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

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Introducing Youth, Technologies, and Identities-in-Action

New Technologies and Young People

Among the many cartoons we clip out of the newspaper for our growing collection, one of our favorites shows a baby popping out of the womb with a cell phone in one hand, a computer mouse in the other, and an iPod plugged into his or her ears (a view of the genitalia is obscured by the arms of whoever is holding the baby). Minutes old, the baby already seems to be communicating the birth experience to a group of as yet unborn cohorts, text messaging in some sort of "baby code" incomprehensible to adults, while presumably also listening to self-selected MP3 files (downloaded perhaps via the umbilical cord?!). It all seems so very . . . "unbaby-like." The boundaries between teens and babies are blurred[1] and adults seem out of the loop altogether. Cartoons such as this are becoming commonplace, almost a cliché, but are still capable of eliciting a smile or a grimace from adults who are wondering about the impact of new technologies on society in general, and on children and youth in particular. Offering a humorous commentary on contemporary societies, the cartoon poses some very interesting questions about how new technologies are forcing us to reexamine identities, bodies, interaction, intergenerational dialogue, and the nature of childhood. It also evokes the influence of popular culture and the increasing role of technology in even the most "natural" aspects of life such as birth.

There are popular assumptions underlying the cartoon that need to be challenged. It is important, for example, to remember that not all children are "born into new technologies" to the same extent. Even in North America there are still homes without computers or Internet access; not every adolescent has a cell phone, an MP3 player, and a Game Cube or Play Station (although it certainly is beginning to seem that way). As research by Seiter[2] and many surveys confirm, there is an economic digital divide that is overlooked and possibly growing. And even amongst the economic elite, it would be naïve to assume that all life is digital. Sports, arts, books, camping, bicycles, hobbies, offline games, and hanging out with friends offline are still a part of childhood for many.

The cartoon also ignores the growing cohort of adults whose engagement mirrors those of the cartoon techno-tot. Whether it is in the quest to remain young and "with it," the desire to keep in touch or keep up with their children and grandchildren, or the necessity of adapting to the changing requirements of the job market, adults are catching up with youth in terms of hardware adoption and use, something that is explored in Susan Herring's chapter in this volume. Some are even co-opting or integrating aspects of youth culture such as the lingo

and conventions of text messaging into their own. Cross-generational dialogue and evolving adult role models challenge the cartoon's assumptions that digital technologies are only for the young. Perhaps the adults witnessing the cartoon birth understand more digital language than the baby realizes. Nonetheless, most of the scholars who write about new technologies and their impact on children are writing about an experience they themselves never had as a child. Text messaging and online gaming, for example, were not available to young people twenty years ago. There is thus a very real danger of misunderstanding what growing up in a digital age is really like from young people's perspectives. It would be a mistake to assume that adults' learning and engagement with new technologies mirror childhood processes.

And so, returning to our image of the techno-newborn, we ask: 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? To explore these questions, we will examine a series of four case studies that highlight the roles that digital media can assume in the construction of youth identities. Before presenting the cases, however, we will first set the scene by raising some of the assumptions, problems, and questions that are central to investigations of young people and new technologies.

Adolescence and Identity Processes As we have seen in the introduction to this volume, adolescence has often been viewed as a key period in identify formation, and indeed as a period of "identity crisis," in which fundamental dilemmas have to be resolved. Instead of referring to an arbitrary age range, adolescence can perhaps more usefully be viewed as a series of questions that youth ask of themselves, the world, and each other, and that others ask of them. "Just who am I?," "What will I do when I leave school?," "Where do I fit in?," "Who do I love?" There is also an assumed plasticity to adolescence (although that assumption may be mistaken). Poised on the cusp of adulthood, adolescents are believed to be at a key stage of identity formation, a time of visible and invisible "becoming" when the biological changes of puberty, emergent sexuality, transitions to more adult roles, and the formation of significant peer relationships all intersect. It is, for most young people, a time of transitions—to new schools, new jobs, new bodies, new relationships, and new responsibilities. In Western discourse, adolescence is often portrayed as a heightened, and perhaps emotional, experiencing of life, a questioning or yearning for . . . some unknown future, the need to situate oneself, to find out who our friends are, to take one's place in society, the ambivalent wish to belong and not belong, to be the same yet stand out. This search may not be unique to adolescence nor typical of all young people, but, in the popular culture of youth at least, it seems to be "writ large."

One could legitimately argue that not all of these assumptions apply to all youth or that they apply to a much broader range of people, but if indeed identity processes during adolescence apply to other ages and phases, then the case for studying this period becomes even more compelling. New technologies are a good place to start these investigations. For many young people, especially in industrialized parts of the world, digital media are significant modalities through which they are seeking, consciously or unconsciously, the answers to identity questions, looking for what Buckingham and Sefton-Green describe as "the me that is me."[3]

Digital Production and "Identities-in-Action" Like youth identities, new technologies keep changing, converging, morphing—seemingly always in flux, and like youth identities, young

people's own digital productions facilitate a blending of media, genres, experimentations, modifications, and reiterations, which Mizuko "Mimi" Ito describes as a "media-mix."[4] Digital productions tell stories of sorts (often nonlinear and multivoiced) and leave a digital trail, fingerprint, or photograph of "where I was then," "where we are now," "who I would like to be," and so on. In other words, young people's interactive uses of new technologies can serve as a model for identity processes. We propose labeling such cultural production activities *identities-in-action* as a reminder that, like digital cultural production, identity processes are multifaceted and in flux, incorporating old and new images.

Following the leads of scholars such as Henry Jenkins,[5] we use the term "production" not only to refer to the creation of digital products, but also to the interactive consumption that is embedded in production, that is, the ways in which youth often take up or consume popular images, and combine, critique, adapt, or incorporate them in their own media productions. Lister proposes that we abandon former distinctions between producers and consumers, collapsing them into one word, "prosumers."[6] As the cases we will present illustrate, the processes of producing, consuming, and being consumed or shaped by digital media are intertwined and often simultaneous. This makes them perfect entry points for investigating learning and identity, for it is at least partially through these processes of interacting with technologies (including hardware, software, and design) that identities are constructed, deconstructed, shaped, tested, and experienced.

Youth digital productions are mostly viewed or consumed by youth audiences, and these often include the very people who are the producers in the first place. Young people revisit their own web productions, not only to see how they might update them, but also to see what has happened to them in terms of "hits" or response messages and so on. They are their own audience. There is a reflexivity to this process, a conscious looking, not only at their production (themselves), but at how others are looking at their productions.

Producing Identities: Four Cases

From data collected in Britain, Canada, and South Africa, we have selected cases that involve a range of technologies and contexts, from adult-mediated activities in schools and community centers to spontaneous media production done in private at home. Moreover, since gender, race, ethnicity, social group, culture, and local context all play important roles in identity processes, we used these factors as well to vary our selection. Although it may seem counterintuitive, focusing on experiences that differ actually helps make what is common to all the cases stand out.

Three of the four cases we present below are taken from a body of funded research that we and our international team have conducted under the umbrella of two major projects over the last six years.[7] One project investigates young people's everyday experiences of new technologies. The other focuses on the use of digital photography and video to enable young people to express their views around issues of violence, gender, and sexuality. A fourth case is based on the viewing and transcription of a video from a community-based youth project led by British researcher and activist Liz Orton.[8]

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

To illustrate the complexities and nuances of identities-in-action through multimedia production, we will begin with a very detailed case drawn from a series of studies of girls' everyday uses of digital technology conducted by the *Digital Girls* research team in Canada.

