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# The Exploration of Young Audiences and Identity Development Through Social Media Platforms

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THE EXPLORATION OF YOUNG AUDIENCES AND IDENTITY  
DEVELOPMENT THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

BY

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
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## **Abstract**

Past research found that messages in popular television promote fame as a top value, while social media allows anyone to reach broad audience. Adolescents ages 11-17 are more likely to value fame, wealth, and image over community, affiliation, and self-acceptance. Teens may become addicted to the peer connection and affirmation they are able to get via social media. As a result, young audiences may be highly influenced at this stage of development and their value system may be influenced negatively by their use of social media? Despite this research, some researchers see adolescent social media use well within normal socialization, as “kids will be kids” noting that many elements of the American teen culture remain unchanged in the digital age. This research explores these expectations through in-depth interviews of teens and an exhaustive literature review of scholarly articles on this topic. I used a survey questionnaire from “My Pop Studio,” an interactive educational media literacy resource developed by the Media Education Lab. A convenience sample of teenagers (between the ages of 11-17) took the “celebrity quiz” from the My Pop Studio website using a think out loud protocol where I observed them taking the quiz and had them explain to me their choices for their response. Findings reveal how teens value television, music, magazines, and online media and were the way they connect to these media forms. This research found that teenagers valued being “liked” and in some instances, being famous. Moreover, they demonstrated values such as confidence and community, revealing that teens’ identity and social development may be affected by participation in a media saturated culture. Through this lens, I explore current emerging themes in the current value system of teens. Because ego is a representation of self, it is important for this study to investigate the development of egos in young audiences who use social media. Based on the findings, it is evident that the rise of social media is connected to the development of self-esteem in teens. The implications of social media use, in particular, YouTube, can build character and confidence through self-identity and creativity. It can also help promote social identity in groups.

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# Table of Contents

## Contents

<b>Abstract</b> .....	<b>ii</b>
<b>Acknowledgments</b> .....	<b>iii</b>
<b>Table of Contents</b> .....	<b>iv</b>
<b>List of Tables</b> .....	<b>v</b>
<b>List of Figures</b> .....	<b>vi</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>CHAPTER 2</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Literature Review</b> .....	<b>3</b>
Adolescent Development Challenges.....	3
Erikson Ego Identity.....	5
Relationship Development and Peer Maintenance.....	9
Young Audiences and Role Modeling .....	12
Teens and social media.....	14
<b>Chapter 3</b> .....	<b>33</b>
<b>Research Methods</b> .....	<b>33</b>
<b>Data Collection Procedures</b> .....	<b>43</b>
<b>Chapter 4</b> .....	<b>47</b>
<b>Results</b> .....	<b>47</b>
<b>Strengths and Limitations</b> .....	<b>62</b>
<b>Chapter 5</b> .....	<b>67</b>
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	<b>73</b>
<b>Future Research</b> .....	<b>73</b>
<b>Appendices</b> .....	<b>74</b>
<b>My Pop Studio Quiz</b> .....	<b>76</b>
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	<b>79</b>

**List of Tables**

Table 1 Phases of Research..... 36

Table 2 Participant Demographics and Context of Think Aloud Protocol..... 38

## List of Figures

Figure 1 Erikson's Stage Model of Human Development.....	7
Figure 2 Relationships between Social and Individual Identity in relationship to Social Media .....	30
Figure 3 Emerging Values in Relationship to Social and Individual Identity with relationship to Social Media .....	72



## CHAPTER 1

### **Introduction**

What are the values that teens hold today? Like, Like, Like!!! How many likes did I get on that recent post? What is the number one priority for teens these days? Being liked!!! A popular misconception is that the current value system that millennials have might be affecting their identity and social development. The current myth implies that social media has a negative impact on adolescent identity and social development. The goal for many now in their use of social media becomes how they can carry acceptance, popularity, status, and, by extension, self-esteem through their profiles and postings. (Taylor, 2011) Instead, popular culture manufactures “portraits” of who it wants us to be. The daunting pressures of being liked and the immediate pressures of wanting to fit into society. This quest to be liked can be so great that at times young audiences often compromise themselves. The politics of identity and social acceptance have always been a common stage for many young children, especially through the stage of adolescence, which is a sensitive stage of development. As you communicate you attempt to promote or market yourself in a particular light. You begin to project yourself by personally branding your values. The problem is that self-identity that is shaped by popular culture serves its own best interests rather than what is best for us.

“It is often suggested that media has potentially profound effects on the social identity formation of young people. However, understanding how media outlets affect the identity of adolescents takes understanding what “identity” entails. (Worsham,

2011) This thesis will focus on the development of teenagers' identity as a communication process, looking at how social media may or may not compromise their identities.

In this thesis, I begin by expanding on these ideas by analyzing Erikson's Ego Identity theory and seeing if there are any differences between pre-social media and post social media as they relate to youth identity development, to the best of my knowledge discuss what social media is and what adjustments have been made to negotiate identity since the emergence of it, and lastly, unpack the ways in which teens still look for ways to socialize and gain affirmation. I talk about the identity of teens in a way to see if social media influences the construction of identity development or negotiates it. I am choosing to look at dimensions such as youth identity development, egos, and social media platforms. I think it's important to air a new conversation and explore these values more closely.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **Literature Review**

This literature review will provide some background information that aids in the support or justification for this research. In my attempt to explore this topic, I will use literature found in journals and articles that provide as much objectivity as possible. Throughout this review, I will be exploring themes such as: youth identity and stage development, young audiences and social media.

### **Adolescent Development Challenges**

*Are You There God, it's Me Margaret?*

"Blume turned millions of pre-teens into readers. She did it by asking the right questions—and avoiding pat, easy answers."

This 1970 novel written by Judy Blume has to be one of my all-time favorite books ever read. I read this book in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade and I still think of it fondly especially when I think of puberty, questions and adolescence. Blume takes us through a young girl's (Margaret) journey to resolve her feelings about her spiritual faith. Along with this spiritual conflict, Margaret struggles with boys, bras and periods. Her grandmother plays an integral part in her life and can mostly be seen as her role model or confidant.

What is so amazing about this book is that it is all too familiar for many of us, especially for girls when we begin this horrible or awkward trip down puberty lane. At a time where our bodies and minds are going through this transition and we are struggling to find answers or are too embarrassed to talk about them. We all go through this phase puberty and it generally comes at such a significant time in our lives.

While adolescence is a recognizable stage in life, it is hard to pinpoint the exact beginning and the exact ending. Adolescence is generally defined on a continuum, but one way to conceptualize it can be best defined by WHO (World Health Organization), adolescence begins with the onset of physiologically normal puberty, and ends when an adult identity and behavior that are accepted. This period of development corresponds roughly to the period between the ages of 10 and 19 years, (World Health Organization, 2016).

The teenage brain is a mystery and even for them it is a mystery. What is it about this wiring of the adolescent brain that makes it a mystery? David Dobbs, scientist writer, became intrigued with this phenomenon as well, when his son was arrested for reckless driving. He wrote a featured article in the National Geographic “Beautiful Brains” he wanted to investigate some scientific theory but also set out to understand what researchers currently know about the teenage brain. Dobbs (2011) suggests the answer is that those troublesome traits don't really characterize adolescence; they're just what we notice most because they annoy us or put our

children in danger. During his interview on NPR radio, he highlighted how teens manage or evaluate risk. Dobbs (2011) suggested they are aware of risk but the big difference is there are rewards in some situations — like driving fast down the highway with your friends — that they care more about than adults will. For example, it is not that they don't understand the risk; it is that the reward balance changes. They see more benefit in certain things. Dobbs (2011) stated as we move through adolescence, the brain undergoes extensive remodeling, resembling a network and wiring upgrade. B. J. Casey, a neuroscientist at Weill Cornell Medical College who has spent nearly a decade applying brain and genetic studies to our understanding of adolescence, puts it, "We're so used to seeing adolescence as a problem. But the more we learn about what really makes this period unique, the more adolescence starts to seem like a highly functional, even adaptive period." Casey (2011) says if you look at the things that characterize adolescence in almost all cultures — risk, novelty-seeking and the affiliation of peers — that's the perfect menu to actually motivate you if you are 14 or 15 or 16 or 18 years old to get out and explore the world, even though it's hard to do and the risk is tremendous.

### **Erikson Ego Identity**

When searching for the correct way to address pre-teens, most scholars reach for Erik Erikson's psychosocial stages to identify with what age group identifies with such virtues. Erikson was an ego psychologist, who made significant contributions to the social sciences, psychology, and the humanities. Many of his efforts were an extension of Freud. He emphasized the role of culture and society and the conflicts

that can take place within the ego itself (McLeod, 2013). Personal development and Identity have been key topics that have been part of an ongoing conversation for over a century between the forefathers of modern psychology; Freud, Adler, and Rogers. What do they all have in common? They all shared similar interests that focused on theories of personal development. The concept of identity development has been widely studied by scholars from different disciplines, such as social psychology and communications. If you are examining identity through the biological lens, you might be hyper focused on gender and identity and would describe the interior or biological make up associated with that gender. “While sex may be a biological trait, people may perform their gender” (boyd, 2002, p.22). The process for a person to identify himself or herself as an individual is often referred to as Individuation. The word itself has roots going back to the 1600’s when it was used to identify a person as an individual (Journal Psyche, 2016).

Similar to Erikson’s thoughts on the individuation process, Carl Jung, shared some of his perspective about identity development as more of a mystifying, holistic experience. His main contributions to identity development focused on personality traits. While, Jung was busy pointing out if you are an introvert or extrovert, Erikson was continuing the conversation that identity is a process but in stages. According to Erikson, the ego develops as it successfully resolves crises that are distinctly social in nature. Figure 1 shows the following stages: these involve establishing a sense of trust in others, developing a sense of identity in society, and helping the next generation prepare for the future. Erikson puts a great deal of emphasis on the adolescent period,

feeling it was a crucial stage for developing a person's identity. (McLeod, 2013)

Much of this thesis will reference the adolescent stage, where the crisis is identity vs. role confusion. Since this stage is predicted to influence identity development the most, it is reasonable to frame identity within this criteria.

Group	Age	Virtue	Crisis
Infants	0 to 18 mo	Hope	Trust vs. Mistrust
Toddlers	18 mo to 3 yrs	Will	Autonomy vs. Shame & Doubt
Preschool	3 to 6 yrs	Purpose	Initiative vs. Guilt
Childhood	6 to 12 yrs	Competence	Industry vs. Inferiority
Adolescence	12 to 18 yrs	Fidelity	Identity vs. Role Confusion
Young Adults	19 to 40 yrs	Love	Intimacy vs. Isolation
Middle Adulthood	40 to 65 yrs	Care	Generativity vs. Stagnation
Seniors	65 yrs +	Wisdom	Ego Integrity vs. Despair

Figure 1 Erikson's Stage Model of Human Development

According to the model, the virtue for adolescence age (12-18) is *fidelity* and the crisis is *identity vs. role confusion*. Erikson (1968) was careful to point out this stage of life is a time of searching for identity not necessarily achieving one (cited in Long & Chen, 2007). Many times when an individual is changing from one stage to the next they can be positioned in both stages for a bit until they have completely

identified with the new stage. When a person undergoes an identity crisis, they are often struggling with it. This is the “crisis” happening. A crisis is more a turning point not a catastrophe. A crisis in this sense does not refer to a traumatic event, but a point at which one has the opportunity to grow mentally based on their ability to surpass the crisis at hand (Erikson, 1968; Marcia 1966). Puberty is often looked at as an identity crisis. According to Erikson (1968), identity can be defined as a process of change and increasing differentiation, signifying the transition from childhood to adulthood.

