1997.....	55,863	8,990	16.1	54,870	8,441	15.4	136,784	12,838	9.4	28,553	2,569	9.0
1996.....	55,606	9,044	16.3	54,599	8,488	15.5	135,586	12,940	9.5	28,464	2,667	9.4
1995.....	55,444	8,981	16.2	54,532	8,474	15.5	134,149	12,869	9.6	28,436	2,572	9.0
1994.....	55,186	9,346	16.9	54,221	8,826	16.3	133,289	13,187	9.9	27,985	2,846	10.2
1993.....	54,639	9,752	17.8	53,614	9,123	17.0	132,680	13,535	10.2	27,580	2,939	10.7
1992 <sup>4</sup> .....	54,110	9,399	17.4	53,110	8,752	16.5	131,694	12,871	9.8	27,256	2,989	11.0
1991 <sup>5</sup> .....	52,523	8,848	16.8	51,627	8,316	16.1	130,312	12,097	9.3	27,297	2,802	10.3
1990.....	51,929	8,232	15.9	51,028	7,696	15.1	129,784	11,387	8.8	26,898	2,707	10.1
1989.....	51,400	7,599	14.8	50,704	7,164	14.1	128,974	10,647	8.3	26,479	2,539	9.6
1988 <sup>6</sup> .....	51,203	7,435	14.5	50,590	7,095	14.0	128,031	10,687	8.3	26,001	2,593	10.0
1987 <sup>6</sup> .....	51,012	7,788	15.3	50,360	7,398	14.7	126,991	10,703	8.4	25,602	2,704	10.6
1986.....	51,111	8,209	16.1	50,356	7,714	15.3	125,998	11,285	9.0	25,173	2,689	10.7
1985.....	51,031	8,253	16.2	50,358	7,838	15.6	125,258	11,909	9.5	24,629	2,698	11.0
1984.....	50,814	8,472	16.7	50,192	8,086	16.1	123,922	11,904	9.6	24,206	2,579	10.7
1983.....	50,726	8,862	17.5	50,183	8,534	17.0	123,014	12,347	10.0	23,754	2,776	11.7
1982.....	50,920	8,678	17.0	50,305	8,282	16.5	121,766	11,971	9.8	23,234	2,870	12.4
1981.....	51,140	7,785	15.2	50,553	7,429	14.7	120,574	10,790	8.9	22,791	2,978	13.1
1980.....	51,653	7,181	13.9	51,002	6,817	13.4	118,935	9,478	8.0	22,325	3,042	13.6
1979.....	52,262	6,193	11.8	51,687	5,909	11.4	117,583	8,110	6.9	21,898	2,911	13.3
1978.....	51,669	5,831	11.3	51,409	5,674	11.0	113,832	7,897	6.9	20,950	2,530	12.1
1977.....	52,563	6,097	11.6	52,299	5,943	11.4	112,374	7,893	7.0	20,316	2,426	11.9
1976.....	53,428	6,189	11.6	53,167	6,034	11.3	110,717	7,890	7.1	20,020	2,633	13.2
1975.....	54,405	6,927	12.7	54,126	6,748	12.5	109,105	8,210	7.5	19,654	2,634	13.4
1974.....	55,590	6,223	11.2	55,320	6,079	11.0	107,579	7,053	6.6	19,206	2,460	12.8
1973.....	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	56,211	5,462	9.7	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	2,698	14.4
1972.....	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	57,181	5,784	10.1	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	3,072	16.8
1971.....	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	58,119	6,341	10.9	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	3,605	19.9
1970.....	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	58,472	6,138	10.5	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	4,011	22.6
1969.....	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	58,578	5,667	9.7	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	4,052	23.3
1968.....	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	6,373	10.7	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	17,062	3,939	23.1
1967.....	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	6,729	11.3	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	16,791	4,646	27.7
1966.....	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	7,204	12.1	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	16,514	4,357	26.4
1965.....	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	8,595	14.4	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)
1960.....	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	11,229	20.0	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)
1959.....	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	11,386	20.6	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	4,744	33.1

See footnotes at end of table.

