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Mediated Youth Cultures: The Internet, Belonging and New Cultural Configurations.

Edited by Andy Bennett and Brady Robards. Hampshire, UK: Palgrave Macmillan,

2014, 256 pp. ISBN 978-1-137-28701-4

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In the foreword of *Mediated Youth Cultures: The Internet, Belonging and New Cultural Configurations*, editors Andy Bennett and Brady Roberts explain how “Through its intersection with the everyday practices of youth, the internet has brought new dimensions to what has conventionally been referred to as youth culture” (1). The eclectic makeup of the book is a consequence of these varied intersections, with the contributions from individual scholars encompassing a broad range of disciplines.

With thirteen chapters from different authors, clustered across three sections (“Online and Offline Identities”, “Engagement and Creativity”, and “Bodies, Spaces and Places”), the contributions from the editors are minimal throughout, rather allowing each essay to exist in its own space. With no cross-referencing or links to broader aims of the title, these individual essays are often very specific and it is unlikely that readers will be familiar with all (or even many) of the topics under discussion. This is not a shortcoming of the title, but the natural result of considering the diversity of online youth cultures in the one body of work. In much the same way that web searches can take internet users to places they could not have initially anticipated, so too does this book, with page clicks substituted with page flicks (unless of course you are reading the Kindle edition).

In the first part of the book, “Online and Offline Identities”, four different essays explore different aspects of identity, as mediated through online interactions. Katie Davis’ contribution on adolescents’ expression of identity finds that online and offline behaviour is much the same, and purposefully so: her mixed-methods research finds that young people

strive to maintain a consistency between their online and offline selves, with fears of being labelled ‘two-faced’, for example. More specifically exploring social networking, Brady Roberts argues that the Facebook timeline represents a unique longitudinal dataset in order to explore the transitory period that is adolescence. Arguing that “Facebook users are already tracing and archiving their experiences in transition” (38), Roberts’ observations highlight the need for a dynamic approach to researching youth culture, and unsurprisingly, the majority of the book is qualitative in nature. Reflecting on the increased portability of networked devices, Siân Lincoln’s essay highlights how young people’s use of the internet is more difficult for parents to monitor; following on from this, Ian Goodwin, Antonia Lyons, Christine Griffin and Tim McCreanor consider the moral panic that of youth drinking culture, and how tales (and images) of drunkenness are shared on social networking sites, including Facebook.

The second part of the book concerns “Engagement and Creativity” and continues the trend of rich qualitative research, particularly in Carmel L. Vaisman’s exploration of graphic design production amongst Israeli girls; the essay shines a light on a prolific group of bloggers who challenge long-held notions that such activities are dominated by males. Three of the five essays in this section specifically concern music. In her review of K-pop, Sun Jung explains how social media is now a core cultural distribution channel and integral to the marketing strategies of the cultural industries. Melissa Avdeef’s wide-ranging essay on young people’s music-listening behaviours highlights how youths are more likely to listen to music on handheld digital devices. Avdeef’s informed discussion makes compelling observations on the recorded music industry, noting that competition for fans is now measured in Twitter followers and YouTube hits. Raphaël Nowak specifically explores the everyday uses of different types of technology in the digital era and shows how new forms of consumption can complement one another, with different technologies meeting different preferences. He explains that “The reception of music is currently characterised by a multiplication and

coexistence of various music artefacts that all possess their own features and characteristic forms of appeal for listeners” (150). In highlighting this, Nowak debunks commonly held myths surrounding the ubiquity of all things digital in the world of recorded music.

In the final section of the book, four different essays explore wholly different topics under the theme of “Bodies, Spaces and Places”. One essay by Adele Pavlidis and Simone Fullagar considers roller derby, explaining how the internet has facilitated this inclusive activity which is billed as ‘women’s only’. The inclusion of this largely underground activity is contrasted with Susan Bird’s account of flash mobs which have inspired considerable media attention, and particularly so on YouTube. Bird explains that the flash mob originated as a joke of sorts to see if people would do something just because others are doing it too (calling to mind recent ‘games’ and ‘challenges’ originating on social media, with varied consequences).

The scope of the book is immense, with little or no theoretical assumptions to provide some sort of consistency across the individual contributions – this may isolate some readers with a tacit interest in just one particular aspect of youth culture, or those readers more broadly concerned with technology overall. To this end, the detailed glossary is revealing in that it defines so many turns of phrase (such as ‘crowdsourcing’ or ‘prosumer’) which lie out with everyday discourse. More telling still is the inclusion of ANOVA (in reference to the one study which uses quantitative methodology) which pre-supposes that readers do not come from a quantitative background; as mentioned, the general methodological approach from the different authors is qualitative, in the broadest sense of the word. Indeed, the book could be used as a template for introducing the diverse array of methodological lines of enquiry which fall under the umbrella of ‘qualitative research’.

As the editors note, the collected works reveal that much of the behaviours exhibited by youths are not new, but rather mediated through the internet. In this light, the internet is

depicted as a communication tool, encouraging the inquisitive and creative mindset of the young to work and play in exciting new ways. Broadly speaking, the book finds that the internet plays a positive role in youth culture.