

Example of an Informed Consent Form for an Online Survey

An Investigation of the Relationship between Women's Weblogs and their Online and "Real Life" Friendships

Informed Consent Form

Purpose of the Study:

This is a study in social psychology that is being conducted by Dr. Cynthia Bane, assistant professor of psychology at Wartburg College in Waverly, Iowa. The purpose of this study is to examine the content of women's weblogs and how the content might be related to their online and "real life" same-sex friendships.

What will be done:

You will complete a survey, which will take 30-40 minutes to complete. The survey includes questions about your blogging history. Other survey questions will address your perceptions of your weblog (for example, how much personal information you think you disclose on your blog), the quantity and quality of your online and "real life" same-sex friendships, the availability of opportunities that you have to develop and maintain friendships, and your perceptions of friendship in general. We also will ask for some demographic information (e.g., age, marital status, number of children, education level) so that we can accurately describe the general traits of the group of women who participate in the study.

After you complete the questionnaire, we will examine some of your weblog entries and will record information about your blogging activity (for example, how frequently you create entries), the content of your weblog entries (the topics that you write about), and the number of readers who write responses to your entries.

Benefits of this Study:

You will be contributing to knowledge about women's friendships and the role that the Internet plays in friendship development. In addition, you will be entered in a drawing for one of five \$20.00 Amazon.com gift certificates (we anticipate that 150 weblog authors will participate in the study). After we have finished data collection, we will conduct the drawing. Winners will receive the gift certificate via e-mail. After we have finished data collection, we also will provide you with more detailed information about the purposes of the study and the research findings.

Risks or discomforts:

No risks or discomforts are anticipated from taking part in this study. If you feel uncomfortable with a question, you can skip that question or withdraw from the study altogether. If you decide to quit at any time before you have finished the questionnaire, your answers will NOT be recorded.

Confidentiality:

Your responses will be kept completely confidential. We will NOT know your IP address when you respond to the Internet survey. We will ask you to include your weblog name and address and an e-mail address when you complete the Internet survey so that we can connect your survey answers to the data we collect from your weblog and enter you in the drawing for the gift certificate. However, your weblog name and address will not be stored with data from your survey or data from your weblog. Instead, you will be assigned a participant number, and only the participant number will appear with your survey responses and weblog entries. Only the researchers will see your individual survey responses and the results of our content analysis of your weblog. The list of e-mail and weblog addresses of our participants will be stored electronically in a password protected folder; a hard copy will be stored in a locked filing cabinet. After we have finished data collection and have sent you a copy of the results of the study, we will destroy the list of participants' e-mail addresses and weblog addresses.

At the end of the survey, we will ask your permission to use quotations from your weblog for professional presentations and publications. If you agree to let us use quotations, we will NOT include any names or nicknames you use, nor will we include your weblog name or weblog address along with the quotations.

Decision to quit at any time:

Your participation is voluntary; you are free to withdraw your participation from this study at any time. If you do not want to continue, you can simply leave this website. If you do not click on the "submit" button at the end of the survey, your answers and participation will not be recorded. You also may choose to skip any questions that you do not wish to answer. If you click on the "submit" button at the end of the survey, you will be entered in the drawing. The number of questions you answer will not affect your chances of winning the gift certificate.

How the findings will be used:

The results of the study will be used for scholarly purposes only. The results from the study will be presented in educational settings and at professional conferences, and the results might be published in a professional journal in the field of psychology. Because we will ask you about a number of different aspects of your weblog activity and your friendships, it is likely that we will use your data to address multiple questions regarding women's weblogs and same-sex friendships.

Contact information:

If you have concerns or questions about this study, please contact Dr. Cynthia Bane at cynthia.bane@wartburg.edu or the Wartburg College Human and Animal Research Review Committee chairperson, Dr. Edward Westen at ed.westen@wartburg.edu

By beginning the survey, you acknowledge that you have read this information and agree to participate in this research, with the knowledge that you are free to withdraw your participation at any time without penalty.