

**Young People, Ethics, and the New Digital Media:
A Synthesis from the Good Play Project**

2/22/08

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Abstract

The new digital media are a frontier rich with opportunities and risks, particularly for young people. Through digital technologies, young people are participating in a range of activities, including social networking, blogging, vlogging, gaming, instant messaging, downloading music and other content, uploading and sharing their own creations, and collaborating with others in various ways. In this paper, we explore the **ethical fault lines that are raised by such digital pursuits**. We argue that five key issues are at stake in the new media, including identity, privacy, ownership and authorship, credibility, and participation. Drawing on evidence from informant interviews, emerging scholarship on new media, and theoretical insights from psychology, sociology, political science, and cultural studies, we explore the ways in which **youth may be redefining identity, privacy, ownership, credibility, & participation as they engage with the new digital media**. For each issue, we describe and compare offline and online understandings and then explore the particular ethical promises and perils that surface online.

In the paper, we define ‘good play’ as online conduct that is both meaningful and engaging to the participant and responsible to others in the community and society in which it is carried out. We argue that the new digital media, with all its participatory potentials, is **a “playground” in which five factors contribute to the likelihood of ‘good play’**: the affordances of the new digital media; related technical and new media literacies; person-centered factors, ranging from cognitive and moral development to beliefs and values of a young person; peer cultures, both online and offline; and ethical supports, including the **presence/absence of adult mentors and educational curricula**. The proposed model sets the stage for an empirical study that will invite young people to share their personal stories of engagement with the new digital media.

I. INTRODUCTION

When in 2006 *Time* magazine declared its “Person of the Year” to be “You,” the magazine was pointing to an undeniable reality—anyone with an internet connection can now be a reporter, political commentator, cultural critic, or media producer. Around the same time, media scholar Jenkins and colleagues (2006) published a white paper extolling the “participatory cultures” of creation and sharing, mentorship, and civic engagement emerging online, especially among teens. While *Time* did not explicitly frame participation in the new media as a youth phenomenon, most of the 15 “citizens of digital democracy” featured in the article were under the age of 35. And Jenkins et al. strongly suggest that young people are especially well-poised to take full advantage of Web 2.0. Indeed, many young people are using the digital media in impressive and socially responsible ways. Consider the following examples.

TVNewser

In 2004, Brian Stelter, then a sophomore communications major at Towson University started a blog called TVNewser which provides an ongoing, detailed record of ratings, gossip, and events in the news media industry. Over the past three years, TVNewser has become a chief source of information for news industry executives; in fact, Stelter receives frequent calls from the likes of Jonathan Klein, president of CNN’s national news division. His youth and lack of credentials notwithstanding, Stelter is considered an extremely credible source (Bosman, 2006).

Global Kids

Global Kids (GK) is a New York-based organization “committed to transforming urban youth into successful students as well as global and community leaders.” In 2000, GK launched an Online Leadership Program (OLP) through which youth simultaneously build technical, new media literacy, leadership, and civic engagement skills. Youth participants engage in online dialogues about civic issues, regularly post on a blog, learn to design educational games and digital films, and play an active role in Teen Second Life, including its youth summer camp which brings them together online to educate one another about global issues, such as child sex trafficking.

Yet for every digital super-kid and for every case of good cyber-citizenship, there seem to be many more examples of (intentional or naïve) misuses—or ethically ambiguous uses—of digital media. Consider these examples.

Lonelygirl15

In June 2006, a series of video blogs posted on YouTube by a teenager called lonelygirl15 began to capture a wide audience. The videos depicted a 16-year old girl named Bree talking about her day-to-day existence, including her experiences being home-schooled and raised by very strict, religious parents. After several months, it was revealed that Bree was in fact Jessica Rose, a twenty-something actress working with several filmmaker friends to produce the video series (Heffernan & Zeller, 2006; “Lonelygirl15,” 2007).

The Digital Public

Aleksey Vayner, a senior at Yale University, became infamous after submitting a resume to an investment bank which contained his online, self-made video titled, “Impossible is Nothing.” The

video appeared to be a record of Vayner's diverse talents, as it depicted him performing skills ranging from ballroom dancing to extreme weightlifting. The video link was circulated by email within the investment bank USB and soon beyond it. After it began making headlines in the blogosphere and in major newspapers, questions were raised about the authenticity of some of the footage. Vayner subsequently sought legal advice for what he considered to be an invasion of privacy (de la Merced, 2006).

Speech in the Blogosphere

On April 6, 2007, a technical writer and prominent blogger, Kathy Sierra, published an entry on her blog entitled, "Death threats against bloggers are NOT 'protected speech.'" For several weeks, Sierra had been receiving anonymous comments containing violence and death threats on her own blog and on two other blogs. Following Sierra's alarming post, a heated controversy about the ethics of speech began to unfold in the blogosphere. Calls for a blogger's code of conduct were met with angry protest indicating how deeply many participants cherish the openness and freedoms of cyberspace (Pilkington, 2007).

For some time, scholars, educators, policymakers, and parents have been debating the implications of media and digital technologies for young people's literacy, attention spans, social tolerance, and propensity for aggression, among other concerns. Considerable strides are now being made in scholarship in many of these areas. The educational benefits of video games, for example, are being convincingly documented by scholars such as Gee (2003), Johnson (2005), and Shaffer (2006). At the same time, debates persist about the relationship between video games and violence (Anderson et al., 2004; Gentile, Linder & Walsh, 2004).

Concerns about ethically-tinged issues in the new media have also come to the fore—but have been a greater focus among journalists, politicians, ideologues, and educators than among scholars. A number of cyber-safety initiatives have recently cropped up, online and in schools around the country, in response to concerns about **online predators, illegal downloading, and imprudent posting of information** and content on social networking sites. The Ad Council's recent slate of YouTube videos entitled, "Think Before You Post," seeks to "to make teen girls aware of the potential dangers of sharing and posting personal information online and of communicating with unfamiliar people to help reduce their risk of sexual victimization and abduction" (Ad Council, 2007). Youth-driven outreach groups and anti-**cyberbullying** campaigns, such as Teenangels and StandUp!, are making their way into schools. Somewhat surprisingly though, objective, research-based accounts of the ethical issues raised by the new digital media are scarce.¹ This paper is an (admittedly ambitious) effort to fill this gap.

¹ Exceptions include UNESCO's 2007 report, **Ethical Implications of Emerging Technologies**. The report presents the potential positive and negative effects of technologies such as the Semantic Web, Digital Identity Management, Biometrics, Radio Frequency Identification, Grid Computing, and other technologies in development or now being adopted. By contrast, our paper explores the broad issues implicated by the range of activities occurring through media technologies which are widely available and frequently used, particularly by young people. See also the Vatican's report on ethics and the Internet:

Among the ethical fault lines present in the new digital media are the nature of personal identities that are being formed online; the fate of personal privacy in an environment where all kinds of information can be gleaned and disseminated; the meaning of authorship in spaces where multiple, anonymous contributors produce knowledge; the status of intellectual and other forms of property which are so easily accessible by a broad public; the ways in which individuals—both known and anonymous—interact and treat one another in cyberspace; and the credibility and trustworthiness of individuals, organizations, and causes that are regularly trafficking on the Internet, just to mention a few that we have particularly scrutinized. In short, we believe that five core issues are salient in the new media: identity, privacy, ownership and authorship, credibility, and participation. These issues are, and have long been, considered important offline as well. Yet in digital spaces, these issues may carry new, or at least distinct, ethical stakes. It thus seems critical to ask: Empirically, are the new digital media giving rise to new mental models—new “ethical minds”—with respect to identity, privacy, ownership and authorship, credibility, and participation? Do the new digital media require a reconceptualization of these issues, and of the ethical potentials they carry? As a starting point for considering these questions, in this paper, we explore emerging data regarding how young people manage these five issues as they participate in virtual spaces; our account considers the unique affordances inherent in the new digital media and associated promises and perils reflected in the opening examples. While we strongly suggest that the five themes explore here are ethically significant in the digital age, we by no means assert that they are *the* final defining ethical fault lines of the digital age. We acknowledge, and even expect, that our subsequent empirical work may turn up new ethical issues and/or suggest a different way of understanding these themes and the relationships among them.

A note about terminology: in this paper, we use the term “new digital media” (NDM) or simply “new media” to refer to the actual technologies that people use to connect with one another—including mobile phones, personal digital assistants (PDAs), game consoles, computers connected to the Internet, etc. Through these technologies, young people are participating in a range of activities, including social networking, blogging, vlogging, gaming, instant messaging, downloading music and other content, uploading and sharing their creations, and collaborating with others in various ways (see Appendix A for a more detailed overview of youth involvement in specific digital activities). Of principal interest to us are those activities that are interactive (e.g., multi-player as opposed single-player games), dialogical (e.g., online deliberation on Gather.com), and participatory (e.g., user-contributed content such as videos posted on YouTube). We use the terms “cyberspace,” “the Internet,” or simply “online” to denote the virtual realm in which such interactive activities are taking place. We also use the term “Web 2.0,” which

http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/pccs/documents/rc_pc_pccs_doc_20020228_ethics-internet_en.html

refers to the “second generation” internet technologies that permit, indeed invite, people to create, share, and modify online content (O'Reilly, 2005).

New Digital Frontiers

The new digital media have ushered in a new and essentially unlimited set of frontiers (Gardner, 2007d). Frontiers are open spaces—they often lack comprehensive and well-enforced rules and regulations and thus harbor both tremendous promises and significant perils. On the promising side, the NDM permit and encourage “participatory cultures.” As Henry Jenkins and colleagues define it, “a participatory culture is a culture with relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing one’s creations, and some type of informal mentorship whereby what is known by the most experienced is passed along to novices. A participatory culture is also one in which members believe their contributions matter, and feel some degree of social connection with one another (at the least they care what other people think about what they have created)” (Jenkins et al., 2006: 3).

Time’s “Person of the Year” points to the power of Jenkins’s concept and suggests that the potential of the new media to empower ordinary citizens and consumers is being realized. To be sure, many cultural critics and social scientists (Jenkins among them) have argued that even audiences of traditional media have never been passive (Lembo, 2000; Radway, 1985). Yet the new media invite a whole different level of agency: blogs allow people to speak out about issues they care about; massive multi-player games invite players to modify them as they play; and social networking sites permit participants to forge new connections with people beyond their real world cliques, schools, communities, even countries. In the most idealistic terms, the NDM hold great potential for facilitating civil society, civic engagement, and democratic participation (Ito, 2004; Jenkins, 2006b; Jenkins et al., 2006; Moore, 2003; Pettingill, 2007). If leveraged properly, the Internet can be a powerful tool for promoting social responsibility. At the same time, technologies themselves may be used for a range of purposes; the new media’s capacities to promote evil are in equal proportion to their capacities to promote good (Williams, 1974). Indeed, the frontier-like quality of the new digital media means that opportunities for ethical lapses abound. There are innumerable ways—some barely conceivable—for the dishonest to perpetrate harms and, in turn, for the innocent to be victimized.

The potentials and perils of the NDM are reflected in polar discourses well described as “digital faith” and “moral panics” (Green & Hannon, 2007). Accordingly, optimist Moore (2003) points to the “worldwide peace campaign” of millions of interconnected people working for social issues and human rights as a “beautiful” example of “emergent democracy” in cyberspace, while critic Keen describes the Internet as “a chaotic human arrangement with few, if any, formal social pacts. Today’s Internet resembles a state of nature—Hobbes’ dystopia rather than Rousseau’s idyll” (2007, 2). These opposing

discourses echo those concerning traditional media that have been raging for decades (if not longer), especially with respect to effects on children (Buckingham, 2000). Yet the new media may pose qualitatively different risks and opportunities. **The reality is that most online situations are rich with promises and risks, both of which often carry ethical consequences.**

Like all frontiers, cyberspace will eventually be regulated in some fashion; what is less clear is how regulation will occur and who will be the beneficiaries or the losers. The Blogger's Code of Conduct and the Deleting Online Predators Act (DOPA) are recent efforts in the direction of regulation that take two different tacks—the former, created by bloggers themselves, establishes guidelines for conduct; the latter, a bill introduced by legislators, actually restricts youth access to social networking and other interactive sites. Moreover, as commercial interests have an ever-growing presence in digital spaces, it is important to consider the extent to which market forces will have a hand in regulation, and what the ethical implications might be. Now is the time to ask what a regulated world wide web would look like. Importantly, how can the openness and socially positive potentials of the NDM be retained while unethical conduct is contained? We believe that such a balance cannot be struck without a more nuanced understanding of the distinct ethical fault lines in these rapidly evolving frontiers. Yet understanding is but a first step. **Ultimately, for the promises of the NDM to be positively realized, supports for ethical participation—indeed for the creation of “ethical minds” (Gardner, 2007a)—must emerge.**

Again, our objective is to provide an overview of the salient ethical issues raised by the new digital media, especially with respect to young people. We are motivated in our project by our concerns about the prevalence of ideologically-driven (as opposed to empirically-based) accounts of youth's online activities. Therefore we wish to provide a balanced account that counters both disempowering skepticism of the new media and its opposite—uncritical celebration or “digital faith” (Green & Hannon, 2007). In writing this paper, we have three further goals: 1) to stimulate conversations with informed readers, scholars, and other critical thinkers about digital media; 2) to establish a research agenda to help confirm, reject, or revise the understandings and hypotheses laid out here; 3) to provide hints about the kinds of supports needed (i.e., the key ingredients for successful outreach efforts) so that young people can reflect on the ethical implications of their online activities and ultimately engage in ‘good play.’

II. THE ‘GOOD PLAY’ APPROACH

Our understanding of what constitutes an ethical issue is deliberately broad, extending from respect/disrespect to morality/immorality, from individual behavior to role-fulfillment, and from the positive (civic engagement) to the negative (deception and plagiarism). In setting out to explore young people's activities in the new media, voluntary leisure time activities or ‘play’ are foremost in our analysis, although ‘work’ activities (such as schoolwork, research, and job seeking) are also carried out

online by youth. As in the physical world, play in the new media includes gaming; we also include activities such as instant messaging, social networking on Facebook and MySpace, participation in fan fiction groups, blogging, and content creation including video sharing through sites such as YouTube. Many of these leisure-time activities are arguably in a 'grey area' between work and play; for example, blogging can be instrumental, goal-directed, and sometimes constitute training for, and lead directly into, paid work. Our conception of 'play' encompasses such activities because, at the very least, they often start out as hobbies undertaken in informal, "third spaces," absent supports, rewards, and constraints of (adult) supervisors, teachers, and lacking explicit standards of conduct and quality. Much of our attention in this paper is focused on these 'play-work' spectrum activities and less so on unambiguous games. In labeling such activities 'play,' we by no means suggest that they are inconsequential or low-stakes; rather, we do so to highlight the nature of the contexts in which they are carried out and the varied purposes participants bring to them.

We come to this effort after 10 years researching 'good work'—work that is excellent in quality, meaningful to its practitioners, and ethical (Gardner, Csikszentmihalyi, & Damon, 2001). Among many relevant findings from this research is the discovery that good and bad work are much easier to define and determine in professions with explicit missions, goals, and values around which key stakeholders are aligned. For example, it is relatively easy to detect when a physician is adhering to medicine's codes of conduct and mission because they are explicit, as are the outcomes of violations (e.g., high rates of patient mortality). It is more difficult to delineate good work in business or in the arts, because these are relatively unregulated spheres of work; and journalism lies somewhere in between a bona fide profession and an unlicensed, unregulated sphere of work.