**Table 22: Poverty Status of People by Age, Race, and Hispanic Origin: 1959 to 2006--Cont.**

(Numbers in thousands. People as of March of the following year)

Race, Hispanic origin, and year	Under 18 years						18 to 64 years			65 years and older		
	All people			Related children in families			Total	Below poverty		Total	Below poverty	
	Total	Below poverty		Total	Below poverty			Number	Percent		Number	Percent
		Number	Percent		Number	Percent						
<b>WHITE ALONE, NOT HISPANIC<sup>7</sup></b>												
2006.....	42,212	4,208	10.0	41,563	3,930	9.5	124,847	9,761	7.8	28,990	2,044	7.0
2005.....	42,523	4,254	10.0	41,867	3,973	9.5	124,326	9,708	7.8	28,704	2,264	7.9
2004 <sup>1</sup> .....	42,978	4,519	10.5	42,363	4,190	9.9	123,481	10,236	8.3	28,639	2,153	7.5
2003.....	43,150	4,233	9.8	42,547	3,957	9.3	123,110	9,391	7.6	28,335	2,277	8.0
2002.....	43,614	4,090	9.4	43,017	3,848	8.9	122,511	9,157	7.5	28,018	2,321	8.3
<b>WHITE, NOT HISPANIC<sup>8</sup></b>												
2001.....	44,095	4,194	9.5	43,459	3,887	8.9	122,470	8,811	7.2	27,973	2,266	8.1
2000 <sup>2</sup> .....	44,244	4,018	9.1	43,554	3,715	8.5	121,499	8,130	6.7	27,948	2,218	7.9
1999 <sup>3</sup> .....	44,272	4,155	9.4	43,570	3,832	8.8	120,341	8,462	7.0	27,952	2,118	7.6
1998.....	45,355	4,822	10.6	44,670	4,458	10.0	120,282	8,760	7.3	27,118	2,217	8.2
1997.....	45,491	5,204	11.4	44,665	4,759	10.7	119,373	9,088	7.6	26,995	2,200	8.1
1996.....	45,605	5,072	11.1	44,844	4,656	10.4	118,822	9,074	7.6	27,033	2,316	8.6
1995.....	45,689	5,115	11.2	44,973	4,745	10.6	118,228	8,908	7.5	27,034	2,243	8.3
1994.....	46,668	5,823	12.5	45,874	5,404	11.8	119,192	9,732	8.2	26,684	2,556	9.6
1993.....	46,096	6,255	13.6	45,322	5,819	12.8	118,475	9,964	8.4	26,272	2,663	10.1
1992 <sup>4</sup> .....	45,590	6,017	13.2	44,833	5,558	12.4	117,386	9,461	8.1	26,025	2,724	10.5
1991 <sup>5</sup> .....	45,236	5,918	13.1	44,506	5,497	12.4	117,672	9,244	7.9	26,208	2,580	9.8
1990.....	44,797	5,532	12.3	44,045	5,106	11.6	117,477	8,619	7.3	25,854	2,471	9.6
1989.....	44,492	5,110	11.5	43,938	4,779	10.9	116,983	8,154	7.0	25,504	2,335	9.2
1988 <sup>6</sup> .....	44,438	4,888	11.0	43,910	4,594	10.5	116,479	8,293	7.1	25,044	2,384	9.5
1987 <sup>6</sup> .....	44,461	5,230	11.8	43,907	4,902	11.2	115,721	8,327	7.2	24,754	2,472	10.0
1986.....	44,664	5,789	13.0	44,041	5,388	12.2	115,157	8,963	7.8	24,298	2,492	10.3
1985.....	44,752	5,745	12.8	44,199	5,421	12.3	114,969	9,608	8.4	23,734	2,486	10.5
1984.....	44,886	6,156	13.7	44,349	5,828	13.1	114,180	9,734	8.5	23,402	2,410	10.3
1983.....	44,830	6,649	14.8	44,374	6,381	14.4	113,570	10,279	9.1	22,992	2,610	11.4
1982.....	45,531	6,566	14.4	45,001	6,229	13.8	113,717	10,082	8.9	22,655	2,714	12.0
1981.....	45,950	5,946	12.9	45,440	5,639	12.4	112,722	9,207	8.2	22,237	2,834	12.7
1980.....	46,578	5,510	11.8	45,989	5,174	11.3	111,460	7,990	7.2	21,760	2,865	13.2
1979.....	46,967	4,730	10.1	46,448	4,476	9.6	110,509	6,930	6.3	21,339	2,759	12.9
1978.....	46,819	4,506	9.6	46,606	4,383	9.4	107,481	6,837	6.4	20,431	2,412	11.8
1977.....	47,689	4,714	9.9	47,459	4,582	9.7	106,063	6,772	6.4	19,812	2,316	11.7
1976.....	48,824	4,799	9.8	48,601	4,664	9.6	104,846	6,720	6.4	19,565	2,506	12.8
1975.....	49,670	5,342	10.8	49,421	5,185	10.5	103,496	7,039	6.8	19,251	2,503	13.0
1974.....	50,759	4,820	9.5	50,520	4,697	9.3	101,894	6,051	5.9	18,810	2,346	12.5

See footnotes at end of table.