Psychology and sociology approach the concepts of identity by different routes. In general, psychology focuses on the interior and interpersonal relationships, while sociology focuses more on the interpersonal aspects and social processes (Long & Chen, 2007). In some disciplines such as medical science, they talk about the “growing pains” and sometimes this can actually make reference to the physical growing pains. As parents, when we say our children are going through growth spurts it’s often seen as their bodies are physically developing. At times, children can become cranky during this growth. Their physical and mental make-up is actually growing. Erikson supported the notion that a positive resolution of the identity crisis results in the person gaining virtue of fidelity, which is “the ability to sustain loyalties freely pledged in spite of contradictions in value systems” (cited by boyd, 2002, p. 20). In a sense, the individual has the character to sustain who he or she wants to be regardless of influence. They have become aware or enlightened to what values they most connect with and can communicate these values to society. Likewise, the



individual is comfortable with the internal and they have a solid sense of how they want to express it externally. Your virtues become your moral compass when making decisions and self-advocating for yourself. Many who possess this type of virtue exhibit personality traits, such as confidence and a good sense of self-esteem. Meanwhile, identity formation in teens can mean gaining confidence and demonstrating competency.

Identity development influences confidence, the ego, and the internal self. This is a sensitive stage of development for adolescents, where, the adolescent is exploring who they are as individuals. During this stage, adolescents explore their independence and develop a sense of self. Identity refers to at least two different aspects of the individual-that is which an internalized notion of the self is, and that which is the projected version of one's internalized self (boyd, 2002). "Freud (1974/1923) distinguishes between a public ego, an internal selfish id, and internal conscience or super-ego." (cited by boyd, 2002, p.20). Your exterior identity is one that ultimately evolves and changes through context and interactions. Your exterior identity can be highly influenced by your surroundings and at times be negotiated by context. Context can influence how you behave, how you respond to experiences, and how you relate to others. Teens develop their identity by two processes; social comparison and role modeling.

## **Relationship Development and Peer Maintenance**

### ***Social Comparison, Affirmation, Feedback***

Identity refers to the social categories you identify with as well as the

categories that others identify with you. How people see you, is the way you see yourself. As one researcher noted, “The social identity is what individuals use to interact with and relate to others. Teenagers’ identity is developed and defined in relation to other people. Yet, it is the internal identity that one is constantly comparing to others in a social environment.” (boyd, 2002, p. 22) Constant comparisons with others play an essential role in social and interpersonal development. Teenagers would not even know whether they are tall or short if they could not compare themselves with their peers. They may not consider themselves witty or serious without comparison. “While one’s social identity emerges from one’s internal identity, its manifestation is read in light of body conveying it and the situation in which in turn evolves based on one’s experiences” (boyd, 2002, p. 22).

Through a process called self-awareness, we can reflect on who we are in the interior and who we are on the exterior. “Self-awareness allows individuals to have a sense of who they are in relation to society and culture” (boyd, 2002, p. 22). And, of course, the degree of acceptance, integration and success teens experience in personal relationships will be determined within a group (Canovas, 2014). This process of comparing our identities in relation to others is said to be social comparison. *Social comparison* is explained by “how I compare myself to others”. Essentially by interacting with others and getting feedback we assess certain values that we deemed to be important. Then we assess similarities and differences to determine how we measure up to others in our identity group (Alberts, 2011). To expand on this, *reflected appraisal* is a term that often complements social comparison (Sullivan,

1953). The term describes the idea that people's self-images arise primarily from the ways in which others perceive them and from the many messages they receive from others about who they are. If someone tells you, you are funny you most likely try to be funny. With the idea now that you view yourself as a funny person. Reflected appraisals are most likely considered benefits from positive messages communicated by peers.

Moreover, the interpersonal relationships you have with others -- including how you think and feel about one another -- develop as you communicate. Through immediacy you build trust, self-acceptance, and affirmation. This is typically where people establish relationships or as for teens how they bond and they do this through socializing. They do this by disclosing many simple, harmless details through small talk. Thus interpersonal exchange functions as a "system" involving many levels of behavior, which operate together; complementing one another, substituting for one another, and influencing one another. (Altman & Taylor, p. 05) Self-disclosure is at times purposeful; therefore, the intent one makes to share information or to keep private with another person is based on the way the interaction between them develops. "The reactions that we get from people as we open up to them help us form our self-concepts and also help determine the trajectory of the relationship" (Anonymous, 2012, p. 01). These reactions, or behaviors, that aid in acceptance or rejecting influence how we feel about ourselves and in turn how we project ourselves to others. These reactions of acceptance might be a good indicator as to why we either

keep on behaving the way we do, or why we change our behaviors.

### **Young Audiences and Role Modeling**

In their continued search for identity, teens often seek out role models. In addition to peer bonding and self-disclosure, teens often attach themselves to people they deem as important. By extension of relationship development, teens search for ways to define who they are. More than 75 percent of children in the United States look to relatives, coaches, teachers and community leaders as role models, according to a 2008-2009 survey conducted by the Horatio Alger Association. We are all mostly familiar with this relationship in life. The need for a role model is often a direct need for guidance and it is mostly sought for. Jay Giedd suggests, "Our brains are better at learning by example and by modeling. And so as a parent, we're often much more effective in just little things, how we treat our spouse, how we treat strangers, how we deal with the stresses and time management of our day-to-day life. So it's not always, sort of, sitting down and having these big talks. It's the little things every day that you're modeling. And I think it's good for us parents ... to realize ... we're always on. And whenever we're with them, that's how their brain is learning how to be an adult, how to take the next step." (Casey, 2011) We are always modeling behavior for them. How we approach situations makes an impact on they will. If we approach dramatic situations with positive or negative strategies will influence how they approach situations or how they deal with them.

It is common for teenagers to view movie stars, sports figures, singers and TV actors as role models. I am then often reminded about celebrity athletes such as

Peyton Manning, Tom Brady, and Michael Jordan etc and reality TV shows, in particular, the Kardashians . But many young audiences build these relationships of role model and celebrity at a young age. Recently, these celebrities have gained much popularity. There are many factors that correlate to why they form these hero relationships to celebrities but many children often form hero role model relationships with teachers and parents.

One common theme amongst teens is they attach themselves to celebrity like role models. Tanya Brown (2015) writes about this relationship between teens and role models and why teens need role models. She explains, that teachers instill the value of hard work, encourage intellectual curiosity and help shape a teen's social development. The repeated support and praise teachers provide can also enhance a teen's confidence and push him to reach his potential. Public figures who have overcome difficulties can also serve as positive influences in a teenager's life. Michael Jordan was cut from his basketball team in high school and went on to become one of the best basketball players of all time. Today many young adults still often find themselves identifying with a celebrity figure, a song, a teacher, a parent someone that helps them make sense of the world around them. They are looking for consistency and commitment. They are looking for a relationship with someone who provides them with examples of how to go about solving problems, someone who listens to them or shares life experiences with them. It's a relationship with someone who helps support his or her development in life.

Have teens always been attaching themselves to celebrity like role models to play out their creative expressive identities? Kadie Calder, a senior at Bingham High School sheds some light on what her peers' say in her article "Why Do Teens Need Role Models? The Reasons Vary but We All Do." In her article for *Deseret News*, she compiles a few responses. Some students shared that "Role models are people you admire, those people that help make you a good person" and "They are necessary part of our lives, part of growing up, and lastly, "Teens need role models to provide direction." (Calder, 1999) Teens are exploring what they might value and this information can be guided or provided through observation. Any media can enrich this but social media helps.

### **Teens and social media**

"According to a report by Common Sense Media, 75 percent of teenagers in America currently have profiles on social networking sites, of which 68 percent use Facebook as their main social networking too" (Ramasubbu, 2016, p. 01) Long & Chen (2007) say traditional psychology understands adolescent identity development based on offline criteria while today's youth is regularly interacting with complex cognitive experiences through *computer-mediated communication* (CMC). The Internet is a game changer and the presence of it has urged some attention to further examine identity and interpersonal relationships. Online communication enables more opportunity to share more personal things about yourself and it helps increase the peer bonding and opportunity to experiment with more socializing. The need and desire to bond plays a critical role in teen's lives, because socializing makes an

impact on human development. Because adolescents and emerging adults construct their identities through peer interactions, examining the nature of their online communication is critical to understanding the potential implications of these technologies for the process of identity development (Long & Chen, 2007) Two distinct motivations that drive Internet social behavior are self-related and group-related (McKenna & Bargh, 1999). A self-motivator for Internet use is to present an image of the idealized self to gain approval and acceptance. For example, posting a selfie is done to gain rewards or to claim an identity for oneself. Social network sites enable users to self-disclose to a broad and anonymous audience and allow teens to have control over their choices. At times social media allows you to explore your identity. It enables you to present an angle of yourself because networking sites offer an assortment of tools specifically designed to help users create a digital impression of who they are (Manago, Graham, Greenfield, & Salimkhan, 2008). Moreover, the features of social media allow you to post images of yourself and identify your friends through tagging.

Although there are many ways to use it, the most common use of the Internet among youth is to communicate with peers (Subrahmanyam, Greenfield, Kraut, & Gross, 2001). Social networking sites are transforming the ways they do so as they become more widely used and replace face-to-face interactions with online exchanges (boyd & Ellison, 2007). Social gathering is vital for social development, gives us a sense of belonging. As Gray (2014, p. 01) puts it, “Such gatherings are crucial to human development; they are how teenagers expand their social horizons, share

views on issues that matter to them, experiment with different versions of their personality, and develop the sense of independence from parents and other adults that they must in order to become adults themselves.” There are many benefits that aid in human development through interaction with others. By socializing teens are more often apt to gain ways to resolve conflict, stand up to peer pressure, make friends, and enter into healthy relationships. Social media is basically a virtual playground for them. This can be a place where teens can learn things like leadership, teamwork, and perseverance. They begin to evaluate what values they want to share with one another or what values they want to emulate. Echoing Erikson in a sense that they are exploring who they are or who they want to be. Teasing out their value system in such a way by sharing with each other they are learning who they are. They are experimenting with their identity and values and beginning to develop a sense of self.

