

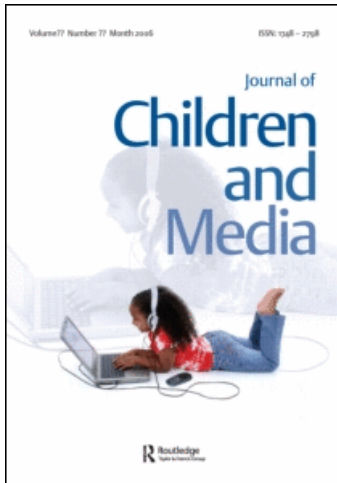
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### Book Reviews

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# BOOK REVIEWS

## *Hanging Out, Messing Around, and Geeking Out: Kids Living and Learning with New Media*

M. Ito, S. Baumer, M. Bittanti, d. boyd, R. Cody, B. Herr-Stephenson, H. Horst, P. Lange, D. Mahendran, K. Martinez, C.J. Pascoe, D. Perkel, L. Robinson, C. Sims, and L. Tripp, 2010, John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Series in Digital Media and Learning, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA  
ISBN 978-262-01336-9

In the last decade, digital media have become so pervasive and diffuse that young people are growing up enmeshed within them, and their lives seem to be getting transformed in the process. One issue of importance is the different kinds of learning that may occur as youth participate in these informal out-of-school experiences with new media. *Hanging Out, Messing Around, and Geeking Out: Kids Living and Learning with New Media* provides a comprehensive and fascinating picture of the many ways in which youth engage with digital tools and networks—and in the process, learn, socialize, and create new forms of literacy.

The book is the outgrowth of a research project, “Kids Informal Learning with Digital Media” funded by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. From 2005 to 2008, a group of twenty-eight researchers led by Mizuko Ito, along with Peter Lyman, Michael Carter, and Barrie Thorne, conducted an ethnographic investigation of youth practice with new media resulting in twenty-three case studies of 12- to 18-year-old youth across America. For a scholarly book, it has an unconventional format—it is neither an edited volume with every chapter written by a different author, nor is it the solo effort of one or two authors. Instead, the book is truly collaborative. Although each chapter has a lead author or sets of authors, it draws on material and input from all of the researchers and all coauthors agreed to take collective ownership for all the material in the book. It is indeed fitting that a book on new media uses such a novel and unique approach!

Using a sociocultural perspective on learning and literacy, the case studies are integrated within the chapters, which describe the different practices that characterize youth’s engagement with new media. The authors distinguish between two principal modes of youth participation with new media—friendship driven and interest driven. The former is a more mainstream practice centering on socializing with peers using digital technology; the latter is structured around shared interests such as gaming or video production. Interest-driven networks can also serve as a jumping off point for those youth who may be at the margins of traditional peer groups, but who are gaining cultural salience in today’s networked world.

Chapter one, “Media Ecologies,” by Horst, Herr-Stephenson, and Robinson, begins by framing the technological and social context in which today’s youth interact with media. As the title of the book suggests, three categories describe how youth engage with media—hanging out, messing around, and geeking out; these labels suggest that these practices

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with new media are normative and similar to offline youth activities. The first genre of participation, *hanging out*, is described as an informal, casual way to interact with new media, most often used in socially driven practices. *Messing around*, another mainstream practice that is more active, uses experimentation and play. The final genre, *geeking out*, primarily the purview of interest-driven engagement, is intense and requires a commitment on the part of the user. For the first two genres in particular, this layering of media and social interaction is centered on peers at school, who serve as the primary point for socializing and identity construction.

Chapters two through four delve more deeply into the ways in which youth use media for the socially driven practices of friendships and intimacy as well as within the home and family. In chapter two, boyd illustrates how social network sites have become incorporated into teen friendship practices, further breaking them into the categories of making friends, performing friendships, and articulating friendship hierarchies. For example, children seem to leverage relationships on social networking sites to get to know people they may not know well at school. Moreover, social networking sites have pushed the category of performing friendships to new heights as youth publically display their "friends" and their conversations with these "friends." The chapter also describes the social norms that have developed regarding how to navigate relationships online; for instance, she notes that youth struggle with many of the same offline issues such as who to reject as a friend. Overall, boyd believes that through such practices within their friendship-driven networks, youth will learn to navigate social interactions in the mediated spaces of the future such as at college and eventually at work.