The ethics of play may be even more difficult to discern because (depending on the activity) participants need not be expected to come to it with consensual goals and values. Play can be experienced by players as "utterly absorbing," yet at the same time perceived as low stakes—"a free activity standing quite consciously outside 'ordinary' life" and, by implication, "outside morals" (Huizinga, 1955). At the same time, play needs to be taken seriously because it expresses important cultural mores. As Geertz (1972) so convincingly argued, play (particularly "deep play") emerges from and serves as a "metasocial commentary" on the culture in which it occurs. At the same time, some players have much greater appreciation of the 'make believe' and 'meta-cognitive' aspects of play (Bateson, 1972). While all aspects of play do not harbor ethical implications, many do and greater awareness of the ethical potentials is surely warranted.

Play in the new digital media is fraught with different (and perhaps greater) ethical potentials and perils than offline play because participants can be anonymous or assume a fictional identity, and can easily exit voluntary communities, games, and cyberworlds whenever they please; in short, accountability

may be rare. At the same time, online play is carried out in a digital public, before a vast and unknowable audience, so that a young person's YouTube mash-up can in short order go from a fun after-school activity to the object of ridicule or, more positively, a spark for serious political deliberation around the world. Because so much online activity is proactive or constructionist—involving content creation and sharing, or simply crafting online identities through profiles (Floridi & Sanders, 2005)—a significant onus is placed on the creator to consider the broad implications of his/her actions. Moreover, although conscious perpetrators and clear-cut victims of misconduct surely exist at play, unintentional lapses may in fact be more commonplace. For example, Aleksey Vayner, described in our opening vignette, surely never imagined that his video resume would be scrutinized and mocked by a vast public. In short, well-intentioned acts may result in significant, unintended harms; therefore, clear-cut perpetrators and victims may not easily be discerned. Understanding the ethics of play is thus more urgent yet may be more difficult than studying the ethical facets of good work. To guide our effort, we rely on the following conceptual anchors:

Respect and ethics: While our principal focus is ethics, our discussion also considers its close ally, respect; the distinction between the two concepts is thus worth noting. As we define it, **respect involves openness to difference and tolerance of others, civility toward them, whether or not they are personally known. The respectful person gives others the benefit of the doubt.** Respect or disrespect can be observed by and directed toward very young children and will soon be recognized as such. In contrast, ethics presupposes the capacity for thinking in abstract, even disinterested terms about the implications of a given course of action for one's self, group, profession, community, nation, and world. For example, "I am a reporter—what are my rights and responsibilities?" or "I am a citizen of Boston—what are my rights and responsibilities?" Ethical conduct is tightly aligned with the responsibilities to and for others that are attached to one's role(s) in a given context.

Roles and responsibilities: At the heart of ethics is responsibility to others with whom one interacts through various roles including student, athlete, worker, professional, community resident, citizen, parent, friend, etc. Such roles can be transposed to new media activities where youth are game players (akin to the athlete or team member role); online community members (citizens); bloggers (writers or citizen journalists); and social networkers (friends). (See Appendix A for a detailed overview of the range of roles young people are assuming online). Regardless of the context (offline/online, social/work), **ethics are part and parcel to one's membership in a group, the role(s) one assumes, and the responsibilities stated or implied therein.**

Emic and etic: This distinction, taken from anthropology and linguistics, allows us to distinguish between an individual's phenomenological experience, on the one hand, and the ways in which her words and actions are interpreted by a trained observer. **Youth may not have an emic (internal) awareness of**

themselves as playing out various roles, offline and online. However, from an etic (external) perspective, they are assuming roles as students, employees at work, and children to their parents; such roles carry implicit, if not explicit, responsibilities. Accordingly, online conduct can have broad consequences that are not easily grasped by—and are particularly not transparent to—young people who blog, post photos and videos on MySpace and YouTube, and interact with known or unknown others in Second Life.

Good Play: Accordingly, we define ‘good play’ as online conduct that is both meaningful and engaging to the participant while being responsible to others in the community and society in which it is carried out. In what follows, we consider how and why identity, privacy, ownership and authorship, credibility, and participation might be managed in responsible or irresponsible ways by youth in online contexts. Again, definitions of responsible or ethical conduct in online spaces may differ markedly from offline definitions. In our account, we consider the new digital media, with all their affordances and participatory potentials, as a “playground” in which the following factors contribute to the likelihood of ‘good play’: 1) the technical and new media literacies possessed by a young person and the digital technologies at her disposal; 2) cognitive and moral person-centered factors, including the developmental capacities, beliefs, and values held by the person; 3) the peer cultures, both online and offline, surrounding her; and 4) the presence or absence of ethical supports, including (adult or peer) mentors, educational curricula, and explicit or implicit codes of conduct in digital spaces.

Our neologism ‘good play’ is meant to highlight that our approach to ethics is not limited to the study of transgressions and the ‘bad apples’ who commit them. It is just as important, if not more so, to understand why, how, and where ‘good’ play happens—and its unique expressions online. Thus we delineate both perils and promises in the new media. Like new media literacy advocates (Buckingham, 2003; Jenkins, 2006a, 2006b; Jenkins et al., 2006; Livingstone, 2002), we wish to move beyond naive optimism/pessimism and to encourage critical reflection on the new media and the considerable variation in the purposes and values young people bring to their online activities.

In the analysis that follows, we explore the ethical implications—both positive and negative—of the various activities in the new media in which young people in particular are engaged. We draw on evidence from over 30 interviews with informants, including academic experts, industry representatives, educators incorporating the new media into their curricula, and youth who are especially engaged in some aspect of the new media. Interviews were approximately one hour in length, semi-structured, and partially tailored to each informant’s specific area of expertise. Questions focused on the broad opportunities and challenges of the new media, youth trends in online participation (both positive and negative), and specific ethical dilemmas that have come up in each informant’s teaching, research, new media work, and/or online participation (see Appendix B for standard interview protocols). We also draw

on the growing literature on games, social networking sites, blogs, knowledge communities, and civic engagement in cyberspace, as well as long-standing research and theory about youth, media, and culture.

Several limitations in the nature of evidence we draw upon are worth noting. First, our data are derived largely from an ‘adult’ perspective—relying heavily on adult informants and scholarship. Second, the handful of youth informants with whom we spoke are highly engaged with the new media, often assuming leadership roles in online communities, games, and blogs; for these reasons, their perspectives may not be representative of the average young person.

Digital Youth

The headlines with which we began this paper touch on the ethical issues that surface online but also refer to typical online pursuits of “digital natives” (Prensky, 2001)—people who have grown up around and who regularly engage with new media. As the Berkman Center’s Digital Natives Project aptly points out, not all youth are “digital natives,” nor are all “digital natives” young people (Digital Natives, 2007). Yet our attention here is to that intersection of youth and digital fluency. We believe that the promises and perils of the new media are especially salient for those young people who possess digital skills, spend considerable amounts of time online, and are assuming new kinds of roles there. These young people may be best prepared to use new media for good but may also be the most likely perpetrators and/or victims of ethical lapses. Our interviews with informants suggest that young people in particular are often genuinely confused by the power of new technologies—that they can so easily do things (like download music and copy/paste images, text, and software) that are technically illegal and may be ethically questionable. Because of their technical skills, a leader of a digital youth group calls young people today “babies with superpowers”—they can do so much but they don't necessarily understand what their actions mean and what effects those actions can bring. Indeed, psychological research on moral development suggests that capacities for moral decision-making and action evolve over time and are affected by social contexts and experiences (Kohlberg, 1981; Turiel, 2006). At the same time, most research on moral development focuses on individual decisions with reference to other persons in their world—there is much less known about the evolution of moral/ethical stances in more public spheres, like interactive media or in relations with institutions. As youth are participants in digital publics at ever-younger ages, questions about their developmental capacities seem particularly urgent. It is important to consider what we might expect of young people—at ages 14, at 18, and at 25—in terms of capacities for discerning the ethical stakes at play in the new digital media. It may be that traditional psychological frameworks of moral development need to be revised in light of the distinct properties of digital media and participation with them from early ages.

To start, we need to consider evidence regarding how young people conceive of the ethical responsibilities that accompany their new media play. Importantly, do young people hold distinct

conceptions of their responsibilities and of the key ethical issues at stake in their online pursuits? Indeed, many informants with whom we spoke claimed that digital youth are qualitatively different from older generations in an ethical sense. First, awareness of ethical implications of online conduct is reported to be generally low, although variation is acknowledged—as one researcher put it, youth range from “completely delusional” to “hyperaware” of the potential audiences. More generally, the young are purported to have distinct ethical stances on core issues such as identity, privacy, ownership/authorship, credibility, and participation. One educator also noted that young people frequently assume that all participants share the same ethical codes, regardless of the fact that ethics are rarely explicit online. In the account that follows, we draw on these impressions of the ethical stances of digital youth, asking how and why traditional stances on such issues might be challenged in digital contexts; at the same time, we treat them as hypotheses to be explored through further empirical research.

III. ETHICAL FAULT LINES in the NEW DIGITAL MEDIA

Are youth redefining identity, privacy, ownership, credibility, & participation as they engage with the new digital media? If so, how, why, and with what consequences? Drawing on insights from interviews and relevant literatures, we address these five issues in turn below. For each issue, we first present a fictionalized vignette that highlights the key ethical fault lines we believe to be at play; we then compare traditional (offline) conceptions of each issue with evidence of new (online) conceptions of the issue; finally, we explore the distinct promises and perils of online conceptions.

The order in which we address these five issues is deliberate—we begin with the self and then move outwards to the self’s relationships with objects, then other persons, then the broader society. Consequently, we first explore identity (the ego itself—how it is represented and managed online); followed by privacy (ego’s disclosure of personal information in the ‘digital public’); ownership and authorship (ego’s relation to objects including intellectual property); credibility (ego’s trustworthiness and extension of trust to others online); and participation (ego’s social relations, conduct, and membership in broader communities).²

1. IDENTITY

Identity Play on MySpace

² This ordering is not meant to suggest that the starting point—the self—is autonomous, free of social influences, or effects. Rather, we begin our analysis with the issue that, on its face, may not appear to have direct ethical implications. Identity formation is *primarily* directed to and concerned with oneself. Yet the ways in which an individual experiments with and represents her identity online can carry ethical weight—i.e., have distinct effects on others. Moreover, we show that identity play can set the stage for (or overlap with) more clear-cut and direct other-oriented (ethically-loaded) conduct related to the issues of privacy, ownership and authorship, credibility, and participation.

Zoe is a 16 year-old high school honors student who is somewhat shy but has a close circle of good friends. Like many teens, Zoe has a MySpace page. When she first joined MySpace, her somewhat strict parents expressed concerns, having heard stories in the press about adult predators and indiscriminate conduct by youth on the site. After some debate, Zoe convinced them to allow her to remain on MySpace but had to grant them access to her page. After a few months, this arrangement began to feel stifling and so, unbeknownst to her parents, Zoe decides to create a second MySpace identity named Zee, age 18.

Zoe uses her Zee page to write more openly about her feelings and experiences and to explore alternative identities. In designing her Zee profile, Zoe decides to post pictures not of herself but of a longtime friend from camp whom she considers to be more attractive and older looking than she is. After all, she figures, her Zee profile is more of a play space and the odds of her friend finding out are slim, especially because they are in touch only rarely. Zee makes a number of new, online friends, including Dominick, whose profile states he is 20-years old and lives in a nearby town. Zoe begins an online relationship with Dominick in which, as Zee, she performs a more flirtatious identity. She finds her interactions with Dominick thrilling and enjoys the opportunity to perform a more assertive identity. After several weeks of flirtation, Dominick proposes that they meet up offline. Zoe is flattered but perplexed—how will he react when he meets her and learns that the photos on her page are not of herself?

Questions raised: How can online self-expression and exploration play a positive role in a young person's identity formation? Under what circumstances does identity play become deception? What do young people stand to gain when they deliberately and strategically perform their identities in a public space? What are the potential costs to both themselves and others?

Identity Play, Offline and Online

Theorists of human development have described identity formation as the major task of adolescence, at least in modern Western societies (Erikson, 1968). During this period in their lives, individuals begin to reconsider their conceptions of themselves as they become increasingly aware of the broader society, including its values, norms, and expectations. Psychologists have identified exploration as the key mechanism through which adolescents can try on different identities and experience how they are received by society (Moshman, 2005; Schwartz, 2001). Erikson (1980) thus described adolescence as a “psychosocial moratorium,” a “time out” that allows youth to experiment freely with their identities in a low-stakes environment. Ideally, this experimentation results in an identity that makes sense to both the individual *and to society*. As Erikson notes, identity formation “is dependent on the process by which a *society* (often through subsocieties) *identifies the young individual*,” a process which begins in adolescence but recurs throughout an individual’s lifetime (1980: 122). The social nature of identity is further underscored by symbolic interactionists who argue that the self develops and is continually enacted and reshaped in a social context (Cooley, 1902; Goffman, 1959; Mead, 1934). With respect to our purposes here then, identity formation is not just an individual project but a deeply social one that hinges on social validation, carries social consequences, and bears ethical promises and risks.

Identity exploration and formation are facilitated by self-expression, self-reflection, and feedback from others. Offline, young people explore their identities in a variety of ways. They may experiment with clothing and hairstyles; adopt the attitudes of music or other subcultures; or become involved in extracurricular activities that develop a talent, passion, or ideology. They can engage in self-reflection through solitary journaling and can elicit feedback in face-to-face interactions with friends, and known peers and adults. However, offline identity explorations are constrained in a number of ways. For instance, individuals cannot easily change the shape or size of their bodies. Youth are also limited by the opportunities and social roles made available to them. A boy will have difficulty trying on the role of dancer if there are no dance classes in his neighborhood, or if his family and friends believe that men should not be dancers. Similarly, a girl may feel she cannot reveal her assertive side if the adults in her life value female submissiveness. As these examples suggest, feedback from others is a critically important source of validation (or, in these cases, repudiation) of one's identity experiments. Offline, feedback is typically received from close relations, including friends, peers, and family, which can be limiting.

Not only are young people limited by the types of identities they can explore offline, the length of time and spaces available to them for exploration may also be disappearing. Adolescence today involves more pressures, related to schoolwork, extra-curricular activities, and college admissions, than it did when Erikson first described the adolescent moratorium, let alone when Hall (1904) first wrote about adolescence a century ago. According to Turkle (1999), the moratorium is being cut short by the high-stakes pressures facing today's youth. It seems that adolescents have decreasing amounts of time and space to explore their identities.

At the same time, the new media are providing adolescents with new spaces for identity exploration. Indeed, Turkle (1999) has described the Internet as a fertile space for youth to undertake Erikson's psychosocial moratorium. Freed from the physical, social, and economic constraints of "real-life," she argues, individuals can experiment with multiple identities in an environment that is perceived to be "low-stakes." Turkle's pioneering book (1995) described how individuals engage in identity play on the Internet by adopting different names, writing styles, and personas for their digital "selves." More than a decade later, the number and types of digital spaces have only expanded, making it possible for many more forms of self-expression and spaces for self-reflection to emerge. Young people can thus elicit feedback on their identity experiments from broader, more diverse audiences than they can offline. Although opportunities to adopt radically different identities exist in many online spaces, researchers are finding that youth's online self-expressions tend to reflect aspects of their offline selves (Huffaker, 2006; Valentine & Holloway, 2002). Youth use their MySpace pages, Facebook profiles, and blogs to express their values and cultural tastes, sexual identities, their personalities, and feelings about their relationships

and experiences. These online expressions are necessarily more deliberate than offline ones—as boyd (2007) points out, online, youth have to write themselves into being.

