

Introducing Identity

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Identity is an ambiguous and slippery term. It has been used—and perhaps overused—in many different contexts and for many different purposes, particularly in recent years. As we shall see, there are some diverse assumptions about what identity is, and about its relevance to our understanding of young people's engagements with digital media.

The fundamental paradox of identity is inherent in the term itself. From the Latin root *idem*, meaning "the same," the term nevertheless implies both similarity and difference. On the one hand, identity is something unique to each of us that we assume is more or less consistent (and hence the same) over time. For instance, as I write, there is an intense debate in the U.K. about the government's proposed introduction of identity cards and their potential for addressing the problem of "identity theft." In these formulations, our identity is something we uniquely possess: it is what distinguishes us from other people. Yet on the other hand, identity also implies a relationship with a broader collective or social group of some kind. When we talk about national identity, cultural identity, or gender identity, for example, we imply that our identity is partly a matter of what we share with other people. Here, identity is about *identification* with others whom we assume are similar to us (if not exactly the same), at least in some significant ways.

Much of the debate around identity derives from the tensions between these two aspects. I may struggle to "be myself" or to "find my true self," and there are many would-be experts and authorities who claim to be able to help me to do this. Yet I also seek multiple identifications with others, on the basis of social, cultural, and biological characteristics, as well as shared values, personal histories, and interests. On one level, I am the product of my unique personal biography. Yet who I am (or who I think I am) varies according to who I am with, the social situations in which I find myself, and the motivations I may have at the time, although I am by no means entirely free to choose how I am defined.

An explicit concern with questions of identity is not a novel development, although it has undoubtedly taken on a new urgency in the contemporary world.¹ Identity is not merely a matter of playful experimentation or "personal growth": it is also about the life-or-death struggles for self-determination that are currently being waged in so many parts of the world. According to the social theorist Zygmunt Bauman, the new prominence that is accorded to identity is a reflection of the fact that it is becoming ever more problematic.² Globalization, the decline of the welfare state, increasing social mobility, greater flexibility in employment, insecurity in personal relationships—all these developments are contributing to a sense of fragmentation and uncertainty, in which the traditional resources for identity formation are no longer so straightforward or so easily available. Like many contemporary authors,

Bauman emphasizes the fluidity of identity, seeing it as almost infinitely negotiable, and in the process perhaps underestimates the continuing importance of routine and stability. Nevertheless, his general point is well taken: “identity” only becomes an issue when it is threatened or contested in some way and needs to be explicitly asserted.

Accounting for Identities

Within the human sciences, several disciplinary specialisms have laid claim to identity. The most obvious distinction here is between psychological and sociological approaches, but a whole range of subdisciplines and intellectual paradigms—developmental psychology, social theory, symbolic interactionism, cultural studies, and many others—have also sought to generate definitive accounts. In the first part of this chapter, I discuss five key approaches to thinking about identity and briefly identify some of their implications for understanding young people, digital media, and learning. These latter issues are then dealt with more explicitly in the second main part of the chapter.

Identity Formation: The Psychology of Adolescence

The first two approaches I discuss here are explicitly concerned with *youth* identities. The modern psychological account of youth can arguably be traced back to G. Stanley Hall’s classic accounts of adolescence, published in the early years of the last century.³ Hall is often credited with introducing the popular notion of adolescence as a period of “storm and stress,” characterized by intergenerational conflicts, mood swings and an enthusiasm for risky behavior. From this perspective, the discussion of adolescence often leads inexorably to the discussion of drugs, delinquency, depression, and sexual deviance. Hall’s approach is perhaps best termed “psycho-biological”: his symptomatically titled book *Youth: Its Education, Regimen and Hygiene* (1906) includes extensive proposals for education and moral and religious training, incorporating practical advice on gymnastics and muscular development (not to mention quaint discussions of “sex dangers” and the virtues of cold baths).

Another classic psychological account of adolescence can be found in the work of Erik Erikson, most notably in his book *Identity: Youth and Crisis*, published in 1968.⁴ Erikson’s developmental theory extends Piaget’s account of “ages and stages” into adulthood and old age. Each of his eight stages is characterized by a fundamental psychological conflict, whose successful resolution allows progression to the next stage. In the case of adolescence, the conflict is between identity and “role confusion.” Resolving this conflict involves finding a more or less settled role in life, and it results in the formation of a “virtue” (a form of psychological strength)—in this case, loyalty or fidelity—that enables the young person to progress to early adulthood and to form the intimate attachments that are the key tasks of that stage. Unsuccessful resolution results in a “maladaptation,” for instance in the form of fanaticism or a repudiation of adult responsibility.

Erikson therefore sees adolescence as a critical period of identity formation, in which individuals overcome uncertainty, become more self-aware of their strengths and weaknesses, and become more confident in their own unique qualities. In order to move on, adolescents must undergo a “crisis” in which they address key questions about their values and ideals, their future occupation or career, and their sexual identity. Through this process of self-reflection and self-definition, adolescents arrive at an integrated, coherent sense of their identity as something that persists over time. While this is partly a psychological

process—and indeed a function of general cognitive development—it also occurs through interaction with peers and care givers. Identity is developed by the individual, but it has to be recognized and confirmed by others. Adolescence is thus also a period in which young people negotiate their separation from their family, and develop independent social competence (for example, through participation in “cliques” and larger “crowds” of peers, who exert different types of influence).

James Marcia builds on Erikson’s account, focusing particularly on the notion of adolescence as a period of “identity crisis.”⁵ Through this period, the young person has to consider potential life choices and eventually make a commitment or psychological investment in particular decisions. Marcia identifies four “identity statuses,” which represent different positions in this process. In the case of “foreclosure,” the individual has effectively avoided the crisis by following others’ expectations; in “diffusion,” the person has given up on the attempt to make the necessary commitment; in “moratorium,” the individual is still actively in the period of crisis, testing out various alternative commitments, while “achievement” only arrives when the person has been through the crisis and made clear choices about who he or she wants to become.

Of course, it is possible to debate the validity of such stage-based theories: is adolescence in fact a distinctive stage with a beginning and an end, or is human development more appropriately seen as a matter of gradual progression? Erikson and his followers claim that the stages they identify are universal, although it could be argued that “adolescence” as such does not exist in earlier historical periods, or in other cultures.⁶ Others, like the psychologist Carol Gilligan, have argued that moral development takes a different path for males and females, which again implies that such generalized models may not take a sufficient account of social differences.⁷ Furthermore, like most developmental theories, this approach is ultimately very normative. The healthy, mature individual is one who has attained a stable, integrated identity. Continuing “confusion” about one’s identity is a mark of incomplete development, and may result in deviant or antisocial behavior. From this perspective, adolescence is seen primarily as a state of transition, a matter of “becoming” rather than “being.”⁸ Adolescents’ key dilemmas are to do with what they will become, particularly in terms of their future occupation and their relationships: their current experiences are only significant insofar as they help them resolve their crisis and hence move on.

