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Being strategic and taking control: Bedrooms, social network sites and the narratives of growing up

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Being strategic and taking control: Bedrooms, social network sites and the narratives of growing up

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Abstract

Despite being distinct, online social spaces are governed by norms and conventions reminiscent of those that govern offline social spaces. Our research into the ways young people's 'private' or 'quasi-private' spaces are managed indicates that the strategies used to exert a sense of control over sites like Facebook borrow heavily from the strategies employed to manage offline private spaces like the teenage bedroom. In this article, we explore these continuities and then consider the limitations of applying a bedroom metaphor to online social spaces. We then consider how these strategies of control are related to a process of 'marking out' the narrative of 'growing up' both in online and offline social spaces.

Keywords

Young people, social network sites, bedrooms, bedroom metaphor, strategies of control, growing up, identity

Introduction

This article draws on qualitative research from two projects that explore the online and offline spaces of young people's social and cultural worlds. The first project was conducted by Siân Lincoln in the northwest of England (NWE) in the UK with 50 young people, both male and female and from a variety of backgrounds in two phases between 2000 and 2003 and 2008 to 2010. The research explored the relevance and significance of private spaces such as bedrooms to young people as part of their social and cultural lives. The second project was conducted by Brady Robards in southeast Queensland (SEQ) in Australia, between 2007 and 2010, with 40 young users of Facebook and/or MySpace, exploring the role of these spaces as sites of reflexive identity work. Both projects draw on ethnographic methods including in-depth interviews, observations and visual methods such as photography (Lincoln, 2012) and friending participants (Robards, 2013).

The forthcoming discussions are informed by the authors' respective datasets. Noticing the overlaps between the strategies of control employed by Lincoln's participants in their bedrooms and Robards' participants using social network sites, we argue that a spectrum of strat-

egies for exerting control over personal space emerges from young people's cultural and social interactions online and offline. These control strategies constitute a central part of the performance of identity. When reflected upon, whether through remembering previous bedroom configurations or scrolling back through a Facebook timeline and Friends lists, changes in these control strategies also serve to 'mark out' a growing up narrative.

By explicitly drawing attention to the translation (or lack of translation) of certain control strategies from physical spaces to online social spaces, we are able to contribute to the broader understanding of how conventions for managing a sense of self in online social spaces develop. We argue that while spatial metaphors – like the bedroom metaphor – are useful to further our understanding of online social spaces, these metaphors do have inherent limitations given the unique affordances of 'the digital'.

One limitation in the continuity between control strategies observed in the teenage bedroom and the profiles of social network sites is the notion of 'context collapse' (Pearson, 2009; Marwick & boyd, 2011; Vitak, 2012). Context collapse describes the conflation of various complex social worlds (made up of family, friends, old school mates, romantic interests, work colleagues, and so on) into a singular performative medium: the profile that is at the core of the social network site.

In order to explore this complexity, we divide our paper into three sections. First, we extend this discussion of spatial metaphors as a commonly used device for making sense of social network sites, before also considering the limitations inherent in these spatial metaphors. Second, we discuss a spectrum of strategies employed by our participants to exert a sense of control over their personal spaces, both online and offline. When taken together, these control strategies constitute what we describe in the third section as a 'marking out' process of identity work. This marking out process changes over time, and, as we contend, can be mapped onto a 'growing up' narrative.

Using spatial metaphors to understand social network sites

The use of spatial metaphors in conceptualising youth cultural practices is not new. Spatial metaphors are used in a variety of ways to explore young people's uses of online spaces, particularly in the context of self-presentation, identity and performance. Even before the rise of the social web that has become enmeshed in everyday life today, spatial metaphors were a popular way to make sense of 'the digital'. Since Gibson coined the term 'cyberspace' in his 1984 novel *Neuromancer*, and perhaps even before then through films like *Tron* (1982) for

which creator Steven Lisberger drew inspiration from early video games in the 1970s, spatial metaphors have been used to help us conceptualise where we ‘go’ when we stare into a screen. Importantly, spatial metaphors serve as useful devices from which comparisons between online and offline activity can be drawn. Rather than suggesting that the ‘new’ forms of self-presentation have replaced ‘old’ forms, spatial metaphors can help to demonstrate both a blurring between the online/offline dichotomy that has emerged over the past two decades and the continuities in self-presentation and self-documentation using a variety of online and offline spaces (Day Good 2013: 570).