There are many ways to use social media, but for this age group, boys and girls are highly motivated to use it for socializing. Despite the superficial ideology held by many, social media is also used comparatively different amongst the genders. Boys and girls view and interact with social media differently. According to a recent study done by the Pew Research, it found differences between the ways teenage girls and boys use social media to socialize. According to the study, in terms of making friends the study found a significant gender gap in the way that teenagers make friends online. The results of the study indicated that 78% of girls who made friends online through social media, while in contrast, 57% of boys’ made friends through online gaming. Why is this important? This is important because the difference



demonstrates how important video games are in teenage boys' social life (Lenhart, 2015). Many boys hardly even participate in posting status updates but are more inclined to simply view them without adding comments or content. In another blog written for Boston College, the conversation became heightened about boy's vs girls: gender differences in social media. Some interesting findings from this research shows that the main tendency for females to post on social media is often pointless statements, usually stream of consciousness type remarks or posts. On the other hand, males usually post more matter-of-fact statements about specific occurrences like sports, events, etc. (Rothman, 2014)

Social media is obviously a big part of how teens learn about themselves and others, so let's examine some of the kinds of social media they are using. According to a recent report from Piper Jaffray report for a-NYSE investment bank, "Snapchat is now the go to social media app for teens as opposed to Instagram and Facebook." In a survey of 6,500 U.S. teens, 28% named Snapchat as the most important service compared to 27% who named Instagram. (The teens surveyed ranged in age from 14 to 19.) What is Snapchat? Snapchat is the popular mobile app that allows you to send videos and pictures, both of which will self-destruct after a few seconds of a person viewing them. At its core, Snapchat is used to send photos and videos - called snaps - to friends. Your friends can view snaps for up to 10 seconds, and then they disappear, (Magid, 2013). Most likely the ten percent change was due to the fact that teenagers go through phases.

Hope King (2013), reporter and CNN news analyst, states, “Snapchat is the most important social network. Her critical analysis of this recent measurement for social media use and teens recognizes that even social media use can be just a phase for teenagers along with pimples and puberty. She says, “Bottom line, teens grow out of it -- like they grow out of other things -- it is just a phase.” Despite the new findings of Snapchat as the new go to for social media, a disclaimer to note about the report is that it measured the perception of the teens, not the actual usage. In addition, kids or teens find ways to organically leave social media websites that adults use. They are motivated to keep what they disclose private from their parents but not their peers. Kids also have social media classified like a hierarchy (with Snapchat at the top, followed by Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook) where as adults have a different Hierarchy (with Facebook at the top, followed by Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube). As you can see, the use of social media by teens looks different than that of adults.

What is YouTube and is it considered a social networking site? YouTube is a free video sharing website that makes it easy to watch online videos. You can even create and upload your own videos to share with others. Originally created in 2005, YouTube is now one of the most popular sites on the Web, with visitors watching around 6 billion hours of video every month. (Feldman, 2007)

Matt McGowal, guest columnist for Google, shared some similar insights in his editorial “Is YouTube a Social Network.” He says there are many reasons to classify YouTube as a social network. When talking about social media networks,

many identify with Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, and twitter. He says in fact, you could argue that it is one of the largest social networks online. Some like Richard Raddon, co-founder and chief executive of ZEFR, even feel it is the future, having recently said: “If Facebook, Twitter and Pinterest are a part of Social 2.0, then video networks like YouTube aptly will be coined Social 3.0 – in other words, the future (McGowal, 2015, p. 01). In other words, since YouTube is the future, then it deserves to be studied.

Reading this literature makes me wonder how can teens manipulate their identity through the use of social media to either indicate who they really are (internally) or who they want you to see them as (externally)? How do they choose what to share and who to share it with and with what kind of platform? At times, social media allows you to explore your identity. For example, Twitter and Instagram allow you to use a nickname and you have a choice to choose any photo of yourself. You can choose any photo you want to communicate your value of identity. In addition, you could explore your identity by using a famous person, a role model, or an athlete. The choice of the photo and screen name can be very symbolic for the teen. Meanwhile, social media platforms have biases that shape what and how you are expected to share. For example, Facebook requires you to use your name, typically your real first name and last name. A person could use a fake name but then friends and family would have a difficult time locating them or accepting them as a friend because of the pseudo name that they have created. In addition, Facebook allows you to post videos, pictures, and a status with an endless word count. It also has privacy

settings that can be controlled to keep information sharing for people such as parents, coworkers, the World Wide Web etc. A person can actually manage sharing information to whom and to how many. So what does this mean about their values? Critics argue that currently the way people accept or reject each other is highly influenced by what they share publicly, especially online. Critics ostracize this behavior online because it seems along the lines of look at me, or look at what I am doing. It points to the ego.

### ***Addiction, Affirmation, Entitlement, and Narcissism***

One look at the relationship between teens and social media might be best explained through a large scaled study on social media and teens done by CNN. (CNN, 2015) This is the first large scale study to analyze what kids actually say to each other on social media and why it matters so deeply to them. More than 200 8<sup>th</sup> graders from across the country allowed their social media feeds to be studied by child development experts. The study expanded from eight different schools across six different states.

So why are teens so anxious about what's happening online? This study done by CNN, (#Being13, 2015), found that it's largely due to a need to monitor their own popularity status, and defend themselves against those who challenge it. The study revealed: 61% of teens said they wanted to see if their online posts are getting likes and comments, 36% of teens said they wanted to see if their friends are doing things without them, and 21% of teens said they wanted to make sure no one was saying mean things about them. A psychologist that was a co-author of the study, Marion

Underwood, suggests that they're addicted to the peer connection and affirmation they're able to get via social media. Underwood (2015, p. 01) states, "This is an age group that has a lot of anxiety about how they fit in, what they rank, what their peer-status is." boyd (2014, p. 78) states that "although teens often use the word *addiction* in passing reference to their online activities, media coverage of teens' use of social media amplifies the notion that the current generation of youth is uncontrollably hooked on these new technologies and unable to control their lives." She proceeds to say that our youth still experience school the same way, and many of the same anxieties and hopes that shaped their experiences are still recognizable today. What differs often has less to do with technology and more to do with increased consumerism, heightened competition for access to limited opportunities, and an intense amount of parental pressure, especially in wealthier communities. Social media is a great place for teens to communicate and socialize with each other but it also increases the influence of social acceptance. Prior to social media, limited context for this was available. Such places for this before social media would be school, playgrounds the school bus, community events or simple around the neighborhood play time.

Lastly, what is the link between social media, teens, and affirmation? The escalation of social media actually enhances affirmation. The root of affirmation is to affirm and to affirm is to say that something is true in a confident way (Merriam-Webster, 2016). The real reason behind having friends and role models is the human need for social acceptance and for affirmation. It as if these primitive need to be

affirmed is always trying to reach its full potential. Whether it's through the eyes of peers using social media, parental affection, or teacher approval. The need to be met is more for affirmation versus the need to be the center of attention. This role model need satisfies this need to be affirmed personally or socially. We do it even as adults. We act out this need at work, in personal relationships and as role models. Even the act of role model fulfills this need of affirmation. It's not only pleasurable for the person who seeks the guidance but it also satiates the need for the role model to be popular or needed. The relationship is reciprocal: celebrities need fans and fans need celebrities. It's like the role of leader. Every leader needs a follower and every follower needs a leader. Kids will socialize regardless because affirmation exists on a continuum.

Can too much socializing on social media lead to negative impacts on personality development? Personal attributes, behaviors, praise, and entitlement all play a role. Vivian Diller (2015) who is a psychologist in private practice in NYC, serves as a media expert on various psychological topics, in her Huffington post blog about healthy living she addresses social media: a narcissist's virtual playground. In her blog, she addresses things like teens have always behaved this way "Are we just seeing this sort of self-involvement that is inherent in adolescent-like behavior? "Look at me, aren't I special?" Or is this a more insidious reflection of growing narcissism among our general population? "Look at me, or else!" She argues that despite cultural critics who think social media is a driving force for narcissism in teens, isn't it possible that millions of insecure adolescents, like those in previous

generations, are doing what they always do? Teens by nature, self-preoccupied, and “finding oneself” are a fundamental passage into adulthood.

Meanwhile, Jean Twenge and Keith Campbell, authors of *The Narcissism Epidemic: Living in the Age of Entitlement* (Twenge & Campbell, 2009, p. 01) addresses some identifiable attributes that she thinks may contribute to narcissism. The authors claim that narcissism is created by “public schools that tolerate mediocrity; a nurturing culture where everyone gets a trophy; social media, where everyone with an opinion can share it; a celebrity and reality show culture that tells Americans anyone can be famous. At the top of the list though, is parenting.” Supporting their claims that narcissists are made, they provided evidence that was gathered by Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences and they suggest that narcissists aren’t born. They concluded that there is no gene for narcissism. Consequently, they argue that if we are raising self-centered teens than they will grow up to be self-centered adults. What is the relationship of parents over praising their children and how has this raised concerns?

Recently, many people have criticized this notion of over praising children and that too much over praising leads to a child who feels entitlement. In addition to these recent claims, studies have been done suggesting that children who play sports should not get a trophy. Critics are saying social media should take the back seat to entitlement and parenting should take the heat. A recent Fox News segment featured Dr. Keith Ablow, a New York Times bestselling and Fox News Psychiatry

contributor, who supported the rise of a generation of deluded narcissist. At the top of his list were parents who were at fault. Despite the rise of social media, he supports the claim that there are a variety of factors, social media being one but parents being the most influential.

The popular misconception is that social media is negatively impacting youth identity development and impacting their current value system. Raising a brow to understand this correctly, there are a particular set of stakeholders who believe that media has a negative impact on teens and that they value themselves more than other things.

**Values: Individual and Collectivist**

To further explore this, Patricia Greenfield, Professor of psychology at UCLA, has devoted many years to research with pre-adolescent and adolescent ages that focuses on the relationship between culture and human development. Much of her research concentrates on this age group and how exposure to media impacts their human development and value system. Basically, Greenfield claims that because values are dynamic and can change we need to take into account the large impact that environmental influences can have. Drawing heavily on the social learning theory, she states that learning from the media saturated culture will have an impact on adolescent development. The *Social learning theory* suggest that social models, such as these provided by the entertainment environment of mass media, convey a large amount of information about human values, styles of thinking, and behavior. Essentially, media influences social change and human development adapts to



changes in socio-demographics such as wealth and technology by becoming more individualistic. According to the theory, changes in socio-demographic factors shape cultural values, which in turn influence the learning environment.

Echoing her previous study in 2009 and 2011, Greenfield continued to explore these assumptions and did a follow-up study with other colleagues (Greenfield, Uhls, & Zgourou, 2014) to investigate more about the connection between media and adolescent values. To find better results they expanded on the sample size and to further examine whether an important task of social development the acquisition of values, is influenced by the dominant cultural products of popular television programming and online social networking platforms. Conducting a national survey with 315 participants, between the ages of 9-15 across the United States about their media habits as well as their aspirations for the future. Together, they made some predictions about teens and future aspirations. They identified that millennials are more likely to value fame, wealth, and image over community, affiliation, and self-acceptance. Greenfield (2014) suggest that this rapid growth of technology in the last twenty years will influence this rise to individualism, catering to the self seems to be a feature of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The study revealed that young audiences were divided into two categories, individualistic and collectivistic. For the purpose of this study, let's define these two terms. Individualistic values are those who tend to prioritize the self, with variability in behavior including independent thought and action as well as a focus on status and power (Greenfield, 2014). Hence, the individual's needs are precedent over the state of the social group. In contrast, collectivistic values are those

that tend to act in accordance with group norms and prioritize others (Greenfield, 2014) The study points out that each media can make a contribution to development that each has strengths and weaknesses, and that ideal childhood environment includes a multimedia approach to learning. It is making the reference that multiple forms of media have a huge impact positive and negative that influence learning and youth development. The projected outcome of the study was to see the relationship between social media use and the values young audiences prefer to hold. However, the results of the study showed there was no difference. “Despite this research, little is known about how the values of today’s early adolescents may be affected by the new informal learning environment” (Greenfield, 2009b, p. 4). Reading this literature made me question the myths.

