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# Hanging Out, Messing Around, and Geeking Out

## Kids Living and Learning with New Media

By: Mizuko Ito

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## Appendix I: Project Overview

The Digital Youth Project was led by four principal investigators, Peter Lyman, Mizuko Ito, Michael Carter, and Barrie Thorne. During the course of the three-year research grant (2005–2008), seven postdoctoral researchers,<sup>1</sup> six doctoral students,<sup>2</sup> nine M.A. students,<sup>3</sup> one J.D. student,<sup>4</sup> one project assistant,<sup>5</sup> seven undergraduate students,<sup>6</sup> and four research collaborators<sup>7</sup> participated and contributed fieldwork materials for the project. To gain an interdisciplinary understanding of the intersection of youth, new media, and learning, principal investigators sought out individuals with expertise in a wide range of fields including anthropology, communication, political science, psychology, and sociology as well as computer science, engineering, and media studies. Many of the researchers also worked in industry and community organizations and built upon this experience to forge meaningful collaborations across research projects and disciplines.

Just as the examination of young people, new media, and learning called for scholars of diverse disciplinary backgrounds and arenas of expertise, our research agenda also demanded new sites and strategies of investigation. As noted in the introduction, our project was designed to document, from an ethnographic perspective, the learning and innovation that accompany young people's everyday engagements with new media in informal settings. Specifically, our focus on youth-centered practices of play, communication, and creative production located learning in contexts that are meaningful and formative for youth, including friendships and families as well as young people's own aspirations, interests, and passions. In practice, this perspective meant that we maintained a broad commitment to understanding the worlds of our research participants by learning about and engaging in the significant new media practices in young

people's lives. Moreover, we recognized that young people's engagements with new media were not necessarily isolated to particular media or locations. For example, social network sites such as MySpace or Facebook are often most meaningful when understood in relation to teenagers and kids at school and at home, with their friends and by themselves. Because these practices move across geographic and media spaces—homes, schools, after-school programs, networked sites, and interest communities—our ethnography incorporated multiple sites and multiple methods (Appadurai 1996; Barron 2006; Gupta and Ferguson 1997; Marcus 1995, 1998).

Alongside participation and observation, the hallmarks of ethnography, we developed questionnaires, surveys, semistructured interviews, diary studies, observation and content analyses of media sites, profiles, videos, and other materials to gain insights into the qualitative dimensions of youth's engagement in digital media and technologies. Where appropriate and relevant, we also interviewed teachers, program organizers, parents, and individuals working in specific media industries. A series of pilot projects conducted by M.A. students at the University of California, Berkeley, were completed in 2005. The bulk of the fieldwork for this project was conducted in 2006 and 2007 by postdoctoral researchers and Ph.D. students. Collectively, we conducted 659 semistructured interviews, 28 diary studies, and focus group interviews with 67 individuals. Interviews were conducted informally with at least 78 individuals and we participated in more than 50 research-related events, such as conventions, summer camps, award ceremonies, or other local events. Complementing our interview-based strategy, we carried out more than 5,194 observation hours, which were chronicled in regular field notes, and we have collected 10,468 profiles, transcripts from 15 online discussion group forums, and more than 389 videos as well as numerous materials from classroom and after-school contexts. The majority of the participants in our research were recruited through snowball sampling in person, via emails, and through institutions, as well as through the placement of recruitment scripts on websites and local community newsletters.

In addition to interviews, we administered paper and online questionnaires to develop a comparative portrait of our participants. The general questionnaire was completed by 363 respondents.<sup>8</sup> Based on the survey material of a significant subset of our research participants, we know that

the population we have examined is distinctive in some important ways. Our survey population ranged in age from 7 to 25, with a median age of 16; 86 percent of these respondents fell between 12 and 19 years of age. Our respondents were evenly split in terms of gender identification. In terms of the ethnic identities designated by our participants, we skew from national averages in having a larger proportion of Asian participants and a smaller proportion of whites.<sup>9</sup> These proportions were influenced by the location of many of our research sites, such as online interest groups and in the large metropolitan centers of California.<sup>10</sup> The focus of our work has been to develop a series of in-depth case studies of youth practice, not in developing a nationally representative sample. Many of our studies focused on online interest groups and youth media programs that represented media-savvy youth at the forefront in innovation of new media literacy and practice. We also sought to counterbalance this focus by developing case studies that were centered on mainstream youth and their friendship-driven practices as well as on lower-income communities with members who do not all have the same access to technical resources. The survey material on its own does not permit us to make generalizations for the overall population we have looked at, but it does enable an understanding of some of the key variations in the different populations that we have explored, and how they are situated in relation to other broader quantitative indicators. (See section 1.1 for more on how our study relates to quantitative studies on youth, media, and technology.)