During the project, we interviewed several girls from different economic, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds. The focus of the open-ended interviews was on their use of new technologies, and in particular their activities around personal websites. By following their friends' posts and links to their websites, we were able to trace and examine friendship groups, some of which included boys.

A bubbly and outgoing eleven-year-old girl raised in a religious North American Catholic family of Italian heritage, Isabella (not her real name) has created three major reiterations of her MySpace home page in the last year. For her large circle of friends and cousins (which includes boys), sharing websites, signing each other's guestbooks, and leaving comments in the chatboxes is de rigueur. The same holds true for her older sister, Maria, and her peers who are two grades ahead, marching into adolescence (there are no boys in this older group). In fact it was watching the older girls create webpages that got Isabella going. And go she did; her site is one of the most elaborate amongst the two groups of youths we followed. We were able to interview the two sisters and view multiple iterations not only of their sites, but also those of their circles of friends too. We focus more on Isabella's site than on others because her site offers the greatest variety of postings and because she was able to articulate clearly her views of website construction and identity. Since she is the youngest of the group, her case affords us a glimpse of the roots, the beginnings of the kinds of things we see in the older teen sites, a point of comparison to see how views and practices change in adolescence. Moreover, it quickly became apparent that so much of what Isabella knows, in terms of technical skills and conventions of display, she has learned from her older sister.

Updated almost daily as soon as she comes home from school, Isabella's site includes many features of a gossipy journal or blog combined with instant messaging and elements of scrapbooking. Despite the fact that it is sitting right out in plain sight in public cyberspace, the site is geared specifically toward her friends and, in many ways, acts as a personal diary with pictures; it is a form of what could be called public privacy. On the site's home page, Isabella clearly indicates both her intended audience (her circle of friends) and her desire to include them, to welcome them, to create a sense of "we-ness" to her site:

> If there's anything you would want me to change like pictures of you or something like a page or wtv don't be shy to tell me! I really don't care . . . . so tell me your corrections on msn [she gives her MSN address below this message].

In looking across the websites of the two friendship circles of young people (aged eleven to thirteen), a common general template or structure is readily apparent. They have developed a group genre and set of codes that incorporate some features that can be found on popular websites and magazines directed at tweens and teens with other aspects, such as daily postings, that are more often found on popular blogs. The organization and content of their sites are also dependent on what the templates, website tools, and site host permit or facilitate.

Almost all of the sites we examined feature:

- a home page that links to all the other pages;
- a "best friends" section (listing members of one's circle and often providing links to their sites);
- a personal page revealing a range of information and opinions (favorite music, "my cute dog," sports, a blog-like posting of snippets of daily experience, love notes to friends, jokes, gossip, candid photos, posed photos, and more);

- a guest book or message board where visitors (assumed to be one's best friends) can sign in and leave messages;
- an instant messaging chat box;
- a "goodbye—come again" page;
- elements of fandom, participation in popular culture, sharing likes and dislikes—popular movies, sport, music idols, and so forth;
- declaration of their friendship group, their heritage group, and in some instances, their family; in other words, certain elements selected to show where they fit in, where they belong;
- inclusion of friends' site addresses;
- a bulletin board for friends to leave messages;
- coded "private" messages for certain friends, sometimes inserted within the main text of the site;
- personal photos (often downloaded from cell phones) and artwork;
- use of the prevailing norms for "cool" language;
- photographs (posed and/or candid shots of oneself, pets, and others, downloaded or scanned photos, often of idols);
- images—sometimes original drawings, but more often clip art taken from other sites, popular images, and commercial logos.

Isabella's site is colorful and cheerful, full of creative combinations of pop-culture images, author-produced layout and script, private coded messages to friends, personal information, photographs of friends and family, jokes, cartoon images, lists of favorites, and more. Sexily posed photos of Isabella herself (à la Hillary Duff or Paris Hilton, two popular teen icons) are juxtaposed with images taken from younger children's cartoons. Combining elements that range from childlike naivete to adult pseudosophistication, the content is poignant, whimsical, funny, occasionally profane, and perhaps to some adult eyes a bit disconcerting. Both the images and the written text evoke a sort of savvy innocence, a playfulness that does not seem to be sexual but that is very affectionate. The written text is a casual and interesting mixture of unconventional and very "in" spellings (e.g., buhh byee, tataa, crazzzy, woww) filled with extra letters for ordinary words, coded abbreviations for swear words (e.g., it was so fkn funni), and typical IM codes (e.g., lol, omg, u r nuts).

The "Best Friends" page is extensive and features an ark full of cartoon animals derived from popular culture (for example, *Hello Kitty*). Clicking a name on the list of her best friends leads to a photo of that person displayed above a message Isabella has written both proclaiming her love for that friend and recalling some shared event ("remember when") or "secret." These messages are written in a creative blend of coolspeak and text message language. For each page devoted to a friend, Isabella changes fonts, wallpaper, and styles, finding ways to improve upon or circumvent the space provider's templates, showing off her growing skill with HTML, experimenting, but also personalizing the page to suit her image of each friend (some of whom are boys). How might they view themselves as posted through her eyes, we wonder.

Most of the friends who visit Isabella's site and who are featured on her best friends' page have sites of their own as well. The look, arrangement of photos, personal information, and

preferences vary; so do opinions for and against Hillary Duff and Paris Hilton! Some talk about their pets, others are more interested in adventures they've had, but in many respects, the sites are similar. One interesting commonality across the sites of those in the circle who have an Italian background is the inclusion on their fan pages of a conscious nod to their heritage though the posting of photos of one or more of the "Hottie Gottis" from the recently cancelled reality TV show *Growing Up Gotti*, a series that featured the three teenaged grandsons of John Gotti. This posting of images reflecting linguistic and national heritage roots does not emerge in conversation with the sisters as central to their identity, but it is important to them. For circle members of Italian heritage, posting such images appears to be a "this is what you are required to do to keep your standing in the community" gesture, as the crosses some of them wear on a chain around their necks are a taken-for-granted symbol that does not necessarily signpost deep religious belief as much as simply proclaim "I am a member in good standing of a particular social group"—or as Isabella puts it, "ya gotta show respect." (There is further discussion of how friendships and identities are constructed in MySpace in danah boyd's chapter in this volume.)

The sites of the three boys in Isabella's circle resemble the girls' sites in many ways. They use similar templates, feature fan pages (more sports icons here), personal information (for example, likes and dislikes, hobbies), candid photographs, similar text message style writing, and more. Their sites seem less elaborate, however, and their popular images veer more toward cars, sports images, and pictures of athletes, stereotypic markers of masculinity. The colors tend to be stronger (fewer pastels, more red and black) and the affectionate outpouring of love for friends a bit more restrained (but only a bit—we were surprised at the frank affection and support for friends expressed on these sites). Like the girls, some token expression of identifying with Italian heritage seems mandatory for the boys, especially during the World Cup months when Italian flags went up on two of the sites. Following the lead of their female friends, the boys also posted pictures from the TV show *Growing Up Gotti*, although unlike the girls, they don't refer to the male Gotti teens as "hot." Without interviewing the boys, it is hard to know the extent to which they might identify with the Gottis in more direct ways than the girls do, or the extent to which these and other fan posts see them as "objects of desire."

