



## Hanging Out, Messing Around, and Geeking Out: Kids Living and Learning with New Media (John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Series on Digital Media and Learning)

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## BOOK REVIEWS

Ito, M., Baumer, S., Bittanti, M., Boyd, D., Cody, R., Herr-Stephenson, B., et al., *Hanging Out, Messing Around, and Geeking Out: Kids Living and Learning with New Media* (John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Series on Digital Media and Learning) (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2009), 432 pp., ISBN 0-262-01336-3 (hbk), £25.95.

*Hanging Out, Messing Around, and Geeking Out: Kids Living and Learning with New Media* is a synthesis of a collaborative, ethnographic work carried out by 28 researchers and collaborators and conducted through the *Kids' Informal Learning with Digital Media Project*. It reports on a three-year investigation of youth new media practice aimed to develop a grounded, qualitative evidence base to inform current debates over the future of learning and education in the digital age. The project began in early 2005 and was completed in the summer of 2008. The book draws on an unprecedented rich qualitative amount of data collected through 23 different case studies with most of the fieldwork taking place during 2006 and 2007.

The authors adopted a sociology-of-youth-and-childhood approach. Within this approach, youth are taken as serious actors in their own social worlds and childhood is considered as a socially constructed, historically variable, and contested category. Media, adults, and classic sociology of childhood literature often view children, on the contrary, in a forward-looking way, in terms of developmental 'ages and stages' of what they will become rather than as complete beings 'with ongoing lives, needs, and desires'.

Media ecologies, friendship, intimacy, families, gaming, creative production, and work are described in depth in the seven chapters of the book. Each chapter is written by one or more leading authors and is based on the same shared corpus of qualitative data.

The whole organization of the book is profoundly influenced by the idea that youth's new media activities span a somewhat continuous range that starts with the more friendship-driven ones and ends with the more interest-driven practice. Within this continuum, the authors identified a set of what they call genre of participation: hanging out, messing around, and geeking out.

The development of this framework is probably one of the most interesting aspects of the book.

‘Hanging out’ is the most common and friendship-driven genre of participation. Given the institutional restriction and regulations placed on young people by adults, kids and teenagers tend to invest a great deal of time and energy talking about and coordinating opportunities to ‘hang out’. Mobile phones, instant messages, and social network sites therefore become both the space to meet friends – when meeting in person is not possible – and the permanent infrastructure to coordinate opportunities to meet.

Whereas in hanging out, the engagement with new media is motivated by the desire to maintain connection with friends, ‘messaging around’ represents the beginning of a more intense engagement with new media. Fortuitous searching (the practice of serendipitous learning using search engines), experimenting, and playing with the resource available for them are core to this genre of participation. Kids can move from media focus engagement that centres on peer sociability to forms that are more interest-driven via messaging around.

‘Geeking out’ primarily refers to an intense commitment of engagement with media or technology, often one particular media property, genre, or type of technology. It is the stance characteristic of kids involved in media fandom (such as Japanese Anime or Harry Potter), or the more committed gamers (such as the ones involved in playing massive multiplayer online role-play games). Participation happens here within a community of practices driven by common and often specialized interests.

While the in-depth description of this framework would in itself value the time spent reading this book, there is much more in it. It is highly suggested reading to anyone interested to know more about kids’ everyday informal learning practices with new media (especially teachers, parents, and policy-makers). While reading it, it is important to keep in mind the precise and deliberate choice of the authors to adopt a sociology-of-youth-and-childhood approach. They attempt to describe this practice from the point of view of youth culture. While this is probably the only feasible approach to understand the ongoing process, the reader should not therefore expect to find in this book a critical review of this practice.

The book, edited by MIT Press, is also available for free download on the editor website. A more detailed description of the 23 individual research studies is provided online on the Digital Youth Project website.

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Edgar A. Whitley & Gus Hosein, *Global Challenges for Identity Policies*. In the *Technology, Work and Globalization Series* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 304 pp., ISBN 978-0-230-54223-5 (hbk), €30.00.

In spite of the title, this book mainly focuses on the attempt to introduce biometric identity cards in the UK. The authors cover a time span from the introduction of the Identity Cards Bill in 2004 to the first applications for biometric residence permits for certain non-European foreign nationals in 2008. Due to the very detailed study of the UK case, the reader will not only learn about the challenges of implementing a new information system within the field of ICT and identity, but also gains insight into British political processes.