The very real developmental task of identity formation is increasingly happening in virtual spaces. It is therefore critical to consider the implications of these new social contexts for the kinds of identities explored and formed, and, importantly, their impacts on others. Again, while identity formation is undertaken by individuals, it both affects and is affected by relationships with others, pushing it squarely into ethical terrain. Also, actions to the self can be considered ethical or unethical if the self is understood as a role that one assumes. In this section (and in the privacy section below), we consider identity play’s ethical promises and perils with respect to the self and mainly interpersonal relationships. In the sections that follow, identity play resurfaces as we consider broader opportunities and risks online, such as those related to ownership and authorship, credibility, and participation in communities.

Promises of Virtual Identity Play

Virtual identity play can aid the identity formation process by providing new tools and diverse spaces for self-expression, self-reflection, and feedback from others. First, online spaces offer multiple avenues for self-expression and creativity, or identity play. Zoe can customize her MySpace page by choosing certain colors, design motifs, and music; posting pictures, poetry, and song lyrics; and making lists of her favorite bands, movies, and books. On her Zee page and blog, Zoe might express her feelings and aspects of her personality, such as assertiveness, candor, and sexuality that her shyness prevents her from conveying to others in the physical world. Indeed, her expressions and the ways she interacts with others may be more authentic representations of Zoe's self or, at the very least, of a "possible self" that Zoe is consciously forming and aspires to achieve in the real world (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Because the stakes are perceived to be low, online spaces can be treated as “safe” places to explore identities, work through personal issues, or even "act out" unresolved conflicts with others (Bradley, 2005; Turkle, 2004). If she so desired, Zoe could extend her identity experimentation further by constructing an avatar in Second Life and exploring sexual flirtations with women in a more anonymous way. Such opportunities to “take the role of the other” (Mead, 1934) can engender greater appreciation for the perspectives of others, possibly increasing social tolerance and mutual respect. This ability to place oneself in another’s shoes is a prerequisite for ethical thinking and conduct.

Second, the need to write one's online identity into existence (boyd, 2007) can encourage self-reflection. Reflection, in turn, can nurture greater awareness of one’s roles and responsibilities to oneself, to others, and to one’s community. In order to reconcile one's childhood roles with the roles made available and valued by society, an individual must engage in a certain amount of self-reflection. Stern (2007) suggests that the deliberate nature of online self re-presentations facilitates identity formation by forcing individuals to articulate who they are now, who they want to become, and what beliefs and values

guide them in their personal growth. At the most concrete level, Zoe defines her online self through the pictures she posts, the lists of favorite bands, movies, and books she creates, and the personal information that she chooses to share, such as her name, age, and geographic location. On a more abstract level, Zoe has the opportunity, through her blog entries, to reflect on how her daily experiences and interactions relate to each other and on the meaning that they hold for her and for others. Through her identity experimentation, Zoe may be pushed to consider consciously the kinds of responsibilities implied by enacting a given identity, and whether an identity is aligned with her responsibilities to her self, including her beliefs and values and the person she aspires to become. Moreover, Zoe may also consider whether her expressions align with the expectations of others (including her parents and online friends such as Dominick) and her responsibilities to them. Self-reflection is an important personal skill that facilitates broader social and ethical skills; in turn, such skills can help engender credibility and socially responsible participation as we discuss in separate sections below.

Finally, online spaces provide youth with unique and important opportunities to gain validating feedback from others. Human development occurs in a social context, and is aided by feedback. Feedback helps individuals reconcile their self-conceptions with society's appraisals of them. Stern (2007) describes the value to adolescents of the feedback they receive online; she observes that online spaces offer adolescents an opportunity for their voices to be heard, an opportunity that is rarer offline. Moreover, youth can test and receive feedback on different versions of themselves, such as their sexuality or unexplored aspects of their personality. If the feedback they receive is positive, they may feel more confident integrating these versions into their offline identities. If the feedback is negative, they have the chance to revise their identities as many times as they wish without embarrassment or disgrace offline—provided their online experiments are undetected by others. In Zoe's case, she gained confidence from the positive feedback she received when she adopted a more assertive and flirtatious identity on her MySpace page. Moreover, as their own selves are validated, youth may be better poised to extend themselves to and validate others. In other words, social validation, which is increasingly attained online, may prevent youth from social alienation and disaffection, and from perpetrating related social harms ranging from bullying to hate speech to violence.

Perils of Virtual Identity Play

While identity play through the NDM can surely be beneficial, the forms of self-expression, self-reflection, and feedback conducted online may serve to undermine, rather than enhance, an individual's identity formation. Failing to develop a coherent, autonomous sense of self, a young person is evading an important obligation to herself. Consequently, she may struggle in myriad ways and, in turn, be incapable of assuming important social roles and fulfilling responsibilities. After all, as noted before, identity formation is a social process—its successes and failures affect others, and sometimes in negative ways.

Social harms can result when identity experimentation crosses over to deception and when explicitly harmful identities are explored. Additional perils to the self, and more indirect harms to others, arise when youth's identities become deeply fragmented, when self-reflection is overshadowed by self-promotion, or when youth become overly dependent on feedback from others. Our focus here is mainly on the self and known others, yet it is important to note that identity lapses can have broader consequences online, at times harming more numerous, unknown, and distant others (Silverstone, 2007).

With respect to relationships with others, identity play can easily cross over to deception. Online friends and strangers alike can be easily misled about the nature of a person's identity offline. Even in contexts such as Second Life where identity experimentation is expected and promoted, avatars can develop online relationships and mislead others about characteristics of their offline selves (their sex, age, sexuality, etc.). The extent to which such information is deceptive or merely part of the 'play' depends on the expectations of the individuals involved—expectations which may only rarely be explicit. When Zoe began on online flirtation with Dominick, she never expected that the relationship would have an offline dimension; as a consequence, she didn't feel compelled to make explicit that Zee's photos were part of the 'play' and not of her true self. In certain cases, offline friends who are privy to a young person's online life can become concerned and confused by a growing disjuncture between online and offline personas. For example, morose poetry or song lyrics posted on a young person's MySpace page can at best signal real underlying struggles on the part of a young person and an earnest attempt to reach out to others. At worst, a LiveJournal blog can be a deceptive performance aimed at garnering attention, as in the recent rash of fake deaths concocted by troubled youth online (Swains, 2007).

Related to this, spaces such as Second Life and massively multiplayer online role playing games (MMORPGs) may permit youth to explore harmful identities, such as rapist, murderer, or misogynist. To be sure, the potential real-world effects, for the perpetrator, of engaging in online rape and hate speech are contested (Anderson et al., 2004; Gentile, Linder & Walsh, 2004; Lynn, 2007). At the same time, virtual acts can create feelings of intimidation and fear even offline for victims of such acts (as evidenced by blogger Kathy Sierra's experience) yet little consensus exists among adults about what is appropriate decorum (Pilkington, 2007). There is evidence that many online communities, such as fan cultures, have entrenched codes of ethics supported by strong ties between participants (Jenkins, 2006a). However, to newcomers to these communities and numerous other online spaces, the proper limits of identity play may be less clear, making young people particularly vulnerable to unintentional lapses and victimization.

As noted, evidence collected to date suggests that most young people's online identities are reflective of key elements of their offline identities (Huffaker, 2006; Valentine & Holloway, 2002). However, concerns have been raised about those youth who do experiment with radically different identities (Glass, 1993; Turkle, 1995). Turkle notes that "without any principle of coherence, the self

spins in all directions. Multiplicity is not viable if it means shifting among personalities that cannot communicate” (1995: 58). Placing this risk in the context of our vignette, over time, Zoe’s Zee MySpace identity could become increasingly unrelated to her offline self. At school, Zoe may persist as a somewhat shy, but easygoing and friendly person. Online, Zoe may feel freer to express more assertive and sexual aspects of herself, but she may feel increasingly frustrated if she can’t somehow connect her online and offline selves, believing that she is shy Zoe, and not assertive Zee, rather than both. According to Erikson (1968), the ultimate goal of an adolescent’s identity explorations is a coherent, unitary sense of self, not a series of fragmented identities. At the same time, the long-term effects of this kind of identity play are unclear. It seems important to explore the extent to which virtual worlds facilitate positive exploration versus pose obstacles to establishing a healthy sense of self (Buckingham, 2007). Ultimately, Erikson’s conception of a healthy self may need to be reconsidered in light of new opportunities for identity development afforded by the NDM.

Another possible peril lies in the performative quality of online identity play. The self-reflection that digital spaces afford can be undermined when presenting to an audience becomes more valued and urgent than turning inward to engage in self-examination. Goffman (1959) used the metaphor of a theater to describe the ways in which people relate to one another as actors in a staged play. It may be that the performative element of self-presentation is magnified online; for example, Stern (2007) found that the teens she interviewed constructed their personal home pages and blogs in a deliberate and strategic way. Using cultural artifacts, they carefully crafted their online identities with an eye towards attracting and entertaining a public audience. They omitted the parts of themselves that did not fit their desired performance and augmented those parts that did. Zoe’s Zee page can be viewed in a similar manner; through the selection of certain photos (in this case, not her own), colors, and music, she is presenting a specific identity to her online audience. Her performance may be personally meaningful, but it is nevertheless directed outward and largely shaped by external cultural symbols. It seems reasonable to question the degree to which one can engage in deep and genuine self-reflection while spending so much energy performing a specific self to others. The performance also risks becoming more important than the truth—a blogger who chronicles his sexual exploits can exaggerate for the sake of creating a compelling story and insodoing might depict friends, peers, colleagues, and others in a negative light, which raises privacy issues, as we address below.

Finally, while online spaces allow adolescents’ ideas, self-expressions, and even confessions to be shared with others, distinct perils can surface with regard to the feedback they seek and receive. More specifically, opportunities for disclosure can set the stage for an overreliance on feedback which can undercut autonomy and create fragile identities. The recent case of Megan Meier, a 13 year old girl who committed suicide after an online ‘friend’ began to taunt her, is an extreme example of this peril. Turkle

(forthcoming) uses the term “tethering” to describe the nearly constant connectivity to others, and sharing of information that is permitted, indeed encouraged, in the digital media. Mobile technologies and ‘status’ modules on instant message programs and social networking sites are commonly used by young people to signal their current locations, activities, and even moods to their online networks. Feedback is encouraged and even expected from others. When young people are encouraged to maintain continuous connections with others, and express and reflect in a fully or semi-public space, the benefits of autonomous self-reflection—indeed, of “being alone”—come to be undervalued. Young people may be developing an unhealthy reliance on feedback from others as a basis for self-development and limiting their capacity for autonomous decision-making (Moser, 2007; Zaslow, 2007). In turn, a strong desire for positive feedback and praise from others might interfere with a young person’s capacity for reflecting in an abstract, *disinterested* way about the ethical implications of his/her conduct.

The Ethics of Online Identities

Virtual identity play may provide youth with unique opportunities to develop healthy identities, but this outcome is by no means guaranteed. Under the best of circumstances, young people are able to express different aspects of themselves in a supportive environment; engage in self-reflection; and elicit constructive feedback from others. However, the new media can also pose significant risks to a young person’s sense of self, including risks related to identity deception, opportunities to assume (or be victim of) harmful virtual identities, and developing an unhealthy reliance on feedback and connectivity to others. Further research is needed to uncover the conditions under which digital participation facilitates and detracts from the development of healthy, autonomous, and socially responsible identities.

2. PRIVACY

Privacy in the Blogosphere

Sofia is an 18 year-old freshman at a small college. She has been keeping a blog on LiveJournal for several years and continues blogging once she enters college as a way to keep her high school friends informed about the ups and downs of her new life at college. Plus, she finds that writing is a great way to think through problems in her life and to express her opinions in a free environment. The stresses of her pre-med courses, dorm life, and making new friends are consistent themes of Sofia’s blog at college, but she also writes about her dating and intimate experiences. Some aspects of her posts are fictionalized, but Sofia has fun writing and judging by the comments her friends leave on her blog, they seem to enjoy her narratives. She only tells a couple of close friends at college about her blog and is careful to disguise the identities of her crushes, hook-ups and dates. Although she does refer to the college she attends by name, she writes under a pseudonym and doesn’t give too many details that would clearly identify her as the author. Even if a few random people happen across her blog, she reflects, they probably wouldn’t be able to figure out her real identity.

A local journalist writing a story on blogging searches LiveJournal for college students in the area who actively maintain blogs. Her search uncovers Sofia’s blog and because it is in the public domain, the journalist feels free to write about its content. After her story appears in the

local newspaper, Sofia is surprised to find that students all over campus start reading and commenting on her blog. Eventually, a few people are able to piece together details from her posts and expose Sofia as the author of the blog. Some of her past romantic partners express anger and frustration because comments from Sofia's friends on the blog reveal their identities. Sofia feels blind-sided by this turn of events and never would have imagined that a broader public would be privy to her most intimate thoughts and experiences.

Questions raised: What does it mean to manage privacy in an ethical manner online? How do online spaces facilitate vs. detract from ethical thinking about privacy? How much personal information is reasonable to share online? Are young people who share online taking steps to protect their own and others' identities, and are these steps sufficient? Is it reasonable for a young person to expect a certain measure of privacy when it comes to their online lives? Who is at fault when an unintended audience becomes privy to a young person's revealing blog or MySpace page? What might be the long-term consequences offline?

Privacy, Offline and Online

Privacy refers to how one's own personal data and information about others are handled in social contexts, particularly more public settings. Offline, privacy is understood as retention or concealment of personal information and, at least in the US, is framed as an entitlement. The 'private' is that which is shared only with close, trusted, face-to-face relations. The 'right to privacy' is frequently invoked to protect sensitive information, such as an individual's finances, medical history, and intimate relations, from public view. Privacy laws in the US, as originally conceived in the late 19th century, largely reflect a desire to protect individuals from exposure to the public through the press and from unwarranted search and surveillance by the state. The right to be 'left alone' and of the individual to maintain freedom from authoritative institutions are the main concerns of current legal statutes dealing with privacy offline (Woo, 2006).

The new digital media allow personal information to be shared with a broad public and are consequently making privacy issues more salient and at the same time altering conventional understandings of privacy. To be sure, non-intervention by institutions is still a concern, and one that is perhaps heightened by the new media. Yet distinct properties of the Internet bear on privacy in new ways. boyd (2007) identifies four such properties, including persistence (what you post persists indefinitely); searchability (you can search for anyone and find their digital "body,"); replicability (you can copy and paste information from one context to another); and invisible audiences (you can never be sure who your audience is). Despite these features, young people in particular are sharing deeply personal information with one another on sites such as MySpace, LiveJournal, and Facebook, much of which are publicly accessible through search engines.

The sharing that is happening in these spaces does not necessarily suggest that youth do not value their own privacy or respect others'; rather, it suggests that privacy is being understood quite differently. To many young participants, privacy is not about hiding personal information but rather carefully

managing its disclosure—what is shared, how it is presented, and who can access it (Woo, 2006). Online, young people are arguably creating a ‘culture of disclosure,’ meaning a distinct set of beliefs, norms, and practices related to their online profiles and lives. This culture legitimates and guides young people’s disclosure of personal information for their intended audiences of ‘friends’ and peers. For example, on sites such as LiveJournal and MySpace, a young person carefully chooses which personal details to disclose and how public to make this information. Choices may be based on the norms of the space (gleaned through studying the disclosing patterns of their peers), her goals within it (to meet new friends, communicate with offline friends, form a fan group, etc.), and beliefs (naïve or realistic) about her potential audience.