**Table 23: Poverty Status of People by Age, Race, and Hispanic Origin: 1959 to 2006--Cont.**

(Numbers in thousands. People as of March of the following year)

Race, Hispanic origin, and year	Under 18 years						18 to 64 years			65 years and older		
	All people			Related children in families			Total	Below poverty		Total	Below poverty	
	Total	Below poverty		Total	Below poverty			Number	Percent		Number	Percent
		Number	Percent		Number	Percent						
<b>BLACK ALONE OR IN COMBINATION</b>												
2006.....	12,375	4,086	33.0	12,206	3,977	32.6	23,510	4,652	19.8	3,128	710	22.7
2005.....	12,159	4,074	33.5	11,975	3,972	33.2	23,338	4,735	20.3	3,053	708	23.2
2004 <sup>1</sup> .....	12,190	4,059	33.3	12,012	3,962	33.0	22,842	4,638	20.3	3,005	714	23.8
2003.....	12,215	4,108	33.6	11,989	3,977	33.2	22,355	4,313	19.3	2,933	688	23.5
2002.....	12,114	3,817	31.5	11,931	3,733	31.3	22,170	4,376	19.7	2,922	691	23.6
<b>BLACK ALONE<sup>2</sup></b>												
2006.....	11,315	3,777	33.4	11,168	3,690	33.0	22,907	4,570	19.9	3,085	701	22.7
2005.....	11,136	3,841	34.5	10,962	3,743	34.2	22,659	4,627	20.4	3,007	701	23.3
2004 <sup>1</sup> .....	11,244	3,788	33.7	11,080	3,702	33.4	22,226	4,521	20.3	2,956	705	23.8
2003.....	11,367	3,877	34.1	11,162	3,750	33.6	21,746	4,224	19.4	2,876	680	23.7
2002.....	11,275	3,645	32.3	11,111	3,570	32.1	21,547	4,277	19.9	2,856	680	23.8
<b>BLACK<sup>3</sup></b>												
2001.....	11,556	3,492	30.2	11,419	3,423	30.0	21,462	4,018	18.7	2,853	626	21.9
2000 <sup>2</sup> .....	11,480	3,581	31.2	11,296	3,495	30.9	21,160	3,794	17.9	2,785	607	21.8
1999 <sup>3</sup> .....	11,488	3,813	33.2	11,260	3,698	32.8	21,518	4,000	18.6	2,750	628	22.8
1998.....	11,317	4,151	36.7	11,176	4,073	36.4	20,837	4,222	20.3	2,723	718	26.4
1997.....	11,367	4,225	37.2	11,193	4,116	36.8	20,400	4,191	20.5	2,691	700	26.0
1996.....	11,338	4,519	39.9	11,155	4,411	39.5	20,155	4,515	22.4	2,616	661	25.3
1995.....	11,369	4,761	41.9	11,198	4,644	41.5	19,892	4,483	22.5	2,478	629	25.4
1994.....	11,211	4,906	43.8	11,044	4,787	43.3	19,585	4,590	23.4	2,557	700	27.4
1993.....	11,127	5,125	46.1	10,969	5,030	45.9	19,272	5,049	26.2	2,510	702	28.0
1992 <sup>4</sup> .....	10,956	5,106	46.6	10,823	5,015	46.3	18,952	4,884	25.8	2,504	838	33.5
1991 <sup>5</sup> .....	10,350	4,755	45.9	10,178	4,637	45.6	18,355	4,607	25.1	2,606	880	33.8
1990.....	10,162	4,550	44.8	9,980	4,412	44.2	18,097	4,427	24.5	2,547	860	33.8
1989.....	10,012	4,375	43.7	9,847	4,257	43.2	17,833	4,164	23.3	2,487	763	30.7
1988 <sup>6</sup> .....	9,865	4,296	43.5	9,681	4,148	42.8	17,548	4,275	24.4	2,436	785	32.2
1987 <sup>6</sup> .....	9,730	4,385	45.1	9,546	4,234	44.4	17,245	4,361	25.3	2,387	774	32.4
1986.....	9,629	4,148	43.1	9,467	4,037	42.7	16,911	4,113	24.3	2,331	722	31.0
1985.....	9,545	4,157	43.6	9,405	4,057	43.1	16,667	4,052	24.3	2,273	717	31.5
1984.....	9,480	4,413	46.6	9,356	4,320	46.2	16,369	4,368	26.7	2,238	710	31.7
1983.....	9,417	4,398	46.7	9,245	4,273	46.2	16,065	4,694	29.2	2,197	791	36.0
1982.....	9,400	4,472	47.6	9,269	4,388	47.3	15,692	4,415	28.1	2,124	811	38.2
1981.....	9,374	4,237	45.2	9,291	4,170	44.9	15,358	4,117	26.8	2,102	820	39.0
1980.....	9,368	3,961	42.3	9,287	3,906	42.1	14,987	3,835	25.6	2,054	783	38.1
1979.....	9,307	3,833	41.2	9,172	3,745	40.8	14,596	3,478	23.8	2,040	740	36.2
1978.....	9,229	3,830	41.5	9,168	3,781	41.2	13,774	3,133	22.7	1,954	662	33.9
1977.....	9,296	3,888	41.8	9,253	3,850	41.6	13,483	3,137	23.3	1,930	701	36.3
1976.....	9,322	3,787	40.6	9,291	3,758	40.4	13,224	3,163	23.9	1,852	644	34.8
1975.....	9,421	3,925	41.7	9,374	3,884	41.4	12,872	2,968	23.1	1,795	652	36.3
1974.....	9,439	3,755	39.8	9,384	3,713	39.6	12,539	2,836	22.6	1,721	591	34.3
1973.....	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	9,405	3,822	40.6	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	1,672	620	37.1
1972.....	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	9,426	4,025	42.7	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	1,603	640	39.9
1971.....	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	9,414	3,836	40.4	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	1,584	623	39.3
1970.....	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	9,448	3,922	41.5	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	1,422	683	48.0
1969.....	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	9,290	3,677	39.6	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	1,373	689	50.2
1968.....	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	4,188	43.1	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	1,374	655	47.7
1967.....	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	4,558	47.4	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	1,341	715	53.3
1966.....	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	4,774	50.6	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	1,311	722	55.1
1965.....	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	5,022	65.6	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	711	62.5