Despite the criticisms that can be made here, psychological accounts of adolescence do provide some useful concepts with which to interpret young people’s relations with digital media. Erikson’s notion of adolescence as a “psychosocial moratorium,” a period of “time out” in which young people can experiment with different potential identities—and indeed engage with risks of various kinds—seems particularly appropriate in this respect. These kinds of approaches are exemplified (and indeed contested) by several of the contributors to this volume. For example, Susannah Stern’s discussion of young people’s online authorship of blogs and home pages suggests that this activity can provide important opportunities for self-reflection and self-realization, and for expressing some of the conflicts and crises that characterize this period. Some of the young people whom she discusses explicitly see adolescence as an “in-between stage,” in which they are consciously seeking future directions in their lives. In a different vein, danah boyd’s chapter also implies that social networking sites like MySpace provide opportunities for social interaction and affiliation that are crucial developmental tasks for this age group—opportunities that are all the more important now, as their access to “offline” public spaces has become increasingly restricted.

Youth Culture and the Sociology of Youth

Sociologists generally take a very different perspective on youth compared with the psychological accounts I have just outlined. Of course, there are some similarities between psychological studies of *development* and sociological analyses of *socialization*, despite the differences in terminology: both are essentially concerned with the ways in which young people are gradually prepared, or prepare themselves, to take up their allotted roles in adult life. A traditional, functionalist account of socialization would see this in equally normative terms: the young person is a passive recipient of adult influences, a “becoming” rather than a “being” in their own right.

Mainstream sociologists have also been particularly concerned with issues of youthful deviance and delinquency, in ways that often entail a pathological view of young people. Youth—particularly youth in marginalized or subordinated social groups—are frequently constructed as a “social problem” or “at risk.” This then serves to legitimate various forms of treatment—the work of social, educational, and clinical agencies that seeks to discipline or rehabilitate troublesome youth, or to define and correct their apparent deficiencies. Nevertheless, sociologists generally understand these phenomena in terms of social factors such as poverty and inequality rather than as a matter of “raging hormones”: their interest is not so much in internal personality conflicts, but more in the social uncertainties that young people face, for example as they make the transition from the parental home to the labor market.⁹

Furthermore, sociologists acknowledge that the nature of youth varies significantly according to the social context, and particularly in relation to factors such as social class, gender, and ethnicity. Indeed, social historians have argued that “youth” is a relatively modern invention, which has resulted from the extension of the period of transition that lasts from the end of compulsory schooling to the entry into waged labor; and this is clearly something that varies significantly between different social groups and between different cultural settings (in parts of the world where children leave school at the age of eleven, for example, “youth” is unlikely to be seen as a distinct category).¹⁰ More recently, one could argue that youth is increasingly defined through the operations of the commercial market. The category of the “teenager,” for example, was effectively brought into being in the 1950s through market research; and in contemporary marketing discourse, we can see the emergence of a whole series of newly invented categories such as “tweens,” “middle youth,” “kidults,” and “adulescents”—categories that crucially blur the distinctions between children, youth and adults.¹¹ The invention and use of a category like “Generation X” (and its subsequent mutations) reflects both the importance and the complexity of age-based distinctions in contemporary consumer culture.¹² As this implies, “youth” is essentially a social and historical construct, rather than a universal state of being.

More radical youth research within Cultural Studies has contested the view of youthful expression as simply a function of adult attempts at socialization. There is a long tradition here of empirical research on youth culture, dating back to the early 1970s, and it is mostly concerned with the ways in which young people appropriate cultural commodities and use them for their own devices. Much of this work has focused on specific youth “subcultures”—groups such as hippies, skinheads, punks, goths, ravers, and others—who are seen to be resisting or opposing the imperatives of the parent culture, for example, through fashion, dance, music, and other cultural forms. Subcultures are seen here not just as a subordinate, but also as subversive: they arise from contradictions and tensions in the dominant social order and represent a threat to established social norms.¹³

Initially, much of this research focused on male, working class “street culture,” although there is now a growing body of research on the youth cultures of girls and young women, and (to a lesser extent) on specific ethnic subcultures.¹⁴ The emphasis here—as in some work on the anthropology of childhood and youth¹⁵—has been on attempting to understand youth cultures in their own terms, “from the bottom up,” rather than judging them in terms of adult-oriented notions such as socialization. However, more recent research has pointed to the dangers of romanticizing youthful resistance and the tendency to overstate the political dimensions of youth culture. It has also challenged the rather simplistic opposition between “subversive” and “mainstream” culture, arguing that youth cultures can be just as hierarchical and exclusive as any other social groupings.¹⁶ Some recent research has suggested that contemporary youth cultures are increasingly diverse and fragmented, and that they are best seen, not as a matter of self-contained “subcultures” but in a more fluid way, as “scenes” or “lifestyles” to which young people may be only temporarily attached.¹⁷ Even so, there has been relatively little research on the more mundane, even conformist, cultures of young people who are not members of such “spectacular” or oppositional groupings (or indeed on affluent middle-class youth).

Despite its limitations, this kind of research focuses attention on the social and cultural dimensions of young people’s identities, in ways which are particularly relevant to their interactions with digital media. On the one hand, we clearly need to acknowledge how commercial forces both create opportunities and set limits on young people’s digital cultures; and we should also not forget that access to these media—and the ways in which they are used—is partly dependent upon differences to do with factors such as social class, gender, and ethnicity. Yet, on the other hand, we also need to consider how these media provide young people with symbolic resources for constructing or expressing their own identities, and, in some instances, for evading or directly resisting adult authority.

These points are taken up in different ways in several of the contributions that follow. Sandra Weber and Claudia Mitchell, for example, provide a series of case studies taken from very different cultural contexts that illustrate some of the diverse ways in which young people use digital media to reflect particular subcultural allegiances, or indeed to claim “spaces” that escape adult control. Likewise, Shelley Goldman, Meghan McDermott, and Angela Booker provide an example of how young people can use media production to address social issues that are of particular concern for them, and to make their voices heard by a wider audience. On the other hand, Susan Herring’s chapter offers an important challenge to the assumptions that are often made about young people and their relations with technology—assumptions that frequently seem to veer between moral panics about the dangers of new media and an exaggerated romanticism about their liberating potential.

Social Identity: The Individual and the Group

Both the approaches outlined so far are directly concerned with *youth* identities, and the contrast between them amply illustrates some of the broader differences between psychological and sociological perspectives. Yet the discussion of identity obviously extends much more widely than this. The remaining three perspectives I discuss here are concerned with broader questions about the changing nature of identities, and the means of identity formation, in modern societies.

There is a large and diverse body of work within sociology, social psychology, and anthropology concerned with the relations between individual and group identities.¹⁸ Researchers have studied how people categorize or label themselves and others, how they identify as

members of particular groups; how a sense of group belonging or “community” is developed and maintained, and how groups discriminate against outsiders; how the boundaries between groups operate, and how groups relate to each other; and how institutions define and organize identities. These processes operate at both social and individual levels: individuals may make claims about their identity (for example, by asserting affiliation with other members of a group), but those claims need to be recognized by others. In seeking to define their identity, people attempt to assert their individuality, but also to join with others, and they work to sustain their sense of status or self-esteem in doing so. As a result, the formation of identity often involves a process of stereotyping or “cognitive simplification” that allows people to distinguish easily between self and other, and to define themselves and their group in positive ways.