Meanwhile, the older girls' sites bear many similarities to those of the younger girls (although they would probably deny this rather vehemently) in terms of structures and genre. However, the content is different—there are fewer nostalgic icons of childhood, more sarcasm, more obvious references to sexuality, and more critique of adults (especially teachers). They draw on a wider color palette, using more austere colors and a lot more black. White text on dark background is, for the moment, considered "cool." There is also more attempt at animation and more links to sites that are beyond one's circle of friends (although, as for the younger girls, a friends page is central to most of their sites). It's as if they have a greater awareness or appreciation of the world wide web beyond their own site, and are more curious about other people's ways of constructing sites. Through experimentation, peer tutoring, and seeking out information, they are actively learning site construction skills and acquiring wider knowledge of genres and esthetic possibilities. Their construction or posting of self seems more deliberate and reflexive.

These web postings demonstrate or even constitute a form of embodiment. The posting of photographs extends their bodies into cyber space; their sites bear their "fingerprints," the traces of their activities, the imprint of their inventive spellings and font choices, the visual evidence that they exist, a signpost to who they think they are or who they want you

to think they are or who they would like to become. As they choose and post a plethora of photographs that include candid photographs of groups of friends, impromptu "clowning around" snaps as well as posed, stylized, and sometimes altered photos, they are presenting themselves, performing their bodies, and trying on "looks." The choice of photographs of their idols can also be viewed as an extension or projection of their bodies, a desiring or coveting of another's appearance. They want their own images and their sites to have a certain look, but the desired look changes as new trends emerge or as someone gets a creative inspiration. There is a tentative experimentation evident in the frequency with which they change certain images, and a growing commitment or certainty about other images that they keep across multiple iterations.

The performance[9], sexualization, and gendering of their bodies was quite prominent. Some of the girls were very intent on posing and dressing their bodies to look "sexy." But what they mean by sexy and what older teens or adults label sexy might be very different, as suggested by the following excerpt from an interview:

Interviewer: What do you mean by "sexy?"
Tween (female): You know . . . cute . . . pretty!

While most of their language suggests a normative emphasis on heterosexuality (the older girls, especially, all talk as if they are mainly into "hot guys"), it is interesting to note that the girls lavish affection and love on female idols (crushes perhaps) which far outnumber the male images they post, and that the boys posted images of male as well as female idols. Same-sex as well as cross-sex (one could also argue sexless) affection is very much the norm for both the older and the younger groups and perhaps reflects strong identification or aspirations to be like those objects of affection. In appropriating images of others for posting, are they trying to incorporate aspects of their identities into their own?

The presentation or expression of self on these sites also contains many contrasting, ambivalent, or even contradictory elements of "self." For example, one trend that runs through most of the girls' sites is the nostalgic inclusion of cuddly animals and images that are associated with younger children, right alongside the sexy poses and images more typical of teen magazines. When questioned, none of them felt that there was any problem with using "childish" cartoons or clichés mixed with sexual images. These images modified and contextualized each other: for example, in the younger group, the word "sexy" can just mean "cute" in one posting and "sexy" in the more conventional adult sense in another.

In summary, this case study illustrates some of the ways in which personal website production provides young people with diverse means of constructing and fashioning their identities through images and words. Their sites contain a variety of pictures, expressions, and references relating to the popular culture of media, new and old. This improvised and almost natural combining of analog and digital components (e.g., scanning analog photos or using old fashioned scrapbooks as website templates) illustrates that young people's evolving media productions reflect what Jenkins calls a "convergence culture,"[10] where the boundaries between old and new media are blurred, and elements of each are blended and adapted to meet emerging needs. The resulting visual and textual collages often contain contrasting elements, all imbued with both personal and social meanings. Highly original artwork sits right alongside popular images and drawings poached from other websites. Many of their postings constitute a declaration of belonging to or identifying with a peer group, a family group, an ethnic or linguistic or heritage group, a stream of popular culture, a particular time, space, and place. These young people teach each other, borrow images or ideas from

each other, and in a sense co-construct identities. But it is also important to emphasize that their posted identities are neither predictable nor homogeneous. As the sometimes subtle, sometimes blatant differences and variations across websites attest, even if they all eat from the same popular buffet, they are not all alike.

Case 2. Why I Love My Cell Phone: Seeing Voice

When she was a fifteen-year-old, Walia, an African refugee living in East London, took part in a digital storytelling (photovoice) project called *Moving Lives*.[11] The goal of the project is to help young refugees make the transition to life in the U.K. by building their confidence in their own voices and empowering them to speak out using digital media. Given *carte blanche* as to the subject matter they choose, young people learn to use digital cameras, PowerPoint, and the Internet to "represent themselves as they want to be seen and heard: as individuals with hopes, histories, ideas, and dreams." Some of the resulting photo stories have been posted on the project's website.

Walia seems to have had no trouble choosing her topic and title: Get my *phone back or die trying*, a recounting of actual events and a creative expression of her passionate feelings about her cell phone. Through a sequence of photographs (some of her, some of the objects she mentions, and others obviously posed using parts of other people's bodies) accompanied by her own voice and words, she tells a story about having her cell phone stolen and how she managed to get it back. When Walia found out from a friend of hers that a school bully (whom she represents as holding a knife) had stolen it, she worked up the courage to approach him to ask if she could buy it back. As the photo essay progresses, we realize she has arranged a sting operation with the vice principal of the school. She gets to keep her money, the bully gets caught and reprimanded, and Walia gets her phone back. Confronting and getting the better of a male bully can be quite a risk, and one might wonder about the wisdom of her plot. But she tells us: "I love my phone. I love it enough to risk my life for it." It's always on, she says, and she keeps it beside her bed at night. She sometimes talks all night, busting her budget and spending her month's money in a few days.

In the course of telling her digital story, Walia weaves in a love poem to her phone, using similes illustrated with photographs to convey what this technology means to her. "My phone," she says, "is like a dog—because it's so cute and loyal. My phone is like New York. It's always busy." And later on in the story, "My phone is like a chicken supreme pizza with stuffed crust—it's the tastiest thing there is. . . . My phone is like boots (photo of knee high black suede sexy boots) to go out clubbing and have fun. . . . My phone is like earrings, I never leave home without it."

This case is interesting for many reasons. For one, it illustrates the use of one digital medium (photography/PowerPoint) to evoke and illustrate the personal significance of another medium, the cell phone. As the Danish youth Gitte Staid describes in her chapter, Walia has incorporated this technology extensively into her daily life. One particular cell phone (hers) seems to act as an extension of self, almost as part of her body. She has invested this object with significant personal meanings. Getting it back seems very important; she doesn't mention even considering buying another one. She seems to be literally saying that she would die without it, or at least, be less of who she is. At the very least, we can conclude that an important dimension of her identity is that "I am a person who has and uses her own cell phone." For Walia, the cell phone seems to act symbolically as a mediator or link between social and personal identities, connecting her to others, even when she is not using it. Perhaps it acts as a stand-in for the people she can "touch" via her phone. She imbues it

with so much meaning, perhaps bestowing on it the affection she feels for the people with whom she chats all evening.

The identity Walia constructs in her online photovoice posting is of a young woman who is sociable, strong, and perhaps stylish (judging from the boots and the earrings). In talking about her friends, her phone, her clubbing, she evokes other people, her desire to be connected and available to her friends. In publicly using a poetic voice and carefully posed photographs to describe her feelings toward her phone, she comes out as an artist. In confronting and besting a bully, she expresses her values and affirms an identity that firmly states what she is NOT. She is not a victim. Nor are the girls in the next case which also involves photography and PowerPoint, albeit in a very different context.