Day Good (2013) suggests that social network sites like Facebook lend themselves to multiple spatial metaphors in terms of the ways in which they are used; not only for social interaction but also as spaces of self-presentation and performance and as ‘personal media archives’ (Day Good 2013: 559). She draws an analogy between Facebook and scrapbooks, friendship books, autograph albums and so on, exploring how historically these artefacts were based on a media assemblage of notes, messages, photographs, symbolic tokens, and snippets of meaningful items (Day Good 2013: 559). Although usually produced and assembled by one person, Day Good notes that in many instances scrapbooks were meant to be seen by others, serving ultimately as ‘symbols of social bonds’ (2013: 562). They were intentionally constructed as records of people’s emerging lives, meant to be traversed by others. In this respect, clear similarities can be drawn between scrapbooking practices and the uses of sites such as Facebook. Other spatial metaphors that have also been applied to Facebook include the ‘exhibition hall’ (Hogan, 2010), which we explore below.

Perhaps one of the most widely used spatial metaphors employed to help make sense of online social spaces is that of the stage. A number of scholars (Chandler and Roberts-Young, 1998; boyd, 2007; Buckingham, 2007; Hodkinson and Lincoln, 2008; Abbott-Chapman & Roberts, 2009; Lincoln, 2012; Robards, 2012) have described young people’s disclosures online as performances, drawing on Goffman’s dramaturgical metaphor whereby all individuals are actors, performing ‘region’ or context-appropriate versions of self. Goffman argues that when individuals interact, they are compelled to draw on available resources to know the person with whom they are confronted, to help ‘define the situation’ (Goffman, 1959: 1). Without this ‘presentation of self’ or without the ability to ‘read’ the identity performances of an individual, agentic social interaction could not occur. Drawing on past experiences and available signifiers, individuals construct a narrative around the person with whom they are interacting. This narrative draws accessible markers of identity together into a cohesive story,

informing appropriate interactions and behaviours, and providing parameters for the interaction (or points of resistance). There has been some debate over whether or not Goffman's dramaturgical framework can be applied to online social spaces, where the body is differently mediated (see Miller, 1995 and Barnes, 2000) but scholars have largely moved beyond this initial debate to further nuance the application of the dramaturgical framework to online social spaces.

Pinch (2010) invokes Goffman's 'sociology of doors', arguing that the rise of new technologies such as social network sites often obscures the importance of 'old technologies' and their role in everyday life. A swinging service door in a restaurant, for example, functions as a technology for separating the performance regions (or contexts) of waiters and cooks, but is rendered invisible because of its mundane nature. Pinch also argues that the applicability of Goffman's dramaturgical framework depends on how 'presence' is conceptualised. 'If co-presence is interpreted as only bodily co-presence', he says, 'then the idea will have limited applicability to online worlds'. However, if co-presence is 'conceived of as a means whereby interactants are available and accountable to each other for their mediated interactions, it has a wider application' (Pinch, 2010: 420).

While flagging this second, wider interpretation of co-presence in applications of Goffman's dramaturgical framework is not common in the literature, it does provide a viable route by which Goffman's important observations and theories on the presentation of self can be made applicable to online forms of sociality. Pinch goes on to advance this second interpretation by providing another example of an old technology that can help us think about the implications of new ones, that of letter writing:

This is a mediated form of communication with its own special norms and obligations. Writing and receiving letters are accountable social actions. The importance of the mediation and how it affects the accountability of actions can be seen when for some reason a person who writes a letter is present when the recipient reads it. The ensuing mild embarrassment is telling and derives precisely from the changed form of mediation and co-presence. (Pinch 2010: 420-421)

As Pinch's example makes clear, the forms of co-presence that are mediated online are much less foreign or 'new' than one might expect, and indeed, our experiences of sociality mediated online are deeply reminiscent of long-standing forms of mediated communication. Hogan (2010) further develops the application of Goffman's work to online social spaces, especially

in relation to the notion of co-presence contested in Pinch's (2010) work, by offering a more nuanced understanding of the dramaturgical framework. Hogan makes a distinction between 'performances', where 'actors behave with each other', and 'exhibitions', where individuals 'submit artifacts to show to each other' (Hogan 2010: 377). Hogan clarifies that exhibitions can also be performances of self (consider the display of photographs in a teenage bedroom, for instance), but that these exhibitions do not require geographical or temporal co-presence for actors to respond to each others' data:

One of the key distinctions between exhibitions and performances is that performances are subject to continual observation and self-monitoring as the means for impression management, whereas exhibitions are subject to selective contributions. (Hogan 2010: 377, 384)

Hogan acknowledges that there are limitations to this typology, such as what he refers to as the 'hybrid spaces' of MMOs (Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games) that 'share aspects of both off-line situations and online exhibitions' (2010: 382). To further complicate Hogan's typology, consider 'Mikalah', a teenaged participant in one of boyd's (2010) studies, who deactivates her Facebook account (rendering her profile invisible/non-existent to her network) each time she isn't directly engaged with the site, or 'Shamika', another of boyd's participants, who deletes each wall post, status update, and 'Like', shortly after it is posted. Both of these practices constitute a form of participation, but also render the recorded performances as ephemeral in different ways, troubling the typology Hogan is seeking to advance.