Chapter three, one of the few chapters to discuss in depth the mobile phone practices of adolescents, describes intimacy within the context of dating and romance. We were somewhat surprised that the label "intimacy" was not used in the context of friendships, the focus of chapter two, as developmental psychology research suggests that adolescence is the period when youth friendships take on the hallmarks of intimacy such as self-disclosure and trust. Lead author Pascoe finds that setting boundaries is a central part of navigating new media relationships as online and mobile technologies allow youth to access their significant other twenty-four hours a day, often outside the purview of parents. Mobile phones allow teenagers to keep tabs on one another, and thus most youth are expected to account for their whereabouts through regular contact. At the same time, the asynchronous nature of this kind of communication allows youth to control the message they wish to portray to a significant other unlike face-to-face communication. Pascoe describes new media practices such as digitized tokens of affection and public representations of relationships; for example, deciding when to announce on Facebook that one is in a relationship can be an important marker in that relationship. Moreover, public profiles allow adolescents to learn about potential mates before deciding whether to engage romantically. The persistence of the Internet may also make it more difficult to extricate oneself from a relationship once it is finished given that the digital representation of the relationship usually lasts longer than the relationship itself. Finally, Pascoe also described the etiquette and norms that users seem to be creating around new media, such as "one should not break up online or by text."

Although adults are not the focus of this book, in chapter four, Horst describes new media within the context of the home and family. She finds that parents, navigating how to structure their children's media use, grapple with normative issues of adolescence such as independence, separation, and autonomy. She first frames the discussion by detailing the

ways that parents craft public or private media spaces, suggesting that these spaces may relate to parents' attempts to structure their children's interactions with media. However, not all families have the same resources and, as such, economics may play a part. Some families connect over media use and see it as a way to facilitate communication and bonding, and Horst finds that the majority of families seem to have routines around media use. Perhaps because this chapter describes adult practices around technology, it did not seem to add much to what we already know in the literature. However, families do represent one of the primary social contexts for youth's ongoing informal engagements with new media, and thus are an important element to consider in a comprehensive narrative about young people's technology use.

Starting in chapter five, Ito and Bittanti shift the focus to interest-driven networks as they discuss gaming practices of today's youth. The work in this chapter was particularly interesting and well developed; perhaps because this world has not been well documented in the literature on games and youth, which has mostly focused on effects. Gaming is the central form of most youth's early computer experience, and forms of game play are now quite varied as the platforms and content have themselves diversified. There is evidence that such games do provide opportunities for learning, particularly in the area of core cognitive skills. The authors astutely point out that "Gaming is a place to compete and achieve where there will not be consequential failure in real life." As in the other chapters, game play is broken up into different genres: killing time, in which youth fill small spaces of unstructured time with game play; hanging out where the driving motivation is to see their friends or family; as gaming practice moves to recreational gaming, traditional gender roles begin to play out and gaming becomes more serious and male centered. In this context, the gaming is peer based, driven by motivation to learn and master the process. As Ito and Bittanti delve deeper into examining the ways in which youth engage in gaming, they describe learning that could occur, typically not associated with game play. For example, dedicated gamers organize and mobilize, creating formalized practices centered on play, which can develop leadership and team skills. The authors describe many gaming subcultures such as machinima or fansubbing within which youth must use persistence and tenacity in order to complete their projects. Moreover, such experiences help youth, particularly males, to claim credibility outside of their mainstream peer culture at school or after school sports programs. As the chapter adeptly demonstrates, learning through gaming is neither obvious nor easy to capture, yet it is occurring and the challenge is to figure out how to capitalize on it and make it more widespread.

The last two chapters move squarely into the domain of interest-driven practices. Chapter six, written by Lange and Ito, describes how user-driven content has become possible due to easy access to video cameras and editing software, as well as the ability to upload video for public consumption on sites such as YouTube or social networking sites. With the ubiquity of digital cameras and mobile cameras on phones, digital photos, part of online socialization and everyday communication, are embedded everywhere. Moreover, access to this technology is more widespread as the economics are viable for most. As the practice moves to specialization and categorization, unique voices and crafts appear on the Internet such as beat making, anime, and fansubbing. In this world, mastering esoteric knowledge gives you status and YouTube celebrities abound. Some are seeking a career as a media professional, whereas others are seeking recognition; almost all want to connect with audiences. Within these worlds there are hierarchies of recognition. The exciting transformation is that youth no longer need to look exclusively to professional and

commercial works for models of how to pursue their craft, because they can gain recognition and validation in niche audiences.

The final chapter by lead author Ito begins to describe how some interest-driven practices could translate into the world of work. As this book demonstrates and confirms early speculation, informal uses of new media can translate into skills training to compete in the twenty-first century. Ito describes other avenues of learning, however, which could lead to job relevant skills, such as youth can learn entrepreneurial skills by offering their technical expertise to adults. She notes that nonmarket work can also allow youth to experiment with different work practices before they make commitments to jobs. A particularly fascinating example was of an adolescent who still played Neopets despite the fact that he was older than most players, because he enjoyed the economics of game play.