See footnotes at end of table.

**Table 24: Poverty Status of People by Age, Race, and Hispanic Origin: 1959 to 2006--Cont.**

(Numbers in thousands. People as of March of the following year)

Race, Hispanic origin, and year	Under 18 years						18 to 64 years			65 years and older		
	All people			Related children in families			Total	Below poverty		Total	Below poverty	
	Total	Below poverty		Total	Below poverty			Number	Percent		Number	Percent
		Number	Percent		Number	Percent						
<b>ASIAN ALONE OR IN COMBINATION</b>												
2006.....	3,573	408	11.4	3,530	398	11.3	9,553	897	9.4	1,205	142	11.8
2005.....	3,472	359	10.3	3,435	352	10.2	9,115	999	11.0	1,144	144	12.6
2004 <sup>1</sup> .....	3,406	329	9.7	3,367	311	9.2	8,780	819	9.3	1,104	147	13.3
2003.....	3,316	420	12.7	3,279	406	12.4	8,510	956	11.2	1,065	152	14.2
2002.....	3,199	353	11.0	3,159	338	10.7	8,292	804	9.7	995	86	8.7
<b>ASIAN ALONE<sup>10</sup></b>												
2006.....	2,956	360	12.2	2,915	351	12.0	9,039	851	9.4	1,182	142	12.0
2005.....	2,871	317	11.1	2,842	312	11.0	8,591	941	11.0	1,118	143	12.8
2004 <sup>1</sup> .....	2,854	281	9.9	2,823	265	9.4	8,294	774	9.3	1,083	146	13.5
2003.....	2,759	344	12.5	2,726	331	12.1	8,044	907	11.3	1,052	151	14.3
2002.....	2,683	315	11.7	2,648	302	11.4	7,881	764	9.7	977	82	8.4
<b>ASIAN AND PACIFIC ISLANDER<sup>9</sup></b>												
2001.....	3,215	369	11.5	3,169	353	11.1	8,352	814	9.7	899	92	10.2
2000 <sup>2</sup> .....	3,294	420	12.7	3,256	407	12.5	8,500	756	8.9	878	82	9.3
1999 <sup>3</sup> .....	3,212	381	11.9	3,178	367	11.5	7,879	807	10.2	864	96	11.1
1998.....	3,137	564	18.0	3,099	542	17.5	6,951	698	10.0	785	97	12.4
1997.....	3,096	628	20.3	3,061	608	19.9	6,680	753	11.3	705	87	12.3
1996.....	2,924	571	19.5	2,899	553	19.1	6,484	821	12.7	647	63	9.7
1995.....	2,900	564	19.5	2,858	532	18.6	6,123	757	12.4	622	89	14.3
1994.....	1,739	318	18.3	1,719	308	17.9	4,401	589	13.4	513	67	13.0
1993.....	2,061	375	18.2	2,029	358	17.6	4,871	680	14.0	503	79	15.6
1992 <sup>4</sup> .....	2,218	363	16.4	2,199	352	16.0	5,067	568	11.2	494	53	10.8
1991 <sup>5</sup> .....	2,056	360	17.5	2,036	348	17.1	4,582	565	12.3	555	70	12.7
1990.....	2,126	374	17.6	2,098	356	17.0	4,375	422	9.6	514	62	12.1
1989.....	1,983	392	19.8	1,945	368	18.9	4,225	512	12.1	465	34	7.4
1988 <sup>6</sup> .....	1,970	474	24.1	1,949	458	23.5	4,035	583	14.4	442	60	13.5
1987 <sup>6</sup> .....	1,937	455	23.5	1,908	432	22.7	4,010	510	12.7	375	56	15.0