Case 3. In My Room: Power Point Projections

. . . the bedroom is an important place for most adolescents, a personal space in which they can experiment with possible selves. (Brown et al.)[12]

What do girls' digital images of their bedrooms reveal about identity and self-image, and how do girls' public rerepresentations of their bedrooms using PowerPoint technology add another dimension to the presentation of self? Here we look at visual data collected as part of a study that involves a group of 50 eleven- and twelve-year-old girls from Pietermaritzburg in South Africa. All of them are English first-language speakers from middle-class backgrounds who participate in a "digital bedroom" project as part of a second-language class where they are learning Isizulu.[13] At their teacher's suggestion, the girls used digital cameras to take still pictures of their bedrooms. Then, using a selection of these images, they each created a PowerPoint presentation which they showed in class. They use Isizulu in the print text that accompanies the photos, as well as in the actual oral presentation to the rest of the class. Their teacher was eager to do this project because she hoped that this use of a personal frame of reference would motivate the girls and enhance their language learning. The rationale for creating visual images and including these images as part of a PowerPoint presentation reflects a recognition of the visual world of the girls, and indeed might even be read as an extension of the photo-sharing practices that are increasingly associated with cell phones.

Most of the girls took pictures of their bedrooms in their own homes, although a few boarders who live in a hostel took pictures of their "home away from home." The images produced by the girls represent a fascinating array of "girl stuff" ranging from photos of favorite objects—floppy stuffed animals, dolls—to photos-of-photos of a horse or a pet dog. Surprisingly, given the influence of popular culture, there was very little overlap in terms of the actual favorite objects selected.[14] Their chosen objects include the various forms of technology in the bedroom (televisions, computers, iPods, DVD players, and so on) as we see in Figure 1, a photo that combines a cell phone and a CD player with candy sours. They also took pictures of "girl spaces": images of special places for hiding things (a drawer or a special box), and images of favorite hiding places where they go when they want to be alone (under a bed, in a wardrobe).

Beyond the single photographs are the actual PowerPoint productions where each girl has rerepresented her bedroom creatively and artistically. Like Walia's photo story noted above, it is the personal narrative that is important. Each girl could use up to four or five images in a PowerPoint presentation. In the presentations the girls make full use of the various features of PowerPoint, including color schemes and backdrops, text layout, particular animation features (bounce, ellipsis, etc.), and slide design and layout.

Figure 1
Slide of technologies in a girl's bedroom.

As one small example of their editing work, the image in Figure 2 is taken from a PowerPoint presentation, which brings life to the stuffed animals through such features as boomerangs and title arcs. They personalize their images in other ways too. One girl, for example, adds in a small image of a stylized dog to accompany each of her images; the dog in a sense becomes the commentator. The girls respond enthusiastically to doing the project on their own, as well as to looking carefully at each other's work. As their Isizulu teacher observes: "Up to now I have always taught the theme "My Bedroom," in an old-fashioned way during Isizulu lessons in the Grade 7 class. The girls would use pictures from magazines and posters to improve their vocabulary and to carry out their oral work. I am of the opinion that the girls were in some ways detached from the task." In other words, allowing girls to express their identities more authentically and freely based on their home life outside of school turned out to be an effective school-initiated teaching strategy, one that empowers and respects students.

The images and projections of the bedrooms complement and extend the work of McRobbie and Garber, who coined the term "bedroom culture" in 1976 to describe the cultural space of girls and young women.[15] They wanted to address the invisibility of girls in studies of youth subcultures. In their work they found that while the girls' bedrooms were not public spaces as such, they were nonetheless social spaces—places where girls talked on the phone to friends, covered the wall with pin-up posters, had pajama parties, and interacted socially in terms of reading novels, writing in diaries, and so on. These private yet social spaces, they argue, contrast with the public street spaces dominated by boys and young men. More recently, Julian Sefton-Green and David Buckingham have explored the idea of the "digital bedroom" to account for the location of children's cyber play.[16] They observe

Figure 2
Slide of a girl's teddy bear from her bedroom.

that whether it be gaming, surfing the Web, or home page construction, much of this is done on a home computer, often located in the bedroom. However, as we explore elsewhere in an analysis of websites produced for and by girls,[17] the term "digital bedroom" is also an apt descriptor of girls' websites, which themselves often resemble bedrooms (featuring digital "pin-ups," décor, blogs and messaging, and so on)—something we noted before in the description of the websites created by Isabella.

When Adrienne Salinger embarked upon her project, *In My Room: Teenagers in Their Bedrooms,* with young people (boys and girls) a few years ago, she commented on the constructed nature of the photographs of the bedrooms. In that project, Salinger and a photographer visited young people in their bedrooms. Although her participants were instructed not to clean up, it became clear as the project evolved that what young people say about their own rooms, and how they talk about them, is indeed an extension (or projection) of themselves. Certain objects have particular currency. As Salinger writes, "Our bedrooms tell stories about us. They become the repository for our memories and the expression of our desires and self-image" (1995, np)[18]. Demonstrating their "tween" status, the girls in the digital bedroom project took photographs of "big girl" clothing accessories such as belts and handbags mixed in with their images of various types of dolls (from Barbies to porcelain dolls and meilie-meil African dolls). In this respect, their digital play resembles the cyber-paper doll play described by Rebekah Willett in the next chapter.

These digitized images of bedrooms, while located within an adult-organized project, offer us a glimpse into the world of girls that links the construction of identity, space, and digital technology. Like Isabella's website construction described in our first case, and the video-making process that will follow in the next one, the use of the digital camera along with

PowerPoint offers the girls an opportunity to project themselves in particular and personal ways. The girls worked in a relatively autonomous manner, with very few restrictions on what they could photograph. And unlike the use of point-and-shoot cameras, where the photographer is forced to wait for the photographs to be developed and where even access to the pictures may be constrained by adult supervision, using digital cameras to represent their bedrooms meant that the girls could edit their images on the spot. Although the girls worked individually, what they have chosen to photograph and project in a public space also represents a social act, not just in relation to what they initially chose to photograph but also in relation to what they chose to project to their peers and teacher. In this respect, their work is not that different from the photo-sharing associated with their cell phone use or within the social networking sites, described in danah boyd's and Susannah Stern's chapters later in this volume. The girls' choices of images raise fascinating questions about their personal–public identities. What meaning, for example, does the addition of the little commentator dog have? How does a certain font or text layout personalize the projection? It is through the use and the reading of these seemingly mundane details that identities emerge.

Case 4. Our Collective Selves: Participatory Video

This last case looks at youth identities-in-action in relation to the idea of collective selves. How do young people create a collective identity through video production? We explore this question through the following excerpt taken from a participatory digital video-making project involving young people in a rural district of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.[19] The video-making workshops are part of a community-based "every voice counts" project, addressing HIV and AIDS in a context where more than 25 percent of young people between the ages of fifteen and twenty-four are HIV positive.[20] An ongoing issue in these communities relates to engaging youth in addressing what has come to be known as the "sick of AIDS" phenomenon, an expression that is intended both literally, given the grim statistics noted above, and figuratively, in the sense that there has been an overdose of "fighting AIDS" messages.[21]

Set against this backdrop, groups of young people between the ages of fourteen and sixteen at two secondary schools (along with teachers, community health care workers, and parents) participated in one-day video-making workshops. The work with digital cameras is linked to other participatory approaches such as photo-voice and drama that have also been used at the two schools. The overall purpose of the workshops is to look at ways that the participants can explore concerns that are meaningful to them. Digital video offers a unique "take" on their engagement with the issues.

