

Digital Media & Learning Conference 2016, UC Irvine

Individual Talk Abstracts

3:15pm – 4:15pm | Identity Making In Online Spaces

Emerald Bay DE

Speakers: Alex Cho, Cindy Cruz, Jane Van Galen, Olivia Gonzalez, Jose Lizarraga, Susannah Stern

242 - Individual Session Research

The Digital Practices of Mobility, Safety, and Surveillance Amongst Queer Street Youth

Cindy Cruz UC Santa Cruz

Much of digital and new media literacy research takes place in predominately privileged educational spaces and middle class contexts, where elite youth are able to leverage their knowledge and participation with digital technologies, maker culture communities, and networked social media sites into academic achievement, career possibilities, and even civic engagement (Ito, M., Gutierrez, K., Livingstone, S., et al, 2013; Zimmerman, 2012). Yet despite a growing educational and technological disparity between in-school and out-of-school learning for non-dominant youth, I have found that queer homeless youth are developing practices of digital improvisation to leverage their own basic needs of food, shelter, and basic health care needs (Cruz, 2016), but are also using mobile technologies to assess the risks of ‘exchange and barter’ under new conditions of increased police surveillance both online and offline in newly gentrified spaces.

This qualitative study of 40 LGBTQ homeless youth aged 14-23 investigated how homeless queer youth bend/hack digital technologies in ways where the issues of “safety” and “mobility” have become central. In a series of focus groups, participant observations, select interviews and ‘hanging out’ at a LGBTQ youth drop-in center with youth aged 14-23, I have found that homeless queer youth learn to bend digital technologies to circumvent the surveillance of police in newly gentrified environments. Thinking with Kris Gutierrez (2008) in her work with literacy in the third space, I find that gentrification forces a certain kind of mobility or migration across familiar and always changing practices in youth mobility, creating cognitive and sometimes even digital maps to help themselves and others follow and access resources across the city. To access resources requires tools to facilitate accurately the sense-making practices necessary for survival. These practices of movement, safety and surveillance highlight the survival practices that are very much a part of homeless youth worlds and technologies. But I want to begin to suggest that as the changing and gentrifying landscape directly affects youth practices of access and survival, it is tempered by the surveillance of police that I suggest make an already underground practice even more invisible, and potentially more dangerous for the youth involved.

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"#QueeringThePresent, #QueryingTheFuture: Digital queer gestures on twitter, transforming discourses, and performativities of new possible futures.

Jose Lizarraga | UC Berkeley | @sapoverde

We live in intensely political times where the struggle for the rights to plurality of identity, expression, and representation in society has unprecedented visibility. Twitter and other

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digitized social networks provide a platform for these negotiations of self and demands for social change to play out in public ways. This paper examines public deployments of digital queer gestures (informed by Rodriguez's, 2014, notion of queer gestures) as ouvertures for new dialogues and transformation of hegemonic discourses, both in the digital and physical realm. Through this examination, I highlight performativities of new possible futures and un-prescribed Utopias (Muñoz, 2009) by those who inhabit the margins of our society; namely, queer, trans, and gender-nonconforming individuals of color. This work brings together queer studies (Rodriguez, 2003, 2014; Muñoz, 1999, 2009) and socio-cultural studies (Cole, 1996, 1998) to explore how digital artifacts and gestures form part of repertoires of practice (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003) that socially organize communities and help develop individuals as historical actors (Gutiérrez & Vossoughi, 2009). Through a textual analysis of tweets and an ethnographic analysis of interviews with queer and trans artists and activists of color, their followers, and expanded communities, I elucidate the affordances and constraints of social media as sites for a queerness of the present and articulations of hope and possibility for the future. Such analyses have revealed clear tensions between the radical and intersectional political enactments (gestures) of queer, trans, and undocumented individuals, and those that form part of prevailing normative "gay agenda" which is predominantly informed by the hopes and desires of white, cis-gendered, gay men. Despite these tensions, digital queer gestures show promise as cultural artifacts that mediate new understandings of the pluralistic nature of today's society and visions of the not here yet (Muñoz, 1999).