See footnotes at end of table.

**Table 25: Poverty Status of People by Age, Race, and Hispanic Origin: 1959 to 2006--Cont.**

(Numbers in thousands. People as of March of the following year)

Race, Hispanic origin, and year	Under 18 years						18 to 64 years			65 years and older		
	All people			Related children in families			Below poverty			Below poverty		
	Below poverty		Total	Below poverty		Total						
	Total	Number		Percent	Total		Number	Percent	Total	Number	Percent	
<b>HISPANIC (ANY RACE)</b>												
2006	15,147	4,072	26.9	14,907	3,959	26.6	27,209	4,698	17.3	2,428	472	19.4
2005	14,654	4,143	28.3	14,361	3,977	27.7	26,051	4,765	18.3	2,315	460	19.9
2004 <sup>1</sup>	14,173	4,098	28.9	13,929	3,985	28.6	25,324	4,620	18.2	2,194	403	18.4
2003	13,730	4,077	29.7	13,519	3,982	29.5	24,490	4,568	18.7	2,080	406	19.5
2002	13,210	3,782	28.6	12,971	3,653	28.2	23,952	4,334	18.1	2,053	439	21.4
2001	12,763	3,570	28.0	12,539	3,433	27.4	22,653	4,014	17.7	1,896	413	21.8
2000 <sup>2</sup>	12,399	3,522	28.4	12,115	3,342	27.6	21,734	3,844	17.7	1,822	381	20.9
1999 <sup>3</sup>	12,188	3,693	30.3	11,912	3,561	29.9	20,782	3,843	18.5	1,661	340	20.5
1998	11,152	3,837	34.4	10,921	3,670	33.6	18,668	3,877	20.8	1,696	356	21.0
1997	10,802	3,972	36.8	10,625	3,865	36.4	18,217	3,951	21.7	1,617	384	23.8
1996	10,511	4,237	40.3	10,255	4,090	39.9	17,587	4,089	23.3	1,516	370	24.4
1995	10,213	4,080	40.0	10,011	3,938	39.3	16,673	4,153	24.9	1,458	342	23.5
1994	9,822	4,075	41.5	9,621	3,956	41.1	16,192	4,018	24.8	1,428	323	22.6
1993	9,462	3,873	40.9	9,188	3,666	39.9	15,708	3,956	25.2	1,390	297	21.4
1992 <sup>4</sup>	9,081	3,637	40.0	8,829	3,440	39.0	15,268	3,668	24.0	1,298	287	22.1
1991 <sup>5</sup>	7,648	3,094	40.4	7,473	2,977	39.8	13,279	3,008	22.7	1,143	237	20.8
1990	7,457	2,865	38.4	7,300	2,750	37.7	12,857	2,896	22.5	1,091	245	22.5
1989	7,186	2,603	36.2	7,040	2,496	35.5	12,536	2,616	20.9	1,024	211	20.6
1988 <sup>6</sup>	7,003	2,631	37.6	6,908	2,576	37.3	12,056	2,501	20.7	1,005	225	22.4
1987 <sup>6</sup>	6,792	2,670	39.3	6,692	2,606	38.9	11,718	2,509	21.4	885	243	27.5
1986	6,646	2,507	37.7	6,511	2,413	37.1	11,206	2,406	21.5	906	204	22.5
1985	6,475	2,606	40.3	6,346	2,512	39.6	10,685	2,411	22.6	915	219	23.9
1984	6,068	2,376	39.2	5,982	2,317	38.7	10,029	2,254	22.5	819	176	21.5
1983	6,066	2,312	38.1	5,977	2,251	37.7	9,697	2,148	22.5	782	173	22.1
1982	5,527	2,181	39.5	5,436	2,117	38.9	8,262	1,963	23.8	596	159	26.6
1981	5,369	1,925	35.9	5,291	1,874	35.4	8,084	1,642	20.3	568	146	25.7
1980	5,276	1,749	33.2	5,211	1,718	33.0	7,740	1,563	20.2	582	179	30.8
1979	5,483	1,535	28.0	5,426	1,505	27.7	7,314	1,232	16.8	574	154	26.8
1978	5,012	1,384	27.6	4,972	1,354	27.2	6,527	1,098	16.8	539	125	23.2
1977	5,028	1,422	28.3	5,000	1,402	28.0	6,500	1,164	17.9	518	113	21.9
1976	4,771	1,443	30.2	4,736	1,424	30.1	6,034	1,212	20.1	464	128	27.7
1975	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	4,896	1,619	33.1	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	137	32.6
1974	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	4,939	1,414	28.6	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	117	28.9
1973	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	4,910	1,364	27.8	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	95	24.9