The current myth is social media has a negative impact on youth. Meanwhile, despite what the experts say, popular culture says regardless of their social media usage teens are supposed to be using social media and experimenting with identity and socializing. Research says there is no significant empirical data that shows this myth is true. There have been multiple attempts to either prove or disprove this notion, but up to this point, none have been successful. Perhaps this hysteria of social media and Internet usage is a dramatic response and probably mostly done so by parents. Asking teens directly might shed light on the matter. Kids seem to report a much different story about their days in the life of social media. danah boyd provides extensive qualitative research that supports this. Her method of ethnographic research is proven to have much accuracy and validity. Drawing heavily on interviews of teens

she is assessing the what, how, and why teens use social media. boyd (2014) says they are not negatively impacted, as a matter of fact, this how they are supposed to be. Of course there are psychological risks that can be undoubtedly increased due to the use of social media.

Despite what people say, there are still some current assumptions and expectations based on this myth. Social media is bad for kids; they suffer from peer pressure, cyber bullying, and self-esteem issues. The list goes on and on. In a recent article blog on Psychology Today, Peter Gray positions his argument against these myths and uses danah boyd and her book *It's Complicated* to support this. According to Gray's research, the Top five myths created by popular culture are: (1) technology creates social isolation, (2) teens are addicted to technology and social media, (3) teens these days have no appreciation of privacy, (4) social media puts teens at great risk from sexual predators, and (5) bullying through social media is a huge national problem. Because of this, we have more or less banned teens from physical public places; so, being humans and needing social networks, they have figured out how to get together online. A recent article in the Huffington Post "Influence of Social Media on Teenagers", by Suren Ramasubbu, explains this position between social media use by adolescents and the importance of the vulnerability of this age group and their identity development. Ramasubbu says, "This influence is important, not only because this particular group of children is developmentally vulnerable but also because they are among the heaviest users of social networking" (Ramasubbu, 2016 p. 1). Gray (2014) echoes, whenever we see behavior among teens that seems strange

to us, or hear of case examples of real atrocities, we tend to rush to judgment, and altogether too often the direction in which we rush is to add yet another restriction to the already highly restricted lives of today's young people.

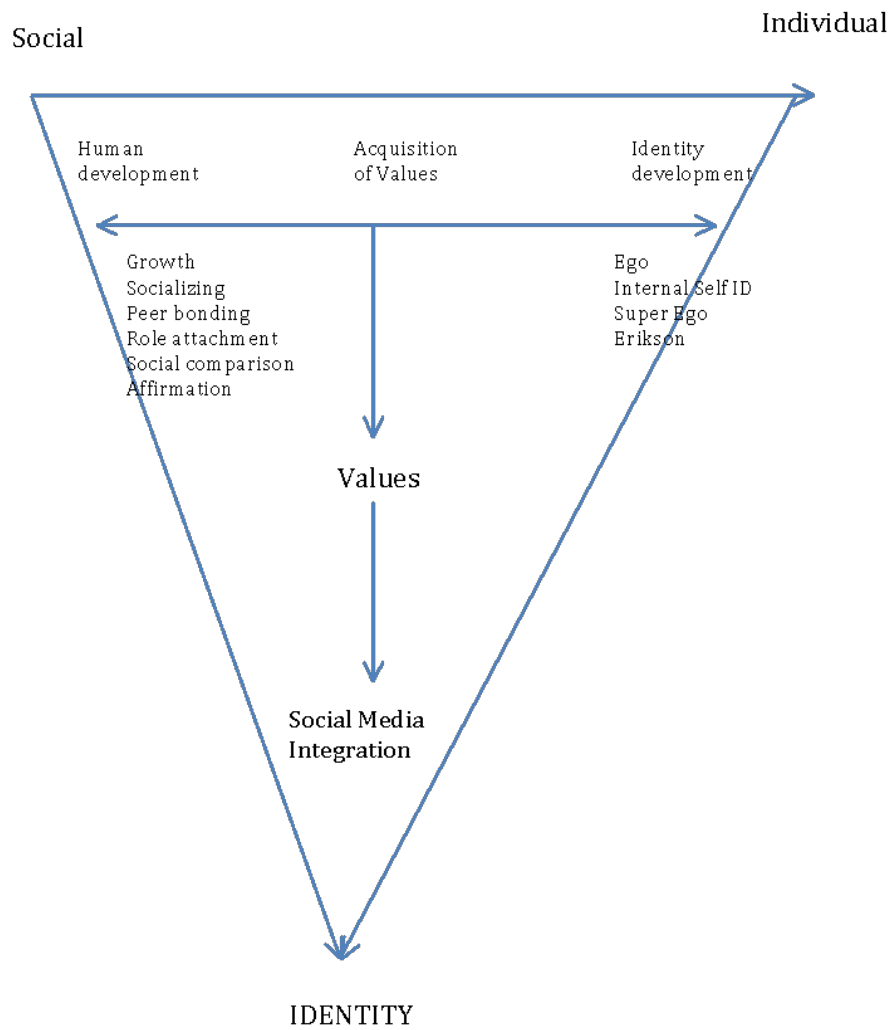
Below is a triangle that shows a visual representation of my own creative synthesis based on the research in the literature. Through this research, I discovered that two important elements of identity development was the relationship between the social and individual characteristics of a person. Making a web of connections to human development, I made a list of all of the words that came to mind. Basically taking inventory of what emerged and dividing the discoveries and placing them in two categories. For example, all of the big ideas that came from human development went underneath it. Repeating the same exercise, all of the other big ideas went under identity development.

The individual was a representation of internal self-separate from social. Identity development had characteristics such as ego, internal self-ID, super ego and Erikson. Erikson's human development model laid the foundation of how I explained identity formation. Building on ideas such as ego and internal self, I explored how research explained this as well. Discovered through the research was that ego was important element of identity and it can be affected by social comparison, whether it's self-esteem or self-concept. It can increase or decrease by socially comparing yourself to others. Meanwhile, parents or the influence of media can increase superego. Role modeling is a place where teens look for ways to understand or develop their egos

based on the role models they have in their life. Social media increases the likelihood for teens to monitor and in some instances interact with their celebrity role model.

The research revealed that for human development to take place teens need to socialize and bond and the need to socialize is important for this to take place. This a place were I discovered some growth. Characteristics of human development were seen as emotional and physical growth. It is also a developmental task that one experiences through identity formation. I put growth under human development because I thought that it was more likely to happen through experiences, such as socializing and peer bonding. Social media was a place where teens can socialize and bond with each other. This research also revealed that there were two processes that were necessary for identity formation; role modeling and social comparison. Consequently, affirmation showed a close relationship or was an effect of social comparison and role modeling.

Meanwhile, an additional discovery was that for identity formation to happen, the social and the individual world have to integrate with each other. As a result of their integration, an acquisition of values emerges. Through this intersection of social media integration, you combine the two identities: social and individual. Essentially, they both are activated by social media use.



**Figure 2 Relationships between Social and Individual Identity in relationship to Social Media**

Note: Figure illustrates important values that emerge from the relationships between social and individual identity in relationship to Social Media

Overall, the purpose of this literature review was to help me gain knowledge about teenagers and their identity development. I began by introducing an animated example from Judy Blume's book *Are You There God? It's Me Margaret*. This example was used to humanize the reader's experience. Framing this thesis in such a way that opened up a conversation, I felt that this was a good starting off point for setting the tone. Demonstrating that this is a sensitive stage of development for teens, in particular, and along with it comes some pretty awkward and challenging barriers. In light of these barriers there also comes growth and maturity. Along with this growth come their values, psychological risks, personality traits, vulnerability, and concerned parents. I'm really just using this opportunity to review any literature to see if there are any relationships or links that connect to any of the themes explored. Meanwhile, investigating it for any relative significance that might add value to this research or open up questions for future research.

When talking about young audiences and egos, I talked about Erik Erikson and his work with the stages of ego development. Drawing heavily on Erikson's ego identity theory, I explored topics such as; adolescent development challenges, relationship development, peer group maintenance and role attachment, teens and social media, and psychological risks. Passing the baton, I introduced Patricia Greenfield and her mastery of the social learning theory, while positioning danah boyd who challenges her claims by supporting the fact that kids are just fine. Kids are doing what they are supposed to be doing. While addressing the notion of identity, Greenfield does it through quantitative methods and boyd does it through

ethnographic qualitative methods. Both neglected to look at fame or knowledge of media.

Moreover, this thesis talked about teens and their social media use. Paying particular attention to their value of social media platforms and why it is so important for them to stay connected and plugged in. Teasing out these themes aired a pretty important discussion. As a result this literature made me wonder:

RQ1: How do adolescents use social media?

Follow up: How is identity formation affected by social media use?

RQ2: How realistic is teens view of media production?

Follow up: Are there differences between boys and girls?

RQ3: How do teens value fame?



## Chapter 3

### Research Methods

My aim for this research was fundamentally based on the desire to discover new knowledge about children's value of media in their lives. This was an exploratory approach to look at aspects such as: egos of young audiences; and their identity development in the context of the use of social media. When evaluating these aspects, I wasn't looking for any right or wrong answer. I was looking to discover what teen's value and how might media compromise or negotiate their identity.

To learn more about this, I used a survey questionnaire from My Pop Studio ([www.mypopstudio.com](http://www.mypopstudio.com)), an interactive educational media literacy resource developed by the Media Education Lab. The survey addresses children's and teens' attitudes towards celebrity culture, media literacy, parental mediation, and media use habits. The purpose of using this quiz was as a starting place to assess current teens' values. The quiz helped engage them in conversation about their values with social media. A convenience sample of 10 teenagers between the ages of 11-17 responded to the questionnaire by using a think aloud protocol. A think aloud protocol involves participants thinking aloud as they are performing a set of specified tasks. Test sessions are often audio-and video-recorded so that developers can go back and refer to what participants did and how they reacted (Kuusela & Paul, 2000). Participants are asked to say whatever comes into their mind as they complete the task. This might include what they are looking at, thinking, doing, and feeling. This gives the observers insight into the participant's cognitive processes (rather than only their final

product), to make thought processes as explicit as possible during task performance. In a formal research protocol, all verbalizations are transcribed and then analyzed. The detailed data was a result of the interviewing method and then asking to explain their reasoning as they completed the questionnaire.

Some of the items I wanted to explore were very basic, because this was an exploration I was looking for straightforward honest responses. The authenticity of the responses was important to me. I was curious how the participants would respond to this think aloud protocol and the level of participation they have in hearing their own thoughts and reflecting on them. Afterwards, I wanted to analyze the responses they had to the same exact questions to see what common themes emerged.