This section focuses primarily on an all-boy group that produced a video called *Rape*. Most of the youth groups elected to focus in one way or another on gender violence, a critical issue throughout South Africa, and given that young women are four to five times more likely to be HIV positive than young men of the same age, not separate from the high rates of HIV infection amongst girls and young women. The story line of *Rape* is organized around the multiple rapes of one girl (G) by her boyfriend (S). The actual narrative is broken up into eight short scenes, four of which directly depict staged rapes. As we see in the scene below, the encounters between the boy and his girlfriend start off in a loving way, but quickly move to forced sex. We offer an English translation of the scene that was originally produced in Isizulu:

2nd RAPE SCENE

S: *Where do you live now my baby? Give me a hug. No way, lets sit down.*

G: *Take a break and have some fresh air.*

S: [Grabs her.]
G: *Just wait a bit. Wait! Stop!*
S: *What is the matter with you?*
G: *I don't like to do it. I don't like it.*
S: *What don't you like?*
G: *To do it. I don't like to.*
S: *What?*
G: *Eh . . . eh . . . I don't like to do it . . . Eh . . . eh . . . You know what, I'll cry out loud.*
S: *Come on now baby* (Rape takes place). *But who are you going to cry out to? Come on baby.*

G. reports her boyfriend to the police. He is imprisoned, and as we see below in the last scene of the video, he appears to show some remorse for what he has done, although not because of the impact of his actions on his girlfriend so much as what has happened to him in prison, where he himself is subjected to sexual violence.

8th Scene
S: Ei! I am now regretful. I raped my sweetheart. When I get out of here she will not even want to see me. Ei, I raped a person really. I am in prison now. Its tough . . . even to eat. It is me that is getting raped now. They mount me. Ei, now I regret what I did.
I don't know what to say. I don't know what to do. I am in prison now. I raped a female person. I raped her and beat her and am in prison now. I don't know what to do now. The men in here mount me and beat me. Just look now, when I get out of here the babes in the location will leave me. I won't get another cherry because I am known to be a rapist now.
But you, my brothers out there, I'm telling you, restrain yourselves, be strong, don't rape females because you will be sentenced and grow old inside (prison).

At one level, the video production can simply be read as a very disturbing and graphic representation of aggressive masculinity, one which reinforces negative stereotypes about boys and young men.[22] Indeed, in many ways the scenario depicted here is no different from the kinds of testimonies that are described in face-to-face interviews with young people in various South African locations where boys report that it is "okay to hit your girlfriend" and where it is "okay to expect sex," and where girls talk about the inevitability of forced sex and unprotected sex.[23] In one of the all-girl video groups, for example, the first point that they brought up during a brainstorming session was "we worry about getting pregnant before we finish school."

However, at another level, the boys' video invites us to consider what difference it makes that this is a "production" (and not just an interview), and to ask how working with new technologies such as digital video (and not, for example, just performance or still photographs) contributes to a deeper understanding of identity construction. The availability of relatively inexpensive equipment (cell phones, webcams, digital cameras with a video function, and inexpensive camcorders) clearly has made this kind of work more feasible even in a rural school in South Africa—even where, as in this case, the only electricity is in the principal's office. One of the groups, for example, managed to import a soundtrack from a cell phone into the video. This was particularly interesting, given that no one in any of the groups had ever used a video camera before.

One might also ask what difference the collective process makes—particularly in evoking and exploring questions of gender identity. *Rape* was clearly a group effort. Indeed, as we review the footage that was shot during the production process, we can see groups "in action" negotiating particular scenes, as well as working out who would be behind the camera and who would be in front of the camera. In participatory video, there is the possibility of

creating a strong sense of a collective response, one that includes both producers and viewers, directors, actors, technicians, and so on. While it is possible that individual responses may sometimes be overshadowed in this collectivity, we would argue that in the case of gender violence, which is social in nature and multilayered in meaning, the collective response is vital. The group chooses the themes, decides on the images, "constructs" the stage, and so forth. In the case of video (as opposed to live performance), there is a whole array of techniques that expand the possibilities for constructedness—from shot angles to dialogue to theme music. Participants can stop the process, view, and review the work, and indeed, can even easily "see themselves" in action. Each frame is considered and reconsidered. Nothing is accidental. And although we employed a "no editing required" approach, so that each scene was shot as a final cut, participants did have the opportunity to reshoot the scene from the beginning if they wished. Several groups rehearsed the entire episode first, offering yet another way of playing not only with the various components of the video, but also and especially with gendered identities. In *Rape,* the boys work to construct the girlfriend as weak and passive, and themselves as cool and powerful. S appears after each of the rape scenes with his shirt half hanging out, and later in the prison scene appears in one of the "cool" woolen beanies that boys wear outside of school (but which are not part of the mandatory school uniform).

As we have illustrated throughout this chapter, digital media allow for a trying on of various identities. In the process of making the video, the boys seemed to be consciously (and insistently) trying on identities that reproduce the masculine role images that they see around them in school, village, and the media, while at the same time they are also testing out new identities, not the least of which is a type of "prison hero" as we saw earlier in S's final soliloquy.[24] The plea is to feel sorry for him and not to wonder what happened to his girlfriend.

It is also interesting to note that in order for them to project what they feel is a satisfactory macho or male identity, the boys are adamant that they need to "borrow" a girl from one of the other video-making groups so that they could enact the rapes on screen. Although the facilitator tries to convince the group that they could "suggest" rape by using off-camera voices (another group production which also deals with gender violence uses "behind closed door" screaming, not unlike the school rape scene in the film *North Country)* or through the use of an item of clothing as a trace, the boys convince one of the girls to join their group for the purposes of filming the rape. This leads us to ask what role does the "other"—in this case, girls and young women—play in constructing gender identity?

We might also read this process of negotiating and "trying on" identities as an explicit form of reflexivity during the video making, whereby the boys were not only testing out particular scenarios of rape and remorse, but also experimenting with particular technical features such as camera angles and set arrangements. For example, while several of the scenes involve the rapist, S, along with his mates or his girlfriend, the final scene of regret and anguish works so well because of his soliloquy. At a later point in the process when the group screens the video again for the purposes of thinking through the ways in which such a video might be used in the community, their comments reveal the possibility for what Gary Barker[25] and others might describe as an example of an alternative masculinity, one that does not require that boys and young men take on a more normative or hegemonic masculinity that relies solely on dominance and power over girls and young women. They comment, for example, that a critical element of addressing gender violence is to revisit the statement "when no means no," a point that relates to the fact that G, in the video, repeatedly says some version of "no." What is clearly important here is the idea of setting up a space where it is possible

for participants to look back at their production, to reflect on the multiple meanings it might have to different audiences, *including themselves*, and to allow for revision.

Reading Identities Across the Cases

Several of the specific media forms and technologies we have introduced here are considered in much more detail in subsequent chapters in this book, particularly in Part 2. Through our "sampling" of these different youth production practices, we have sought to provide an initial indication of some of the broader issues that cut across these seemingly diverse media forms. A careful reading across the examples reveals certain shared features of digital production that can be useful to understanding both youth as cultural producers and youth *identities-in-action*.