## Notes

1. The seven postdoctoral researchers include Sonja Baumer (University of California, Berkeley), Matteo Bittanti (University of California, Berkeley), Heather A. Horst (University of Southern California/University of California, Berkeley), Patricia G. Lange (University of Southern California), Katynka Z. Martínez (University of Southern California), C. J. Pascoe (University of California, Berkeley), and Laura Robinson (University of Southern California).

2. The six doctoral students include danah boyd (University of California, Berkeley), Becky Herr-Stephenson (University of Southern California), Mahad Ibrahim (University of California, Berkeley), Dilan Mahendran (University of California, Berkeley), Dan Perkel (University of California, Berkeley), and Christo Sims (University of California, Berkeley).

3. The nine master's students include Judd Antin (University of California, Berkeley), Alison Billings (University of California, Berkeley), Megan Finn (University of California, Berkeley), Arthur Law (University of California, Berkeley), Annie Manion (University of Southern California), Sarai Mitnick (University of California, Berkeley), Paul Poling (University of California, Berkeley), David Schlossberg (University of California, Berkeley), and Sarita Yardi (University of California, Berkeley).

4. Judy Suwatanapongched is a J.D. student at the University of Southern California.

5. Rachel Cody was a project assistant at the University of Southern California.

6. The seven undergraduates are Max Besbris (University of California, Berkeley), Brendan Callum (University of Southern California), Allison Dusine (University of California, Berkeley), Sam Jackson (Yale University), Lou-Anthony Limon (University of California, Berkeley), Renee Saito (University of Southern California), and Tammy Zhu (University of Southern California).

7. The collaborators include Natalie Boero, an assistant professor of sociology at San Jose State University; Scott Carter, a Ph.D. candidate at the University of California, Berkeley, who now works at FXPai; Lisa Tripp, assistant professor of school media and youth services, College of Information, Florida State University; and Jennifer Urban, clinical assistant professor of law at the University of Southern California.

8. These respondents were those we conducted interviews with in our homes- and neighborhood-focused studies as well as in a number of other projects, including Patricia G. Lange's study "Thanks for Watching: A Study of Video-Sharing Practices on YouTube," Mizuko Ito's "Transnational Anime Fandoms and Amateur Cultural Production," Becky Herr-Stephenson's "Mischievous Managed," and danah boyd's "Teen Sociality in Networked Publics." While some parents and other adults participated in the survey, all statistics reported here are based on survey participants who are 25 years old or younger, of which there were 363 respondents.

9. We presented respondents with 14 ethnicity categories (one being "other") and asked them to choose all that apply to them—49.3 percent of our population identified as white and 10.5 percent of our participants self-identified as African-American or black; 9.6 percent self-identified as Other Spanish-American/Latino and another 5.2 percent self-identified as Mexican/Mexican American/Chicano; 6.3 percent of our participants declared themselves Chinese/Chinese American; and just over 8 percent of our respondents identified themselves as Asian, a category that in the United States incorporates East Indian/Pakistani, Filipino/Filipino American, Japanese/Japanese American, Korean/Korean American, Vietnamese/Vietnamese American, and Other Asian. Another 5.2 percent identified as Other. Because respondents were able to choose more than one category, the percentages did not add up to 100 percent. Our participants diverged from the averages calculated by the 2000

U.S. census, particularly in terms of the density of the Asian population (which is quite a bit above the national proportion of 3.6 percent) and white populations (which is far below the national proportion of approximately 75 percent).

10. In California, whites make up approximately 60 percent of the population and Asians constitute around 11 percent of the state's population, according to the 2000 U.S. Census. Latinos, who are not clearly defined in the 2000 U.S. Census, are also prominent in California.



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