The primary objective of this book was to document the learning in the lives of youth as they use media, and in this the authors were quite successful. Although many of the core findings were not new, they certainly will give the reader a qualitatively rich picture that was heretofore not possible from larger scale survey studies. Given how quickly technology and young people's use of it changes, the data did seem at times to be out of date, but this is a challenge for any research in this arena. The core message of the book is that adolescents are grappling with the same issues online that they grapple with offline, and the public and pervasive nature of this new medium may be intensifying these issues. Future research will need to dig deeper to understand how development might be affected when children are born into a digital age.

The larger goal of this work was to stimulate discussion on how to focus future policy and education agendas. The defined genres of participation, socially and interest driven, provide clear and compelling frameworks for the ways in which youth engage in media and is in our opinion a major contribution of this book that will help guide research on new media in the years to come. The work demonstrates that it will be crucial for adults to respect youth expertise, autonomy, and initiative, as well as the fact that online communication and gaming are central to youth sociability. The authors present a convincing case that there are valuable learning dimensions to young people's social and recreational online activity. The potential for a change in learning with new media use is imminent and tangible; teaching the next generation of learners to successfully compete in an increasingly complicated, innovative, and exciting world will not be an easy task, but we put this book down (from our electronic Kindle) feeling that we are headed in the right direction.

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*Children, Adolescents, and the Media*

V.V. Strasburger, B.J. Wilson, and A.B. Jordan, 2009, 2nd ed., Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA  
ISBN 978-1-4129-4467-0

In April 2010, the Supreme Court of the United States agreed to hear a case on appeal from US Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals in Sacramento. The case was entitled "Arnold Schwarzenegger, Governor of California, et al., Petitioners v. Entertainment Merchants Association, et al." (docket 08-1448). The case stems from regulation passed by the California Legislature, and signed into law by Governor Schwarzenegger, that prohibits the sale or rental of violent video games to anyone under the age of 18 years. The video game industry appealed (and won) with the Ninth Circuit Court; and now the State of California is appealing to the Supreme Court to uphold the right of the state to protect minors from the deleterious effects of video violence.

The reason I bring up this case is that it is precisely the type of case that needs the sound reasoning and advice of scholars and researchers who have had a long history of studying media and children. This second edition of the classic textbook *Children, Adolescents, and the Media* is a perfect example of bringing together the best in a field, and adding to an established, yet constantly growing and changing, field.

This exciting new volume, this time edited by Victor Strasburger, Barbara Wilson, and Amy Jordan, follows on the strengths of the first edition and expands the material with several additional chapters that help to round out the coverage of all relevant aspects of knowledge about media and youth. The chapters all give an excellent overview of the literature on the topic and a sense of the scope of the issues they deal with, along with insightful analysis and/or additional novel findings. Moreover, it is clearly written to be accessible for a vast array of audiences—from undergrads, to grad students, to industry professionals. In this sense, the new edition is truly "media education for all"—all reasons, all seasons, and all audiences.

The thirteen chapters and over 600 pages of review and commentary fully explore the diverse issues concerning the impact of media on children, teens, and their families. The topics range from the impact of advertising, media violence, and sexuality and drug portrayals, to the influence of rock music, video games, the Internet, and food/eating and disorders. Add to this comprehensive tour, an excellent chapter on media literacy, and the attempts to give children, adolescents, and adults the skills to understand media processes and influences, and you have a beautiful and well-rounded textbook.

In addition to the three editors/authors' contributions to the various topics, the volume includes several chapters authored by specialists in particular areas, namely Edward Donnerstein (the Internet), Jeanne Funk (video games), and Robert McCannon (media literacy/media education). And there is a charming introduction by Dorothy Singer. All in all, a very satisfying, thorough, and practical work.

Finally, there are several features that I found particularly useful as a teacher of undergraduate and graduate students in psychology and communications. The graphics are interesting and well-organized and the "Exercises" that conclude the chapters are clearly and cleverly designed to engage the student. In addition, I found the cartoons, which are scattered throughout the text, to be delightful.

This is an outstanding textbook and also serves as a useful primer for professionals who want an overview of the field of media effects research. I wish that more of them had this book on this shelf for reference, inspiration, and understanding. It is heartening to see the compilation of research and the careful writing that is displayed in this text. It is destined to be a classic teaching and research tool for students and professionals.

**John P. Murray** (PhD) is a Research Fellow in Psychology at Washington College, an Emeritus Professor of Developmental Psychology in the School of Family Studies and Human Services at Kansas State University, and a Visiting Scholar in the Center on Media and Child Health, Children's Hospital Boston, Harvard Medical School. He has conducted research on media and children for over 40 years. His current interests lie in neuroimaging of children's brain activations while viewing video violence. E-mail: [jpm@ksu.edu](mailto:jpm@ksu.edu)