Online, a number of strategies can be—and (to varying extents) are—used by youth to control the presentation of their identities and thereby manage their privacy, including privacy settings, selective disclosure, code switching, and deception. Most social networking sites have settings that allow users to limit access to their profiles to a narrow audience of confirmed ‘friends’ and evidence suggests that many young people use them. According to a recent Pew survey, 66% of teen social networking site participants report restricting access to their profiles in some way (Lenhart & Madden, 2007). Participants can also use selective disclosure—filling out only a portion of the fields provided by the site to indicate their personal information, often omitting details like last name, city of residence, etc. One social networking profile might be used to interact with friends and another less detailed or partly fictitious profile to interact with strangers; an educator with whom we spoke called this practice “code switching” and noted that it provides a sense of control, allowing for the presentation of different identities in different contexts. Finally, deception is a widely used practice for enhancing online privacy. According to Pew, among teens whose profiles are public, 46% say they give at least some false information (Lenhart & Madden, 2007). Taken together, these privacy strategies can produce either multiple identities or one “fragmented identity,” both of which can preserve a sense of privacy while still allowing for disclosure and participation.

The prevalence of privacy strategies suggests that, **online, privacy is being consciously managed by many young people. But this is only part of the story; other evidence suggests that some youth (and adults, for that matter) elect not to—or simply fail to—use protectionist strategies.** Pew reports that, even while Internet users are becoming more aware of their “digital footprints,” surprisingly few of them use strategies to limit access to their information (Madden et al., 2007). This ‘laissez faire’ approach to disclosure can be interpreted in a number of ways, ranging from utter carelessness to a more conscious (though fragile) set of assumptions and norms about one’s audience. It has been suggested that in imagining their audiences, many young people (perhaps naively or egocentrically) assume that only invited ‘friends’ will read their profiles or blogs and that the uninvited (parents, teachers, etc.) respect

their privacy, and will treat their online expressions as if they were ‘off limits,’ as a hand-written journal would be (boyd, 2007; Weber, 2006). As Weber (2006) asserts, to youth, “public is the new private: young people often realize that their blogs and homepages are public and accessible, but they trust that only their peers are interested enough to view them. Adults are supposed to know where they are not welcome and act accordingly.” Normative codes among youth participants may also contribute to lack of use of privacy strategies—for example, the belief that information shared among participants in one online context should not be copied and posted without permission into another context. In our vignette, Sofia assumed that the small circle of friends who knew about her blog would not refer to it or paste content from it on their Facebook pages. **The conception of privacy here shifts the responsibility for ethical management of personal information away from the young person to her audience, the scale of which, whether acknowledged or not, is inherently unknowable.**

Promises of Online Privacy

The youth ‘culture of disclosure’ that is emerging online contains important promises for young people, including empowerment of themselves and others; creation of communities of support around shared struggles; and the development of a broader, ethical sense of responsibility with respect to privacy.

As noted in our treatment of identity above, online communities are fertile spaces for identity development because they encourage self-expression, self-reflection, and feedback. Most relevant to privacy is how disclosure can be carried out (partially or fully) anonymously online and yield positive and comforting, even empowering, feedback. **Young people can feel empowered by the ability to tell their stories and reflect on struggles in their lives online through blogs, Facebook, and virtual worlds.** Sofia found her voice as a writer through her blog and gained insights into her self and relationships with others through writing about them; positive feedback from her readers lent her confidence and encouraged her to continue to write. Sofia’s blogging could open future doors for her in journalism or fiction writing. Furthermore, Sofia’s reflections could provide inspiration to empower other young women to express themselves and their sexualities, especially women in restrictive situations (e.g., teen girls with strict families or at conservative schools). **Posting their stories and reflections in the digital public, young women may quite unintentionally be doing a kind of consciousness-raising akin to what second-wave feminists did through print books in the sixties.**

Disclosure of personal stories online can also yield support for troubled youth. Social networking sites such as MySpace and Facebook invite young people to reveal private aspects of themselves with strangers and build communities around common struggles. Young people struggling with sensitive issues can reach out to others anonymously to find support for personal problems they may fear disclosing face-to-face, forming support groups around issues such as coming out to one’s family, coping with shyness, and practicing self-injury (cutting). Practices that allow youth to present fragmented identities, such as

anonymous participation, code switching, and deception can help youth reach out and build communities of support while maintaining a sense of control over sensitive information. A teen's anonymous online journal about his struggles growing up in an alcoholic family could become an important source of comfort, support, and perhaps even action for other young people in comparable family situations. As another example, young people frequently make use of online communities to cope with tragedies, as was demonstrated by the countless online memorials about the Virginia Tech shootings.

A final promise of the online 'culture of disclosure' is that young people develop a genuine ethics of privacy that helps them present themselves and handle other people's information in a considerate and responsible way online. Many youth who take a laissez approach, electing to disclose more information online, hold a conception of privacy that at its heart assumes responsible conduct on the part of their audiences. **While such assumptions can be naïve and expose youth to significant risks, if consciously construed and made explicit, they could help endow youth with, and create online communities guided by, an ethics of responsibility.**



Perils of Online Privacy

Potential perils of the 'culture of disclosure' are numerous. Youth can harm themselves and others by failing to consider altogether the persistence, searchability, replicability of, and invisible audiences for, their personal data and the information they share about themselves online. Deception intended to protect oneself can also have unintended negative effects.

The fragile assumptions made by young people like Sofia about other participants in the blogosphere, and about audiences for their online identities, can create significant risks. Sofia's intended audience for her personal reflections was her close friends; she assumed that others who came across her blog would click the 'back' button out of respect for her privacy. This assumption was shattered by the attention she drew from a journalist whose article placed her, and the innocent people about whom she wrote, in an uncomfortable and potentially damaging position. Even while she took some measures to control her online identity, she was caught off guard and thrust into the public eye. Sofia's reputation as a friend, classmate, and responsible writer was damaged by a failure to consider fully the risks and responsibilities attendant to even semi-anonymous or selective disclosure in a digital public. Furthermore, Sophia's blog entries may have harmed her innocent subjects—the romantic partners and friends about whom she wrote—in unpredictable ways ranging from their reputations at school to their future opportunities beyond it.

Indeed, unwitting participants in the 'digital public' may be the most frequent victims of privacy lapses. boyd (2007) asserts that many young people develop MySpace and Facebook profiles for their offline friends as a way of populating their own 'friends' space on their profiles and thus indicating the extent of their offline popularity. Some young people are therefore yielding control over the creation of

their online identities to their friends, with little understanding of the broader, potentially negative consequences. A semi-fictionalized blog entry about a friend's predilection for shoplifting or, worse, a video from a party posted on YouTube can negatively affect another person's reputation and opportunities for the indefinite future if accessed by unintended viewers such as college admissions officers and potential employers. This risk of "collapsed context" (boyd & Heer, 2006) is of particular concern in the social networking environment. Even a non-incriminating photograph or video of a young athlete stretching before a track meet posted online can have unforeseen negative effects. This peril is exemplified by the recent case of an attractive high school student whose photograph, posted by a fan on a football message board, was discovered by a sports blogger with a wide audience who soon helped spread it across the Internet. Within days, the athlete was an innocent victim of ogling and harassment online; a YouTube video showing her at a track meet was viewed over 150,000 times (Saslow, 2007). This story suggests that a person's identity, reputation, and sense of safety in the world may be increasingly beyond her control as the new media permit rapid and widespread sharing of information. Above all—and per our focus on ethical considerations—the story also highlights the responsibilities young people have to one another to handle the personal information and content they disclose to each other online with tremendous care. Overall, the culture of disclosure only works if all potential audiences operate with the same ethical code regarding access and use of information available online.



The final privacy-related peril relates to deception. If done with the intention of protecting one's own privacy, online deception is largely viewed as proper and is even encouraged by many parents. In short, deception can be a safe way of participating online. The lack of face-to-face interaction makes deception easier online than in real life. Nevertheless, the line between benign and malicious deception can be difficult for young people to discern in mediated spaces where outcomes are not immediately clear. For example, pretending to be someone you are not online (an expert in a field, a potential friend or romantic partner, etc.) can be harmful to others, even if the harms are distant or invisible to the perpetrator (Silverstone 2007). Furthermore, as boyd (2007) has suggested, it is worth considering the broader message that is being conveyed to young people when they are encouraged to misrepresent themselves online, even for safety's sake. Decades ago, Bok (1979) argued that profound societal harms—such as the decline of pervasive trust—are associated with habits of lying. The great potentials of the Internet can hardly be realized if basic trust cannot be forged among participants.

Related to this, the unknowable "distance" between a young person's online identity and his/her audience is a perilous feature of the new digital media (Silverstone, 2007). Privacy strategies such as code switching and deception perpetuate the problem of unknowable social and geographic distance between online participants. What results, according to Silverstone, is a "polarization... The unfamiliar is either pushed to a point beyond strangeness, beyond humanity; or it is drawn so close as to become

indistinguishable from ourselves." (2007, p. 172) Both scenarios pose risks and set the stage for ethical misconduct. For example, the 'culture of disclosure' can cause young people to overshare and form potentially dangerous relationships with other users online, as in cases of teen-adult predator relationships. At the same time, anonymity and deception can reduce accountability in online spaces making online 'violence' possible, ranging from grieving to anonymous death threats as in the recent attacks on blogger Kathy Sierra.

The Ethics of Online Privacy

An emergent 'culture of disclosure' in the new digital media holds both risks and opportunities for young people. On the one hand, carefully managed and informed sharing can inspire and empower youth, build supportive communities for the troubled, and encourage an ethics of privacy in others. On the other hand, careless oversharing can have long-term negative effects on a young person and the friends about whom they write and whose online identities they co-create. Deception for safety's sake can also create confusion and pose risks. The promises of the 'digital public' can be realized and the perils avoided if young participants are conscientious, responsible participants who consider the broader implications of their self-presentations in light of the properties of persistence, searchability, replicability, and invisible audiences (boyd, 2007) that characterize the new media. Silverstone's concept of "proper distance" (2007) has implications here that might be useful. Proper distance emerges from the "search for enough knowledge and understanding of the other person or the other culture to enable responsibility and care...We need to be close, but not too close, distant but not too distant." (2007, p. 172) Part of this 'proper distance' is modulating the sharing of one's personal information—preserving a sense of individual privacy while maintaining openness to community. Future studies are needed to confirm or revise hypotheses about digital youth's mental models of privacy—we need to understand the extent to which their approaches are distinct from offline models, consciously formed, and considerate of the promises and risks of engagement in the digital public.

3. OWNERSHIP AND AUTHORSHIP

Authorship in Knowledge Communities

Daniel is a high school senior who has a long-standing interest in social movements and is an occasional contributor to articles on Wikipedia. For his American History course, he was asked to write a research paper about an American protest movement. Daniel decides to write about the May 1, 2006 immigration rallies. In his paper, he draws extensively from an entry about the rallies on Wikipedia to which he contributed a few months ago. After reading Daniel's paper, his teacher calls him into her office and accuses him of plagiarism, noting that he had used verbatim lines from Wikipedia without giving proper credit. Daniel replies that since he was a contributor to the Wikipedia article, his use did not constitute plagiarism. Even so, he argues, the passages he used were mainly historical supporting facts; the core of the paper is his unique analysis of the rallies' significance as a protest movement. Above all, the ethics of Wikipedia, Daniel asserts, is

to make knowledge available for widespread use. He hardly expects to be cited by others for his contributions; authorship is irrelevant.

Questions raised: What are the perils associated with the free flow of information online? What does authorship mean in knowledge communities like Wikipedia – and what constitutes ‘fair use’ of articles on the site? To whom should writers give credit when citing information from knowledge communities? More to the point, who is the victim when credit is not given? How might exposure to and participation in online knowledge communities be engendering a new ethics of authorship? On the whole, how are concepts of ownership changing in the new digital media?

Ownership and Authorship, Offline and Online

Offline, ownership and authorship are tied to the legal concept of property (intellectual or tangible), which bestows rightful ownership and exclusive intellectual property (IP) rights to an individual or organization for its work. In short, credit and profit are given to creators. In schools, plagiarism codes help guide students about fair use of offline copyrighted materials and citation styles. Most universities have strict anti-plagiarism and peer-to-peer (P2P) laws, but also retain constitutional and contractual rights to intellectual freedom and freedom of information (Putter, 2006). Offline, ownership and authorship are well-defined concepts, protected by law and reinforced by cultural norms in corporations and schools.

The stability of these concepts offline should not suggest that violations of fair authorship and ownership do not occur there. Our previous GoodWork data document that pressures to succeed, poor peer norms, and an absence of mentors contribute to transgressions, including plagiarism, offline (Fischman et al., 2004). According to a recent report from The Josephson Institute of Ethics (2006), 60% of high school-aged youth admit to having cheated on a school test, almost 30% to having stolen from a store, and 33% to having plagiarized from the Internet for an assignment, providing further evidence that participating in a "cheating culture" may be routine for many youth (Callahan, 2004). So even while authorship and ownership are well-protected, clearly defined legal concepts offline, lapses are still fairly commonplace.

For various reasons, online, ownership and authorship are less clear-cut. Technology, and the ease with which it can be manipulated through copy-paste functions, permits easy access to copyrighted material. Nearly anything can be easily obtained, for free or via purchase, on the Internet. With this widespread availability of free content, software, and files mixed with pay-for-use versions, the navigation of what is freely available and what is not can be confusing. This confusion may be accompanied by a naïve belief, on the part of younger users, that if something is downloadable, then it's everybody's property for free. Lenhart and Madden (2005) report that "teens who get music files online believe it's unrealistic to expect people to self-regulate and avoid free downloading and file-sharing altogether." At the same time, online applications, such as wikis and hosted documents, are making

authorship and ownership increasingly collaborative. As such, the distinctions between author and audience are blurred; comments on a blog impact the content of a blogger's entries, and a gamer's changes to a game's code are used by the company in next-generation versions. Finally, in contrast to offline legal restrictions, attempts to regulate online IP and copyright through Digital Rights Management and the Digital Millennium Copyright Act of 1998 have proven difficult to enforce.


These features of ownership and authorship in the new media surely influence ethical stances on these issues. Consequently, certain cultural norms and attitudes regarding online materials are evident, particularly among young people. Daniel's justification for his failure to cite Wikipedia in his paper suggests a shifting understanding of authorship. An educator with whom we spoke asserted that, thanks to the digital media, young people live in and embrace in an "infringing culture" where immediate access to information and goods is expected. **Considered in a more positive light, a new ethics of collaboration and sharing may be emergent.** Either way, implications for creators and lawful owners of music, video, images, and text are uncertain at best. What is clear is that past conceptions of ownership, authorship, and copyright are now contested, and are likely to be significantly revised or reinterpreted for the digital age.

Promises of Ownership and Authorship Online

While much attention is focused on transgressions, significant promises for young people stem from new conceptions of ownership and authorship emerging online. Increasing opportunities for co-creation (Jenkins, 2006b) and participation in "knowledge communities" (Pierre Lévy, 1999), along with the free flow of information, lend youth new skills which can empower them to become engaged citizens and successful workers.

The new digital media shift the traditional separation between—and roles and responsibilities of—audience and author, forging opportunities for co-creation which may be especially advantageous to youth. Co-creation of content can range from fan fiction writing in an online community to contributing new code to pre-existing commercial games. Opportunities for co-creation grew exponentially with the advent of Web 2.0. For example, one prominent youth blogger with whom we spoke noted how his readers became co-creating 'tipsters' regarding facts and stories. The virtual world Second Life has an open code model which allows users to build their own modifications to the world while retaining authorship and ownership benefits. **While co-creation can produce tensions regarding an author's obligation to his/her audience or a company's rights vis-a-vis its game, virtual world, or site, these practices also allow readers and players empowering opportunities to assume creator and contributor roles.**

Participation in co-creation can engender new skills and, along with them, a sense of efficacy and empowerment. On a more abstract level, Web 2.0 demystifies authorship and ownership for youth and invites them to see themselves as creators and active participants in something larger than themselves.