Despite these limitations, it is clear that Goffman's dramaturgical framework remains useful for understanding the various ways individuals present themselves online, even when the technologies and processes of mediation present new challenges. Beyond being useful in this respect, the dramaturgical framework also serves as an effective spatial metaphor for thinking through a perceived public/private divide. For Goffman, 'front stage' performances are regulated by the social and cultural constructs of 'public' spaces and there is a system of codes and conventions that regulate these spaces within which the performance takes place. The individual 'performs' accordingly and, additionally, the performance is 'standardised' within those conventions. Conversely, in 'back stage' performances the performance becomes regulated by the codes and conventions of the private realm within which the individual has arguably more control.

Drawing on Goffman's work within the context of social media, Pearson argues that there is a collapsing of front and back stage whereby the boundaries of public and private space are increasingly blurred. This means that, potentially, elements of a public front stage performance may seep into a back stage performance and vice versa, as she demonstrates through the 'glass bedroom' metaphor.

The metaphor can take a number of forms, but at its core it describes a bedroom with walls made of glass. Inside the bedroom, private conversations and intimate exchanges occur, each with varying awareness of distant friends and strangers moving past transparent walls that separate groups from more deliberate and constructed 'outside' displays. The glass bedroom itself is not an entirely private space... it is a bridge that is partially private and public, constructed online through signs and language. (Pearson, 2009)

While this metaphor is useful to a certain extent in exploring social network sites, it also has its limitations. For example, it renders the transparency of the profile as common to all visitors, implying that everyone who visits a certain profile will see the same content. In fact, 'Friends lists', for instance, or user-specific access settings, allow the profile author to group their Friends and give groups or individual users varying levels of access to a profile. Thus, the performative space of the profile becomes multiple and varied depending on the individual accessing it. This is where most spatial metaphors, and certainly the bedroom metaphor, find their limitations, and where the digital challenges our conceptualisations of space.

The metaphor of the bedroom has also been utilised in other ways as a framework for thinking specifically about this interplay of public and private in the lives of young people who occupy multiple identity spaces on and offline. Much of this work has focused on young people's web pages (Walker, 2000; Reid-Walsh and Mitchell, 2004) or online journals (Hodkinson, 2007; Hodkinson and Lincoln, 2008) but more recently on social network sites such as the once popular MySpace and the now dominant Facebook (Pearson, 2009; Robards, 2012; Lincoln, 2012). A small body of work also exists that explores the crossover between real and virtual bedrooms for young women who use private space to explore and articulate their (gendered) identities (see Reid-Walsh and Mitchell, 2004; Dobson, 2008 and Senft, 2008).

In the following section of this paper, we consider the forms of control exerted over young people's private spaces using examples from our two studies, linking the strategies of control

used to manage bedrooms to the strategies of control used to manage a presence on social network sites like Facebook. Our argument here is that, although limited, the bedroom metaphor serves as a useful device for exploring what we describe below through the work of Hodkinson and Lincoln (2008) as practical and symbolic forms of control.

Rethinking and resisting strategies of control

In their study of blogging website LiveJournal, established in the late 1990s, Hodkinson and Lincoln (2008) explore the ways in which users of the site exerted control over their online presence. Hodkinson and Lincoln link these online control strategies to the ways in which teenagers exerted control of their offline personal spaces, namely their bedrooms. They argue that the bedroom is ‘the first individually oriented physical space of young people’s lives’ (28), enabling them to draw parallels between the bedroom and LiveJournal, focusing on both the *symbolic* and *practical* control young people have over these spaces. They argue that both the bedroom and LiveJournal tend to be highly regulated by young people using them in terms of access (practical control) and content (symbolic control) and that consequently both spaces offer a ‘perceived safety and individual freedom’ that is of key importance to young people using them (Hodkinson and Lincoln 2008: 32). LiveJournal has a system of privacy not too far removed from the privacy practices observable on MySpace and Facebook. LiveJournal, for instance, also included a Friends-List which users could populate with contacts and allow only those individuals access to their journal entries. Hodkinson (2006), like boyd in her work on social network sites (2007a; 2010), found that users of LiveJournal emphasised the value of the platform for maintaining contact with existing friends. Some of the key findings from this existing research will be explored in the following sections in relation to new insights gained from Lincoln and Robards’ studies.