Drawing on this approach, Richard Jenkins argues that social identity should be seen not so much as a fixed possession, but as a social process, in which the individual and the social are inextricably related.¹⁹ Individual selfhood is a social phenomenon, but the social world is constituted through the actions of individuals. As such, identity is a fluid, contingent matter—it is something we accomplish practically through our ongoing interactions and negotiations with other people. In this respect, it might be more appropriate to talk about *identification* rather than *identity*.

One classic example of this approach is Erving Goffman’s *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, first published in the late 1950s.²⁰ Goffman provides what he calls a “dramaturgical” account of social interaction as a kind of theatrical performance. Individuals seek to create impressions on others that will enable them to achieve their goals (“impression management”), and they may join or collude with others to create collaborative performances in doing so. Goffman distinguishes here between “front-stage” and “back-stage” behavior. When “on stage,” for example in a workplace or in a social gathering, individuals tend to conform to standardized definitions of the situation and of their individual role within it, playing out a kind of ritual. Back stage, they have the opportunity to be more honest: the impressions created while on stage may be directly contradicted, and the team of performers may disagree with each other.

Critics have argued that Goffman tends to overstate the importance of rules and to neglect the aspects of improvisation, or indeed sheer habit, that characterize everyday social interaction. More significantly, he suggests that back-stage behavior is somehow more authentic, or closer to the truth of the individual’s real identity, which appears to imply that front-stage behavior is somehow less sincere or less honest. This could be seen to neglect the extent to which *all* social interaction is a kind of performance. Like some other researchers in this tradition, Goffman sometimes appears to make a problematic distinction between *personal* identity and *social* identity, as though collective identifications or performances were somehow separate from individual ones, which are necessarily more “truthful.”²¹

Nevertheless, this approach has several implications for our understanding of young people’s uses of digital media. It is most obviously appropriate for understanding online interactions, for example, in the case of instant messaging, chat or social networking, and for mobile communication, where questions of rules and etiquette are clearly crucial—not least because of the absence of many of the other cues (such as visual ones) we conventionally use to make identity claims in everyday life. The issue of performance is also very relevant to the ways in which young people construct identities, for example, via the use of avatars, e-mail signatures, IM nicknames, and (in a more elaborate way) in personal homepages and blogs. The question of whether online identities are more or less honest or truthful

than offline ones has of course been a recurrent concern in studies of computer-mediated communication.²²

These kinds of issues are explored in various ways in the subsequent chapters. For example, Gitta Stald's discussion of young people's uses of mobile phones points to several ways in which mobile technologies may be changing—or at least intensifying—the forms of social connectedness that characterize their interactions both with friends and family. The use of mobiles requires young people to develop new social and communicative skills and new social norms that enable them to regulate these relationships. Similarly, danah boyd's analysis of how friendships are conducted in MySpace draws attention to the complex ways in which hierarchies are formed, impressions are managed and social roles are played out; and while these processes have much in common with those that apply in traditional "offline" relationships, they have nevertheless generated significant anxiety for many adults.

Reclaiming Identities: Identity Politics

Questions of social power are implicit in social identity theory, but they come to the fore in what is often termed "identity politics." Clearly, different groups of individuals will lay claim to positive identities in quite different ways, and these claims may be recognized as more or less legitimate by those who hold power in society. As such, questions of identity are inevitably tied up with the issue of social status. The term "identity politics" refers primarily to activist social movements that have explicitly sought to challenge this process: they have struggled to resist oppressive accounts of their identities constructed by others who hold power over them, and claimed the right to self-determination. The most obvious aspects of this relate to "race," ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and disability; although the term "identity politics" is also often used in relation to forms of indigenous nationalism, religious groupings (and indeed forms of "fundamentalism"), and so on.

Identity politics thus entails a call for the recognition of aspects of identity that have previously been denied, marginalized, or stigmatized. Yet this call is not in the name of some generalized "humanity": it is a claim for identity not *in spite of* difference, but *because of* it. As this implies, identity politics is very much about transformation at the level of the group, rather than merely the individual: it is about identification and solidarity. Issues of representation—about who has the right to represent, or to speak, and for whom—are therefore also crucial here.²³

Identity politics has been popularly criticized, both from the political right (as a kind of special pleading) and from the political left (as a diversion from the imperatives of the class struggle). But even in its own terms, identity politics has raised some significant problems that do not seem capable of easy resolutions. Perhaps the most fundamental issue here is that of essentialism, that is, the tendency to generalize about the members of a particular group and assimilate them to a singular identity. This approach runs the risk of fixing identity, for example in terms of people's biological characteristics or their historical origins, and ignoring their diversity. It neglects the fact that people have multiple dimensions to their identities, and may well resist having to select one that will override all the others.

Exponents of identity politics have argued that a kind of strategic essentialism may be necessary for particular purposes, and that different coalitions may be formed at different times. But such alliances can founder on the almost infinite factions and subdivisions that can emerge: does "race" override gender, for example, and who has the right to say that it does? Furthermore, different forms of power can operate within groups as well as between them: for example, women may unite to resist male oppression, but middle-class women will have

access to other ways of exercising social power that are not available to their working-class counterparts. There is often a tension within such social movements between two contrasting aims—on the one hand, a claim for separatism (which can result in marginalization), and on the other, a move towards integration with the mainstream (which can result in the erasure of identity).

In some respects, therefore, the difficulties of identity politics follow from the fundamental paradox of identity with which we began. It could be argued that this kind of identity categorization is inevitably reductive; and yet all sorts of well-established social practices—and indeed laws—are based on such categories, for example, in the case of racial profiling, citizenship laws, immigration priorities, as well as the various “isms” of racism, sexism, homophobia, and so on. Of course, emphasizing aspects of identity that are shared inevitably means playing down aspects that differ. Yet claiming authenticity for a given identity is problematic when that identity is defined in opposition to another. To assert what is uniquely female (or feminine), for example, is to run the risk of reinforcing the binary opposition (male/female) that one is seeking to challenge. To assert “racial” authenticity with reference to unique historical origins or roots is to reassert the differences (and indeed the socially constructed category of “race”) that one is seeking to undermine.²⁴ Yet to do the opposite—to celebrate gender fluidity or ethnic “hybridity”—is to run the risk of dissolving the very identities on which political claims can be made.

Queer theory offers a radical challenge to identity politics on precisely these grounds. It challenges established identity categories—including “gay” and “lesbian”—on the grounds that they inevitably lead to essentialism, to normative conceptions of identity, and to exclusion.²⁵ Judith Butler, for example, argues that attempts to articulate the interests of “women” as a specific, unified group merely reinforce binary views of gender and close down possibilities for other, more fluid or subversive, formations of gender and sexuality.²⁶ Interestingly, there are several similarities between Butler’s notion of identity and Goffman’s apparently more traditional one: she too argues that identity is performed, although (unlike Goffman) she does not seem to imply that there is a “back-stage,” personal identity that is more authentic than the “masquerade” of everyday social life. Likewise—although queer theorists might well resist such comparisons—they have much in common with the social identity theories outlined above, not least in the idea of identity as a fluid, ongoing process, something that is permanently “under construction.” From both perspectives, identity is something we *do*, rather than simply something we *are*.

Of course, there are some significant criticisms that can be made of such an approach. It can be seen to imply that identity is just a matter of free choice—that individuals can simply assume a particular identity at will. Furthermore, it emphasizes the potential for diversity and resistance to dominant identities, while neglecting the pressure to conform, and the comparative predictability of everyday behavior. Ultimately, it can be seen to result in a kind of relativism that undermines any attempt to speak of, or on behalf of, a particular identity—although that, of course, is precisely the point.

