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Look at me! Look at me! Self-representation and self-exposure through online networks

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Abstract

With the ever more user-friendly Web, the opportunities to use available channels of online communication complicate ways in which individuals oscillate between exhibition and inhibition, self-exposure and self-preservation, authenticity and deception. This paper draws on empirical research with high school students to examine the ways in which youth represent themselves and interact with friends and others in online networks such as MySpace. The conceptual framework for the discussion draws on the politics of visibility and notions of spatiality. These twin factors have consequences for new modes of technologically-mediated modes of representation with respect to community, friends, communication, and recognition. They also are helpful for considering what self-exposure means in terms of trust, risk, and privacy. The paper argues that there is no escaping the fact that online networks and other related activities hold both promise and peril. However, in constructing new social practices that traverse public and private spaces, technology itself is a key player in shaping how a community contributes to an individual's identity formation and social activities.

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