The parallels between LiveJournal and social network sites allow for an extension of this model to sites like MySpace and Facebook, although there are also clear separations. While the spaces discussed by Hodkinson and Lincoln often involve a strong sense of intimacy, as the journal entries they discuss often divulge very personal reflections, the profiles of social network site users can lack this element. This difference is likely due to the differences in perceived audience. LiveJournal users were unlikely to encounter the same forms of context collapse that Facebook users deal with as part of their everyday engagement with the site. However, regardless of the level of intimacy involved in disclosures, individuals in both

spaces are clearly exercising a similar kind of symbolic and practical control over the content in these spaces. That is, they are making strategic decisions around who to give access to these spaces (practical control) and strategic decisions around how to perform a sense of self through symbolic disclosures like profile pictures, and autobiographical 'about me' text (symbolic control).

It could be argued that if practical control manifests through a list of Friends, this list also constitutes a symbolic performance in itself. On MySpace, for instance, users could list their 'top friends' (boyd, 2006) in a hierarchical fashion. Although listing 'top friends' in a clear sequence is not as central to Facebook as it was to MySpace, Friends continue to play a particular role as 'co-performers' of the profile author's identity, tagging them in pictures, posting messages, videos, and links to their profile, and so on. For our purposes, however, we make a distinction between practical and symbolic forms of control, while also recognising that the Friends lists and posting/tagging privileges are shaped by practical control, while also figuring into symbolic control.

The extent to which young people exert both practical and symbolic forms of control in their personal spaces varies greatly. In teenage bedrooms, Lincoln observed young people who regulated entry into their bedrooms with 'keep out!' signs, even door bells, while others operated an 'open door policy' whereby family members or friends could come in and out as they pleased. This was largely dependent on factors such as internal family relationships, the uses of other rooms in the household and the size of the family as well as the level of control afforded to young people over their bedrooms by their parents or custodians. While young people's identities were readily stamped upon bedroom spaces (Lincoln, 2014), the extent to which this was done, for example through decoration, varied greatly and with differing levels of intensity. For example, there were participants who actively engaged in full bedroom 'renovations' as a way of creating a personal and private space that that was meaningful to them and represented their current identities. This often meant getting rid of childhood related objects such as teddy bears, changing the colour, for example from childlike shades of pink or yellow to more vibrant shades of blue, or subtler tones of creams and whites and replacing posters with photographs of friends, holidays, nights out and so on. On the other hand, there were participants whose bedrooms were minimally decorated and were not really considered 'worked upon' in terms of displaying a particular identity. For example, older teens who were spending more time in public social and cultural domains 'passed through' their bed-

rooms to get ready for a night out rather than investing time in them. The performance and representation of their identities shifted from private to public spaces.

In his study of young MySpace and Facebook users, Robards found that some individuals preferred to populate their profiles with as little content as possible (a performance of identity in itself) and did not actively report managing their impression. Others regularly updated and managed their performance of self through various identity tools, and still others went through phases of impression management or apathy. Some even existed in the middle-ground on a spectrum between actively exercising symbolic control or not. In the case of the latter, not being seen to care, or describing yourself as not caring about the goings-on of Facebook in an interview scenario, could in fact coherently (even by way of contradiction) run alongside very active back-stage impression management practices.

As an example of a user at the more apathetic end of the symbolic control spectrum, consider one of Robards' participants, Melissa, aged 20 (SEQ). When asked to explain why she did not keep information (such as hobbies and interests) on her profile up-to-date, she explained, 'it's not important to me... meet me and ask me, don't see that I'm a person on Facebook'. Melissa also had a reasonably open friending strategy, whereby she would friend most people who she had met offline through work or study or at pubs, clubs and parties, thus exhibiting low-moderate levels of practical control and low levels of symbolic control. Simon, 15, (SEQ) explained that on his MySpace profile he went through phases of information sharing, whereby sometimes he would populate his profile with images, text and backgrounds, and other times he would remove the content and only have a black background. This in itself represents a high level of symbolic control. Simon had a very open friending strategy, however, friending 'randoms' (people he did not know prior to a friend request) so that he could 'check them out'. Simon explained that he was more likely to friend a random if it was a 'hot' female random. Lynne, 24, (SEQ) was meticulous in the way she exerted symbolic control over her MySpace and Facebook profiles. When she was predominantly using MySpace, she explained that she would update and edit her profile with different profile pictures and songs on a daily basis to reflect her mood. She also had a reasonably tight friending strategy. She was more restrictive with whom she would add on Facebook, but even on MySpace, Lynne would friend only people she knew well offline. Eric, 20, (SEQ) did not care so much about his basic profile information on Facebook, but would oscillate between profile pictures to reflect his different sides and 'moods'. Eric had discrete groups of friends that he provided access to his Facebook profile.