Gamers who create new levels in games or modify their avatars may be prompted to consider future careers they may not have thought possible, such as software engineering. Co-creation allows users to create their own dynamic works, moving beyond passive modes of entertainment to active engagement with texts. Would-be journalists can practice their narrative and editorial skills through blogging and posting comments on others' blogs, while aspiring filmmakers can post their serial mini-dramas on YouTube. Such experiences can be considered 'practice' for adopting professional producer roles in the future and can carry stakes that are commensurate to those that accompany 'professional' work. The stakes associated with co-creation in a digital public or in participatory cultures or other "affinity spaces" (Gee, 2004) online can push a young person to consider her role as a creator and the responsibilities implied therein.

A second promise of the new media with respect to authorship and ownership is open access to knowledge and information. Open source advocates argue the virtues of providing content and free information to the masses, inviting their contributions to production and design. The open source movement promotes the idea that sharing information may lead to higher quality creations, greater knowledge, and more efficient knowledge-building processes. Wired youth, in their roles as students and learners, are poised to be the main beneficiaries of this exciting democratization of knowledge. Young people "google" facts they hear on television, rely on Really Simple Syndication (RSS) readers or aggregators for the latest news and, like Daniel, find background information on Wikipedia for school assignments. With freedom of information, youth are exposed to vast resources for learning, rich experiences with intellectual exchange, and a sense of connectedness to knowledge as never before possible. Implications for their future roles as workers and citizens are stunning.

Freedom of information, if handled properly, can engender deep respect for the work of others. Use of Creative Commons licenses provides an excellent model for IP law online that both protects the creator and keeps quality work accessible to the public. If youth are taught to use these authorship and information paradigms, perhaps they will be more likely to share their works with the whole of the Internet community, spawning a virtuous cycle of authorship protection and freedom of information. Moreover, as information is freely available, there may be a democratizing effect, creating new opportunities for civic engagement for the individual and community. Daniel's role as a Wikipedia contributor could spark an interest in participating in protest movements offline, inspiring active adoption of his citizen role. To be sure, freedom of information and increased interactivity with texts destabilize traditional conceptions of authorship, ownership, and the roles of authors and audience. However, it is precisely this destabilization that lowers the barrier of participation for youth, generating more active and critically engaged young users who are empowered to act rather than just watch or react.

Like Daniel, young people can feel empowered when they contribute their expertise to knowledge communities. Some educators are experimenting with class assignments that ask students to actively contribute to Wikipedia (Students Assessed, 2007). On a concrete level, they can take away valuable skills such as teamwork. On a more abstract level, they stand to gain an appreciation of the importance of respect and ethics in collaboration. Moreover, personal responsibility can be cultivated through online knowledge communities where youth are expected to contribute meaningfully. Knowledge communities may actually serve as an antidote to plagiarism, some informants suggested, from simply providing "many eyes on the work" to increasing the awareness amongst students of their responsibilities to one another. Sharing school work-in-progress online, through class wikis for example, can help build students' skills in peer critique, knowledge building, and grasping the meaning of quality work.

While some might point to the benefits of anti-plagiarism communities such as Turnitin.com, knowledge communities' most important promise is not identifying 'bad play' but rather advancing 'good play' and learning. Co-creation and knowledge communities provide youth the opportunities to assume the roles of creators and collaborators and learn the responsibilities associated with these roles, while building valuable skills for their futures as workers and citizens.

Perils of Ownership and Authorship Online

The perils that can arise around ownership and authorship in the new media include exploitation of youth by corporate entities, abuse of information and content (as in illegal file sharing and downloading), and confusion about authorship distinctions in knowledge communities.

Youth's authorship and ownership claims can (and often do) go unacknowledged when they co-create online. For example, gamers and game companies have a symbiotic relationship and yet intellectual property rights lie with the companies. The case of hobbyist game modders, noted by Postigo (2003), casts a spotlight on the sometimes contested nature of ownership and authorship in the games space. Modders are gamers who 'hack' into game code and create new game play levels, elements of the virtual world, and other game play components for no monetary reward. While modders are infringing on the copyrighted materials of game companies, the companies benefit greatly from modder's free and innovative play-work: this activity produces extended game play, fan bases, and design ideas for new products while decreasing development time and labor costs. Yet most modders are denied authorship credentials, compensation, and ownership rights, and sometimes pejoratively labeled 'copyright infringers' or 'hackers.' This exploitation is not just limited to game modders— aspiring filmmakers', musicians', and writers' online creations can just as easily be misappropriated by corporate interests and other users, or through restrictive licensing agreements. As stated in the MySpace Terms of Service (2007), users who publish content thereby grant to MySpace a "limited license to use, modify, publicly perform, publicly display, reproduce, and distribute such Content solely on and through the MySpace

Services." Exploitation of young people's play-work may in turn lead them to have little regard for the integrity of their own and other's work, and to deny the responsibilities implied in co-creation.

A second ethical peril for youth is the temptation to abuse the free flow of information and content online. With regard to music, video, and other non-original content, copyright law dictates that materials cannot be widely distributed without purchase. Corporations representing musicians, for example, are working feverishly to manage rampant illegal downloading, as in the current RIAA legal battles with college students over illegal music downloads. **The prevalence of illegal downloading suggests that young people may be operating with a distinct implicit conception of ownership—that they are entitled to what they can easily access online.** As one educator we interviewed put it, young people perceive "no sense of scarcity" in the virtual world.

Setting aside the question of legality, it is important to consider where and when such appropriation is clearly unethical and where it is arguably appropriate, even ethical. Jenkins and Green (forthcoming) use the concept of "moral economy" from Thompson (1971) to capture the ways in which music downloaders and fans justify their appropriation and repurposing of content such as music, video, and text. The average young person (or older adult, for that matter) may be unlikely to perceive how her illegal downloading victimizes mammoth entertainment companies or celebrity entertainers. Indeed, one informant noted that youth often frame their illegal downloading or file sharing in Robin Hood-like terms, making reference to the concentration of wealth and power by large media companies and producers: "Artist X is already wealthy, therefore, my illegal download doesn't matter." Moreover, a recent survey of European youth reported that low levels of trust in entertainment companies may be an important factor contributing to piracy (Edelman, 2007). A different stance is often held by participants in fan communities; Jenkins and Green (forthcoming) suggest that fans' remixes of copyrighted content can actually increase the visibility, popularity, and success of the original content, yielding great benefits in the long run for media producers and owners. **In short, fans create more fans who, in turn, purchase original content.**


The conflicting stances of different stakeholder communities suggest that the ethics of music downloading and appropriation are far from clear-cut. In keeping with our conception of ethical conduct, consumers who are capable of thinking in abstract terms about their responsibilities to others, and not simply about their own interests, are engaging in ethical thinking. Are music downloaders and fans fully considering the perspectives of media producers and owners? In turn, are media producers and owners considering the stances of users? What then constitutes ethical conduct in this situation? While definitive answers to these questions are beyond the scope of this paper, it is clear that **the failure to forge consensus over these issues may be problematic for all stakeholders.** Further research is needed to shed fuller light on the beliefs and ideas held by youth—and adults—with respect to these issues.

Returning to young consumers and co-creators, while their downloading and appropriation might possibly represent an ethical (even if not legal) stance, one peril for users is that a sense of entitlement becomes a ‘habit of mind’ that is overextended to other contexts. In school work, appropriation without giving credit to original authors can constitute clear-cut academic dishonesty. The extent to which ethical ‘mental models’ regarding some forms of appropriation cross over to others is unknown but appears to be an important question for further research. Daniel's mental model regarding uses of Wikipedia is surely affected by his role as a contributor there, but may also stem from (and cross over to) experiences with other forms of media. As a contributor to Wikipedia, he holds certain beliefs about the knowledge that is built and shared on the site, and expectations about appropriate uses. Of course, Daniel’s standpoint might be at odds with that of other contributors, who may see Wikipedia as the product of dedicated work by individuals who deserve credit. If Daniel is also a hobbyist game modder in his spare time and feels exploited by commercial game owners, he might come to see the Internet as a free-for-all. In addition, Daniel might observe adults around him engaging in a range of ethically-questionable practices, such as software piracy, without an explicit or coherent justification. While online plagiarism, illegal downloading, and software piracy are widely discussed as youth transgressions, adult participants can add to the confusion. On the whole, it seems clear that young people may be deprived of opportunities for learning about the perspectives of different stakeholders and reflecting on the ethics of content appropriation.

Finally, in the realm of authorship, what happens to credit in an era of knowledge communities and collaborative work? **Some individual creators may want (and need) credit for the work they do both for personal pride, to demonstrate competence and achievement, and to make a living; others, like Daniel, may consider it irrelevant.** Conceptions of authorship, and responsibilities to authors, may be unclear to many youth users and participants in knowledge communities. As a Wikipedia contributor, Daniel felt a greater responsibility to the knowledge produced – and less concern with the need to give or collect credit. Yet traditional educational institutions may still operate on the ‘single author’ model and may not consider the extent to which knowledge communities are qualitatively different – with implications for citation norms and notions of ‘fair use.’ Teachers who maintain traditional notions of authorship and credit—and punish students for treating material from Wikipedia differently—may be missing opportunities to engage their students in a productive dialogue about evolving notions of authorship. As Davidson (2007) notes, **recent panics around Wikipedia, such as Middlebury History Department’s decision to ban its use, overlook the great opportunity such sites provide for teaching research methods, critical assessment, and learning processes.**



The Ethics of Ownership and Authorship Online



In an age of file sharing and knowledge communities, ownership and authorship become muddy issues. Young people, and indeed all new media users, are caught between old and new modes of authorship and ownership, in a state of confusion about what constitutes ethical use. The worst case scenario is that youth will embrace an overreaching sense of entitlement with respect to knowledge and other creations in digital circulation. In their future roles as workers, they may avoid teamwork for fear of not receiving due credit; they may be more apt to usurp their colleagues' products as their own. Conversely, the same youth could become tomorrow's innovators, pooling their skills, talents, and resources for the greater good. Crucial to these promising outcomes is fostering productive dialogue among teachers and students about ownership and authorship, and fair use, in a digital age. As conceptions of ownership and authorship, and the responsibilities implied therein, are destabilized, building consensus around new conceptions of these issues—or revising old conceptions for the digital age—are priorities for both youth and adults.

4. CREDIBILITY

Expertise and Credibility in Online Forums

Maya is a 24-year old receptionist at the local gym, where all employees receive basic training in CPR and first aid. Maya observes the trainers in the gym very closely and notes the kinds of workouts they suggest for their clients. She has been interested in fitness and health since an early age and keeps up on all the latest exercise and diet information by reading magazines and visiting GetTrim.com, a social networking site about healthy living, where experts and non-experts interact.

Maya notices that some participants on GetTrim.com report difficulties improving their health and feels sure that she could help. She posts that she is state certified and an expert in health and fitness and would like to share her knowledge with the community. A few users seek out Maya's advice on various exercise and nutrition matters and begin her suggested regimes. Within a few weeks, users are posting their positive results and encourage others to contact Maya. In a short period of time Maya is giving advice to many users on a wide range of issues.

Josh, who is one of the master trainers at the gym, decides to advertise his services as a personal trainer on gettrim.com. He notices that many users are talking about Maya's advice and he checks out her profile. To his surprise he discovers that she is the gym receptionist and claims to be a state certified expert. Josh confronts Maya in the online community forum about her lack of credentials. Maya does not respond to Josh's comments. Josh then makes a complaint to the site administrators who decide to close Maya's account due to a breach of the truthful representation rule. There ensues a heated exchange between Maya's satisfied 'clients' and other members of the community who are genuinely certified or just outraged by the deception.

Questions raised: What role do offline credentials play in online credibility? Can deception about credentials harm the cohesion of online communities? Why might someone misrepresent his/her expertise online? What harm can be done, and to whom?

Credibility, Offline and Online

Credibility has two aspects: 1) one's own credibility in the eyes of others, and 2) one's ability to assess the credibility of others. While the ability to evaluate others' credibility is extremely important and can have ethical implications, of principal concern here are the judgments and actions of young people that affect their own credibility. How do young people decide to present themselves—their credentials, skills, and motivations—to various others in various contexts? **For our purposes here, credibility is about being accurate and authentic when representing one's competence and motivations.**

Offline, credibility is typically conveyed through credentials, which are achieved through education leading to certification, on the job training, and/or by gaining a reputation for competence. Credentials take time to accrue but, when achieved, reliably signal competence. **But credentials alone are not enough; credibility is also determined by the integrity of one's interests and motivations.** For example, a highly qualified and esteemed medical doctor touting a new drug may not be deemed credible if she is discovered to hold stock in the drug company. Her motivations can be called into question: Is she promoting the drug because in her professional opinion it is effective, or because she has a stake in the company's profits? Motivations, though difficult to discern, are an important aspect of credibility.

In our story, Maya seems to have good intentions; she wants to share her knowledge in order to help others. However, she does not have the requisite qualifications to work as a trainer or to publish an article in a reputable health magazine. She has not yet established her credibility in the offline health and fitness world.

Credibility is relatively easy to define with respect to working adults; but what does credibility look like among young people who have not yet completed their education or entered the work force? Youth signal their credibility in their everyday activities in various ways. In school, a young person can demonstrate her competence and good intentions by completing her school work diligently and competently, and by achieving good grades without cutting corners. At home, she could show her credibility by competently carrying out her chores and abiding by her parent's rules. With her friends, she could keep trusted secrets, provide support, and follow through on her commitments. In her community, she could volunteer at various events for the sake of the community. Across these contexts, credibility is achieved through a track record of fulfilling obligations competently and with clear intentions.

Certain qualities of the new media, particularly the absence of visual cues, affect how credibility is signaled and assessed online. The new media's hallmark "low barriers to participation" (Jenkins et al. 2006) mean that people with diverse backgrounds, competencies, and motivations—experts and non-experts, honest persons and poseurs alike—can have a voice in a variety of online spaces. Depending on the context, verifying credibility of participants can be extremely important. Where medical advice is dispensed for example, presenting one's competence in a truthful way is critical. Credibility may be less

(or at least differently) important in spaces explicitly designed for fantasy play such as Second Life. Other key qualities of the new media that bear on how credibility is conveyed include the potential for anonymity; the asynchronous nature of communication; the relative absence of mechanisms for accountability and authority figures/mentors; and the ephemeral nature of online communities.

Signaling credibility is at once easier and more difficult online where traditional means for conveying competence and motivations are unavailable. A young person can join innumerable online communities where his credibility will be judged by the quality of his participation, including his conduct and creations; she can contribute to Wikipedia; become a Guild Master in World of Warcraft; post an amateur music video on YouTube; join and lead a political discussion group on Gather.com; or start a blog about reproductive rights. Feedback from the community helps determine her credibility in these spaces. Maya joined an online community in order to share her knowledge, and gained positive feedback and increasing requests for advice. In the online health and fitness world, she gained credibility through the quality of her contributions and their presumably positive impact on people's lives.

Promises of Online Credibility

Online conceptions of credibility can hold distinct promises for young people and the online communities in which they participate. Youth can be empowered by opportunities to demonstrate expertise. Provided access to the Internet, anyone can participate in public online communities. Online communities can be "affinity spaces" (Gee, 2004) where diverse participants collaborate around a shared purpose or interest with little concern for differences in age, gender, ethnicity, and other status markers. People are not barred from entry simply because they lack formal training and credentials; young people can act as 'experts' due to their competence alone. Dialoguing and co-creating on an equal playing field with adults, young people can experience "collegial pedagogy" (Chavez & Soep, 1995) in many online spaces. As noted above, Brian Stelter started his TVNewser blog as an undergraduate and now commands a massive audience, including top news media executives. In short, online, fewer restrictions exist on what counts as knowledge, and who qualifies as an expert.