(NA) Not available.

<sup>1</sup> For 2004, figures are revised to reflect a correction to the weights in the 2005 ASEC.

<sup>2</sup> Consistent with 2001 data through implementation of Census 2000-based population controls and a 28,000 household sample expansion.

<sup>3</sup> For 1999, figures are based on Census 2000 population controls.

<sup>4</sup> For 1992, figures are based on 1990 census population controls.

<sup>5</sup> For 1991, figures are revised to correct for nine omitted weights from the original March 1992 CPS file.

<sup>6</sup> For 1988 and 1987, figures are based on new processing procedures and are also revised to reflect corrections to the files after publication of the 1988 advance report *Money Income and Poverty Status in the United States: 1988*, P-60, No. 166.

<sup>7</sup> The 2003 CPS allowed respondents to choose more than one race. White alone refers to people who reported White and did not report any other race category. The use of this single-race population does not imply that it is the preferred method of presenting or analyzing data. The Census Bureau uses a variety of approaches. Information on people who reported more than one race, such as White and American Indian and Alaska Native or Asian and Black or African American, is available from Census 2000 through American FactFinder. About 2.6 percent of people reported more than one race in Census 2000.

<sup>8</sup> For 2001 and earlier years, the CPS allowed respondents to report only one race group. The reference race groups for 2001 and earlier poverty data are White, non-Hispanic White, Black, and Asian and Pacific Islander.

<sup>9</sup> Black alone refers to people who reported Black and did not report any other race.

<sup>10</sup> Asian alone refers to people who reported Asian and did not report any other race.

Note: Prior to 1979, people in unrelated subfamilies were included in people in families. Beginning in 1979, people in unrelated subfamilies are included in all people but are excluded from people in families.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 1960 to 2007 Annual Social and Economic Supplements.

## APPENDIX E: AFRICAN AMERICAN CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

Taken from the *Sociology of Race and Religion in America*  
By Major Coleman

**Table 26: Black Religious Preference**

	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Cum</b>
Protestant	4319	83.8	83.8
Catholic	398	7.72	91.52
Jewish	9	0.17	91.69
None	302	5.86	97.55
Other	105	2.04	99.59
Moslem/Islam	6	0.12	99.71
Orthodox-Christian	1	0.02	99.73
Christian	9	0.17	99.9
Inter-Denominational	5	0.1	100
Total	5154	100	