In addition to this variety of strategies, it also became clear that as users of social network sites become accustomed to exerting a sense of control over their presence online, and as this 'vanguard' (Livingstone 2008: 394) of young users continue to develop the conventions that govern these spaces, they had to be regularly rethought. In the following section we consider two scenarios whereby the strategies for controlling personal space had to be reconsidered.

Rethinking strategies of control

Brad was a 20 year-old tradesperson, living on the Gold Coast (SEQ). Brad felt isolated after losing his driver's licence for driving under the influence of alcohol, but using Facebook allowed him to maintain his friendships and even helped him to co-ordinate lifts from his friends to parties and social gatherings. During this time of relative immobility, Brad relied more heavily on Facebook as a site for intimate communication, particularly with girls he had a romantic interest in. This more intensive use had implications for Brad, and his 'mismanagement' of this quasi-private space is captured in the 'embarrassing scenario' recalled below. This scenario made Brad re-think his strategies for control:

The boys at work give me a lot of stick. We're all best mates as well as on Facebook... I remember I was having a conversation with a girl [on Facebook], and y'know, she was dropping the "I love you" and stuff like that, so my boss proceeded to print out my comments page and y'know, do like a little role-play re-enactment when I walked in [to work] the next day. So um, it was quite embarrassing, but y'know... you just have to laugh... I suppose when it's happening *you don't really think that everyone can read what you're saying*. (Brad, 20, emphasis added)

The embarrassing scenario described by Brad above is a particularly useful example of how interactions on social network sites trouble conceptualisations of space, in terms of 'publicness' and 'private-ness', and also in terms of how this troubling relates to strategies of impression management. The situation that Brad finds himself in corresponds to Goffman's work on embarrassment and social organisation (1967) in which he states that:

Because of possessing multiple selves the individual may find he is required both to be present and to not be present on certain occasions. Embarrassment ensues; the individual finds himself being torn apart, however gently. Corresponding to the oscillation of his conduct is the oscillation of his self (p.110)

Brad describes how easy it was to sometimes ‘forget’ about his actual audience compared to his imagined audience on Facebook, and how slippages that evoke embarrassing situations like this one work to shape his strategies of impression management.

Brad explained that after this incident he was particularly cautious when it came to personal conversations on Facebook, ensuring they took place through a one-on-one IM conversation or via an inbox thread, visible only to the participants in the conversation rather than the broader network of Friends. This failure to navigate context collapse helped Brad to consider what was appropriate for the quasi-private space of ‘the wall’, for which there was a controlled audience (Friends only), but where, up until this incident, there was no regular *imagining* of that audience. In other words, Brad previously did not consider exactly who had access to his profile – and the wall specifically – each time he posted to that wall or read a message posted there by one of his Friends. This scenario also highlights the portability of disclosures made on Facebook. That his boss at work could print out Brad’s wall and then re-enact the conversation therein aloud at work represents not just a form of context collapse, but also a transplantation of context.

Embarrassing incidents like this one – embarrassing precisely because of context collapse – worked to shape Brad’s future strategies for impression management, and made him rethink his usage of the ‘devices’ of identity available to him on Facebook. The game of romance has always been fraught with awkward embarrassment, and we are still getting used to how this plays out online. boyd (2008: 122) describes the ‘risk of being taken out of context’ that comes from the ‘persistent, searchable, alterable, and networked nature’ of what she describes as networked publics. Certainly, Brad’s embarrassing scenario exemplifies this risk, but it also served as a useful, reflexive moment for Brad in which to re-think his control strategies and more clearly conceptualise his ‘audience’ on Facebook.

In Lincoln’s ethnographic study (2012), private and personal spaces such as bedrooms were identified by participants as one of the key sites within which they were able to ‘document’ their emerging teen and young adult identities and biographies. The physical space of their bedrooms provided many of them with a ‘canvas’ to represent who they are, who they would like to be, and their past and this was largely (although not exclusively) achieved through use of the material content of their room. The ‘things’ that young people had in their rooms were meaningful to them. This meaning was not entirely fixed, but changed and evolved, with ob-

jects becoming more or less significant as a young person got older, started to engage in new experiences and so on.