These debates around identity politics suggest some quite different ways of understanding young people’s relationships with digital media. For example, on the one hand, it could be argued that the Internet provides significant opportunities for exploring facets of identity that might previously have been denied or stigmatized, or indeed simply for the sharing of information on such matters. Such arguments presume that media can be used as a means of expressing or even discovering aspects of one’s “true self,” for example, in relation to sexuality.²⁷ Yet on the other hand, these media can also be seen to provide powerful

opportunities for identity play, for parody and subversion of the kind promoted by queer theory. Here, the emphasis would lie not on honesty and truth, but on the potential for performance and even for deception. Sherry Turkle's discussion of the fluidity of online identities—for example, in the form of “gender bending” in Internet communities—provides one well-known (and much debated) instance of this kind of approach.²⁸

Several authors in this volume address the complexities of identity politics, particularly in relation to gender (“race” is the focus of a separate volume in this series). Rebekah Willett, for example, looks at how girls' online play with dressing up dolls raises questions about body image and sexual politics; and while the girls in her study are very self-consciously critical about these issues, they also differentiate themselves from invisible “others” whom they believe to be more at risk of negative media influences. Sandra Weber and Claudia Mitchell also address questions of gender and ethnicity, looking at how the markers of positive identities can be quite subtly coded in young people's online expressions; and they also explore some uses of digital technologies by socially excluded groups, who tend to be largely ignored by research in this field.

The Modern Subject: Identity in Social Theory

Finally, we need to address some of the ways in which identity has been defined and addressed within more general social theories. Two specific—and quite contrasting—perspectives will illustrate some of the tensions at stake here.

Anthony Giddens is probably the best-known exponent of a broader argument about the changing nature of identity in what he terms “late modern” societies.²⁹ Giddens argues that many of the beliefs and customary practices that used to define identities in traditional societies (such as those of organized religion) are now less and less influential. In this “post-traditional” society, people have to make a whole range of choices, not just about aspects such as appearance and lifestyle, but more broadly about their life destinations and relationships. They are offered a plethora of guidance on such matters by experts of various kinds and by the popular media (for example, in the form of lifestyle news, makeover shows, and self-help books), although ultimately the individuals are required to make these choices on their own behalf.

As a result, Giddens suggests, modern individuals have to be constantly “self-reflexive,” making decisions about what they should do and who they should be. The self becomes a kind of “project” that individuals have to work on: they have to create biographical “narratives” that will explain themselves to themselves, and hence sustain a coherent and consistent identity. Like many of the other authors I have discussed, Giddens sees identity as fluid and malleable, rather than fixed. He recognizes that this new freedom places new burdens and responsibilities on people; particularly in a world of increasing risk and insecurity, the individual is placed under greater emotional stress. Yet in general, he regards this as a positive development and as part of a broader process of democratization; modern consumer culture has offered individuals multiple possibilities to construct and fashion their own identities, and they are now able to do this in increasingly creative and diverse ways.

There are several problems with Giddens's argument, but the most significant one has to do with his evidence. It is by no means clear that the processes he is describing are distinctive to the “late-modern” era, and, more significantly, that they actually apply to the majority of the population (rather than merely to academic social theorists). Some of the difficulties here become apparent when we contrast Giddens's approach with that of Michel Foucault and some of his followers. What Giddens appears to regard as a form of liberation (or at least

self-actualization) is seen by Foucault as simply another means of exercising disciplinary power. Foucault argues that who we are—or who we perceive ourselves to be—is far from a matter of individual choice; on the contrary, it is the product of powerful and subtle forms of “governmentality” that are characteristic of modern liberal democracies.³⁰

Foucault asserts that there has been a shift in the ways in which power is exercised in the modern world, which is apparent in a whole range of social domains. Rather than being held (and indeed displayed) by sovereign authorities, power is now diffused through social relationships; rather than being regulated by external agencies (the government or the church), individuals are now encouraged to regulate themselves and to ensure that their own behavior falls within acceptable norms. What Giddens describes as self-reflexivity is seen by Foucault in much more sinister terms, as a process of self-monitoring and self-surveillance. Giddens’ “project of the self” is recast here as a matter of individuals policing themselves, and the forms of self-help and therapy that Giddens seems to regard in quite positive terms are redefined as modern forms of confession, in which individuals are constantly required to account for themselves and “speak the truth” about their identities.

Nikolas Rose extends Foucault’s argument to the operations of what he calls the “psy complex”—the forms of academic, therapeutic and institutional expertise that make up modern psychology.³¹ This “technology of the self,” he argues, actively forms what it means to be human, and in the process, it seeks to regulate and control individual behavior in line with limited social norms. While appearing to act in the name of individual freedom, autonomy, and choice, such technologies ultimately give the power to experts to determine the ways in which identity can be defined.

As with Giddens’s theories, there are questions that might be raised here about how this very generalized analysis actually plays out in individuals’ everyday lives. Yet although there are some striking differences between these approaches, they do draw attention to some significant shifts in how identity is constructed and experienced in the contemporary world. In my view, this is important to bear in mind when we consider the specific nature of young people’s interactions with digital media. As I shall argue below, one of the major problems with popular debates in this field is the tendency to regard technology as the driving force of social change. Social theory of the kind I have discussed here reminds us that technological change is often merely part of much broader social and historical developments. In particular, I would suggest that the *individualization* made possible by digital technology could be seen as an instance of much more general shifts in the ways in which identity is defined and lived out in modern societies, although (as this section has made clear) it is possible to interpret these developments in very different ways.

Here again, these questions are taken up by several of the contributors to this book. Gitte Stald’s account of the role of mobile phones in generating a sense of (and indeed a requirement for) constant “presence,” Susannah Stern’s discussion of how teenagers construct and fashion particular forms of identity online, and danah boyd’s analysis of how young people “write themselves into being” on social networking sites indicate just some of the ways in which these broader social theories might be used in analyzing specific aspects of young people’s digital cultures. Rebekah Willett’s chapter confronts some of these arguments more directly, drawing on Giddens and Rose to challenge the emphasis on “compulsory individuality” that she sees as a characteristic of contemporary “neo liberal” discourses. She argues that young people are being encouraged to construct identities in terms that are aligned with consumer culture: far from being free to “express themselves,” the forms of that expression are in fact being regulated in ever more subtle ways. Finally, Kirsten Drotner’s chapter

suggests that the new forms of identity work that are required in complex, “late-modern” societies call on new forms of cultural competence that schools need to address much more directly than they currently do.

Digital Media, Young People, and Learning

Among the different views of identity outlined in the first part of this chapter, there is often a shared assumption that the ways in which identity is defined (and hence what *counts* as identity) are undergoing far-reaching changes in the contemporary world. This is certainly debatable, but it does imply that one place to look for evidence of change would be young people, and perhaps specifically young people’s relation with new technologies. In the second part of this chapter, therefore, I intend to raise some broad points about how we understand digital technology, youth, and finally learning.