My aim was to evaluate the responses to choices the participant made to the questionnaire and how might they respond to this think aloud protocol method and their level of participation. In addition, to assess their knowledge of fame and social media use. I was also interested in the choices the participants made when responding and what types of new knowledge emerged. Moreover, I was interested in seeing what types of attitudes, interests, values, and opinions emerged from the participants as they answered the quiz.

Despite my role as a researcher and academic, I wanted the participants to feel like I was their friend who genuinely was interested in who they are and what they have to say. Considering the age group of the interviews, I felt that this approach was appropriate when getting the most honest and natural answers.

The research was done in multiple phases: proposal, scholarly research, IRB

application, deciding sample size, recruiting participants, conducting interviews, compiling audio recordings, synthesizing raw field notes, analyzing data. Table 1 offers a timetable chart describing all the phases of my research.

**Table 1 Phases of Research**

<b>Time Table</b>	
<b>December 2015</b>	Proposal
<b>January 2016</b>	Literature Review/IRB Submission
<b>February 2016</b>	Literature Review/IRB Submission
<b>March 2016</b>	Conducting Interviews
<b>April 2016</b>	Conducting Interviews
<b>May 2016</b>	Analyzing Data/Writing
<b>June 2016</b>	Analyzing Data/Writing
<b>July 2016</b>	Writing
<b>August 2016</b>	Writing
<b>September 2016</b>	Revising/Editing
<b>December 2016</b>	Revising Editing
<b>February 2017</b>	Revising/Editing
<b>March 2017</b>	Revising/Editing
<b>April 2017</b>	Defend

**IRB Process**

Because I wanted to explore the thoughts and attitudes from teens, I needed to submit an IRB application to approve my research. When researching human participants for any kind of research a researcher must get permission from an Institutional Review Board at their University. In addition, because I was interviewing participants under the age of 18, I needed to get parental consent. Along with parental permission, I needed the child's assent too. Appendix A displays a copy of the consent and assent forms I used in this study.

**General characteristic of population**

Because my main goal was to find new knowledge about teens and their rising identity using social media, I focused on a specific target audience, which included young audiences between the ages of 11-17. This age group looks large but it is mostly considered the age considered for adolescence.

**Recruitment and Sample**

I had to find a way to gather a convenient sample of at least 8-10 teenagers who were willing to participate in this interview process. I promoted this research project by using my own personal social media platform, Facebook. I asked if any parent was interested in having their teen participate in a research study that I was conducting. I posted a Facebook announcement as my Facebook status. The announcement read: "Hi, FB peeps-Let me know if you are interested in having your child participate in this awesome social media research I am conducting. It is for my

URI thesis research that will be approved by the URI IRB and conducted under the direction of Dr. Hobbs.” Ultimately, I had identified about 14-16 subjects within my own social media network of parents who had children, and who had agreed to participate in the study. Table 2 describes the participants who agreed to participate in the study and includes information about the subjects’ relationship to me and the location and context of the interview.

**Table 2 Participant Demographics and Context of Think Aloud Protocol**

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Relationship</b>	<b>Location of Interview</b>	<b>Who was present</b>
<b>Ralph</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>Nephew</b>	<b>My house</b>	<b>Cousin and my son</b>
<b>Olivia</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>Niece</b>	<b>Her house</b>	<b>Her mom, her two brothers, and my son</b>
<b>Rachel</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>Cousin</b>	<b>Her house</b>	<b>Her Aunt</b>
<b>Ryan</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>Nephew</b>	<b>His House</b>	<b>His mom, sister, brother, and my son</b>
<b>Erick</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>Nephew</b>	<b>My house</b>	<b>Cousin, mother, my son</b>
<b>Brandon</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>Nephew</b>	<b>My house</b>	<b>Cousin, my son</b>
<b>Matt</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>Friends son</b>	<b>School</b>	<b>Students</b>
<b>Sheri</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>Friends Daughter</b>	<b>School</b>	<b>Students</b>
<b>Jake</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>Student</b>	<b>School</b>	<b>Students</b>

Brett	13	White	Student	School	Students
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### **Conducting Interviews**

Once I had a handful of participants I knew I would be able to interview, I began to decide how I was going to go about interviewing them. I could have made many different decisions in terms of how I wanted them to take the quiz. Ultimately, I decided that printing out a paper copy was best for this research project. I wanted to stay consistent. That being said, I couldn't assume all participants had access to the Internet and relying on this assumption alone would only cause some roadblocks or limitations. Although I could have brought my laptop for them to use, the paper questionnaire served to anchor the think aloud protocol process. Moreover, forecasting the results was based on obtaining better results. The interview would provide more comprehensive results if I handled it this way.

### **Researcher Positionality**

I found recruiting to be a bit of challenge because although I had many parents agree to have their child participate, it became hard to schedule a time to conduct the interview. Because recruiting took some time, the sample size stayed at the 8-10 range. As a result of this challenge, many of the participants that I interviewed ended up being my extended family members. Because they were relatives it did make it easier because they were ultimately willing to participate. In addition, it made meeting with them a little easier. One drawback from this situation was that I do know the subjects and that might have caused some pre-conceived notions about who

they are, how they view celebrity culture, and how they use social media. Moreover, I had an idea about the quality of parental mediation since I knew how the parents controlled (or did not control) the use of media in the home. Regardless of my relationship to the subjects, this research project revealed more about them if anything, and I felt it brought us closer. I don't usually talk to my nieces and nephews so this was an opportunity to get to know them and for them to get to know me.

### **Recruiting participants**

Promoting the research phase was a challenge. Although I was able to use a social media website, which in theory reaches more people especially because I have 650 friends, I thought this would not be a challenge. Because of the way Facebook works, not all of my friends could see my post. At times, there is a logarithm put in place for Facebook and it can cause only some people to see what you post and others will miss it in their feeds. Or, some people do not look at their Facebook feed as often or even ever. Consequently, using Facebook as my recruiting tool was useful but limited because I already knew people close to me, whether it was friends or family that had children in this age group. I really tried to target the parents and family that I knew. This also helped because the parental approval process seemed easier because of prior parental approval. Although it seemed easy to get parental approval through the social media platform, having the parent then ask their teen or get their teen to be home was another challenge. The use of social media was a great asset in terms of reaching out and promoting my research and recruiting parents to allow child consent.



It really was the best method and helped recruit efficiently and I think it increased the sample size.

### **Gaining access to the sample**

Ultimately, teenagers are hard to track down. This caused some limitations for a few reasons. Because they are never around it caused some potential limitations for scheduling the quiz. This delay in scheduling appropriately was hard for me because I have a busy schedule as well. So between reaching out to the teens and then solidifying a good time to do the quiz became like a game of tag. In addition, teens are just simply too busy socializing; playing video games; or just basically I wasn't their priority. It could have also been that they just haven't finessed the idea of getting back to adults in a timely manner yet.

F2F became the only way I was able to meet with them. At times, technology hindered the process. In many occasions it did. Not all of the participants had a cell phone, which might have been a result of age, or some of them were not very attached to their phones or only used their mobile devices for very specific things like surfing the web not ultimately to communicate via phone or text. In some cases they had a phone but it was dead, or it was shut off. Some had even misplaced or lost them.

### **Instrument**

To facilitate this process, I printed out a paper copy of the "celebrity quiz" from the "My Pop Studio" website, which is an online educational game designed to introduce concepts of digital and media literacy to children ages 9-14. The estimated time that it took each participant to complete the think aloud protocol was about

45min to an hour. The quiz addressed attitudes that current teens hold towards celebrity culture; media literacy, parental mediation; and media use habits. The celebrity section asked questions that focused on the internal to external relationship a participant would have with fame. For example, “would you like to be famous, like a celebrity?” The media literacy portion addressed current knowledge the participant would have about media. This section tested their knowledge about how much they knew about the medium. For example, “The people who create pop music make lots of choices “behind the scenes” before you ever hear the song?” The third section asked questions that focused on parental involvement and how much the teen knows about the parental involvement, if any. For example, “Do your parents monitor what you do online?” lastly, the fourth section focused on the media habits of the participant and asked questions that centered on how they use the medium. For example, “Do you post comments about your famous celebrity?” Additionally, I continued to ask them added questions to see why they made the choices for the responses.

The purpose of this think aloud protocol was designed to get more results from them because they were actually participating and being part of the process, by having them part of completing the questionnaire. By having them read the questions and then make a decision to respond by using a pen or pencil I felt that this would ignite their self-awareness. Self-awareness allows individuals to have a sense of who they are in relation to society and culture. Upon questioning them once they made a choice to respond, I asked leading questions like why do you think this? How do you

know this? By using the think aloud method, this created metacognition. This part of my research was the most effective. I can report the participants enjoyed me asking questions about their choices because it showed I was really interested in what they thought and I valued their intellectual property as a person.

In addition, some questions actually even ignited more leading conversations where we ended up having an open candid conversation with each other. I think this generated a more pleasurable experience for the researcher and the participant. There seemed to be less than perfect expectations that both people had. Using the survey questionnaire to gather data for analysis was very useful when exploring new ideas for current research or for asking critical questions necessary for future research.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

I used an audio recorder to tape the survey from start to finish. During the interview, I jotted down my own notes. After the survey was done, I re-listened to the recording to collect additional data and I added them to my field notes. I prepared my field notes by compiling my raw hand-written notes and using the recording to add any additional information and details that I might have missed. The benefits from audiotaping and the composition of field notes helped me identify key patterns.

### **Benefits/Risks**

The research had very few if any risks for the participants. There were no risks or discomforts for the child because there was no right or wrong answer. Consequently, there were some potential benefits to the study for the participants. A positive result of participating in the study was that the procedure was pleasurable.

Some of the benefits to the think aloud research as a method is that it can be a host for the student because they are listening to themselves discuss their own thoughts on such topics and how they ultimately feel about it. In a thinking aloud test, you ask test participants to use the system while continuously thinking out loud that is, simply verbalizing their thoughts as they move through the user interface (Nielsen, 2012). By doing this, they are revealing something about themselves that they might not have been aware of. They used their own knowledge, thoughts, or opinions about their choices, so they gain perspective. It's a reflection process where the student reveals things and makes a connection about their relationship with their own identity and their identity in society.

#### **Researcher Bias: Assessing my perspective**

Research bias can have an effect on the research process as a whole. What is researcher bias? Research bias is a set of values, opinions, and or beliefs that one might have due to personal and or cultural experiences. In the book, *Blindspot* written by Banaji and Greenwald (2015), they explain this phenomenon as the portion of the mind that houses hidden biases. These authors question the extent to which our perceptions of social groups-without our awareness or conscious control shapes our likes and dislikes and our judgments about people's character, abilities, and potential. Another name for research bias is experimenter bias, which is a process where the scientists performing the research influence the results, in order to portray a certain outcome.

As a researcher, I am aware of my own research bias and I recognize that my

own biases frame the work in this thesis. I am also a single mother of a nine year old, which puts me in a positive position as a parent. My own bias might reveal or predict a certain outcome. I think the best way to approach your own bias especially before conducting the research is to assess it. Assessing your own biases might even help take them out of the research. Perhaps unleashing them prior to diving in with participants. Perhaps the research bias should be part of a pre-process for starting research.