The openness of the new media permit young people to explore different domains and outlets for their skills without the costs and time associated with training and education. Blogging and game modding might be considered quasi-internships or apprenticeships that prepare youth to enter fields such as journalism and engineering, ones that they may have never considered. Opportunities to interact and perhaps co-create with individuals with greater knowledge and expertise may help engender subject matter expertise, facilitate cognitive development, and nurture key interpersonal skills including teamwork. From an early age, the new media provides youth opportunities to try out new roles and prepare them to become adept professionals, collaborators, and citizens.

In turn, domains such as journalism, software engineering, game design, and civil society more generally can benefit from the present and future contributions of many young co-creators. Online knowledge communities such as Wikipedia demonstrate these reciprocal benefits—youth can feel empowered by the opportunity to contribute, and diverse contributors facilitate good knowledge building. Ideally, such experiences help engender in youth a broader perspective, a feeling of efficacy, and a sense of responsibility. The broader definitions of expertise and credibility that exist online can thus yield positive social outcomes for individuals, communities, and for society as a whole.

Perils of Online Credibility

While the distinct ways in which credibility is granted online can be beneficial, they also provide occasion for numerous misdeeds, including opportunities for deception and misrepresentation of one's identity, competence, and motivations. The relative absence of visual cues and visible accountability structures online allow for various forms of deception, making it difficult to ascertain the credibility of participants' claims regarding their competence and motivations. A person can readily post someone else's work as her own, pay for someone to advance her in a game, misrepresent herself as a professional, or join a voluntary community with the hidden intention to disrupt it or with disguised commercial interests in mind. Certain qualities of new media make assessments of credibility qualitatively different and arguably more difficult than in offline situations.

Online, young people might feel tempted to misrepresent their identities (who they are, how old they are, where they are, what they do) and their backgrounds (what they have done, what their skills and capabilities are) because identity verification is difficult. Online cues that signal one's credibility can be unreliable and misleading (Donath, 1999). Maya was able simply to state in her profile that she was 'state certified' without needing to provide evidence. While such misrepresentations also occur offline, and can go unnoticed for decades, accountability mechanisms online are rarer still.

The forms of identity experimentation that are encouraged in certain online spaces can contribute to an attitude that fictional identities are permitted in all kinds of online communities. This attitude can be problematic in spaces where one's offline identity, competence, and motivations genuinely matter—as on WebMD, where consumers expect articles about breast cancer treatments to be written by certified medical doctors and researchers. Credentials often serve valuable purposes in online spaces; they can reduce risks by providing security through a process of vetting. Young people may not yet be equipped developmentally to differentiate between contexts in which identity play is acceptable and expected, and those in which one should truthfully represent one's (real world) credentials.

Maya's story highlights the potential disconnect and tensions between offline and online credibility. Offline, she was barred from helping gym members because she lacked credentials. Online, participation in Gettrim did not require explicit credentials: Maya could freely dispense advice and be

judged by the quality of her contributions. Yet at the same time, offline understandings of credibility affected Maya's online conduct. Well aware of the requirements at the gym, Maya believed it necessary to appear credentialed in order for GetTrim users to heed her advice and, online, it was relatively easy for her to misrepresent herself. Being transparent about the extent and limits of one's expertise therefore becomes critically important online.

Motives and goals are even harder to ascertain online due to the ability to be anonymous, the superficiality of some online relationships and the transient membership in online communities. Maya's motives seem to be pure in nature; she wants to help others by sharing her knowledge with the community. Her intention is not to give false or dangerous information. However, other people may have more sinister motives; for example, a corporate representative could post an anonymous testimonial about a weight loss supplement on Gettrim.com. Participants on the site have no way of verifying the validity of such claims.

With few accountability structures in place online, everyone is responsible for his/her own self-representation. In this, the support and guidance of adult mentors would surely be beneficial to young people. However, the vast gulf between the average adult's understanding of the new media and the ways young people engage with it virtually precludes good mentoring. **If the new digital media's savviest participants cannot find a way to manage credibility themselves, the broader peril is that external parties will regulate their participation, imposing restrictive rules, erecting barriers to access in many online spaces, and stifling participatory cultures.**

A further peril associated with online credibility is that young people may begin to undervalue credentials and so miss out on opportunities to gain valuable but less readily acquirable skills. If everyone can participate and become an expert, formal training and education may seem unnecessary at best. Maya may begin to feel that she is just as capable as the trainers in her gym and does not need to take classes and gain legitimate qualifications. Positive feedback from GetTrim.com users may lead her to overestimate her competencies and suggest the irrelevance of credentials. Furthermore, as Maya's clients begin asking for advice on a broader range of issues outside of her knowledge base, she may feel compelled or entitled to respond. Overextending her areas of expertise, she risks giving harmful advice. She also risks doing irreparable harm to herself; revealed to the digital public, her deception may haunt her for the indefinite future.

The Ethics of Online Credibility

Participatory cultures offer youth unparalleled opportunities to develop and demonstrate knowledge and skills, assume roles as leaders and experts, and thus earn credibility even at a relatively early age. At the same time, the relative absence of accountability structures permits deception. The desire to participate in certain online spheres, and the perception from the offline world that credentials

matter, might lead a young person to misrepresent their qualifications. Even if well-intended, deception of this kind can pose risks to both deceiver and the deceived. Genuine credibility hinges on being truthful and transparent about one's competence (and its limits) and one's motives. Young people who understand and fulfill the responsibilities implied when credibility is granted to them are more likely to retain and nurture it online and off.

5. PARTICIPATION

Civic Engagement on YouTube

Xander is a 22-year old nature photographer with a long-standing interest in the environment and sustainability. He belongs to a Google Group started by other nature photographers. One day a message is posted to the group about a YouTube competition on environmental stewardship for Earth Day. Xander checks out the site and notices that much of the material submitted is accusatory, placing blame on politicians while failing to alert people to the everyday changes they can make to help the environment. Xander decides to make a video montage of his nature photos overlaid with statistics about climate change and suggestions on 'living green.' He mentions this idea to some friends. One suggests that he Photoshop some of his images because most viewers won't get the extent of environmental damage unless it is made dramatic for them.



While he agrees that more dramatic photos might have more of an impact on the audience, Xander thinks that using Photoshop in this way is inappropriate. Instead, he gathers information from the Union of Concerned Scientists website and the Worldchanging blog for his video, which he cites in his submission.

After the launch of the video some members of the YouTube group comment on his artistic technique and others on the uplifting tone of his submission. An anonymous user leaves a comment accusing Xander of copying images from a popular nature website and falsifying statistics. Xander ignores the comments, but the user returns and launches a defamatory attack on him. He is offended, but confident about his work and chooses not to engage the offending commenter.

Questions raised: What is the meaning of ethical participation in online communities? What standards of behavior exist on sites like YouTube to guide youth conduct? What ethical codes guide how content is created and shared? Do the new media create distinct and new opportunities for civic engagement? In what ways is the role of citizen being assumed by young people online? Are distinct responsibilities implied by cybercitizenship?

Participation, Offline and Online

Here we address participation, the culminating ethical issue in the NDM, which arguably subsumes the other issues of identity, privacy, ownership/authorship, and credibility. Participation centers on an individual's roles and responsibilities in community, society, and the world; it takes various forms, including communication, creation, sharing, and use of knowledge and information in all spheres of life—political, economic, and social. For the purposes of this paper, we consider three different levels of participation: 1) Access to a given sphere and to basic skills and roles that allow participation in it; 2) Standards of behavior, or codes for conduct in a social context, including those related to speech and

conceptions of ‘fair play’; and 3) Proactive participation, ranging from content creation to civic engagement.

Offline, participation in social, economic, and political life typically has the following features: First, access to participation is often limited to those with certain resources, credentials, and attributes (such as age, race, sex, class, geography, resources, various forms of capital). Young people often have limited access to skills for participation and, importantly, to roles that permit a voice in key spheres of decision-making (political, economic, educational), creation, and distribution of knowledge and information. Constraints limiting the diversity of participants in those spheres affect the kinds of issues raised, decisions made, and the content or knowledge produced. Second, standards of behavior, including norms and explicit rules, in formal spaces (e.g., schools) are often created and enforced ‘top down’ by those in power (typically adults). In such settings, roles (e.g., student, teacher), responsibilities, and sanctions for rule violations are typically explicit. Third, with respect to proactive creation, young people’s amateur creations (writings, music, photography, etc.) can be shared locally but are not easily distributed to a broader audience.

Civic participation differs markedly historically and culturally. When Tocqueville came to the U.S., he was struck by the proliferation of voluntary associations—participation writ large without need for status or credentials for many groups. Such associations, he felt, served as crucial antidotes to the isolating tendencies of modern democratic societies and helped check the power of government. Yet, according to Putnam (2000), in-person participation has diminished in the same country 150 years later. At the same time, opportunities for youth civic engagement persist through student activities groups, community service organizations, and political parties, and many youth engage through these traditional offline venues. However, participation offline requires ‘real time,’ physical presence—attending rallies, distributing leaflets, volunteering at a soup kitchen, etc. In offering new (asynchronous) ways to participate and inviting anyone to have a voice, the new digital media may be contributing to a resurgence of the voluntary association model (Gardner, 2007, 10 April).

Indeed, online, the role of participant is available to anyone with consistent access to the technologies that make up the new media (which are increasingly available through public libraries, schools, Computer Clubhouses, etc.) and to the skills (technical, social, etc.) to navigate them. Second, standards of behavior online are less explicit and, in fact, many participants resist the notion of constructing them at all for fear of undercutting freedom of expression (Pilkington, 2007). Third, a hallmark feature of new media is captured by the concept of Web 2.0, that online content is open to user modification. Participation is not limited to those with specific credentials and attributes (race, class, sex, age, etc). Thus, online spaces provide opportunities to move beyond consumption and reaction to the proactive creation of content, including music, video, journalism, and identities (Floridi & Sanders, 2005;



Jenkins, 2006a, 2006b). Proactive participation ranges from ethically neutral creations (e.g., posting a video of oneself throwing a frisbee) to more ethically-tinged ones, including political blogging, citizen journalism, or designing “serious games.” The latter activities might be classified as forms of civic engagement and examples of “cyber citizenship” insofar as they are motivated by a larger sense of purpose, such as promoting a particular cause or viewpoint, sharing information with a broader public, or encouraging deliberation and collective problem-solving.

Promises of Online Participation

The promises of online participation are frequently touted. Positive outcomes may come to the individual (in the form of access, acquisition of skills, sense of empowerment or efficacy, exposure to diverse viewpoints); online communities themselves (diversity of membership, information sharing, etc.); and to society (citizen journalism, civic engagement, democratic participation). It is not surprising, then, that there is excitement about the potentials inherent in this virtually open ‘public sphere.’

First, the openness of the NDM provides youth opportunities to assume empowering participant roles. A young person can form and lead a film discussion group on IMDB (Internet Movie Database); contribute to the creation of standards of behavior within a political discussion group on Gather.com; and become a mentor and teacher to peers and adults who are less sophisticated users of the new media. Such opportunities to assume leadership, mentoring, and educating roles can build key skills and a sense of efficacy. Furthermore, opportunities to interact with diverse participants through online dialogues, blogs, social networking sites and MMORPGs can provide exposure to a wider range of ideas, opinions, and perspectives than exist in more local, offline forms of participation.

Second, great promises lie in ordinary citizens playing a direct role in shaping the content of the new media. Again, regardless of one’s formal credentials and ascribed attributes (race, sex, etc.), participants from all walks of life can contribute to the creation and distribution of knowledge and media. One positive outcome associated with this openness is ‘citizen media’ or ‘citizen journalism’—journalism carried out by ordinary people without formal training, captured on devices like cell phones and distributed via blogs and YouTube. Decentralized news is citizen- and therefore locally-driven, focusing on issues of importance to the writer (or to her intended audience) as opposed to the sensationalist headlines that news industry all too often relies on to sell newspapers. While offering important opportunities and skills to individuals, such proactive participation can enhance the quality of journalism produced and thus create a better knowledge base for deliberation about public issues. Through his video, Xander can have a voice in, and contribute valuable data to, a broader public dialogue about environmental degradation.

Third, opportunities for participation online might mobilize young people to social and political action. According to Pettingill (2007) a new model of civic engagement, “engagement 2.0,” is emerging

through the new media, spawned by the “participatory cultures” that Jenkins (2006b) suggests are starting points for a more participatory democracy. Jenkins suggests that participatory cultures are powerful because, through them, a young person can take action and make a difference. Participation, even in spaces that are not considered political such as Facebook or World of Warcraft, can lead to an increased sense of efficacy, an important component of social and political engagement. This sense of efficacy stands in sharp contrast to the diminished sense of agency many youth feel vis-à-vis traditional politics. Furthermore, as youth act through participatory cultures, they may begin to demand that traditional politics, and not simply the market, respond to their creations. Jenkins (2006a, 2006b) asserts that the strong sense of community many young people experience in these cultures may lead them to see the importance of civic ties more generally, and their obligations to other communities of which they are members and citizens.

In sum, opportunities for youth to assume empowering social roles online can endow them with a sense of responsibility to others, to their communities, and to society. Sharing his video with a wide audience through YouTube can reaffirm Xander’s perception of himself as a citizen, and thus inspire further civic participation.

Perils of Online Participation

As youth increasingly engage in and become more proactive participants in the NDM, numerous ethical perils can be raised. First, while the NDM are technically open to all, digital divides persist. Although access is increasingly available in spaces such as public libraries, some young people don't have consistent access to the new media nor, more importantly, to support structures to guide their use or participation. To these youth, the new digital media may be viewed as intimidating, as opposed to inviting, engaging, and empowering. A divide is thus emerging between those who have access to skills and those who don't; youth with strong supports and resources offline are best poised to take advantage of the participatory potentials of the new media. As skills such as multi-tasking, risk-taking, and mental flexibility become increasingly valuable in the workplace, non-digital youth may be left behind as more traditional skills become less attractive.

Second, among youth who do participate, individuals can engage in hate speech, grieving, trolling, and other forms of misconduct online, which may be encouraged by the anonymity, lack of face-to-face interaction, and short response time of the Internet. Cyberbullying is on the rise, although school systems may be loathe to interfere because cyberspace is outside of their purview. Far from participating as citizens with clear responsibilities, some young participants may feel accountable to no one online ('And why should they?' many argue- they are at play!). While there is a freedom in the absence of clear roles and responsibilities, confusion and anomie can ensue. The real or perceived absence of accountability structures means that little or no recourse exists for victims. So as not to undercut the



promises of participation noted above, it is important to state that these perils are most salient to individuals who may not perceive themselves to be members of a “participatory culture” with a shared sense of purpose, interest, and belonging implied therein. For instance, the MySpace member who trolls the site from time-to-time; the blogger who posts his views but does not perceive himself to be a ‘citizen ‘of the blogosphere; the World of Warcraft player whose personal agenda in the game overrides his loyalty to his guild. In these cases, the onus is on individuals to behave in respectful and ethical ways, and to respond with integrity and decisiveness when others do not. As discussed in the conclusion, person-centered factors (developmental stage, values) and cultural factors (peer norms) become critically important guides for behavior.