Technology: The Limits of Determinism

Technology is frequently held to be transforming social relationships, the economy, and vast areas of public and private life. Such arguments are routinely recycled in popular debates, in advertising and publicity materials, and indeed in academic contexts as well. As Carolyn Marvin (1988) has indicated, such discourses have a long history. She shows how the introduction of electricity and telecommunications in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries was both encouraged and challenged by discourses that attributed enormous power to technology. On the one hand, these technologies were promoted through forms of expert “boosterism,” which glorified the opportunities they presented, yet on the other, there were frequent claims that technology might be threatening established social relationships. The telephone, for example, was celebrated for the way in which it could make business more efficient and facilitate more democratic forms of social life, yet it was also condemned for its disruption of intimate relationships and its unsettling of established social hierarchies.

Needless to say, there are striking similarities between these debates almost a century ago and those that currently surround the use of digital technology. Popular discussions of the Internet, for example, veer between celebration and paranoia; on the one hand, the technology is seen to create new forms of community and civic life and to offer immense resources for personal liberation and empowerment, while on the other, it is believed to pose dangers to privacy, to create new forms of inequality and commercial exploitation, as well as leaving the individual prey to addiction and pornography. On the one hand, the technology is seen to liberate the individual from constraint and from narrowly hierarchical ways of working, while on the other, it is regarded as a false substitute for the supposedly authentic values it is seen to be replacing.

Such discourses typically embody a form of *technological determinism*.³² From this perspective, technology is seen to emerge from a neutral process of scientific research and development, rather than from the interplay of complex social, economic, and political forces. Technology is then seen to have effects—to bring about social and psychological changes—irrespective of the ways in which it is used, and of the social contexts and processes into which it enters. Like the printing press, television, and other new technologies that preceded it, the computer is seen as an autonomous force that is somehow independent of human society and acts upon it from outside. In the case of education, this often takes the form of what might be called “information determinism.” Information is seen as a neutral good, which appears as if from nowhere. Learning often seems to be equated simply with access

to information, and in providing this access, technology is seen to perform an essentially beneficial function.³³

This “transcendent” view of technology and of information has been widely challenged. Kevin Robins and Frank Webster, for example, argue that it leads to a “desocialized” view of technology, which ignores its social history and sees it as somehow “influencing society yet beyond the influence of society.”³⁴ Likewise, notions of the “information society” and the “knowledge economy,” which are often used to justify the growing use of information technology in schools, involve some highly debatable assumptions about the changing nature of employment and about the skills that workers will need in order to function effectively in the new economic and technological order. More broadly, the claim that the “information society” represents a new mode of social organization, in which established forms of economic, political, and social activity are being fundamentally altered—and the assumption that this change is somehow an inevitable consequence of technology—has been widely challenged.³⁵

However, such critics also point to the dangers of an opposite view—the notion that technology is somehow entirely shaped by existing social relations. Crudely, this approach sees technology as simply a matter of what people choose to make of it: it has no inherent qualities and is regarded as essentially value free. This ignores the fact that technologies have inherent potentialities or “affordances”: it is much easier to use them for some purposes than for others. Relatively few of these affordances are inevitable: the history of technology is full of examples of unanticipated consequences and even subversive uses. Even so, the forms that technology takes are largely shaped by the social actors and social institutions that play a leading role in producing it, and in determining where, when, and how it will be used, and by whom.

In his influential discussion of television, Raymond Williams makes a powerful argument for a more dialectical approach, in which technology is both socially shaped and socially shaping.³⁶ In other words, its role and impact is partly determined by the uses to which it is put, but it also contains inherent constraints and possibilities which limit the ways in which it can be used, and which are in turn largely shaped by the social interests of those who control its production, circulation, and distribution. This approach thus begins to move beyond the notion of technology as a simple “cause” of social change (on the one hand) and the idea of technology as an easy “fix” for complex social problems (on the other).

Similar arguments can be made about media or modes of communication. For example, the so-called “medium theory” of Marshall McLuhan implies that specific media necessarily create or promote particular forms of consciousness, and hence particular forms of social organization.³⁷ Likewise, theories of “multimodal communication” appear to assume that changes in the dominant modes of communication—for example, from the predominantly verbal to the more visual style of the contemporary media—necessarily result in changes in social relationships.³⁸ These kinds of arguments have often been used to support far-reaching assertions about the liberating impact of new media. Yet here again, such theories tend to neglect the diverse ways in which these different media or modes of communication are used, and they ignore the complex and sometimes quite contradictory relationships between media change and social power.

Rethinking the Digital Generation

These kinds of ideas about the impact of technology tend to take on an even greater force when they are combined with ideas about childhood and youth. The debate about the

impact of media and technology on children has always served as a focus for much broader hopes and fears about social change.³⁹ On the one hand, there is a powerful discourse about the ways in which digital technology is threatening or even destroying childhood.⁴⁰ Young people are seen to be at risk, not only from more obvious dangers such as pornography and online pedophiles, but also from a wide range of negative physical and psychological consequences that derive from their engagement with technology. Like television, digital media are seen to be responsible for a whole litany of social ills—addiction, antisocial behavior, obesity, educational underachievement, commercial exploitation, stunted imaginations . . . and the list goes on.

In recent years, however, the debate has come to be dominated by a very different argument. Unlike those who bemoan the media's destruction of childhood innocence, advocates of the new "digital generation" regard technology as a force of liberation for young people—a means for them to reach past the constraining influence of their elders, and to create new, autonomous forms of communication and community. Far from corrupting the young, technology is seen to be creating a generation that is more open, more democratic, more creative, and more innovative than their parents' generation.

For example, Marc Prensky makes a distinction between digital "natives" (who have grown up with this technology) and digital "immigrants" (adults who have come to it later in life) that has been widely influential in popular debate.⁴¹ Prensky argues that digital natives have a very different style of learning: they crave interactivity, they value graphics before words; they want random access, and they operate at the "twitch speed" of video games and MTV. As a result, they are dissatisfied with old styles of instruction, based on exposition and step-by-step logic: they see digital immigrants as speaking in an entirely alien, outdated language. Prensky even suggests that digital natives have a very different brain structure from that of immigrants, as though technology had precipitated a form of physical evolution within a period of little more than a decade.

Likewise, Don Tapscott's *Growing Up Digital: The Rise of the Net Generation* is based on two sets of binary oppositions, between technologies (television versus the Internet) and between generations (the "baby boomers" versus the "net generation").⁴² Tapscott's oppositions between these technologies are stark and absolute. Television is a passive medium, while the net is active; television "dumbs down" its users, while the net raises their intelligence; television broadcasts a singular view of the world, while the net is democratic and interactive; television isolates, while the net builds communities; and so on. Just as television is the antithesis of the net, so the "television generation" is the antithesis of the "net generation." Like the technology they now control, the values of the "television generation" are increasingly conservative, "hierarchical, inflexible and centralized." By contrast, the "N-Geners" are "hungry for expression, discovery, and their own self-development": they are savvy, self-reliant, analytical, articulate, creative, inquisitive, accepting of diversity, and socially conscious. These generational differences are seen to be *produced* by technology, rather than being a result of other social, historical, or cultural forces. Unlike their parents, who are portrayed as incompetent "technophobes," young people are seen to possess an intuitive, spontaneous relationship with digital technology. "For many kids," Tapscott argues, "using the new technology is as natural as breathing." Technology is the means of their empowerment, and it will ultimately lead to a "generational explosion."