Constructedness

One of the most salient characteristics of identity processes to emerge across the cases is the "constructedness" of the various media productions. Borrowing from the phenomenon of construction toys, we are referring here to the manner of playful yet more or less deliberate creative "assembling" involved—whether it be of the virtual components of websites or the constructing and deconstructing of gender as part of on- and offline role play. As with construction block play, in media productions like those described earlier, you usually start out using the materials at hand, respecting or finding ways to get around their limitations, working with others or alone. Suggested blueprints or models may be included with both toys and media design, but individual and collective uses and interpretations of them may differ; negotiation, subversion, and adaptation are commonplace. Once you have acquired some skills and have explored possibilities, you may find yourself improvising and seeking out additional materials to incorporate into your construction. What you end up with may have unintended potential uses or effects on others. The creative construction that is involved in digital production permits the manipulation of gendered, raced, and sexualized identities, both online and offline.[26] Moreover, in looking across the cases, it strikes us that, like the products of construction toys, the identities emerging through multimedia production retain traces of the original materials, faint outlines of the building blocks as it were. As in a collage, you can see remnants of other images that contribute to identity—bits of media material, fragments from personal life, original poems, family photos, social symbols, shared memories, cut-and-paste resources of media tools, and site hosts—that in combination add up to a unique image—an identity work-in-progress that, like block construction, can be toppled, changed, or rearranged.

Collectivity and Social Construction

The notion of collectivity follows from these socially constructed and co-constructed images and identities described above. As we saw in the case of Isabella and Maria, for example, digital technology enables them to present their identities in various guises to a select audience and to examine them in the reflected light of the comments and reactions of their friends (and in Isabella's case, her older sister). The sites could be regarded as montages of group and individual identities, improvisations that draw on and blend a variety of genres and sources that provide the raw material for construction. They are created not only as expressions and explorations of individual identities, but also very much as a way of including others in their own personal "identity work" and of extending and linking themselves to significant

others. Through this process, they become part of a collaborative, participatory culture.[27] Identity constructions on these sites evoke the wider collectives of peer group and family, and facilitate a dialectical relationship between personal and social identities, one that shifts and flows, reacting to new information, situations, and contexts.

Exploring the collective process in group video making (as in our final case) may help to deepen our understanding of social construction more broadly. The fact that each of the videos is produced by the group (from group brainstorming to group decision making about the scripting, planning, and filming) reflects both the idea of constructedness noted above and the idea of negotiation. The technology of the camera and the "no editing required" constraint means that groups must collectively arrive at decisions about *who* (will play the rapist, do the filming, play the police), *what* (the number of scenes, dividing them up, and so on) and *how* (choosing locations, deciding on props and sound, etc.). In the case of *Rape* (as well as most of the other videos that were produced about gender violence), the group itself participates in performing gender. At one point, for example, when one of the groups is still brainstorming the various "in-my-life" critical issues, there is a discussion about gangsterism and the "look" of a local gang member, wherein various group members physically stand a certain way, pull up their collars, put their hands in their pockets, and so on. In line with Judith Butler's ideas about gender identity[28] discussed in the introduction to this volume, the technology of video making and the group effort accentuates the dimension of performance. The fact that most groups rehearsed their scenes before they actually filmed them meant that group members were able to offer suggestions, and in some cases even role play what the person who was being filmed should be doing. And while this could be true for any type of performance, it is the capturing on film that adds to the identity-in-action process and the possibilities for social action.[29] This collective and social aspect of construction is also evident in the two case studies of youth activism described by Shelly Goldman, Meaghan McDermott, and Angela Booker later on in this volume.

Convergence

Reading digital production both within and across the cases offers a unique glimpse into the intersection and blending of old and new media more generally. As Henry Jenkins writes:

> Media convergence refers to a situation in which multiple media systems coexist and where media content flows fluidly across them. Convergence is understood here as an ongoing process or series of intersections between different media systems, not a fixed relationship (282).[30]

In the video production of *Rape*, for example, young people "perform" identities using traditional forms of role play, although one might look at some of the parallels to role play on the Internet.[31] Through their use of digital cameras to capture these performances, they are able to work with an instant replay, whereby they can see if they have caught the scene exactly as they want it, and, as noted earlier, one of the group members imports a sound track from a cell phone into the video. As a different example, the long established media practice of the photo essay is central to the PowerPoint narrative of "I love my cell phone" where Walia has visually portrayed the various scenes of her story. Capturing these performed events digitally and rerepresenting them through a PowerPoint presentation that focuses on a cell phone results in a compelling document that uses one medium to comment on the significance of another. In the case of "In my room," the girls work with the conventions of display and the techniques of photovoice, each of which could have been presented without digital technology. Using PowerPoint as a type of storytelling, however, enables them to

play around with and explore how they (and their private bedrooms) can be represented in a more public setting. And finally, returning to the first case, even in the most seemingly "new" technologies of website construction, we see blends of older ones—journal writing, photo albums, slide projectors, scrapbooking, and more. This ongoing convergence mirrors or reflects identities-in-action, which similarly incorporate and merge old and new elements of experience.

Reflexivity and Negotiation

One of the key ways in which media production contributes to the construction of identities is through the facilitation of *reflexivity*. By this we mean to suggest three things: Firstly, their own media production (both through its processes and its outcomes) forces young people to look at themselves, sometimes through new eyes, providing feedback for further modification of their self-representations. Secondly, the source materials and modes of young people's media production are often evident or transparent; the choices and processes that they use reveal and identify them in ways that they themselves might not even realize. Thirdly, 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. Even so, as Buckingham indicates in his discussion of Giddens's and Foucault's theories of identity in the preceding chapter, the question of *whose* eyes we see ourselves through and whose language we use to express ourselves is not so easily answered. A reflexive regard is not necessarily as critical as one might think; it too is shaped by culture and experience. Because we are not always aware that seeing is something we are taught to do and that language is something into which we are socialized, our ability to read and represent ourselves can lose its critical edge. It is, therefore, the ability of media production to occasionally provoke this awareness that makes it so useful to identity construction.

The expression and construction of identities through digital media production usually relies heavily on the visual, and it is this visual component that can jolt us into a more critical reflexivity. Visual anthropologists such as Sarah Pink[32] and Jay Ruby[33] assert that there is an element of reflexivity inherent in working with images. Much of what we have described in this chapter—the photo sharing, the constructed images, and so on—is visual and closely linked to the identities that young people are reflecting upon and exploring.[34] When we look across the cases, we see evidence of this in different ways. As one example, through the visual structure and content of their websites, Isabella and her friends were constantly negotiating their standings and identities within general pop culture, their heritage community, and their circle of friends, closely examining and giving each other feedback on their posts, subtly suggesting through example what can and cannot be posted, what is "cool," and so forth. Posting the image of a flag or a particular pop idol is an identification that strengthens a sense of belonging. In visiting and adapting their own and each other's sites, these young people were in a sense gazing at themselves, critiquing and consuming their own images.

Embodiment

There is a tendency, when discussing identity in the context of new technologies, to forget that identities are always and inescapably embodied.[35] Although we may forget our bodies when cruising in cyberspace, all our actions are taken through them. Indeed, if there is

anything that gives a sense of permanence and stability to the flux of identity processes, it is the body, which even as it changes in appearance, remains at the heart of identity. While theorists may ignore the role of actual bodies in both individual and collective identities (they seem to prefer theoretical ones), young people most certainly understand that identity is always embodied. For example, by posting photos of themselves which they have taken, often deliberately posed (e.g., à la Hillary Duff) as we saw in the first case, young people are examining, modifying, dressing, adorning, and putting their bodies out there. During adolescence, they sometimes treat or read appearance as the very substance of identity, something alluded to in more detail in the following chapter by Willett.