This notion of a 'canvas' also maps onto the identity performance practices on social network sites like MySpace and Facebook. The 'private' contexts within which this identity mapping exists do come with a variety of risk, embarrassment being one. Just as Brad in the scenario above had to rethink his strategies of control in light of his embarrassing moment at work and his complacency in using Facebook, participants in Lincoln's research also had to consider similar management in the spaces of their bedroom. For example, participants regularly talked about hiding items such as cigarettes, alcohol and pornography in their rooms so that they would not be found by parents. Other participants spoke about watching television in their rooms to avoid those embarrassing moment of "the sex scene" when watching communally with parents and siblings. Often however, the contexts of the bedroom and the social network site intertwine, with identities being managed on social network sites from the space of the bedroom via a laptop or a smartphone. In addition to this, public contexts such as a pub or club also come into play, for example if a young person is uploading photos of a night out onto Facebook from their bedrooms. In this scenario, young people are managing their identities across multiple contexts within which they have to think and rethink their strategies of control, sometimes in the context of embarrassment. This crossover is significant in the context of growing up narratives because it highlights the position of 'in-betweenness' that young people often find themselves suspended within. Bedrooms and social network sites provide spaces within which both individual and communal identities can be explored, documented and experimented with. Importantly, the interplay of bedrooms and social network sites offer young people a collapsed environment the virtual and physical perimeters of which offer varying levels of privacy. This is crucial in the context of symbolic and practical control because it enables young people to use privacy (settings) as a tool for managing their personal space, identities and growing up stories. Lisa, aged 18 (NWE) and her use of photographs in both on and offline identity spaces provide an example of this.

Lisa was, by her own admission, a hoarder who kept many different everyday items and objects as mementos of her life as it was unfolding. For example she had kept a receipt of the first food shopping she had done at university pinned onto her wall. Lisa was living in halls of residence, but her room at university was practically a replica of her room at home, at her father's house. For example, she had placed items in the same places that she would find

them in her room at home and she had decorated her room at university similarly, albeit with the restrictions set on the uses of the space by the university. One of the most significant elements of replication was the numerous photos that were on display in her room, dotted all over the place as well as collected in collages, for example on the side of the wardrobe. For Lisa, photographs held important memories of her home life and her family, but also served to document her unfolding life. This meant that among those photos of home were photographs of nights out with new friends, photos that captured a new city and being at university. Lisa's mapping of her past and present through photographs represents the symbolic control she takes over the display of her identity in bedroom space.

Lisa was also an avid, yet reluctant user of Facebook who had especially taken to using it since her move to university. Much like the symbolic practices of identity construction that Lisa undertook in her bedroom, she also undertook on social network sites, particularly in relation to photographs. In talking about how her hoarding tendencies translated from bedroom to social media, particularly in relation to photographs, Lisa remarked:

Yeah, I've got absolutely loads [of photos on her Facebook page], but if I'm on a night out and I take my camera, no one is allowed to see or delete the photos and they all go on Facebook.

SL: Right, OK.

Lisa: No matter what. You can end up with, one night I ended up with like 200 photos from one night out and they all went on and everyone got tagged in every photo they were in. And there were some attempts to un-tag them but they weren't coming off, and there were some hideous ones of me but they were part of that night, they had to be there kind of thing.

SL: Yes, yeah. So why do you think that's so important to you?

Lisa: I think it's down to my lack of ability to delete things again.

In this scenario, Lisa is using the 'unedited' series of photographs as a way of taking control over what she believes is a more 'authentic' (to use her terminology) representation of the night out she is documenting. This control is exercised through the tagging of friends in all photos and the replacement of any tags that friends have tried to remove. In her quest to represent the night, as it unfolded, through numerous images, she applies the 'authentic' rule to representations of herself and her own personal identity by posting 'hideous' and embarrassing photos of herself as well as her friends rather than editing them or deleting them before posting. This practice serves to highlight – and problematise – the notion of a 'co-constituted self', where users are able to contribute to the identities of others presented on social network

sites through tagging. Indeed, Lisa's quest for what she perceives to be authenticity can potentially disrupt the extent to which her friends are able to exercise control over their own presence on Facebook.