Communities themselves may be vulnerable to dissolution if standards of behavior and codes of conduct that are agreed-upon and well-understood are not created among members. Civility may be consigned to the back seat if personal liberties, such as free speech, are cherished at the expense of community, as demonstrated in the controversy over death threats posed on Kathy Sierra’s blog. In the absence of strong ties and formal commitments to online communities, participants can join temporarily, for short periods of time, and roam from one community to the next. **Indeed, the word ‘community’ may not even apply to spaces where membership is in continual flux and commitment is weak. In such contexts, the aforementioned opportunities for young people to work with others in building shared standards of behavior may pass them by.**

On the other hand, one of the most dangerous potentials related to participation in the new media is that individuals will over-commit to certain communities and fail to take advantage of the opportunity to be exposed to diverse perspectives. **As users personalize their consumption of information and knowledge, balkanization and splintering can occur. Turning only to their preferred news sources, they may effectively isolate themselves from valuable, alternative facts and viewpoints. Citizen journalists may be too committed to localism at the expense of broader concerns; and while citizen reporters may engage in important work, they have no inherent responsibility or accountability to their communities (beyond goodwill).** The citizen in ‘citizen media’ often refers to the person contributing the media, and not the citizenship, nor the responsibilities, of that citizen. Young people may circumscribe their participation to groups that subscribe to and reinforce a myopic, or prejudicial, worldview. Participation in the new media can thus lead to a resurgence of hate-mongering, neo-Nazi groups, or terrorist organizations as surely as it can stimulate deliberation and the creation of land mine treaties. So while the Internet is an impressive patchwork of diverse communities, the ways in which people participate online may preclude the dialogues across communities that constitute an authentic public sphere.

Finally, a notable peril is related to the oft-cited political potential of participation—the frequent assumption that participatory culture is synonymous with or leads to civic engagement and democratic

participation. Just because the NDM hold the potential for invigorating democracy doesn't mean that this potential is actually being realized. In fact, participation in the new media could lead more people to withdraw from participation in real world politics out of frustration at its remoteness from their lives, inefficiencies, or corruption. **If youth only see themselves as efficacious online, they may avoid an offline political system that they already see as problematic, difficult to navigate, and uninviting.** Furthermore, there may be a danger in assuming that civic engagement in virtual worlds like Second Life and MMORPGs requires and engenders the same skills for democratic participation that are needed in the real world. This is not to suggest that valuable lessons and skills are not gained in these cyberspaces, but rather to indicate that **the transfer from online contexts to the real world may not be direct (Pettingill, 2007).**

The Ethics of Online Participation

The new digital media's most important virtues, and greatest risks, lie in their openness. On the one hand, the new media can empower young people by inviting them to assume new empowering roles and exposing them to diverse perspectives. On the other hand, in online spaces youth can engage in bullying and easily avoid accountability and circumscribe their participation to narrow-minded group. Thus splintering rather than greater social tolerance and responsibility is one possible outcome of participation. Whether or not they realize it, the online roles youth are assuming—blogger, Facebook 'friend,' filmmaker, citizen—carry responsibilities. Online participation, ranging from comments posted on MySpace to the more proactive creation of a digital film for Earth Day, involves conscious choices on the part of participants. **Ethical conduct and creation online requires youth to consider carefully, as Xander did, the broader implications of one's conduct and creations.** While a significant onus falls on young people, institutions and adult authority figures are also deeply implicated. Gatekeeping institutions, including local government, schools, libraries, and even families broker initial access to technologies, while educators and other adults are poised to provide the technical skills that permit a basic level of participation and the social and ethical skills that can nurture 'good participation.'

Prior to youths' conduct and proactive participation is the provision of an environment of supports that prepare—or fail to prepare—youth to participate in the digital public. On the most basic level, youth need access to technology and to core skills required to use it. Ideally, access is granted in both formal and informal educational settings, rich with traditional (older) and peer mentors. Mentors play an important role not only in passing on vital technical skills, but also in teaching young people to view themselves as participants who do not simply use media, but shape it. This perspective is echoed by **Jenkins et al. (2006) who consider the new media literacies to entail not just traditional literacy skills such as writing and research, but social and ethical skills as well. Youth need social skills to interact with the larger community and see themselves as part of it. Furthermore, they need to be thoughtful and reflective**



about their actions. These key skills are not learned in a vacuum, and certainly cannot be assumed to accompany technical skills. Here the responsibility lies with adults (educators, policymakers, parents, etc.) to provide young people with optimal supports for good play and citizenship.

IV. CONCLUSION: Towards ‘Good Play’

Some are tempted to think of life in cyberspace as insignificant, as escape or meaningless diversion. It is not. Our experiences there are serious play. We belittle them at our risk. We must understand the dynamics of virtual experience both to foresee who might be in danger and to put these experiences to best use. Without a deep understanding of the many selves that we express in the virtual we cannot use our experiences to enrich the real. If we cultivate our awareness of what stands behind our screen personae, we are more likely to succeed in using virtual experience for personal transformation. (Turkle, 1995, 268)

Turkle’s plea for taking virtual worlds seriously was made back in 1995 in *Life on the Screen*, her account of multi-user, online game participants. Back then, few might have anticipated how important, indeed routine, virtual interactions would become for so many of us. Her plea resonates today across a wide spectrum of activities in which youth and adults are regularly engaged.

In this paper we provide a wide-ranging account of the ethical issues that we believe to be emerging in the new digital media. This account has been informed by interviews, emerging scholarship on new media, and theoretical insights from anthropology, cultural studies, psychology, political science, and sociology. We assert that ethical fault lines are apparent in the digital media revolving around five issues: identity, privacy, ownership and authorship, credibility, and participation. Our account considers evidence that **“digital youth” hold distinct mental models with respect to these issues. In social networking sites, blogs, games, and other online communities that comprise the digital media, specific norms appear to be emerging around self-representation and self-expression; disclosure of personal information; creation, appropriation, and sharing of content; and conduct with others. Some of these norms—such as identity deception, either for play or for safety’s sake—carry ethical stakes and suggest that distinct “ethical minds” may be emerging.**

That said, research specifically focused on the ethical perspectives of young people regarding their online pursuits is scarce. Importantly, it would be unwise to presume that our largely adult-informed claims about the chief ethical fault lines in the NDM align neatly with youth’s perspectives and struggles. Therefore this paper is a conceptual starting point from which we—and, we hope, others—will launch empirical studies of young people themselves. We expect to revise this conceptualization—the themes themselves and our understanding of the relationships among them—in light of our research. It is our hope that our studies will provide insights as to whether new frameworks of ethics are needed to address the unique affordances, opportunities, and perils of our increasingly digital lives. Furthermore, we hope

to understand whether and how traditional psychological theories of moral development may need to be revised in light of digital participation by youth at ever-younger ages.

A Model of ‘Good Play’

We define ‘good play’ as meaningful and socially responsible participation in cyberspace. The contested and evolving nature of issues ranging from privacy to ownership and authorship suggest that it is premature to define what constitutes socially responsible, ethical, or ‘good’ play, and its opposite—irresponsible, unethical participation. Even so, we can assert the factors that are likely to contribute to a given individual’s mental model or ethical stance around such issues. On the basis of our research and reflection, we posit that a range of factors will influence the ethical stances of young people, in relation to how they manage their identities and privacy, regard ownership and authorship, establish their credibility, treat others, and consider broader civic issues as they participate in online spaces. Five key sets of factors are implicated (see Figure 1 below).

1) *The Affordances of the New Digital Media*: The ‘playground’ of the digital media includes the technologies themselves and the structural features that invite participation and affect the likely forms that it will take. As noted and established by other scholars (e.g., Jenkins et al., 2006), Web 2.0 technologies encourage active participation. Specifically, many games and virtual worlds like Second Life invite (indeed rely on) user contributions, such as modding. Copy-paste functionality facilitates downloading of content and information. Privacy settings on social networking sites can help users manage disclosure of personal information, yet the massive scale of the Internet can create an illusory sense of privacy, safety, and anonymity that make privacy strategies seem unnecessary (Huffaker, 2006). These ‘structural’ features constitute the backdrop against which an individual participates and affect the likely forms that participation takes. For example, digital technologies themselves could, although most at present don’t, prompt youth to consider invisible audiences; the persistence, searchability, and replicability of online information (boyd, 2007); and the negative effects of ownership and authorship transgressions. Architects of digital media hold diverse interests, ranging from education to knowledge-sharing to profit; whether explicit or not, these interests affect the nature of the affordances.

2) *Technical and New Media Literacies*: Complementing the affordances of the new media are the skills and literacies required to use them effectively. The expertise of a young person can range from simple knowledge of ‘copy-paste’ functions to HTML programming and game design skills, to broader media literacy skills. Young people who have grown up exposed to digital technologies are typically savvy enough to navigate the web, manipulate information and files, and artfully design their MySpace pages. The term “copy-paste literacy” is often used to describe these aptitudes typically held by youth today. More sophisticated young people may engage in ‘hacking’ and modding, some of which is illegal, some permitted and encouraged. Advanced technical abilities possessed by a young person can allow her

to take full advantage of the affordances of new media technologies, the effects of which can be socially positive or deeply unethical. In short, the affordances and literacies of the NDM—the impressive things that the technologies permit young people *to* do—may overshadow ethical questions about what young people *should* do. Digital youth who also possess the cognitive skills and motivation to consider the implications of their activities are well-poised to use their ‘powers’ to engage in ‘good play.’ Yet the acquisition of these literacies—technical, social, and ethical—also depends on forces outside of a young person’s control, including the availability of ethical supports such as mentors and new media literacy curricula.

3) *Person-centered factors*: Individual factors include a young person’s cognitive and moral development, and the beliefs, values, purposes she brings to her online pursuits. In order for an individual to act ethically, she needs to understand possible consequences for herself, for others in her community, and for society. Such abstract thinking requires certain cognitive and moral skills, including the ability to take different perspectives, think critically about possibilities, hypothesize about the future, and make connections between actions and consequences; these skills are gained through certain kinds of experiences that often (though not always) come with age (Kegan, 1994; Kohlberg, 1981; Turiel, 2006). With respect to ownership, for example, complex concepts such as copyright infringement may not be easily grasped by tweens, while older youth with higher stage cognitive skills might be able to identify ethical dilemmas in authorship and privacy issues, for example, and take considered steps. Yet, as previously noted, young people are increasingly confronting these issues at relatively young ages; despite the presence of privacy safeguards and moderators on its site, Club Penguin is not immune from problems such as cheating (Benderoff, 2007).

As with all experiences, those within digital worlds can advance cognitive and moral development (Bradley, 2005). Pivotal digital moments, positive or negative, are learning experiences that potentially push a young person to consider her actions in a new light and make different future choices. These moments can include empowering experiences with co-creation/participation, as well as negative experiences involving privacy lapses (oversharing and thereby harming a friend) or identity play that deceives and harms another person. A young person can be assuming different roles within such scenarios (e.g., intentional or unintentional perpetrator, victim, or bystander) and still gain insights that further his/her moral skills. Notwithstanding these valuable learning experiences, a digitally savvy child (or even tween) cannot be expected to fully grasp the possible ethical consequences of her choices in cyberspace.

Equally important to cognitive and moral capacities are the more stable beliefs and values held by a young person, which may stem from formative influences, family, and religion, among other sources. Additionally, a strong sense of purpose, as exemplified by our environmentalist Xander, can engender (but by no means guarantee) ethical participation (Bazerman, 2006).



4) *Peer cultures*: Both online and offline peer norms and values constitute powerful influences for youth. Our analysis makes reference to an “infringing youth culture” online, meaning an overreaching sense of entitlement with respect to information and property such as music that normalizes illegal downloading and thus may be “infringing” on the rights of musicians and other creators. Youth may feel justified in such illicit activities if their own ownership claims are ignored, as in the case of game modders, or may simply define their actions in 'Robin Hood'-like terms (i.e., stealing from the rich).



We also discuss evidence for the existence of youth ‘cultures of disclosure’ which encourage and reward sharing of personal information on social networking sites and blogs, often aided by practices such as selective disclosure, deception, or code switching. Peer norms on social networking sites are extremely powerful. Young people study other Facebook users’ profiles, noting the kinds of details disclosed, and often model their own profiles after the appealing models. Social networking sites are becoming important spaces for the transmission of cultural tastes through ‘favorites’ lists (Kaufman, personal communication, 2007, March 22). The desire to be accepted is a powerful incentive for mimicking other youth’s profiles and revealing personal information, often without considering the potential consequences. At the same time, socially responsible cultures also exist online. Groups with explicit ‘good play’ agendas have emerged, such as Teen Angels through which youth educate peers about cyberbullying and encourage responsibility with respect to such issues as privacy, predators, piracy issues. Youth Radio and Global Kids engage in civic pursuits online, build educational games, and produce citizen journalism, and are thus positive role models of youth participation.



Second, offline peer cultural influences may be just as important as the affordances, literacies, and youth cultures in the digital media. As established by previous research, social pressures on young people to succeed today, coupled with the absence of mentors and the presence of a “cheating” peer culture can lead to unethical conduct (Callahan, 2004; Fischman et al., 2004; Josephson Institute of Ethics, 2006). We do not suggest that youth cultures dedicated to ‘good play’ do not exist offline; through sports, community service, and student political groups, young people can and do model ethical conduct. However, the “cheating culture” may be equally powerful, especially given the noted mounting evidence about the absence of adult ethical supports.



5) *Ethical supports*: Adult supports, ranging from parent role models to teacher-mentors to school curricula, can play a decisive role in young people’s choices online. Positive adult role models could provide resources to help youth buck the norms of the offline “cheating culture,” and make considered choices online with respect to identity, privacy, ownership and authorship, credibility, and participation. If a young person’s parents engage in software piracy, they unwittingly reinforce the norms of the “infringing culture.” If few digital mentors—individuals with greater technical *and* ethical knowledge and experience—exist, then a young person may have no supports for reflecting on the larger

implications, for himself and others, of sharing details of his college drinking adventures on his MySpace page. If schools limit access to certain websites yet fail to provide students with the literacies to navigate the frontier of the web out of school, then, at the very least, they are doing little to prevent unethical conduct. New media literacies curricula can go a long way towards encouraging ‘good play’ but require buy-in and, perhaps more importantly, know-how on the part of adult educators.

Ethical supports can also be, and increasingly are, provided through digital media themselves. Educational games like Quest Atlantis and curricula such as The New Media Literacies Exemplar Library, both of which are available online for anyone to access, prompt participants to consider ethical issues. That said, the ethical lessons contained in such media may be better grasped if the online experience is supplemented by offline adult facilitation. At the same time, commercial entities have an increasing presence on the sites that youth most frequent (such as Facebook and MySpace); industry may be supporting—or detracting from—critical thinking about privacy, identity, and other issues discussed above. **On the whole, it seems urgent to consider which stakeholders—education, industry, or government—are best poised to define the public interest, to lead conversations about digital ethics, and to scaffold young people around these issues.**

Ideally, the factors implicated in our ‘good play’ model provide a balance of affordances, opportunities, and support, setting the stage for youth to become productive, innovative, and ethical participants in the new digital media. However, at present, the burden of ‘good play’ may fall on individual youth. The frontiers of the new digital media permit and empower youth to engage in largely free play and participate in the public sphere in new ways and to an unprecedented extent. In other words, the structures of the technologies themselves set few limitations; as we have shown, in this there are both tremendous promises and significant perils for young people. At the same time, evidence suggests that detrimental peer cultures exist (and may be more powerful than socially responsible cultures) and that access to ethical supports (mentors, role models, and educational curricula) may be scarce (Fischman et al., 2004; Josephson Institute of Ethics, 2006). In turn, at this time, there is a tremendous onus on young people to possess the cognitive and moral skills and integrity of beliefs, values, and purposes that engender ‘good play.’