I am aware that some of my biases could draw from selecting the subject, creating the design, and selecting the sample. When selecting the subject, I might have selected subjects that are more likely to generate a desired result, which could have caused some handicaps governing the normal process. For example, I used my own social media platform to recruit so I might have favored my subjects because I knew them. Especially because 90% of the subjects ended up being my family I could have preconceived judgments about what my nieces and nephews might say. My status as a single mother could have also shaped some of my biases, perhaps maybe putting me on a more parental control position. For example, I could have become attached to a certain viewpoint that might have jeopardized the results. Especially, when I was asking more leading questions when the participants made choices for their responses. I might have said questions like, how so, or why do you feel that way about particular questions hoping for a certain direction. In addition, when choosing which subjects to sample, I might have used my personal bias to omit specific ones

and when choosing which samples to include.

When designing my research, I might have failed to take into account all of the possible variables. This could also result in either altering my data or even maybe omitting some. As an academic, I draw from a diverse set of disciplines, including communications, education, and psychology. While I am competent in all of these fields, I am by no means an expert in any of them. Much of my rawness has been collected and processed based on personal experiences. My idea of youth identity can only be generalized based on my own personal experience and perspective.

As a mentor and role model, I try to keep my mind open and support empowerment on all my scholars. Because I am interested in having participants answer honestly and openly, I try to be as honest and open with them about my own research. I am aware that research is a learning process, and I approached this experience as a learner.

## Chapter 4

### Results

The data was collected, analyzed, and synthesized between quiz answers, quotes from kids, and field notes. In this chapter, I am going to answer two questions; how realistic are young audiences' view of media production, and what is their value of fame? Results from the in-depth interviews on topics such as music, magazines, television, and digital media literacy, showed some significant importance of identity formation in adolescence. The questions were asked in order to the survey, this way preserving the sequence of kid responses as we moved through the interviews. Meanwhile, the results of their responses to these questions brought out many anecdotes from their own personal experiences. Many of these answers to these questions showed a lot of competency and ability to self reflect about particular behaviors they are engaged in everyday life and what values they have about particular media. One of the developmental tasks of identity formation is this level of gaining competency and for the adolescent to reach the next stage in their life dependent from their parents. As we will see below, teens demonstrate different levels of confidence, competence and independence in considering their knowledge and attitudes about media and their interest in acquiring fame. In this section, I summarize the key findings by exploring the media literacy portion of the quiz to identify some themes. After collecting and reporting the data, I was able to divide the finding into four categories. I focused on music, magazines, television, and digital media.

This segment revealed the media literacy and competence of the participants. The accuracy of their responses shed some light on what teens report about their awareness of the constructed nature of media. Comments stimulated some interesting views that young audiences have about media. For example, when participants were asked particular questions that aimed at their knowledge of media, the results showed their understanding of how they comprehend media.

The first type of media that stimulated responses was Music. When asked to rate their level of agreement with the statement “All it takes to create pop music is a singer and a song”, they shared some unique and creative responses. Some of them talked about the quality of music and that not everyone can create a good song. For example, Olivia claims, “Just because you can sing doesn’t mean it sounds good. Moreover, not every song is a good song. There is a line of work that you will need to go through to be popular.” This comment suggests that Olivia has a good understanding of the complex business practices involved as musicians and their managers construct an image and a brand. Her comment reveals that she rates good singers based on the quality of the song or how popular a singer is. This comment demonstrates a good level of competency and confidence to share her opinion.

Meanwhile, other students shared responses that did not demonstrate a good understanding of the complex process of creating pop music. For example, Rachel said, “Creating music is simple and that it just takes a keyboard and melody in your head to create” and Ryan said, “All you need is a turning table, a music board and a mixer.” These comments suggest that music is pretty easy and simple and that



musical talent was really unnecessary to have. His comment reveals that the process to making music is easy, which makes his knowledge of how music is made a little weak. His comment could also be suggesting that anyone can make music as long as they have a musical instrument.

When asked to rate their level of agreement with the statement being "Do pictures in magazines make people look different than they actually look in real life," most participants shared sophisticated responses and said things like "pictures are photo shopped" and "pictures in magazines do not represent a real identity of a person." Teens seemed to be confident with their knowledge of what magazines put out there. Many of them drew upon their own knowledge and personal experiences from what they think they see and what they actually do see. For example, Erick said, "Magazines do not portray the real person most of the time." He then proceeded to say, "Not sure what they do but the person does not look the same." This comment reveals a powerful recognition of his knowledge of media and that he is aware that magazines are not representing the real identity of a person. He is also aware that he isn't quite sure how or what they do to create this illusion but that he knows it is somehow not completely true. This comment helps us see different levels of competence about their understanding of how media is made.

Many of them seemed to be confident that the reality of what they see is just a representation of what the magazines want them to see. Photoshop is the main driving force for what is behind pictures in magazines. Mostly the magazine companies make the produced version and they decide what they think and what we

should think is beautiful. Essentially, it is the magazine that makes the decisions for what “beautiful” looks like and whom we should see as beautiful. These comments suggest that magazines create this illusion of what beauty is and ultimately they project the message that basically anyone can be a model especially if you know how to use photo shop. Many of them seemed to be confident that the reality of what they see is really just a representation of what the magazines want them to really see.

When being asked to rate their level of agreement with the statement “Beautiful models are shown in magazines just for entertainment” participants said yes and alluding to the notion that the male gender satisfaction causes this. Different boys had different perspectives on the purpose and value of modeling. The differences that emerged from the responses of the male gender were quite noteworthy. For example Ralph said, “Beautiful women are shown in magazines because they are attractive and men like to see attractive women.” Ryan said somewhat true, he said “even though they do it for entertainment, girls mostly want to get paid”. Ryan conceptualized this as an exchange; male magazine users pay for a visual thrill, and female models get money. Ryan suggested modeling was a way to gain wealth and it was a form of occupation, while Ralph suggested it was dictated by a demand of male needs in a form of entertainment. Some of the respondents conceptualized this as an exchange; male magazine users pay for a visual thrill, and female models get money. Surprisingly, Olivia and Rachel felt that beautiful models were shown in magazines for entertainment as well, they responded totally true. Meanwhile, Sheri responded with “No, not at all and that they do it as an occupation”.

This comment reveals there are gender differences between how male and female value magazines. As a result of this, they are learning gender differences and the power relations from media messages. It made the impression that they see women as sex symbols that are working to please the male generation. So apparently, the way boys view messages driven by the magazine industry influence how they see the female gender in society. Overall, magazines want us to see the female gender in a certain light and the magazine media does not dictate the economics of beauty. This section provided some powerful discoveries about gender differences and their process of self-reflection when talking about magazines. These comments showed a link between the level of competency and the level of confidence. The participants shared some sophisticated opinions, which demonstrated that when it comes to magazines they have more competence and confidence.

***TV: the dying medium***

When being asked to rate their level of agreement with the statement, “TV editing is used to make people feel good about some characters and bad about others”, participants responded with some good comprehensive answers. For example, Olivia said, “Just because you play a villain does not mean you are one in real life.” Following up with, “Television editing can cut and move scenes and shapes our image of what we see as good or bad.” This statement suggests the Olivia has a good understanding of the differences between an actor and a character and of the role of editing in shaping audience perceptions of characters.

Ralph is also aware of media manipulation when he states that, “TV

characters on TV shows are not just like they are in real life because it's all fixed, he said he knows this because the Internet tells you stuff like this." However, the use of the phrase "it's all fixed" suggests that Ralph is less aware of specific strategies used to construct media narratives. Erick provided a good example, he stated that "action movies have good guys and bad guys and that this can't be true because Jackie Chan kills people and he doesn't do that in real life."

Similarly, Rachel said "it's almost the same as magazines and how they choose pretty people for it and then make them prettier with photo shop." For example, "Keeping up with the Kardashians" choose certain clips and they edit stuff out." They choose certain clips to show. Rachel talked about Kim Kardashian and she stated "Kim K seems different in real life than she does in public." For example, "Kim K shows herself with her family and kids on TV sometimes and then when she is in public she seems different". It is noteworthy that Rachel herself made the connection between magazine manipulation and TV manipulation. In reflecting on Ray J, an African American rap singer, Ryan said, "Ray J was a good example because when people think of him with music they think of him as being a "bad boy", but in real life he is actually very caring with his family." Following up his comment with the rationale, "So he basically gives the people what they want in the music industry." These comments reveal a great amount of competency and knowledge of about TV editing and how they view the realistic representation of these actors in television and real life. By talking me through their thoughts, it showed a great deal of awareness of what messages they really see from the media. It also shows a

connection that they comprehend the difference between entertainment and reality.

**Digital Media: the confidence behind the teen**

When asked to rate their level of agreement with the statement, “Doing lots of things at the same time on a computer can make it hard to pay attention”, participants were aware they are challenged at multitasking. For example, Ralph said it was hard for him to multitask on the computer because “if you are watching a YouTube video, and doing an assignment on word for school you will most likely be watching the YouTube video and not work on the assignment.”

Some participants felt it was hard to concentrate when they had to use the computer for schoolwork because they felt the urge to do other things on the computer. For example, Rachel said, “Doing multiple things on the computer makes it hard to pay attention, especially when she has to do homework on the computer it distracts her very much.” Meanwhile, other participants felt torn between the economics of leisure. Paying attention and being engrossed in such leisure activities may cause them to miss something, especially if they were focusing on a good movie. For example, Erick says, “Yes, multitasking is so hard.” “It's so confusing”, and “I might miss a part in the movie if someone is texting me”. These students seemed highly aware of the challenges of multitasking and of the ways in which it may compromise their attention to schoolwork and leisure time. Many of them talked about doing schoolwork on the computer and that by doing it on the computer, other things distracted them. It might be because when they associate schoolwork they associate this idea of mental focus.

Aside from having to make big decisions such as watch a movie or text a friend, some participants were very aware of their media habits and made some competent connections. For example Ryan said, “that some people can multitask and some people can’t. For me I know this because if I’m on the computer, I really don’t focus on anything else or anything around me.”

Out of all ten participants, only one felt at ease with multitasking. Doing lots of things on the computer does not make it hard to pay attention but it may cause computer issues, like it may run slower if you have a lot of stuff going on. For example, Olivia said, “If you have many tabs open at the same time, your computer might take longer to do something.” Olivia demonstrates a high level of maturity and her comments reveal a great deal of mastering skills that are acquired to use the computer. She also may be using the computer for non-entertainment tasks, which enables her to have a higher level of mental focus.

When being asked to rate their level of agreement with the statement, “People can easily get the wrong idea when they are talking over IM or text messages, participants seemed astute and pleased with their ability to respond. All ten participants responded with pretty competent answers. Some kids thought the differences relied on the interpretation in how you are reading. For example, Olivia said “People can definitely get the wrong idea when they are talking over IM or text messages. This is because “everyone is reading with a different voice or attitude so you can misinterpret what people say.” Again, Olivia demonstrates a high level of competency and confidence when answering questions such as these. This may be

because she is the oldest or just has a high level of maturity.

Other respondents came to the conclusion that grammar, such as punctuation has the potential to communicate specific messages. Suggesting that punctuation used or not to communicate via text or IM makes a big difference in the meaning of the message created. In this case, Ryan felt it was “because all you are doing is reading and if someone leaves out an exclamation mark it might mean one thing.” Following up with, “So it can be taken the wrong way.” These comments reveal a great deal of critical thinking and self-awareness.