Source: General Social Survey 1972-1998



**Table 27: Major Black Christian Denominations**

	<b>Membership</b>
<b>Baptists</b>	
National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc.	7,500,000
National Baptist Convention of America, Inc.	5,000,000
National Missionary Baptist Convention of America	2,142,150
Progressive National Baptist Convention, Inc.	1,800,000
National Primitive Baptist Convention of the U.S.A.	250,000
United American Free Will Baptist Denomination, Inc.	100,000
	Subtotal 16,792,150
<b>Methodists</b>	
African Union First Colored Methodist Episcopal Church, Inc.	5,000
Reformed Methodist Union Episcopal Church	3,800
AME	3,500,000
AME Zion	3,000,000
CME	800,000
	Subtotal 7,308,800
<b>Pentecostal/Holiness/Apostolic</b>	
Church of God in Christ	6,000,000
Pentecostal Assemblies of the World	450,000
United Holy Church of America	50,000
Church of Christ (holiness)	10,000
Fire-Baptized Holiness Church of God in the Americas	15,000
	Subtotal 6,525,000
<b>Catholic</b>	
African American Catholic Congregation	7,000
<b>Other</b>	
Rastafarian	5,000
	Grand Total 30,637,950
Sources: African American Desk Reference, 1999	

**Table 28: Black Protestant Denominations**

	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Cum.</b>
Baptist-Don't Know	1832	42.5	42.5
Other	653	15.15	57.65
Southern-Baptist	438	10.16	67.81
Methodist-Don't Know	281	6.52	74.33
Amer-Bap-Assoc	191	4.43	78.76
Other Baptist	137	3.18	81.94
AME	112	2.6	84.54
Amer-Bap-USA	105	2.44	86.98
National-Bap-Amer	101	2.34	89.32
United-Methodist	100	2.32	91.64
Non-Denom	91	2.11	93.75
National-Bap-USA	66	1.53	95.28
Episcopal	66	1.53	96.81
AME-Zion	39	0.9	97.71
Presbyterian -Don't Know	25	0.58	98.29
Other-Methodist	23	0.53	98.82
Lutheran-Don't Know	11	0.26	99.08
United Presbyterian –USA	9	0.21	99.29
Amer-Lutheran	7	0.16	99.45
Lutheran-Missouri-Synod	6	0.14	99.59
Presbyterian –USA	6	0.14	99.73
Wiscon-Evan-Luther-Synod	4	0.09	99.82
Lutheran-Church-In-America	3	0.07	99.89
Other-Presbyterian	2	0.05	99.94
Other-Lutheran	1	0.02	99.96
Evangelical Lutheran	1	0.02	99.98
Presbyterian-Church	1	0.02	100
Total	4311	100	

Source: General Social Survey 1972-1998

**Table 29: Blacks in Other Protestant Denominations**

<b>Denominations</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
Pentecostal (assume these are black)	137	20.15	20.15
Jehovah's Witness	80	11.76	31.91
Church Of Holiness (black)	69	10.15	42.06
Church Of Christ (black)	48	7.06	49.12
Seventh Day Adventist	44	6.47	55.59
Church Of God In Christ (black)	35	5.15	60.74
Churches Of God (black)	31	4.56	65.29
No Answer	25	3.68	68.97
Central Christian	20	2.94	71.91
Missionary Baptist	19	2.79	74.71
Apostolic Faith	17	2.5	77.21
Pentecostal Holiness	17	2.5	79.71
Holiness Nazarene	16	2.35	82.06
Sanctified Sanctification	15	2.21	84.26
Disciples Of Christ	9	1.32	85.59
Spiritualist	8	1.18	86.76
Congregationalist First Congregation	6	0.88	87.65
Pentecostal Apostolic	5	0.74	88.38
Don't Know	5	0.74	89.12
Assembly Of God	4	0.59	89.71
Church Of God In Christ Holiness	4	0.59	90.29
Pentecostal Church Of God	4	0.59	90.88
Apostolic Church	4	0.59	91.47
LDS Mormon	3	0.44	91.91
Missionary Church	3	0.44	92.35
Christian & Missionary Alliance	2	0.29	92.65
Freewill Baptist	2	0.29	92.94
Evangelical Evangelist	2	0.29	93.24
Mennonite	2	0.29	93.53
Mormon	2	0.29	93.82
Religious Science	2	0.29	94.12
Unitarian	2	0.29	94.41
United Church Of Christ	2	0.29	94.71
Zion Union Apostolic Reformed	2	0.29	95
Holiness Church Of God	2	0.29	95.29
House Of Prayer	2	0.29	95.59
Christian Tabernacle	2	0.29	95.88
Primitive Baptist	2	0.29	96.18
Ind. Bible Fellowship	1	0.15	96.32