From this perspective, technology is seen to have brought about fundamental changes in a whole range of areas. It has created new styles of communication and interaction, and new means for constructing community. It has produced new styles of playful learning, which go

beyond the teacher-dominated, authoritarian approach of old style education. It is creating new competencies or forms of “literacy,” which require and produce new intellectual powers, and even “more complex brain structures.” It provides new ways of forming identity, and hence new forms of personhood; and by offering communication with different aspects of the self, it enables young people to relate to the world and to others in more powerful ways. Finally, these technologies are seen to be leading to the emergence of a new kind of politics, which is more distributed and democratic: the Internet, for example, is “a medium for social awakening,” which is producing a generation that is more tolerant, more globally oriented, more inclined to exercise social and civic responsibility, and to respect the environment.

Wishful thinking of this kind undoubtedly has its pleasures, but it is important to address some of the fundamental limitations of these arguments. The technologically determinist stance adopted by these authors means that there are many issues and phenomena that they are bound to ignore. They tend to neglect the fundamental continuities and interdependencies between new media and “old” media (such as television)—continuities that exist at the level of form and content, as well as in terms of economics. A longer historical view clearly shows that old and new technologies often come to coexist: particularly in the area of media, the advent of a new technology may change the functions or uses of old technologies, but it rarely completely displaces them. On average, members of the “net generation” in fact spend more of their time watching television than they do on the Internet; and of course there are many members of the “television generation” who spend much of their working and leisure time online.

This relentlessly optimistic view inevitably ignores many of the down sides of these technologies—the undemocratic tendencies of many online “communities,” the limited nature of much so-called digital learning and the grinding tedium of much technologically-driven work. It also tends to romanticize young people, offering a wholly positive view of their critical intelligence and social responsibility that is deliberately at odds with that of many social commentators. It is also bound to ignore the continuing “digital divide” between the technology rich and the technology poor, both within and between societies. Technology enthusiasts are inclined to believe that this is a temporary phenomenon, and that the technology poor will eventually catch up, although this is obviously to assume that the early adopters will stay where they are. The possibility that the market might not provide equally for all, or indeed that technology might be used to exploit young people economically, does not enter the picture.⁴³

Finally, this account of the “digital generation” is also bound to ignore what one can only call the *banality* of much new media use. Recent studies suggest that most young people’s everyday uses of the Internet are characterized not by spectacular forms of innovation and creativity, but by relatively mundane forms of communication and information retrieval.⁴⁴ The technologically empowered “cyberkids” of the popular imagination may indeed exist, but even if they do, they are in a minority and they are untypical of young people as a whole. For example, there is little evidence that most young people are using the Internet to develop global connections; in most cases, it appears to be used primarily as a means of reinforcing local networks among peers. Young people may be “empowered” as consumers, at least in the sense of being able to access a much wider range of goods and services much more easily. But as yet there is little sense in which they are being empowered as citizens; only a minority are using the technology to engage in civic participation, to communicate their views to a wider audience, or to get involved in political activity.⁴⁵ As Mark Warschauer points out, the potential for multimedia production—which requires the latest computers and

software, and high bandwidth—is generally quite inaccessible to all but the wealthy middle-classes.⁴⁶ Research also suggests that young people may be much less fluent or technologically “literate” in their use of the Internet than is often assumed: observational studies suggest that young people often encounter considerable difficulties in using search engines, for example, although this is not to suggest that they are necessarily any *less* competent than adults in this respect.⁴⁷

Aside from those who are denied access to this technology, there are also many who positively refuse or reject it, for a variety of reasons.⁴⁸ Only a relatively small proportion of young people are driven by a desire to purchase the latest technological gadgets or participate in the latest form of online culture, and rather than being regarded as “cool,” they are still often dismissed by their peers as “geeks.”⁴⁹ In general, one could argue that for most young people, technology per se is a relatively marginal concern. Very few are interested in technology in its own right, and most are simply concerned about what they can use it for.

Ultimately, like other forms of marketing rhetoric, the discourse of the “digital generation” is precisely an attempt to construct the object of which it purports to speak. It represents not a description of what children or young people actually are, but a set of imperatives about what they should be or what they need to become. To some extent, it does describe a minority of young people who are actively using this technology for social, educational and creative purposes, yet it seems very likely that most of these people are the “usual suspects,” who are already privileged in other areas of their lives and whose use of technology is supported by their access to other forms of social and cultural capital.

Of course, none of this is to deny that different generations or age cohorts will have different kinds of experiences, and that these may result in “generation gaps.” Generations can be defined—and come to define themselves—through their relationships to traumatic historical events, but also through their experiences of rapid social change (as, for example, in the case of the “Sixties generation.”)⁵⁰ Nor is it to deny that contemporary developments in technology do indeed present new opportunities—and indeed new risks—for young people. Some differences between generations are a perennial function of age—the interests of the young and the old are bound to diverge in systematic and predictable ways—but others are a consequence of broader historical developments, which include technological change. Even so, the emergence of a so-called “digital generation” can only be adequately understood in the light of other changes—for example, in the political economy of youth culture, the social and cultural policies and practices that regulate and define young people’s lives, and the realities of their everyday social environments. These latter changes themselves can also be overstated, and frequently are, but in any case, it makes little sense to consider them in isolation from each other.

These issues are taken up in various ways in later chapters. The authors are generally wary of easy assumptions about the impact of technology on young people, and of the dangers of romanticizing youth. They are also keen to locate contemporary uses of technology in relation to older forms of communication or of teenage social interaction. Susan Herring’s chapter provides the most direct challenge to these kinds of assumptions, puncturing some of the easy rhetoric about the “digital generation,” and locating adults’ views of young people and technology in a broader historical context. At the same time, she is keen not to fall into the trap of merely suggesting that “we’ve seen it all before.” Technology—in combination with a whole series of other social and economic changes—is transforming young people’s experiences, albeit in ways that (as Herring suggests) may only become fully apparent several years further down the line.

The Place(s) of Learning Finally, what are the implications of these arguments for our thinking about learning? Learning is undoubtedly a central theme in popular debates about the impact of digital technology.⁵¹ On the one hand, critics have often seen technology as incompatible with authentic learning. For example, the use of computers in schools has been condemned for undermining students' creativity and for emphasizing mechanical rote learning, and it has also been seen to promise instant gratification, at the expense of encouraging students to develop the patience that is required for the hard work of education.⁵²

On the other hand, advocates of technology have extolled its value for encouraging creative, student-centered learning, for increasing motivation and achievement, and for promoting demanding new styles of thinking.⁵³ Don Tapscott and Marc Prensky, for example, wax lyrical about the interactive, playful styles of learning that are promoted by the Internet and by computer games. Prensky's "digital natives" and Tapscott's "net generation" are seen as more inquisitive, self-directed learners: they are more sceptical and analytical, more inclined toward critical thinking, and more likely to challenge and question established authorities than previous generations. Above all, learning via these new digital media is seen as guaranteed "fun," as the boundaries between learning and play have effectively disappeared.⁵⁴