Although distinct, both Brad's and Lisa's stories give us an insight into the various ways in which offline identity performance practices carry over into (or are troubled by) online social spaces. Brad was embarrassed when he failed to properly conceptualise his audience on Facebook, and his performance of intimacy was transferred between contexts (from the Facebook wall to the workplace). This subsequently led to a reconfiguration of audience segregation for Brad, at least at the conceptual level. Lisa, on the other hand, embraced the embarrassment that came from sharing and tagging friends in sometimes 'hideous' photos from a night out on Facebook. Precisely because they were embarrassing, these photos were valorised as 'authentic' records of the night out, subverting the presentation of a more idealised self while also troubling the capacity of her friends to exert a sense of control over their own image.

The performance of growing up: from offline to online spaces

To further explore the ways in which identity practices are translated from physical to online social spaces, we extend our discussion to consider notions of symbolic and practical control in the context of 'the performance of growing up' (Robards, 2010) and 'identity marking' (Lincoln, 2012) in the following section. In doing this, we argue that as part of the ongoing revision of strategies for impression management discussed above, young people are constantly updating and revising their online and offline spaces. As we will argue, this is often done through quite dramatic 'renovations' of (bedroom) space or through a 'graduation' from one space to another (MySpace to Facebook) when the other seems no longer fit for purpose.

Bedrooms, materiality and identity marking

James, aged 16 from Manchester (NWE) had recently undergone a 'renovation' (his own terminology) of his bedroom when we met. This renovation (in consultation with his mother) had included re-painting the room, laying down new carpet, putting up new posters, photos and pictures on display on his bedroom walls. James explained what his room had been like before the 'renovation':

...My previous room looked childish. It had kids' stuff, no posters, teddies in it and stuff, a thing coming off the ceiling, it looked like a 12 year old lived in it, not a 16 year old. It was bright yellow and in winter it was dark and gloomy, the room was depressing.

James was 'managing' his 'new' 16 year old identity through the contents of his bedroom. His description of the renovation was in the main self-referential as he used his childhood and the objects and decoration associated with it (teddies, the colour yellow) to talk about his 'old' identity. His explanation represented a metaphorical moved out of this previous bedroom space, which he associated with a now 'alien' identity that he did not relate to his more grown up self.

Insert Figure 1: James's bedroom

In creating a space that represented his present identity, the colour yellow had been replaced with a more 'masculine' dark blue while another wall had been graffiti'd with the Manhattan Skyline. The teddies were replaced with pieces of technology such as a games console, music playback system and iPod. The bare blue walls were adorned with a small selection of band posters, gig tickets, cinema tickets, a car number plate and photographs of James' recent high school prom. A collection of beer bottle tops decorated his door frame and a photo of a woman bending down into a fridge picking up a beer bottle, revealing her underwear adorned the inside of his bedroom door. In many ways, the new things to be found in James' bedroom represented a series of new 'rites of passage' that James could now embark on such as going out with friends, learning to drive, drinking alcohol and engaging in sexual relationships.

Interestingly, and as figure 1 demonstrates, James' marking out and performing of identity was purposeful and deliberate and his bedroom provided the canvas for him to represent his current interests (music, cinema), his identity (particularly in terms of his masculine identity – the colour blue, the car number plate) and significant transitions (leaving school, starting college). The attention to aesthetic detail was particularly interesting as it represented a statement about how sure he was about his new identity; feeling things are a bit more 'in order' and 'real' than in his previous bedroom that he dismissed as childish, disordered and alien. In addition, his room was not just for sole private use, but James' friends were also invit-

ed around and would spend time there socialising in the evenings or at weekends. In this case, there was a certain ‘to-be-looked-at-ness’ (Mulvey, 1975) about James’ space that he also had to consider and manage.

From MySpace to Facebook

Just as James explained his strategies for performing a growing up narrative through his bedroom, so too did participants in Robards’ research articulate this performance of growing up through descriptions of the move between the once popular MySpace to the now dominant Facebook. It is worth noting here that despite a broad, popular decline in MySpace use, a handful of younger (mid-teen) participants in Robards’ research still used MySpace mainly because their parents were not on the site (see Robards, 2012). Charlotte, 19, (SEQ) described herself primarily as a Facebook user but also reflected back on several years of social media use including MySpace. She referred to MySpace as ‘juvenile’ because of the abundance of messy graphics and disorganised profiles. In contrast, she described the ‘clean’ uniformity of Facebook, where users could not customise the design, layout or colour scheme. Charlotte explained that this was more appealing to her:

Charlotte: I don't know, I always saw MySpace as being a more juvenile version of Facebook, because everyone on MySpace had crazy layouts. I can't read that without... hurting someone. I think it's like MySpace was more of a 'post your photos', 'talk in a certain'... there was a certain way you could talk on MySpace that when people tried to shift it on to Facebook they looked like idiots. I don't know why exactly, but they just did. So... in a lot of 'about me' sections, if people wrote the same shit they had on MySpace, like you know: 'likes tea' [in a condescending, high voice] and then has this whole list... it doesn't work.