Others began exploring their feelings and self-reflecting of specific instances that they could emotionally connect with. For example, Rachel’s opinion was that people could easily get the wrong idea because “Sometimes her friends will be sarcastic with her and she can’t tell the tone over the texting and sometimes she gets the wrong message.” As a result of this, she often tends to get mad at them and they tell her it was meant to be sarcastic.” This comment reveals a bit of insecurity and makes a direct link with role confusion. Erikson’s ideas on identity formation are that individuals are secure in society with their identity. This comment reveals a level of confusion and insecurity with who she is. It also demonstrates this process of affirmation and self-acceptance. Rachel is suggesting that she affirms her identity based on what her peers say to her. So she is still seeking affirmation from her peers to reveal her self-acceptance in society.

By the same token, some respondents used this question as really good opportunities to self reflect about situations and relationships they are connected with.

This behavior demonstrated a lot of maturity from the respondents. For example, Ralph says “Sometimes his mom takes it personal if he only answers with one word or his girlfriend might take things he says the wrong way.” Ralph is demonstrating his ability to use self-reflection as a way to critically think and then answer. These responses showed a level of emotional intelligence amongst these participants, demonstrating confidence and gaining competency to be aware of other individuals.

### ***“Wanna BE like Mike”***

#### **Famous- the “C” in you-charity, confidence, and career**

Students were asked to respond to sentences about their level of interest in becoming famous. In depth interview questions in this category asked participants about how much they value different types of digital fame. An increased level of wanting to be famous seemed to be linked to statements that suggested high levels of self-confidence. For example, Ralph said he would most likely want to be famous because “Who wouldn’t want to be famous?” Following up with “People would be like ‘Ralph is famous’ and because ‘I am cute and because I am so interesting.’” This comment shows a direct link to how I compare myself to others and the ideas of affirmation that were explored in chapter two of the literature review.

When asked to rate their level of agreement with this statement, “I would like to become famous, like a celebrity”, they all admitted that they liked the idea of being famous. Respondents shared their values for fame by expressing their interest in being wealthy. Expressing that their values are focused on being socially accepted and then seen as popular. For example, Erick would like to be famous “so people



would know me” and because “I would be wealthy”. Although gaining fame for wealth was highlighted, they also shared interest in using this fame and wealth to then in turn help their family. For example, Olivia would like to be famous because “I can make money and then help out my family.” Ryan said “Personally I think I would be a good celebrity and I could also make a difference and help my family.” One participant expressed their interest in being famous and being able to help a particular group or charity. Rachel remarked “she could make a difference in the world if she was”. For example, “She could create charities and support things such as gays and lesbians and LGBT.” Rachel is demonstrating a lot of competency in understanding how rich qualitatively it would be for her to gain fame and then to use her fame as a way to help others. Rachel is one of the youngest participants so she is showing a lot of maturity and independence for her age. When reflecting back to Erikson’s human model, she is illustrating this level of maturity along with competency, which is one of the developmental tasks of identity formation.

Some discoveries that were made from this section revealed their confidence level for the medium and their mastery of skills for that medium. The purpose for most fame through channels of media is to gain wealth and popularity with the slight adjustment of being charitable.

When asked to rate their level of agreement with the statement “Would you like to be famous online”, YouTube was a place where they talked about being famous. Much of the attraction was to play video games and then be compensated for playing them. For example, Olivia stated, “Posting video games of her playing videos

was a big interest to her especially because you can get paid to do it.” There was a great connection of playing on YouTube and being compensated with money. Ryan said he “wants to be famous online because he can get paid for being online.” Explaining that, “The more people who subscribe to you (fans), the more famous you can be.” Then following up with, “You can post funny things and be paid as a comedian.” Teens are well aware of the economics of YouTube celebrity and this may contribute to their sense that online fame is easier to accomplish than other types of fame. These comments reveal a great level of competency and confidence of using social media platforms such as YouTube. They recognize this connection of using skills to gain wealth, which essentially communicates their knowledge of career and occupation.

Other respondents shared emotional connections to having an identity that was richly connected to who they were or how they view themselves. For example, Rachel said, “Because the people who make YouTube videos are just like her.” Explaining, “Regular girls just like me can make their own video.” Following up with “An ordinary person, just like me can do it.” This comment reveals a rich understanding of how famous people are viewed in society comparatively to how someone who is not famous in society. Rachel is making a great use of social comparison and how I compare myself to others. We see this process in chapter two of the literature review. Adolescence tends to view themselves in society as individuals who are different than others. They can see the difference between famous identity and realistic identity.

Other respondents admitted that being famous online would be awesome. For example, Erick says, “it seems awesome to be famous” and “he would like to YouTube.” I asked him what he would do on YouTube to become famous? He stated, “Mostly play games such as basketball”. Explaining “I would have someone tape me play basketball and then upload to YouTube.”

### ***Music-the art of you***

When asked to rate their level of agreement with the statement “I would like to make my own music record” some respondents saw the dollar sign again. Olivia remarked, “that making her own music record would allow her to make money and to see a lot of places”. In addition, Rachel showed interest in making her own music record because she likes to sing and she said that it seemed like it would be fun. Meanwhile, other respondents said they had other interests that trumped music, such as being active in sports. Ryan stated that he was more into sports and that he doesn’t really like singing in front of people and that was his number one reason for not wanting to make his own music record.

The overall opinions of the participants were entertained of the idea of making their own music but they didn’t quite seem to care if they became famous by it. Historically, the music industry created the most hype and many desired to achieve fame through this medium. The music industry has evolved and how music is manufactured and delivered so quickly may affect their attitudes or value toward this industry. That being said, their responses did not reflect the same understanding or knowledge of the music industry. The lack of understanding how the music industry

works may have been a result of how they responded to wanting to make their own music record. Here's why, when asked about the music industry, many of them could not articulate their understanding of it.

### ***TV-the exposure of you***

When asked to rate their level of agreement level with the statement "I would like to be famous on TV" participants showed a lot of interest. Some respondents shared that because they enjoy performing, being on television would invite this opportunity to continue a similar interest. Olivia said, "I like the idea of being on TV especially because it connects with my love for acting." One respondent became self aware of how television exposure could elevate his own story of coolness and he suggested he could socially compare himself. For example, Ryan said "because I can brag to everyone else that I was on TV and I'd like to see myself on TV". He exclaimed, "I want to see what I did and see if I did anything stupid." This comment reveals a high level of thinking and the process of social comparison and how being affirmed in society by peers and other is important.

### ***Magazine-the fake of you***

When asked to rate their level of agreement with the statement, "I would like to be on a magazine cover", the fame for being a model only held interest for a few participants. For example Rachel said, "It would depend on the magazine." Explaining, "She would definitely be interested in being on a fashion magazine but she was not interested in being on the cover of magazines such as *People*." This comment reveals that she is definitely thinking about "who" would be viewing the

magazine. The only motivating factor seemed to weigh heavily on making money. Being a model didn't seem to have the same symbolism for fame or beauty anymore. Photoshop apparently killed the fame that used to trail behind modeling. This was a great section for learning their competency and the awareness they have of what messages are out there and how to draw conclusions on their own about it.

This study suggests that teens' knowledge of media and social media impacts identity formation in three ways; confidence, competence, and independence. When students had more knowledge of how YouTube celebrities get famous, they were more interested in this possibility for their own life. When they had less knowledge (as in the case of their understanding of the music industry), they were less interested in music performance as a means to fame. There was a great connection between competency and confidence when answering these statements. When answering statements related to media and fame, the participants exhibited maturity and growth by sharing their sophisticated opinions and how developing a sense of identity in society was important. Olivia seemed to be an exemplar of all areas and her high level of thinking was a great example of competency and maturity. Echoing the developmental task of identity formation, these ideas from Erikson about identity formation and resolving crisis involve adolescence to demonstrate competency by way of gaining confidence and independence when completing this stage.

The survey was used for a stimulus of discussion in the event to see if anything interesting emerged. It was found that in depth interviewing was a very good method when evaluating data from participants. The overall motivation for fame is

still to gain wealth and popularity. This might be predicated on the premise of why people like social media, because they can continuously entertain this idea of fame with greater aptitude. It still stays the same regardless of technology even though technology can make you become famous quicker. Perhaps the value to being famous like a celebrity has the same intent as before: wealth and popularity.

## **Strengths and Limitations**

### ***Limitations***

My method of choice again is a questionnaire to a survey using a think aloud protocol and I am aware that this survey alone will only reveal qualitative results. I was expecting some scheduling limitations because I was interviewing adolescents and because of their age this required me to contact parents or them and coordinate a time. In addition, I considered the age group to present some limitations, because they are teenagers, how was I going to get them to take this questionnaire seriously or how was I going to actually find them and get their attention for 45 minutes. A third potential limitation to consider was promoting and recruiting, because I was using my own personal social media account would this interfere with my research bias especially in terms of picking my subjects. A fourth potential limitation to consider was technology, if there were any technical difficulties, would it interfere with the observation process? Another potential limitation might be the environment. Ultimately because the observation was done in many different environments, I expected some potential limitations. Another potential limitation might be the level of education of the students. Also, if there were any technical

difficulties, would it interfere with the interview process? How was the interview set up and could participants interact freely? Another potential limitation might be the level of education of the students and a fourth potential limitation might be motivation behind the participant

### ***Interviewing Adolescence age group***

The procedure of interviewing adolescent participants had some potential strength and some limitations. One of the strengths to this was their actually age group. I felt that this age group has a lot of offer to research especially in terms of quality knowledge. I say this because they are still at an age where they still have some innocence. Their limited experience of life protects them from some of the harsher realities and the truth. Although they are still a bit innocent they are also very observant and smart too. Its interesting that although this age group is still maturing at times they give the most honest and rich answers. They say whatever comes to their mind and I think that is the best kind of information.

### ***Authenticity of answers***

Consequently, the rawness of responses and answers were better than I expected and I do think one of the strengths to this was a direct result of the willingness to participate. The direct and authentic responses F2F were all rooted in preexisting relationships. Many participants seemed eager to take the quiz, which was a bonus for me. The motivation for them was quite interesting; they seemed to have enjoyed the questions. I think it entertained their ideas of being famous. In addition, asking questions like who is your favorite celebrity made the quiz fun and

teens like fun.

#### **Level of commitment**

The level of commitment on the participants was well received once in the interview. I was very pleased to see the dedication and honest answers that came from them. This level of commitment added great depth to the research process. The seriousness that the participants took in this process was very useful.

#### **Location and Environment of the Interview**

In addition to the structure of the survey, it was also very important to take note of the environment. The environment played a very crucial part in this research. The environment culture is important for cultivating comfortable thinking responses. So, when conducting the interview, it was important to take note of the environment. I invested very little time inspecting the structure of the environment because many of the interviews were spur of the moment. The only type of planning I could account for was that I had a photocopy of the printed quiz, pens, notebook, and an audio recorder. The importance of the environment was heavily weighed on the logistics because it can promote learning outcomes.

