

# **Imaging, Keyboarding, and Posting Identities: Young People and New Media Technologies**

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## **New Technologies and Young People**

- New technologies forces us to re-examine identities bodies, interaction, intergenerational dialogue, and nature of childhood
- Evokes the influence of popular culture
- The cartoon example given portrays a popular belief that all children are born into a world of technology → when in reality it is the economic digital divide and the traditional ways of childhood that works against this statement
- The understanding of childhood in the digital age may differ from an adult compared to a child → adult have not experienced it themselves – however their learning and engagement are said to mirror childhood processes – creates cross-generational dialogue

Questions posed on the techno-newborn:

Who is this new baby and who will she become?

How will she view herself in relation to her peers as she approaches adulthood?

How will she use technologies to express and learn about herself?

## **Adolescence and Identity Processes**

- Adolescence – period of “identity crisis” – at a key stage of identity formation – period of transition to more adult roles and the formation of significant peer relationships. It is a time of transition – schools, jobs, new bodies, relationships, responsibilities etc

## **Digital Production and “Identities-in-Action”**

- Weber and Mitchell argues that youth identities are always in flux – similar to new technologies
- Young people’s interactive uses of new technologies can serve as a model for identity processes – it is multifaceted and in flux, incorporating new and old images
- The processes of producing, consuming and being consumed or shaped by digital media are intertwined and often simultaneous → “presumes”
- Youth digital productions are mostly viewed or consumed by youth audiences, and these are often the people who produce it in the first place – they are their own audiences

## **Producing Identities: Four Cases**

### **Case 1. Personal Websites and Friendship: Situating Personal and Social Selves**

- Several girls from different economic, ethnic and backgrounds interviewed

- Found they were able to trace and examine friendship groups by following posts and links on their websites
- Signing each other's guest books and leaving comments becomes necessary according to fashion
- Updated daily, the site is geared toward friends
- The website acts as a personal diary with pictures
- Sense of "we-ness" established – she communicates to her friends and speaks out to them
- Common template structure is apparent – group genre and set of codes has been created
- Common features include: home page that links to all other pages, "best friends" section, personal page revealing range of information and opinions, guest book or message board, instant messaging chat box elements, bulletin board, coded "private" messages, use of "cool" language, personal photos, photographs, and images
- Page is personalized to suite her image of each friend – how might they view themselves as posted through her eyes?
- An example of frequency in which their images are changed → posed, stylized and altered photos they present – the choice of photographs can be viewed as an extension or projection of their bodies, desiring to look like another's appearance- but desired looks changes as new trends emerge or someone gets a creative inspiration
- The presentation or expression of self on the sites also contain contrasting or contradictory elements of "self" → i.e. Cute VS Sexy – different meanings expressed by different age groups
- In conclusion: personal website provides diverse means of constructing and fashioning their identities through images and words – content related to popular media (new and old) – we can see Henry Jenkins's example of "convergence culture" created where boundaries between new and old media are blurred and blended to meet emerging needs. – postings constitute a declaration of belonging or identifying with a group – young people teach each other, borrow images/ideas to establish identities

### **Case 2: Why I Love My Cell Phone**

- Walia's *Get My Phone Back or Die Trying* – illustrates use of one digital medium (through power point /photography) to evoke personal significance of another medium (the cell phone)
- The technology is used extensively in her daily life – the object is invested with significant personal meaning
- Cell phone acts as a mediator between social and personal identities – connecting to others even when she's not using it

### **Case 3: In My Room: Power Point Projections**

- "Bedroom culture" → cultural space of girls and young women
- Their bedrooms were private yet social spaces
- Idea of "digital bedroom" → can use to describe gaming, surfing the web, home page construction for boys. For girls → describes their websites, which themselves often resemble bedrooms (digital "pin-ups", décor, blogs, messaging etc) – similar to an actual bedroom

### **Case 4: Our Collective Selves: Participatory Video**

- Question posed: How do young people create a collective identity through video production?