<b>Denominations</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
Church Of God Saint & Christ	1	0.15	96.47
Moravian	1	0.15	96.62
African Methodist	1	0.15	96.76
Baptist Northern	1	0.15	96.91
Witness Holiness	1	0.15	97.06
Brethren Plymouth	1	0.15	97.21
United Brethren	1	0.15	97.35
Christian Disciples	1	0.15	97.5
Christian Reformed	1	0.15	97.65
Christian Scientist	1	0.15	97.79
Church Of The Living God	1	0.15	97.94
Community Church	1	0.15	98.09
First Christian	1	0.15	98.24
Full Gospel	1	0.15	98.38
Nazarene	1	0.15	98.53
Reformed	1	0.15	98.68
United Holiness	1	0.15	98.82
Zion Church	1	0.15	98.97
Disciples Of God	1	0.15	99.12
Unity	1	0.15	99.26
Federated Church	1	0.15	99.41
Apostolic Christian	1	0.15	99.56
Christ Cathedral Of Truth	1	0.15	99.71
Evangelical Methodist	1	0.15	99.85
Christian Calvary Chapel	1	0.15	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>680</b>	<b>100</b>	

Source: General Social Survey 1972-1998

**Table 30: Frequency of Church Attendance**

	<b>Black</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>Black</b>	<b>White</b>
	Percentage		Cumulative Percentage	
<i><u>Irregular attendance</u></i>				
Never	8.13	15.41	8.13	15.41
less than once a year	5.92	8.41	14.06	23.81
once or twice a year	9.54	13.77	23.6	37.59
several times a year	13.61	13.02	37.2	50.61
once a month	8.82	7.08	46.02	57.69
<i><u>Regular Attendance</u></i>				
2-3 times a month	16.89	7.86	62.91	65.55
nearly every week	7.35	5.63	70.26	71.18
every week	19.77	21.38	90.03	92.56
several times a week	9.97	7.44	100	100
Total Percentage	100	100		
N	5,115	31,532		

Source: General Social Survey 1972-1998. Results are the same for 1998. Most whites do not attend church regularly, most blacks do.

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Williams, R. (1997). The Social Shaping Of Information And Communications Technologies.



# Vita

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### EDUCATION

#### COLLEGE OF INFORMATION SCIENCES & TECHNOLOGY, THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY

*Doctor of Philosophy, Information Sciences and Technology*

University Park, PA  
May 2008

#### SMEAL COLLEGE OF BUSINESS, THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY

Master of Science Supply Chain and Information Systems

University Park, PA  
May 2006

#### UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

Bachelor of Science, Environmental Engineering

Norman, OK  
May 1999

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### TEACHING EXPERIENCE

#### THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY

*Co-Instructor*

Fall 2006- Fall 2007

- Co-Instructor with "The Information Environment" course. Class consisted of 40 senior level students.

*Teaching Assistant*

Spring 2006

- Teaching Assistant with "Organization of Data" course. Class consisted of 80 junior level students.

*Course Instructor*

Summer 2004

- Designed and taught "Introduction to Supply Chain Management" course to class of 80 junior level students.
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### FORTHCOMING PUBLICATIONS

- "Third Places in the Blackosphere". *Encyclopedia of Information Science and Technology, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.* February, 2008
  - "An African-American Weblog Community's Reading of the AIDS Crisis in Black America". *Journal of Computer Mediated Communication*, March 2008
  - "Beyond the Digital Divide into Computer-Mediated Communications: A Content Analysis of the Role of Community Weblogs in Building Oldenburg's Virtual "Third Places" in Black America". Fall 2008
- 

### CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

*Counterproductive Behavior in Virtual Teams: A Grounded Theory Approach*

2008 IST Graduate Symposium

Pennsylvania State University

*Virtual "Third Places" in Black America*

2008 i-conference

University of Central Los Angeles

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### COMMUNITY & UNIVERSITY SERVICE

*Director of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania's Guide Right Mentor Program (Harrisburg Nativity School)*

2006-2008

*Co-founder & President of AFRIST (Africans in Information Sciences & Technology)*

2006-2007

*Other University Leadership Positions Held*

- Executive Board, Smeal PhD Association 2003-2004
  - Member, Smeal College of Business Diversity Advisory Committee 2004-2005
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### PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS

- National Society for Black Engineers (NSBE)
- Beta Gamma Sigma, Business Honor Fraternity, Inc.
- The PhD Project
- National Black MBA Association (NMBBAA)

### OTHER AFFILIATIONS

- Kappa Alpha Psi International Fraternity, Inc.
- Center for the Information Society, The Pennsylvania State University