Academic analyses of learning in relation to digital media have drawn on a wide range of perspectives. It is sometimes forgotten that one of the key advocates of behaviorist theories of learning, B. F. Skinner, was also an enthusiast for what he termed "teaching machines"—machines that have some striking similarities with contemporary computers.⁵⁵ Behaviorism is certainly alive and well in the design of contemporary "drill and skill" software, although most enthusiasts for computers in education tend to espouse a form of "constructivism" that emphasizes active, student-centered learning rather than instruction.⁵⁶ More recent approaches have drawn on social theories of learning, such as the "situated learning" approach. From this perspective, learning is seen to be embedded in social interactions (or "communities of practice"), and it can take the form of a kind of apprenticeship, as newcomers observe and gradually come to participate in particular social practices by modeling and working alongside "old timers." This theory also suggests that learning entails the development (or "projection") of a social identity; in learning, we take on, or aspire to take on, a new role as a member of the community of practice in which we are seeking to participate. Such theories have an obvious relevance to the study of online social networks, for example in the case of gaming and fan communities.⁵⁷

One key emphasis in these debates is on the importance of the "informal learning" that characterizes young people's everyday interactions with technology outside school. Seymour Papert, for example, extols the value of what he calls "home-style" learning, seeing it as self-directed, spontaneous, and motivated in ways that "school-style" learning is not,⁵⁸ while Marc Prensky and Don Tapscott also look outside the school for alternatives to what they regard as the old-fashioned, instructional style of Baby Boomer teachers. Similar arguments have increasingly been made by academic researchers, who have looked to young people's leisure uses of digital technology—for example, in the form of computer games—as a means of challenging the narrow and inflexible uses of information and communications technology (ICTs) in schools.⁵⁹

To be sure, young people's everyday uses of computer games or the Internet involve a whole range of informal learning processes, in which there is often a highly democratic relationship between "teachers" and "learners." Young people learn to use these media largely through trial and error. Exploration, experimentation, play, and collaboration with others—both in face-to-face and virtual forms—are essential elements of the process. Playing certain types

of computer games, for example, can involve an extensive series of cognitive activities: remembering, hypothesis testing, predicting, and strategic planning. While game players are often deeply immersed in the virtual world of the game, dialogue and exchange with others is crucial. And game playing is also a “multiliterate” activity: it often involves interpreting complex three-dimensional visual environments, reading both on screen and off screen texts (such as games’ magazines, and websites), and processing auditory information. In the world of computer games, success ultimately derives from the disciplined and committed acquisition of skills and knowledge.⁶⁰

Likewise, online chat and instant messaging require very specific skills in language and interpersonal communication.⁶¹ Young people have to learn to “read” subtle nuances, often on the basis of minimal cues. They have to learn the rules and etiquette of online communication, and to shift quickly between genres or language registers. Provided youths are sensible about divulging personal information, online chat provides young people with a safe arena for rehearsing and exploring aspects of identity and personal relationships that may not be available elsewhere. Again, much of this learning is carried out without explicit teaching: it involves active exploration, “learning by doing,” apprenticeship rather than direct instruction. Above all, it is profoundly social: it is a matter of collaboration and interaction with others, and of participation in a community of users.

In learning with and through these media, young people are also learning how to learn. They are developing particular orientations toward information, particular methods of acquiring new knowledge and skills, and a sense of their own identities as learners. They are likely to experience a strong sense of their own autonomy, and of their right to make their own choices and to follow their own paths—however illusory this may ultimately be. In these domains, they are learning primarily by means of discovery, experimentation, and play, rather than by following external instructions and directions.

Even so, there are some important limitations to all this. Media content is, of course, not necessarily neutral or reliable: it represents the world in particular ways and not others, and it does so in ways that tend to serve the interests of its producers. Activities such as chat and game play are heavily bound by systems of rules, even if the rules are not always explicitly taught and even if they can sometimes be broken or bent. The structure or “architecture” of software itself (for example, of links on the Internet) imposes very significant constraints on the ways in which it can be used. And the social worlds that users enter into as they participate in these activities are by no means necessarily egalitarian or harmonious. For all these reasons, we need to be wary of simply *celebrating* young people’s “informal” experiences of media and technology, and there are good reasons to be cautious about the idea of simply extending those experiences into the more “formal” context of the school.

This raises the important question, not so much of *how young people learn* with technology, but of *what they need to know* about it. The need for “digital literacy” is fast becoming a growing concern among educators and policy-makers in many countries. To date, however, most discussions of digital literacy have been confined to a fairly functional approach; the emphasis is on mastering basic skills in using technology, with some limited attention to evaluating the reliability or credibility of online sources (an issue addressed in detail in another of the volumes in this series). These are undoubtedly important issues, but digital literacy clearly needs to be seen much more broadly. Literacy is more than a matter of functional skills, or of knowing how to access information; we need to be able to evaluate information if we are to turn it into meaningful knowledge. Critical literacy is not just about making distinctions between “reliable” and “unreliable” sources: it is also about understanding who produces

media, how and why they do so, how these media represent the world, and how they create meanings and pleasures.⁶²

In this respect, I would argue that digital literacy should be seen as part of the broader field of media literacy. There is a long history of media literacy education in many countries, and there is a well-established conceptual framework and a repertoire of classroom strategies that are recognized and shared by teachers around the world.⁶³ Clearly, new media such as games and the Internet require new methods of investigation, and new classroom strategies, and schools need to think hard about how they should respond to the more participatory forms of media culture that are now emerging (for example in the form of blogging, social networking, fan cultures, video production, game making, and so on).⁶⁴ Nevertheless, media educators' long-standing concerns with questions about representation, about the characteristics of media "languages," and about the ownership and production of media continue to be highly relevant here, as does the emphasis on connecting these more critical concerns with the practical production of media (enabling students to create websites or digital videos, for example).

The issue of learning is addressed indirectly by several of the contributors here, but it is taken up most explicitly in the two final chapters. Kirsten Drotner's key concern is with the implications of young people's emerging digital cultures for the institution of the school. How should teachers and schools build on the forms of creativity and learning that young people are experiencing in their everyday uses of digital media? Rather than making the school redundant, Drotner argues that it has a new role to play, both in addressing inequalities in access to technology and in providing new forms of literacy. Meanwhile, Shelley Goldman, Meghan McDermott and Angela Booker focus on the possibilities and the challenges of "informal" learning in out-of-school contexts. While technology does provide important new possibilities for self-expression and communication, they clearly show that technology in itself does not make the difference. On the contrary, we need to think hard about the "social technologies"—the other forms of social interaction—and the types of pedagogy that surround the technology, and which crucially determine how it will be used. (These authors' concern with the role of digital media in young people's civic participation is taken up in another volume in this series.)

Conclusion

Simply keeping pace with the range of young people's engagements with digital media is an increasingly daunting task. Inevitably, there will be many gaps in our account here. Some of them are more than amply filled by other books in this series, such as the volumes on games, on ethnicity, and on civic engagement. Other gaps relate to the types of young people who are addressed here. To date, research on young people and digital media has tended to focus on the "early adopters," who, as I have suggested, are also likely to be privileged in other areas of their lives. Some of the chapters here—such as those by Sandra Weber and Claudia Mitchell, and by Shelley Goldman, Meghan McDermott, and Angela Booker—do focus explicitly on disadvantaged young people, although this is an issue that needs to be addressed more effectively in future research.