Embodiment is also evident in a more subtle way in our third case study, of girls' photos of their bedrooms. The digital images that they chose for their PowerPoint presentations evoke their everyday embodied world of sleeping, eating, playing, collecting, caring for pets, and so on. Moreover, objects such as those found in their bedrooms can be markers or even the material of identity production. Clothes, for example, display and shape embodied identities, something that explains to a certain extent the obsession some gamers have with dressing and reconstructing their avatars. A garment, accessory, or piece of jewelry, like Walia's boots and earrings (and, one could argue, her cell phone) in case 2, can extend, represent, and reconstruct the body. In the *Rape* video, we see the various characters "trying on" identities: rapist, gangster, repentant prisoner. Items of clothing and body gestures become markers of these identities: the shirt half hanging out, the "cool" walk of the gangster, and the beanie of the prisoner.

At times, bodies are front and center, the very focus of media production. In the horrifying rape scene, S is filmed overpowering G. with a simulated attack on her body which could be interpreted in one way as an attack on her "person," on who she is. However, as a reminder that the *Rape* video was simulated or "made up," it is important to observe that someone has put down two sheets of flip chart paper so that G. does not have to lie on the dirty cement floor of the classroom during the shoot, a protection of the very body that is being violated, but also a further reminder that media productions, like identities, are always embodied.

Learning

Learning is another theme that we see running across the cases. The differences in educational structures and settings, for example, can have an impact on both the skills and content of young people's media productions. In the first case, where girls construct websites on their own without direct adult supervision, the learning is informal and self-motivated, embedded in their daily lives outside school, and occurring at their own pace and in their own space. As the need arises during the website production or posting process, Isabella turns to her sister to learn such things as where to find templates and how to modify them, a good example of sibling-as-mentor. She also turns to her peers for ideas, feedback, and guidance. There is an experimentation and authenticity to her learning as well as pleasure and satisfaction in what she achieves. Far from being a solitary process, learning in this kind of situation involves interacting with friends whose responses fuel and shape media production.

The learning processes that occur in the more formal school and community center settings of the last three cases differ in some ways from the first case, especially in terms of the power and freedom afforded to young people. For example, unlike the first case, the type of production (PowerPoint, photovoice essay, video) is predetermined by adults (teacher or community worker or animator). Moreover, the skills needed to do the media production

are modeled and taught before production begins during hands-on workshops, and then coached as necessary during production. Although the young people can freely choose specific content and write their own stories in all of the cases, there are varying degrees of adult control over the general topic from case to case. It is perhaps not too surprising to realize that it is the production project (photographing bedrooms) initiated by a teacher as schoolwork that has the most restrictive general parameters (it is taken up, nonetheless, very enthusiastically by her students).

Access to technology also emerges as a critical feature of learning. In the first case, for example, the girls and their friends clearly had access to various digital media in their homes and communities. In the third case, the girls who created their own PowerPoint presentations had access to digital cameras outside of school, making it possible for them to experiment on their own. In the fourth case, however, none of the participants (teachers and other adults as well as the students) had access to any digital media outside the workshop. A point worth making here, therefore, relates to the important role of other community members and community resources in expanding the possibilities for young people to experiment with media.

In all the cases, the young people we observed learn *through* media production which often exemplifies constructivist notions of learning, a self-motivated learning through play, through trial and error, and through actively engaging with the world. Not only do they acquire technical skills, they also learn to create and critique, developing their own sense of esthetics and learning goals. Their emerging media literacy enables them to further articulate and experiment with multiple identities as they refine their productions. And while the idea of cultural production and media literacy has often been taken up elsewhere,[36] it remains critical to understanding learning in the context of digital media and youth identities.

Conclusion: Identity Production as Bricolage

Many contemporary theories of identity—such as those reviewed in the introduction to this book—conceive of identity as a process, rather than a fixed possession or label. From this perspective, identity is not something that can ever be achieved once and for all: it is fluid and open to negotiation, but also subject to many constraints. Similarly, the structural features or characteristics of digital production we have described in this chapter also reflect a broader view of identity as an ongoing process, one that is always under construction but that also has a permanence or longevity, an existence tied to embodiment. To encapsulate our conceptualization of identity, we draw in this section on the concept of *bricolage*, a French term often used to refer to a construction or creation (for example, of a work of art or a craft project) that is improvised, using whatever materials are at hand. Like "identity," the word bricolage can be used to refer to a process as well as a product. It relates, in some ways, to the metaphor of block building we used earlier.

Turkle[37] speaks of identities in the digital age as fragmented, shifting, partial. In contrast, our notion of identity as personal and social bricolage[38] places those fragments within a single work-in-progress, an evolving active construction that constantly sheds bits and adds bits, changing through dialectical interactions with the digital and nondigital world, involving physical, psychological, social, and cultural agents. Identities, whether individual or collective, are not unitary wholes cut out of a single cloth—they are constructed in action, using whatever cultural and life material is at hand. Like bricolage, identity construction involves improvising, experimenting, and blending genres, patching together contrasting or

even contradictory elements, creating and modifying meanings to suit the context and in response to the requirements, affordances, and meanings of the situation. For many young people, digital media (whichever ones are "at hand") provide tools and display possibilities that are well suited to bricolage.

Several years ago, Julian Sefton-Green and David Buckingham took us into the digital bedroom to survey young people's esthetic and cultural production practices. While they were somewhat despairing of what they described as a form of "lego creativity" which falls short of a more autonomous use of new media, they nonetheless highlight the significance of young people's cultural production and the fact that they do "muck around" in ways that are uniquely their own.[39] "Mucking around" is part of what bricolage entails, an experimentation that gradually leads, with or without help, to production skills as well as knowledge of available materials and how to manipulate them, both to create new meanings and reproduce old ones.

Our conception of bricolage as both shaping and being shaped by "what is at hand" reflects a dialectical model of identity, similar to Bakhtin's, wherein identities are simultaneously both personal and social.[40] We construct and deconstruct and reconstruct ourselves in dialectical relationship with the world (which includes the material cultural world and other people), and we construct others in relation to ourselves and our situation. Identities are negotiated and tested in the context of circles of relationships and the wider community, and fed back into the ongoing bricolage. Social and individual identities co-constitute each other.

Clicking, posting, and text messaging their way through a shifting digital landscape, young people are bending and blending genres, incorporating old ideas, activities, and images into new bricolages, changing the face, if not the substance, of social interaction and altering how they see themselves and each other. Whether it be the frequent postings on websites, the improvisations in the filming of a story, the incorporation of objects at hand in a PowerPoint, the cases we have described in this chapter give us a way to view and interrogate the ongoing production of youth identities.[41] As technologies become more deeply integrated into ever widening areas of our lives, their roles as mediators of identities and learning are likely to be taken for granted, perhaps becoming almost invisible. That's why it is so important to examine and reflect on them now.

Notes

1. For an interesting discussion of this blurring, see David Buckingham, *After the Death of Childhood: Growing up in the Age of Electronic Media* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2000); for earlier although more alarmist views, see Neil Postman, *The Disappearance of Childhood* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994).