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Tumblr is a Place to Express Myself": Digital design considerations for queer youth of color activism

Alexander Cho | UC Irvine

What is it about Tumblr that makes it such a hotbed of queer youth of color digital media activism? This paper, based on over six years of fieldwork as a participant observer and qualitative interviewer in queer youth of color Tumblr networks, observes that 1) queer youth of color heavily prefer Tumblr over Facebook to authentically "express" themselves, their sexuality, and their political views, and 2) Tumblr's combination of relative anonymity, largely image-based circulation, and opaque public-facing architecture may be part of the reason why. Some queer youth of color even go so far as to create "fake" Facebook profiles in order to divert suspicion from unsupportive or homophobic family members, some have horror stories of being "outed" by the Facebook interface, and many have had life-altering experiences of learning about sophisticated gender and race theory through Tumblr. This paper ultimately suggests that we use Deleuze and Guattari's theory of "smooth" and "striated" space as a shorthand to understand how design considerations in digital environments may enable non-normative lived experiences to emerge into circulation with lower stakes for reprisal.

Work Cited:

Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari. 1987. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

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Adolescents' Experiences of Co-Constructed Identity on Social Media

Susannah Stern | University of San Diego
Olivia Gonzalez | University of San Diego

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Most research on contemporary young people has presumed that youths largely shape their own identities online. Yet, it has become increasingly clear that youth's online identities can easily be shaped by others, and not exclusively in situations involving deliberate harm. The objective of this project was to understand how young people feel about the co-construction of their identities in digital settings. In particular, we asked, what is it like to have others shape one's identity online through unsanctioned posts or comments? Which strategies do young people use to maintain control? And finally, what are teens' overall perceptions of control of their online identities?

We conducted fifteen individual interviews and one focus group interview with a diverse group of young people between the ages of 13 to 18 (total N=25). We analyzed the interviews qualitatively using a constant comparative method, following a grounded theory approach.

Our findings demonstrated that participants experience a variety of situations in which they unwillingly or unintentionally surrender control of their identities online. Just as importantly, participants described a range of strategies they employ to maintain or wrest control back from friends, peers, and social media companies. These strategies include both behavioral efforts (e.g., using different platforms, unfriending) as well as cognitive activities (e.g., discounting the importance of posted comments). By employing these strategies or feeling as though they could employ these strategies in the future, participants are able to experience a high perception of control over their online identities. Perhaps most interestingly, instances of identity co-construction are not typically regarded as lapses of control, but as opportunities for authentic feedback and validation.

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First in our Families: First generation college students, storytelling, and equity

Jane Van Galen | University of Washington Bothell | @jvg

This project explores digital storytelling and social media as a means of supporting greater voice, visibility, equality, and agency for First Generation College students in the U.S. In digital storytelling workshops held at four campuses across the country, marginalized students crafted first-person stories weaving images, video, sound, and silence to craft multimedia pieces about pride, growth, resilience, anger, tenacity, doubt, shame, and discovery as they navigate economic, cultural and social barriers to higher education.

Working at the intersections of art, sociology, democratic education and storytelling, participants collaboratively re-examined their own narratives of educational success as they developed counter-narratives to the deficit-laden language in much of the academic literature on First Generation students.

Students then screened their digital stories at campus events and disseminated them via social media and a project website. As these stories name the political, emotional, and intellectual work of claiming one's place in college against the odds, they invite all stakeholders to imagine new means for making college more inclusive.

Finally, each storyteller was interviewed about how writing and mediating a personal narrative of Being First affected their sense of agency, identity and voice within broader discourse about equity in college.

In screening two stories followed by open discussion, this talk will examine digital stories as mediated authoring within contested social and cultural spaces.

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First in our Families is a partnership between a university faculty member on the west coast and a national non-profit focused on eradicating class barriers and class privilege, headquartered in Boston.