BR: So there were different ways of constructing profiles on the two sites?

Charlotte: Yeah. I think so.

The distinction that Charlotte points towards here between identity performance or symbolic control conventions on MySpace and Facebook is a useful example of how nuanced these practices of marking out space online are. In other words, while established conventions may be appropriate in one space – MySpace, in this instance – they are not readily transferred to other spaces, like Facebook. To use Goffman’s (1959) language, Charlotte is discriminating between conventions required to perform a context- or region-appropriate version of self.

What we see here in the examples of James and Charlotte is a ‘collapsing down’ of contexts in their current form deemed no longer a good fit in the growing up narratives of these two participants. Both are taking symbolic control of their emerging adult identities through the management of their respective spaces. James was ‘managing’ his ‘new’ identity through the aesthetics of his room – the colour scheme, the exhibiting of gig and cinema tickets, photographs of occasions with friends, technology, and so on that represented a rejection of what he deemed childish objects, the presence of which contributed to feeling alienated from that space. Similarly Charlotte describes a set of devices through which a ‘growing up’ narrative is articulated: from the tone of autobiographical writing, the ‘busyness’ of a profile, and the focus on self to interaction, communication and the network of Friends.

While it is our central argument here that there are strong links between the strategies of control for managing both bedrooms and profiles on social network sites, it is also clear that online social spaces are also unique in many ways. The norms and conventions that govern sociality on sites like Facebook continue to emerge. Friending strategies (Robards 2010), selecting profile pictures (Sessions, 2009; Mendelson and Papacharissi, 2011), and ‘self-writing’ through status updates (Sauter, 2013) are distinct and ‘new’, while also following the logic of offline spaces, as we have argued here. While these conventions and norms are developing, they are also highly contested. The point is, the conventions that govern appropriate identity performances in online social spaces are highly contingent on a personal set of preferences. What constitutes ‘appropriate’ here is clearly open to critique. The participants from both Lincoln’s and Robards’ research projects described varying practices for undertaking identity-work either on their Facebook and/or MySpace profiles, or in their bedrooms.

Limitations

While our studies did seek to engage with diverse groups of young people, the extent to which the themes covered here can be generalised are limited, as they are drawn from our work with small qualitative samples of participants: 50 for Lincoln, and 40 for Robards. Further research is needed in other contexts and locations, in order to take account of cultural differences, in ways not possible in the confines of these two studies based in the northwest of England, and the southeast of Queensland, Australia.

Conclusion

In this article we have used the examples of the teenage bedroom and profiles on social network sites to consider how we might make sense of the ways in which young people are managing a range of strategies for marking out identity across multiple spaces. In this respect, we have argued that there are a number of similarities in the ways in which young people are presenting their growing up narratives both on and offline and how they are using personal and private or quasi-private spaces to order and document these narratives. As we have demonstrated, using the examples of James and Charlotte, young people engage in a series of identity practices to make space meaningful and relevant to them and there is an ongoing process of identity marking that ensures this. This can be fairly radical, for example when spaces feel ‘alien’, young people may migrate to another (MySpace to Facebook) or ‘renovate’ them, and in the narrative of growing up this also meant ‘streamlining’ and ‘clearing up’ or moving away from ‘messy’ spaces for our participants. In both bedrooms and on social network sites there is a constant revision of boundaries, as these spaces are regularly re-conceptualised. These revisions are informed by reflecting on who the space is for, and what the space represents.

Although separate, conducted on different sides of the world and with distinct intentions, our two projects have each revealed stories of young people navigating and ‘managing’ the complex, blurred boundaries between public and private space: managing privacy, managing self-presentation, managing friends and networks, and managing their ‘growing up’ narratives. In both studies, these control strategies were also subject to limitations imposed by others. At one level were parents, siblings, and friends who might exert their own strategies for control over both teenage bedrooms and social network profiles. At yet another level there were corporate interests, such as those of Facebook, who collects the disclosures young people make on their profiles to target marketing material. The evidence discussed here suggests that young people are being strategic in the way they manage a sense of self online, contrary to broader discussions that frame young people as not concerned about privacy or ‘taking control’ of their presence on the social web. In this respect, young people are managing the ‘walls’ on which they are representing their online and offline selves within a challenging framework of context collapse and through various strategies of both practical and symbolic control.

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Figure 1: James's bedroom