Research on ‘Good Play’ – the need for deeper empirical study

The proposed model of Good Play in the new digital media sets the stage for an empirical study that invites young people to share their stories and struggles. Again, it is important to explore the extent to which our treatment of ethical fault lines here aligns with youth perspectives and experiences. Our research will explore the following questions: **What are the mental models held by young people with respect to ethical issues online? How if at all do they think about the ethical connotations of their play? What variation exists among youth in their ethical approaches to the new media? What are the leading**

areas of confusion and inconsistency? We need to understand how, and under what circumstances, privacy and credibility are experienced by youth as ethical issues, and in what situations young people believe that appropriating online content is ethical versus unethical. Importantly, we hope to learn the extent to which ethical supports exist for average youth as they participate in the NDM. Overall, we seek to understand how person-centered factors interplay with the affordances of the digital media, technical and new media literacies, peer cultures, and ethical supports in affecting how a young person conceives of (not to mention engages in) ‘good play.’ We have some suspicions but plan to proceed in eliciting the perspectives of young people themselves before making definitive conclusions about the ethical fault lines at play. We will conduct qualitative interviews that will explore the everyday activities of young people and, from their point of view, the salient ethical issues that come up, how they manage them, and the supports that guide their choices.

Interventions and Supports for ‘Good Play’ – the need for research-based interventions

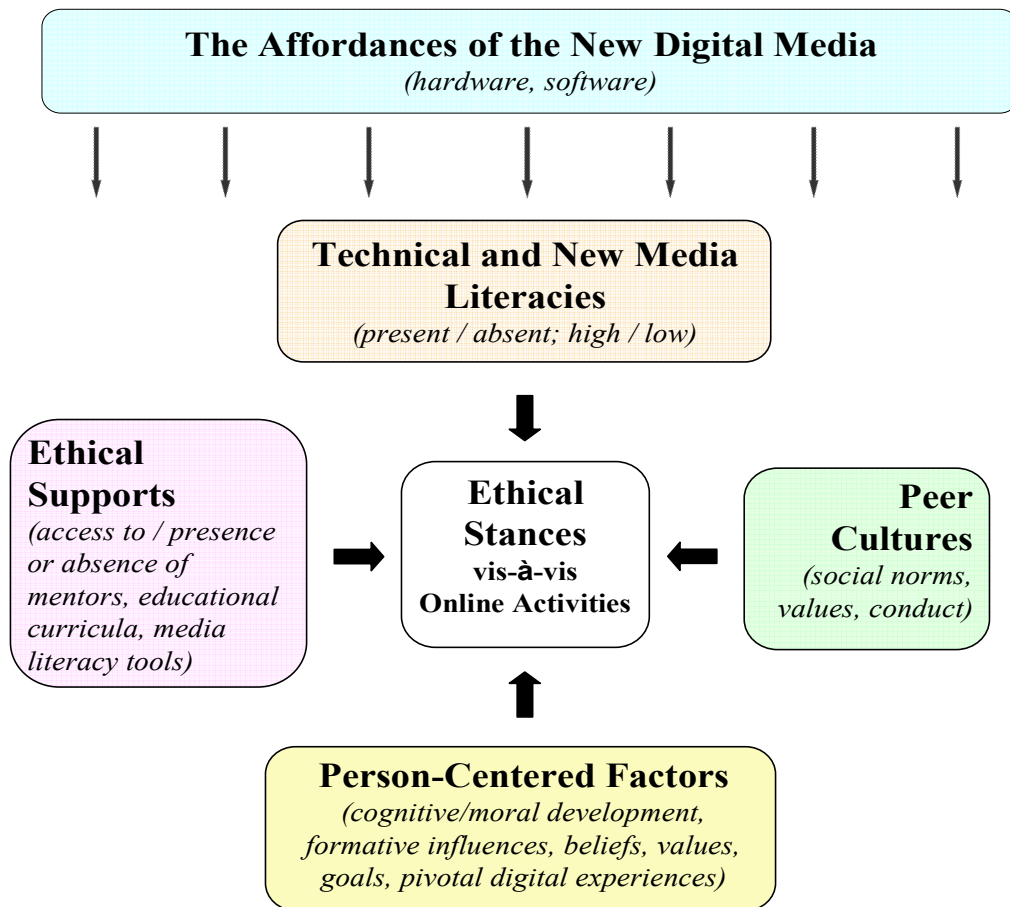
As young people spend more time in digital environments, it is critical that they are equipped with the capacities to act responsibly there. Ultimately, our effort is motivated by a desire to create ethical supports for young people to engage in reflection about what constitutes ‘good play’—meaningful and socially responsible pursuits—both online and off. Countless examples of ethical misconduct and confusion online suggest a pressing need. For the promises of the new digital media to be positively realized, supports for the development of ethical skills—or, better yet, “ethical minds” (Gardner 2007a)—must emerge. While it is clear that a complex set of factors is at play in producing the ethical stances young people hold in relation to their online activities, encouraging them to reflect on these issues can be an important intervention. **Youth who can consider their roles in various online contexts, understand the responsibilities implied by them, and imagine the larger implications of various judgments, are well-poised to engage in ‘good play.’**

In conjunction with Henry Jenkins and his New Media Literacies team, we have begun to fashion prototypes of curricular exercises designed to meet these objectives. The curriculum places a premium on role-playing activities that bring to light, and ask participants to confront, the ethical issues raised in the new media landscape. Such role-playing exercises will be buttressed by case examples of “real” ethically-tinged situations discussed by our youth interview participants and by professional media makers in the video interviews that make up the New Media Exemplar Library produced by Jenkins’s team. We envision the final product to be comprised of five or more modules, each organized around a central ethical issue—the five issues considered above and perhaps other yet-to-be discovered issues that surface in our research.

To make our broader purpose in this effort clear, we seek to understand and encourage ‘good play’ not principally as a means for creating more obedient, respectful youth. Rather, we understand

ethical reflection and conduct as a key foundation for youth empowerment. The new digital media create tremendous opportunities for young people—to nurture important skills, to connect with others around the world, to engage in meaningful play, to nurture skills for future careers, and, ideally, to engage in civic pursuits and contribute to a greater good. Our hope is that our work helps to cultivate these promises, while minimizing the risks that lie in the frontiers of digital media.

Figure 1: The Ethics of Play



Acknowledgements

This project is possible thanks to a grant from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation's Digital Media and Learning initiative. We are thankful to Jessica Benjamin and Sam Gilbert for their helpful comments and excellent research support, and to Linda Burch, Katie Clinton, Henry Jenkins, Elisabeth Soep, Margaret Weigel, and Connie Yowell for helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper. In preparation for writing this paper, we consulted a diverse group of informants, including educators, academic experts, professionals in the new digital media industry, and youth participants. We are extremely grateful for the insights and stories they shared with us. More specifically, we would like to thank the following individuals:

Sonja Baumer, Ph.D., Digital Youth: Kids' Informal Learning with Digital Media Project, University of California, Berkeley and University of Southern California

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Don Buckley, Director, Information and Communications Technology, The School at Columbia University, New York, NY

Lena Chen, Sex and the Ivy blog

Chris Dede, Timothy E. Wirth Professor in Learning Technologies, Harvard Graduate School of Education

Nate Dern, social networker and comedian

Judith Donath, Associate Professor of Media Arts & Sciences, Asahi Broadcasting Corporation Career Development Professor, Director of the Sociable Media Group, MIT Media Lab

Kevin Driscoll, Prospect Hill Academy, Cambridge, MA; Co-Founder, TeachForward

Megan Finn, Digital Youth: Kids' Informal Learning with Digital Media Project, University of California, Berkeley and University of Southern California; Ph.D. Candidate, School of Information, University of California, Berkeley

Tom Gerace, Founder & CEO, Gather.com

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Nick Summers, Co-founder, IvyGate blog

Sarita Yardi, Digital Youth: Kids' Informal Learning with Digital Media Project, University of California, Berkeley and University of Southern California; Ph.D. candidate, Human Centered Computing Program, Georgia Institute of Technology

Jonathan Zittrain, Professor of Internet Governance and Regulation, Oxford University; Jack N. and Lillian R. Berkman Visiting Professor for Entrepreneurial Legal Studies, Harvard Law School; Co-Founder & Faculty Co-Director, Berkman Center for Internet and Society

Appendix A – Youth Engagement with the New Digital Media

Young people today are frequently engaged in the following activities—and thus assume a number of different roles—through the new media:

1. Self-expression and identity experimentation: including creating avatars through role-playing games and virtual worlds; creating and sharing content individually and collaboratively (text, video, music) through blogs (LiveJournal, Xanga), vlogs (YouTube), and music sharing sites (MySpace). Studies suggest that 57% of online teens create content, including blogs (Lenhart & Madden, 2005), and even younger children are increasingly playing active, creator roles online (Demos, 2007).

2. Social networking: including chatting with friends; reaching out to people with shared interests; and establishing support groups (Facebook, MySpace). According to a recent Pew study, 55% of online teens use social networks and have created online profiles. 91% of teens chat with offline friends through these sites while half pursue new online friendships (Lenhart & Madden, 2007).

3. Gaming: single player and multi-player, role-playing games (World of Warcraft, etc.) Gaming is a popular youth activity: the average 13- to 18 year old plays 14 hours of video games per week (Martin & Oppenheim, 2007) and over half of the 117 million “active gamers” in the US play games online (Nielsen Interactive, 2006).

4. Consumption and entertainment: downloading music (iTunes), watching videos (YouTube), shopping (Amazon). Pew’s 2005 study of online content found that half of online teens download music (Lenhart & Madden, 2005).

5. Educating: teaching and mentoring others (technical skills, online game strategies, etc.). Through programs such Youth Radio, Computer Clubhouses, Scratch, and online gaming communities, young people are increasingly teaching their peers technical skills and game strategies.

6. Knowledge-building: research, school work, news and other information gathering (Wikipedia, Google, NYTimes.com). According to Pew’s recent report on Wikipedia, young adults are more likely than older adults to turn to Wikipedia; 44% of those ages 18-29 turn to Wikipedia for information, compared to only 29% of users age 50 and older (Rainie & Tancer, 2007).

7. Dialogue and Civic Engagement: engaging in public discourse, promoting social change; political, social, and cultural criticism: Through programs such as Youth Radio and the Global Kids Online Leadership Program, and sites such as Gather.com, youth are educating their peers about key social issues, and mentoring civic engagement and activism online.

Appendix B – Informant Interview Protocol

What follows is a general template of questions used as a starting point in preparing for interviews with diverse informants. In each interview, questions were tailored to the background and expertise of the specific informant.

The GoodPlay Project: Ethical Perspectives on Youth and Digital Media
Informant Interview Protocol (General template)

I. Broad Entry Questions

1. Can you tell us how you became interested in researching / teaching youth / or participating in the new digital media?
 - a. What findings from this research have been most surprising or intriguing to you?
 - b. What is the focus of your current and future research?

II. Digital Media: Buckets, Goals and Roles of Participants

2. How would you define the domain of digital media?
 - a. How would you parse the domain? In other words, what are the most important “buckets” (or major types of activities) that make up the domain?
3. Which buckets of the digital media are most important to explore in a study of young people?
 - a. If applicable: What kinds of digital activities are the kids you studied most frequently engaged? What specific sites do they frequent? (Myspace, Facebook, Youtube, Second Life, World of Warcraft, etc.)
4. What are the various goals of participants in these activities?
 - a. Is there consensus around the goals of participation in a given space (myspace, games, blogging, etc.)?
 - b. Have you witnessed instances when the goals and/or values of participants are in conflict? (Example: A jokster “crashes” a MMORPG, pretending at first to be a serious player, winning the trust of co-players, then undermining the game at an opportune moment) If so, how was the conflict resolved?

Can you think of a case (or space) in which conflicting goals/values of participants were successfully managed? How was this accomplished?

5. What kinds of roles are these young people playing in these spaces?
 - a. Are these roles explicitly defined? What kinds of responsibilities accompany these roles? Are these responsibilities explicitly acknowledged, or more implicit?

III. Ethical Issues

6. In your experience studying / teaching youth about / participating in the digital media, have you come across situations in which youth (or adults) struggle over “right” versus “wrong” courses of action?
 - a. In other words, what types of ethical dilemmas have you come across?
 - b. Are these dilemmas unique to the digital space?
 - c. Are there distinct ethical situations or dilemmas that arise among young participants? Describe.

7. Do distinct ethical issues emerge in the different “buckets” that make up the domain?
 - a. For example, what kinds of ethical issues and dilemmas are common in the blogging space? In multi-user games? In online communities? In chat rooms?
 - b. Are any of these issues unique to a particular bucket or to the online (vs. offline) world?
8. When there is unethical behavior (or behavior that is seen as unethical), what sanctions are imposed? By whom?
9. How aware are young people of the ethical implications of their online conduct?
 - a. In your research, did you find evidence of awareness of the ethical implications of one’s conduct online? Do specific examples/incidents that reflect such awareness come to mind?
 - b. Are there ethical issues relating to the Internet that you believe young people in particular are unaware of, or deliberately ignore? Do specific examples/incidents come to mind?
 - c. Are there ethical issues that you think young people should be made aware of? If yes, do you have any ideas about how this could be best accomplished?
10. Are the ethical concerns (and awareness) of young people similar to or qualitatively different from those of older generations? If different, how?
11. Broadly speaking, what major ethical concerns do you have about the digital media?

IV. Mentors

12. Based on your knowledge of this space, do you have a sense of whom kids turn to for advice in their activities online? Do they have mentors?
 - a. If yes, who are they? (peers vs. traditional mentors = individuals with greater in age, experience, and/or wisdoms?)
 - b. Some would argue that peer mentoring is more common for youth participants in new media. How is peer mentoring different from (and similar to) traditional mentoring in this space? Where, when, and how does digital mentoring happen?
 - c. What are the implications of peer mentoring for awareness of ethical issues and for encouraging ethical conduct? In other words, do you think peer mentors are capable of instilling ethics in their mentees in the same way that traditional mentors do in other domains?
13. Is there evidence that kids have “anti-mentors” or well-developed conceptions of the kind of conduct online that is inappropriate / disrespectful, etc.? If yes, elaborate.

V. General opportunities & challenges of the New Digital Media

14. What are the greatest opportunities offered by the Internet? For young people?
 - a. Do you think the Internet opens up unique opportunities for civic engagement? If yes, could you describe how? If no, why not?
 - b. Do you think the greatest opportunities of the Internet can/will be realized? If so, when and how? If not, what obstacles might prevent their realization?
15. What are the greatest challenges posed by the Internet? For young people?
 - a. What are your thoughts on the “digital divide” between white middle class kids and less privileged kids? Do you perceive this gap to be closing?
 - b. Do you think these challenges can/will be surmounted? If so, when and how? If not, why not??

VI. Ethical issues in digital research

16. What major challenges can you foresee for us in conducting this research?
17. Can you speak generally to any major ethical considerations in doing *research* on the digital media that we should bear in mind as we go forward?
18. In addition to conducting interviews such as this, we hope to observe young people as they engage in various online interactions. For instance, other researchers (developmental psychologists) who study the social interactions of adolescents on the Internet have entered teen chat rooms as passive observers.

What are your reactions to this? Do you see any ethical issues involved in this type of research? What might be some alternative ways of learning about how kids are interaction online?

VII. Conclusion / Information Gathering

- Is there anything relevant to digital media, ethics, and young persons that you would like to add that I didn't ask you about?
- Can you recommend other individuals with whom we should speak?
(including other educators working with kids and technology, experts, researchers, as well as very experienced participants – both youth and adult)

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