Besides the strong focus on the UK, the authors pursue to map challenges of identity policies more globally. Chapter two provides reviews of national identity policies, mainly in European countries, but also in commonwealth countries, the Middle East, Asia and the United States. In the concluding chapter, the authors recommend effective identity policies for the British case specifically, but also more generally. Hence there are attempts to establish more global themes in identity policies also outside the UK.

In spite of the somewhat ambiguous focus, this book is highly recommended for anyone interested in identity policies, regardless if reading it as a detailed study of the British case, or as a review of global challenges. The in-depth descriptions of the debates and proceedings in the UK are also of interest for any scholar researching policy-making and for political scientists specialized in British politics.

On an even more general level, this book touches upon one of the most pressing challenges in contemporary society, namely that of the complex intersection between discourses around the possibilities of information technology, security issues in a post 9/11 world, personal integrity and the role of policy-making. However, readers looking for theoretical tools to understand and approach this challenge will have to go elsewhere. The UK identity policy-making procedure presented here, with all its twists and turns, is rather suitable as a case to evaluate theory against.

This book highlights the difficulties and complexities in enforcing ICT policies, in general, and identity politics, in particular. A dominant theme is the

difficult relation between policy-making in sectoral national democratic institutions on one side, and borderless information technology with multipurpose uses on the other. The UK case underlines that the approach to technology among politicians is still dominated by an instrumental attitude, technology as a tool for achieving well-defined and limited purposes. This is unfortunate since uses will be difficult to mold according to politicians preferences. At the same time, the authors stress that the many purposes of identity policies, from combating terrorism to consumer identity verification, could hardly be obtained in one single policy. The complexities and ambiguities attached both to the issue of identity as well as to ICT's, make it a particularly tricky area in policy-making. This book is a good example to illustrate this point.

Jakob Svensson

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Gerard Goggin & Larissa Hjorth (eds), *Mobile Technologies: From Telecommunications to Media* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 297 pp., ISBN 978-0-415-98986-2 (hbk), \$118.00.

Gerard Goggin and Larissa Hjorth, the editors of *Mobile Technologies: From Telecommunications to Media*, focus their collection on 'promoting inquiry' into the 'changes in mobiles that the shift into media brings; the related changes in the nature of contemporary media that mobiles catalyze' (p. 5). Their main concern and major contribution, in other words, is a new way of thinking about mobile technology *as* media. At first, this may seem like a minor or nuanced adjustment in our conceptualization of mobiles, but, to this reader, they are asking a new and important question: what happens when mobile technology subtly fades *into* media? Or, what happens when mobiles stop being thought of as telecommunication devices and simply considered part of our evolving daily media ecology?

Many of the familiar names in mobile studies are here making excellent contributions. For example, Leopoldina Fortunati uses mobiles *as* media as a lens to reflect on gender constructions over the last few decades. Rich Ling traces the ways in which mobile communication shape the transition from childhood to

adolescence and finally adulthood. Daisuke Okabe, Mizuko Ito, Aico Shimizu and the globe-traveling Jan Chipchase explore Japanese *purikura*, or photo sticker booths, as a springboard for an enlightening discussion of the power of visual culture in the lives of Japanese teenagers. The concluding part of the book is called 'Mobile Imaginings', and it offers some truly fascinating, cutting-edge work on mobile studies. For example, Kathy Cleland examines how avatars are migrating from the world of games and the web to mobile media. Dong-Hoo Lee posits that as digital photographs mesh with online maps they create a new sense of place. Kate Crawford provides a significant contribution on mobiles and Twitter by pushing aside issues of truthfulness in networked spaces in order to explore new concepts of intimacy. And Nicola Green explores how mobile media intervene in our cultural and political memory practices. The only minor issue is that there is no chapter dedicated to the iPhone or similar touch-screen devices. It seems self-evident that the iPhone changed the mobile game and has had an enormous cultural impact. Thus, given the mission of the book – to explore the mobile's shift to media platform – this omission seems unfortunate. Regardless, this book makes many excellent and exciting contributions to mobile studies, and I would highly recommend it for graduate students and scholars who study the social impact of mobiles from a variety of fields, such as media studies, communications, human–computer interaction, anthropology and more. The book also seems to be an excellent complement to the *Handbook of Mobile Communication Studies*, edited by James Katz (2008). Both books together offer a rich collection of studies on mobility. In the end, Goggin and Hjorth seem to have fulfilled their initial goal of exploring what happens when mobiles shift from telecommunication devices to media, and their contribution to mobile studies is all the richer for it.

Jason Zalinger

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