2. For an informative discussion of Internet access and the economic divide in the United States, see Ellen Seiter, *The Internet Playground: Children's Access, Entertainment, and Mis-Education* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005); for one in Britain, see Sonia Livingstone, and Magdalena Bober, *U.K. Children Go Online: Surveying the Experiences of Young People and Their Parents* (London: London School of Economics and Political Science, 2004).

3. David Buckingham and Julian Sefton-Green, *Cultural Studies Goes To School* (London: Taylor and Francis, 1994).

4. Mizuko Ito (in press), Mobilizing the Imagination in Everyday Play: The Case of Japanese Media Mixes, in *International Handbook of Children, Media, and Culture,* eds. Sonia Livingstone and Kirsten Drotner (London: Sage).

5. Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2006), 290.

6. Martin Lister et al., *New Media: A Critical Introduction* (Routledge: London and New York, 2003).

7. We gratefully acknowledge the financial support of the Social Sciences and Research Council of Canada for *Digital Girls: Girls' Everyday Experiences of Technology: From Play to Policy*.

8. *Moving Lives* is a digital photovoice storytelling project for young refugees run by Liz Orton and based in Trinity Community Centre in England. For more information, see http://www.photovoice.org/html/projectgallery/photovoiceproj/movinglives/ (accessed October 29, 2006).

9. Performance as we use it here not only refers to the roles that Erving Goffman claims we are *always* assuming, whether onstage or backstage, but more along the lines of embodiment as proposed by Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), and then wonderfully critiqued and extended by Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).

10. Jenkins, 2006.

11. Liz Orton, ibid (note 8).

12. See Jane Brown, Carol Reese Dykers, Jeanne Rogge Steele, and Ann Barton White, Teenage Room Culture: Where Media and Identities Intersect, *Communication Research* 21, no. 6 (1994): 813–827.

13. We wish to acknowledge the work of Maureen St. John Ward and her students at Wykeham Collegiate.

14. Even if the girls had photographed similar objects, it is the personal meanings, as Christian Boltanski points out in his Favourite Objects project, that is the point. See Claudia Mitchell and Jacqueline Reid-Walsh, Virtual Spaces: Children on the Cyber Frontier, in *Researching Children's Popular Culture: Cultural Spaces of Childhood* (London and New York: Routledge Taylor Francis, 2002).

15. See Angela McRobbie and Jane Garber, Girls and Subcultures: An Exploration, in *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain*, eds. Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson (London: Hutchinson, 1976), 209–222.

16. See Julian Sefton-Green, Digital Visions: Children's Creative Uses of Digital Technologies, in *Digital Diversions: Youth Culture in the Age of Multimedia*, ed. Julian Sefton-Green and David Buckingham (London: Routledge, 1998), 62–83.

17. See also Mitchell and Reid-Walsh (2002).

18. See Adrienne Salinger, *In My Room: Teenagers in Their Bedrooms* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1995).

19. Here we would like to acknowledge the participation of the Learning Together research team at the Centre for Visual Methodologies for Social Change, University of KwaZulu-Natal. The Learning Together team is headed up by Naydene de Lange.

20. Centre for the AIDS Programme of Research in South Africa (CAPRISA). http://www.caprisa.org/Projects/women_and_aids.html# (accessed August 18, 2006).

21. See Claudia Mitchell and Ann Smith, Sick of AIDS: Literacy and the Meaning of Life for South Africa Youth, *Culture, Health and Sexuality* 5, no. 6 (2003): 513–522.

22. In their work with youth in South Africa, Catherine Campbell and Catherine McPhail, *Letting Them Die* (Cape Town: Double Storey, 2003), found that the notion of the male sex drive as uncontrollable was assumed. Here they are also confirming the work of Janet Holland, Caroline Ramazanoglu, Sue

Sharpe, and Rachel Thomson, Feminist Methodology and Young People's Sexuality, in *Culture, Society and Sexuality: A Reader,* eds. Richard Parker and Peter Aggleton (London and Philadelphia: UCL Press, 1999), 457–472. They note that male sexuality is often portrayed as "a train that cannot be derailed once engaged."

23. Reshma Sathiparsad, *Perceptions of Rural Zulu Male Youth on Sexual Violence*, University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2006 explores the links between hegemonic masculinity in Zulu culture and sexual violence in her unpublished doctoral dissertation.

24. At the time of the video-making workshop, Jacob Zuma, the deputy prime minister of South Africa, was embroiled in a court case where he was being accused of having raped a young woman who was visiting the family home. Much media attention through radio, television, and newspaper was given over to a public interrogation of Zulu male culture.

25. Gary Barker et al., Engaging Young Men in Violence Prevention: Reflections from Latin America and India, in *Combating Gender Violence in and Around Schools,* eds. Claudia Mitchell and Fiona Leach (Trent, UK: Trentham Books, 2006).

26. Jacqueline Reid-Walsh takes up this idea of construction further in a conference paper, "Virtual Spaces as Critical Spaces: Girls' Consumption and Production of Popular Culture Web Sites as Instances of Critical Digital Literacy," presented at the Researching New Literacies: Consolidating Knowledge and Defining New Directions conference, October 16 and 17, 2006, Memorial University of Newfoundland, St. John's, NL. She also discusses construction and multimedia in "Harlequin Meets *The SIMS*: A History of Interactive Narrative Media for Children and Youth from Early Flap Books to Contemporary Multi Media," in eds. Sonia Livingstone and Kirsten Drotner (in press), *International Handbook of Children, Media, and Culture* (London: Sage).

27. Jenkins, 2006.

28. Butler, 1990.

29. Michael Schratz and Rob Walker, *Research as Social Change* (New York: Routledge, 1995) argue that a critical feature of various interventions like the video making workshops which lend themselves to social change is that they are in fact social in nature in the first place. They involve the group and cannot be managed "individually and in isolation." As they go on to write: "It (Motivation) requires a collaborative effort and a reassessment of the nature of self in relation to social context, not a submerging of the individual within the collective, but a recognition that the person only exists in the light of significant others."

30. Jenkins, 2006.

31. Here we are thinking of the role play involving online interactive societies such as *World of Warcraft* and *Second Life*.

32. See Sarah Pink, *Visual Ethnography* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2001).

33. See Jay Ruby, *Picturing Culture: Explorations of Film and Anthropology* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

34. In their work, *Finding Our Voices: Gendered and Sexual Identities and HIV/AIDS in Education* (Nairobi: UNICEF ESARO, 2003), Rob Pattman and Fatuma Chege argue that "identities such as male, female, black and white, only exist in relation to each other . . . " and that individuals are always "producing and negotiating—whether consciously or not" these identities.

35. For a very interesting account of embodied identity, see Grosz (1994).

36. For example, in Buckingham and Sefton-Green (1994).

37. Sherry Turkle, *Life on the Screen* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995) was one of the first to examine identity in relation to new technologies.

38. Although Joe Kincheloe's passage is intended as a description of research processes [Joe Kincheloe, *Qualitative Inquiry* (Sage, 2001), 679–692] the elaboration of bricolage (following Yvonne Lincoln's extension of Levi-Strauss's famous term) very well describes or fits our notion of identity processes.

39. This observation is reminiscent of the earlier work of David Buckingham and Julian Sefton-Green in their study of young people constructing identity posters. See David Buckingham and Julian Sefton-Green, *Cultural Studies Goes to School* (London: Falmer Press, 1994). (Quote is from page 73.)

40. Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays,* eds. Carol Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).

41. For further cases and discussion, see Sandra Weber and Shanly Dixon, eds., *Growing Up Online: Children and Technologies* (New York: Palgrave, 2007).