Even so, our hope for this book is that the theme of identity will provide a useful lens through which to view particular aspects of young people's relations with digital media more clearly. Identity is a very broad and ambiguous concept, yet it focuses attention on critical questions about personal development and social relationships—questions that are crucial

for our understanding of young people's growth into adulthood and the nature of their social and cultural experiences. Focusing on this theme gives us a particular "take" on the relationship between the individual and the group. It raises questions about social power and inequality, and it enables us to connect the study of technology with broader questions about modernity and social change.

Perhaps most importantly, a focus on identity requires us to pay close attention to the diverse ways in which media and technologies are used in everyday life, and their consequences both for individuals and for social groups. It entails viewing young people as significant social actors in their own right, as "beings," and not simply as "becomings" who should be judged in terms of their projected futures. In our view, the needs of young people are not best served either by the superficial celebration or the exaggerated moral panics that often characterize this field. Understanding the role of digital media in the formation of youthful identities requires an approach that is clear sighted, unsentimental, and constructively critical. We trust that this collection will be read, and its contents debated, in an equally rigorous manner.

Notes

1. Richard Jenkins points to the long history of debates about identity in *Social Identity* (2nd Edition, London: Routledge, 2004).
2. Zygmunt Bauman, *Identity* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2004).
3. G. Stanley Hall, *Adolescence* (New York: Appleton, 1904) and *Youth: Its Education, Regimen and Hygiene* (New York: Appleton, 1906).
4. Erik Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (New York: Norton, 1968).
5. James Marcia, Identity in Adolescence, in *Handbook of Adolescent Psychology*, ed. Joseph Adelson (New York: Wiley, 1980), 159–187.
6. For histories of "youth," see John Gillis, *Youth and History* (London: Academic Press, 1974); Michael Mitterauer, *A History of Youth* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1992).
7. Carol Gilligan, *In A Different Voice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).
8. This distinction between "being" and "becoming" is a key theme in the sociology of childhood: for a thoughtful discussion, see Nick Lee, *Childhood and Society* (Buckingham, UK: Open University Press, 2001).
9. Christine Griffin gives a useful overview of sociological perspectives in *Representations of Youth* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 1993). For a good sociological overview, see Andy Furlong and Fred Cartmel, *Young People and Social Change* (Buckingham, UK: Open University Press, 1997).
10. For historical studies, see note 6 above. Cross-cultural accounts may be found, for example, in Sharon Stephens, ed., *Children and the Politics of Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995) and Vered Amit-Talai and Helena Wulff, eds., *Youth Cultures: A Cross-Cultural Perspective* (London: Routledge, 1995). Some of the complexity of this definition is apparent in the very diverse ways in which national legal systems and international agencies like the UN and the European Commission define the age boundaries of "youth."
11. Bill Osgerby gives a useful overview of these issues in *Youth Media* (London: Routledge, 2005).
12. See John Ulrich and Andrea Harris, eds., *Genxegesis: Essays on Alternative Youth (Sub)Culture* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003).

13. Key examples of this early work would include Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson, eds., *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain* (London: Hutchinson, 1975); Angela McRobbie, *Feminism and Youth Culture: From "Jackie" to "Just Seventeen"* (London: Macmillan, 1991); and Paul Willis, *Learning to Labour* (Farnborough, UK: Saxon House, 1977). Ken Gelder and Sarah Thornton provide a useful, broad-ranging compilation in their *Subcultures Reader* (2nd Edition, London: Routledge, 2005).
14. Examples of more recent research can be found in Tracy Skelton and Gill Valentine, eds., *Cool Places: Geographies of Youth Culture* (London: Routledge, 1998) and Andy Bennett and Keith Kahn-Harris, eds., *After Subculture* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).
15. See, for example, Barrie Thorne, *Gender Play: Girls and Boys in School* (Buckingham, UK: Open University Press, 1993) or JoEllen FisherKeller, *Growing Up With Television* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002).
16. See particularly Sarah Thornton, *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 1995).
17. Andy Bennett, *Popular Music and Youth Culture* (Basingstoke, Hants, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000) and Steven Miles, *Youth Lifestyles in a Changing World* (Buckingham, UK: Open University Press, 2000).
18. Key examples of this work would include Henri Tajfel, *Human Groups and Social Categories* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Michael Hogg and Dominic Abrams, *Social Identifications* (London: Routledge, 1988); and Anthony Cohen, *Self Consciousness: An Alternative Anthropology of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1994).
19. Richard Jenkins, *Social Identity* (2004).
20. Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Anchor Books, 1959).
21. A summary of some critiques of Goffman, and a response, may be found in Simon Williams, *Appraising Goffman*, *British Journal of Sociology*, 37, no. 3 (1986): 348–369, and the special issue of *Sociological Perspectives* 39, no. 3 (1996).
22. See, for example, Andrew Wood and Matthew Smith, *Online Communication: Linking Technology, Identity, and Culture* (Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 2001).
23. See the insightful discussion by Cressida Hayes in the *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*. <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/identity-politics/> (accessed May 29, 2007).
24. See Stuart Hall, *The Question of Cultural Identity*, in *Modernity and its Futures*, eds. Stuart Hall, David Held, and Anthony McGrew (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 1992).
25. See Annamarie Jagose, *Queer Theory: An Introduction* (New York: New York University Press, 1996).
26. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (London: Routledge, 1990).
27. See, for example, some of the papers collected in *Digital Generations: Children, Young People and New Media*, eds. David Buckingham and Rebekah Willett (Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 2006).
28. Sherry Turkle, *Life on the Screen* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995).
29. The key text here is *Modernity and Self-Identity* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 1991) by Anthony Giddens. Other authors who appear to me to be making related arguments include Ulrich Beck and Zygmunt Bauman.
30. The most accessible way in here is via Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1979).
31. Nikolas Rose, *Governing the Soul* (2nd Edition, London: Free Association, 1999).

32. See Kevin Robins and Frank Webster, *Times of the Technoculture* (London: Routledge, 1999) and Frank Webster, *Theories of the Information Society* (London: Routledge, 1995).
33. These ideas are debated at length in David Buckingham's (forthcoming) *Beyond Technology: Children's Learning in the Age of Digital Culture* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2007).
34. Op. cit.: 74.
35. See, for example, Nicholas Garnham, Information Society as Theory or Ideology, *Information, Communication and Society*, 3, no. 2 (2000): 139–152; Christopher May, *The Information Society* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2002); and Frank Webster, op. cit.
36. Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (Glasgow: Fontana, 1974).
37. Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extension of Man* (New York: New American Library, 1964).
38. See, for example, Gunther Kress, *Literacy in the New Media Age* (London: Routledge, 2003).
39. See David Buckingham, *After the Death of Childhood: Growing Up in the Age of Electronic Media* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2000).
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41. Marc Prensky, *Don't Bother Me, Mom—I'm Learning!* (St. Paul, MN: Paragon House, 2006).
42. Don Tapscott, *Growing Up Digital: The Rise of the Net Generation* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1998).
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50. See June Edmunds and Bryan Turner, *Generations, Culture and Society* (Buckingham, UK: Open University Press, 2002).
51. For fuller discussion, see David Buckingham (2007), particularly Chapters 3 and 6.
52. See Colleen Cordes and Edward Miller, op. cit.; Alison Armstrong and Charles Casement (2000) and Jane Healy (1998).
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