- Consider the difference of a “production” and how working with new technologies such as digital video can contribute to a deeper understanding of identity construction
- When speaking of the collective process and what difference it makes → we see that in the production process groups “in action” – negotiating scenes, working behind camera – brings strong sense of collective response – includes producers, viewers, directors, actors, technicians etc
- Digital media allow for trying on of various identities

### **Themes that run across the cases mentioned**

#### **Constructiveness**

- Referring to the manner of playful yet more or less deliberate creative “assembling” involved components of websites or the constructing and deconstructing of gender as part of on and offline role play → you start with materials at hand – work with others or alone – blueprints or models may be used including toys and media design
- Digital production permits the manipulation of gendered, raced and sexualized identities, both online and offline

#### **Collectivity and Social Construction**

- Identity constructions on websites evoke wider collective peer group and family – facilitates dialectical relationship between personal and social identities
- Can also be explained by the video making case – videos are produced by a group – reflects idea of constructiveness

#### **Convergence**

- Reading about digital production offers intersection and blending of old and new media
- I.e. Video production → traditional forms of role play is incorporated with the use of technology to capture the performances
- I.e. Website construction blends in with older methods of establishing identities → such as journal writing, photo albums, slide projectors, scrapbooking etc

#### **Reflexivity and Negotiation**

- Reflexivity → one of the key ways in which media production contributes to the construction of identities
- 1. Their own media production forces young people to look at themselves, providing feedback for further modification of their self-representations. 2. The sources of materials and modes of young people’s media production are often evident or transparent → the choices and processes that they use to identify themselves in a way that they may not even notice. 3. Through built-in response mechanisms or simply through audience response, media production invites other people’s feedback and readings, sparking a dialectic that is inherent to mediating and reshaping how we see ourselves and how we think others see us.
- Reflexivity is shaped by culture and experience – media production creates awareness that enhances our ability to see the way we present ourselves in a critical manner

- Expression and construction of identities through digital media production is usually visual

### **Embodiment**

- Identities are always embodied → young people are examining, modifying, dressing, adorning, and putting their bodies out there – i.e. taking photos of themselves posed similar to celebrities
- Items of clothing and body gestures become markers of identities – i.e. The image of the “cool” gangster dressed with his shirt half hanging out

### **Learning**

- The differences in educational structures and settings can have an impact on the skills and content of young people’s media productions, in this sense, learning involves interacting with friends and family whose responses shape media production
- Can be informal (website construction) or formal (use of power point or photo voice)
- Young people learn through media production which exemplifies constructivist notions of learning – self motivated learning through play, trial and error and through actively engaging with the world thus they acquire technical skills, creativity and skills to critique

### **Conclusion: Identity Production as Bricolage**

- Identity is fluid and open to negotiation – subjected to many constraints – an ongoing process – an existence tied to embodiment. We improvise, experiment, blend and patch together elements of life that suit different contexts accordingly.
- *Bricolage* → refers to a construction or creating that is improvised – the process as well as the product – “building block”
- Turkle → speaks of identities in the digital age as fragmented, shifting, partial – involves active construction that constantly sheds bits and adds bits, changing through dialectical interactions with the digital and non-digital world – involves physical, psychological, social and cultural agents

### **Extra! Extra!**

Definition of Photo voice:

“Photo voice blends a grassroots approach to photography and social action. It provides cameras not to health specialists, policy makers, or professionals, but to people with least access to those who make decisions affecting their lives...”

“Photo voice is processes by which people can identify, represent, and enhance their community through a specific photographic technique. It entrusts cameras to the hands of people to enable them to act as recorders, and potential catalysts for social action and change, in their own communities. It uses the immediacy of the visual image and accompanying stories to furnish evidence and to promote an effective, participatory means of sharing expertise to create healthful public policy.”

-Caroline Wang and Ann Burris

[http://www.ivmproject.ca/photo\\_voice.php](http://www.ivmproject.ca/photo_voice.php)