Some of my limitations included where I did the survey and who was in the room for it. There was always somebody there. I would have wanted a quieter environment or more studious one when giving the survey, but at times this was very challenging because getting the teens for any amount of time was difficult, so when I had any use of time to interview them I had to take that opportunity to survey them. As a result of this, at times there was almost always an additional person in the room. The strangest



factor that limited this was in most cases, people especially parents wanted in on the survey. I was not really sure what their concern was. It may have been just intellectual curiosity for themselves or an overall security concern for their child. I honestly do not think the responses were affected by this presence but I am not entirely sure.

Consequently, this was a strength of the research because they were in their own environment. Because I was interviewing them in his or her own home, I thought that this might alleviate some pressure or anxiety. I wanted get the most honest responses I can. The more honest and straightforward their responses, the more accurate information I will get.

However, conducting interviews in their home also caused some limitations because it was unfamiliar to me. I had some difficulties because when setting up where to sit I wasn't quite sure if the spot we picked would be the most effective and when recording the audio, I wasn't sure if there was enough room. Being flexible and adaptable was the best method I found. Some of the interviews were done at my house, which could have been strength for me but a limitation for them. Even though the interview was done at my home there were still people around (especially parents), which often made this noisy-many of the interviews always seemed to have somebody in the room. In many of the occasions it was another family member. Although this presence annoyed me, it ultimately pulled people together and advanced conversation. And to say it annoyed me is kind of contradiction to what I had previously said about wanting freedom of expression, I think because in the back

of my mind I still knew this was part of research. So it could have been my personal judgments about context and learning. For example, I am the student desiring to learn but because of all the noise barriers, I am conflicted with this learning outcome.

**Researcher bias**

Assessing my own perspective was a strength because I had to really become self-aware and try to recognize that although I want to be completely free of bias, I ultimately have my own thoughts, opinions, and values that are set in stone. I had to consider my pre-existing relationships with the subjects and how this affected my interpretation of the children's responses and how deep knowledge of the family context provided a kind of "positive bias". In addition, I had to consider how my identity as a single mother affects my interpretation of the children's responses. I make decisions about my sons media use and I know that I may hold strong opinions about children and media may shape my interpretations of children's comments.

## Chapter 5

This study was designed to help me learn more about how adolescents use social media, how identity formation is affected by social media use. I also wanted to understand teens' views of media production and how teens value various kinds of fame and celebrity. I used a think-aloud protocol, which enabled me to get access to teens' knowledge about media, their attitudes and their levels of independence, competence and confidence as consumers and creators of media. Some significant ideas from the research literature included the implication that social media has a negative impact on young audiences and identity development. Teens are highly influenced by the way they are accepted by their peers. Experts say that teens are addicted to social media because they are driven by their motivations to be popular and liked. They want to monitor their own popularity and majority of kids protect their ego because of peer pressure. Many elements that influence this kind of affirmation show a strong relationship to reflected appraisal and self-concept. Much of how teens decide how they identify with themselves is heavily weighed on how their peers respond to them on social media platforms. They eagerly rate themselves by how their peers rate them.

Aside from the peer addiction, teenagers feel some sense of entitlement. Research suggests that parents, in particular are responsible for creating this "lazy behavior" attitude towards common values that in the past had to be earned. Research has not yet revealed that entitlement is causation by means of social media. Currently, there is no empirical data that supports a positive or negative relationship amongst

teens, social media use and identity development. However, this research suggested that adolescence identity might be affected, in particular, their need to be liked.

An overabundance use of social media might craft one's own image as likely to achieve fame. Aside from being celebrity attached and wanting to be famous like celebrity athletes or reality TV stars, many teens want to be famous and they have expressed their desire to be famous by way of YouTube. Historically, before the Internet, it was much harder to claim fame by other forms of media. It was much more difficult to be considered famous by traditional forms of media such as tv, magazines, or movies. Fast-forward to the 21<sup>st</sup> century and online fame is sought out for and quickly reached by the use of YouTube. It is far-fetched to think that you can be famous over night by simply uploading a YouTube video of yourself. It seems very unrealistic, but, with the pervasiveness of the Internet, it now seems very attainable.

Whether that social world is online or offline, the identity formation for teens seems to be very in line with the adolescence stage presented in Erikson's' stage model of human development: they demonstrate competence and confidence which illustrates the level of maturity to resolve crisis. The participants used their own knowledge, thoughts, or opinions about their choices, so they gained perspective. I saw this through the think aloud protocol, where they reflected about their own thoughts and revealed things and made connections about their relationship with their own identity and their identity in society. Echoing, the teenage brain is a mystery. Consequently, although it is a mystery, it still exhibits similar behaviors while going

through this process: confusion, identity crisis, peer pressure, and innocence. Consequently, teenagers are still innocent and premature when it comes to pinpointing exactly how the world works and thus, who they are and how they identify with it. Teens have always looked for ways to be liked and to be affirmed by the social world they live in. For example, Ralph said multiple times how he would like to be famous because people will know him. In addition, Rachel expressed her concern for being understood correctly by her peers in the text-messaging segment. She was quick to answer that her friends needed to reassure her that they were kidding about their comments and that they were just being sarcastic.

Reflecting back to the myths demonstrated in the literature review, Gray established five myths and amongst them were these three. (1) Technology creates social isolation, this research revealed a different message. The research discovered that participants sought approval and affirmation, and above all attention. Secondly, Gray introduced that (2) teens are addicted to technology and social media. This research didn't exactly argue this myth but it did reveal that teens like social media. Lastly, (3) teens these days have no appreciation of privacy. This myth may be a great idea for future research because the desire for fame complicates or contradicts the desire for privacy.

In reflecting on the connections between the research I read and the research that I conducted, I revised the triangle model I presented in Chapter 2. I began with the same approach when designing this Figure and used Figure 2 as original model. There were some similarities that emerged in both sections. Echoing previous

discoveries from Figure 2, additional developmental tasks that one experiences through identity formation is confidence, competence, and independence. This research discovered that adolescence gain confidence especially when using social media. In other words, confidence was highlighted in both areas and there was a relationship between the knowledge of the medium and then the confidence to use that medium. For example, when we review the results of media items, we saw that digital media illuminated the most confidence. Olivia was clearly the most confident, competent and independent of the students I interviewed. She by contrast, was the second oldest out of all the participants, but she was the oldest female. Discovering their confidence and mastery of social media platforms, teens revealed that they were the most confident using online media in particular, YouTube. As a result, they seemed most confident wanting to be famous online. The same relationship emerged with fame. The teens that revealed the most confidence in them-selves as a characteristic trait were the teens that wanted to be famous.

Meanwhile, there were many discoveries of competency. For example, some of them exhibited a high level of emotional intelligence in their answers. They expressed some social awareness of peers and others. They were self reflective about multitasking and understanding messages over IM.

### **Community Affiliation**

This study revealed that regardless of the gender, or social medium used, many of them it not all wanted to contribute back to their families or help in other community causes. If fame was involved, they still entertained the idea but also had

some close connection to helping someone once fame was involved. This study revealed that social media use amongst teens created a more empathetic community building individual. It also revealed that many millennial's' who aspire fame would use their wealth and popularity to give back to their families and charities. This study revealed that teens' do hold values, in particular, collectivistic aspirations about themselves and fame. Regardless of the gender, or social medium used, many of them if not all wanted to contribute back to their families or help in other community causes. If fame was involved, they still entertained the idea but also had some close connection to helping someone once fame was involved.





## **Conclusion**

This was an exploratory study to consider the role of fame and desire for celebrity as it may intersect with knowledge of media production and social media behaviors. Young audiences search for ways to be social, popular, accepted, and find ways to organically leave spaces where parents or adults may be. Teens are using social media to maintain and achieve healthy relationships with themselves and with others. The development of the Internet quite often makes them seem resilient and more competent. Therefore, it is reasonable to say the rise of social media is connected to the development of self-esteem in teens. However, there was no implication of attrition between negative impacts on young audiences' identity development by their use of social media. Meanwhile, young audiences are behaving and developing the same way they always have regardless of social media.

Consequently, the significance of exploring their attitudes and values towards media in their lives is relevant to understanding their values and beliefs about their identity and human development. Findings reveal how teens value television, music, magazines, and online media were the way they connected to these media forms. This research found that teenagers valued being "liked" and in some instances, famous. Meanwhile, the values in traits such as confidence and competence were most salient. Therefore it is reasonable to say that teens' identity and social development may be positively affected by participation in a media saturated culture.

## **Future Research**

Based on the data analysis and the end results of this study, follow up research is needed to determine to what extent adolescent identity development may or may not be compromised due to social media. I believe the following recommendations will help guide the design of further research. The think aloud protocol was a kind of learning experience where teens got a chance to reflect on what they know and don't know about different types of media. This may be a valuable strategy for informal media literacy learning in the home if a trusting adult can interact with a young person in a way that promotes reflection.

1. Consider further examination with a larger sample size
2. Consider designing a study to examine social media use and communicating through social media
3. Explore the differences and similarities of using social media amongst genders
4. Explore parental control and what parents report about young audiences and social media use.
5. Explore how media literacy amongst young audiences may impact their values of social media
6. Consider teens interest in fame and celebrity culture and that it may intersect with the desire for privacy

## **Appendices**



Assent Form

My name is Ms. Sara L. Benn. I am doing a research study to try to find out more about the different ways kids your age use social media platforms.

If you agree to be in this study, here is what will happen: I will ask you to take a quiz in the form of a printed version. I will also ask you questions once you have selected certain choices or responses. For example, I may ask you why you feel that way about your response. Please note, any of your answers or responses is neither right nor wrong. I am looking for your honest opinion or thoughts. It will take us about 45-1 hour to finish the quiz together.

You may ask any questions or disclose any thoughts about the study at any time. Also, if you decide you do not want to finish, you can stop whenever you want. There are no right or wrong answers because this is not a test.

You should talk this over with your parents before you decide to be in the study or not. I will also ask your parents to give their permission for you to be in this study. But even if your parents say “yes”, you can still decide not to do this.

Signing this paper means that you have read this form or had it read to you and that you want to be in the study. If you do not want to be in this study, Please do not sign the paper. Remember, being in this study is completely up to you. No one will be upset with you if you decide you do not wish to participate in this or to sign this paper, even if you change your mind later.

Signature of participant: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

I agree that my voice will be audio recorded for research purposes

Signature of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
(audio recording)

Signature of Investigator: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_



Assent Form

My name is Ms. Sara L. Benn. I am doing a research study to try to find out more about the different ways kids your age use social media platforms.

If you agree to be in this study, here is what will happen: I will ask you to take a quiz in the form of a printed version. I will also ask you questions once you have selected certain choices or responses. For example, I may ask you why you feel that way about your response. Please note, any of your answers or responses is neither right nor wrong. I am looking for your honest opinion or thoughts. It will take us about 45-1 hour to finish the quiz together.

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(audio recording)

Signature of Investigator: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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**My Pop Studio Quiz**

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/5DH6KNJ>

Do you have a favorite celebrity? We want to know what stars you like best and why!

But first, tell us a little bit about you!

**1. Are you a girl or a boy?**

Girl

Boy

**2. How old are you?**

**3. How true are these statements about you?**

	Totally true	Mostly true	Somewhat true	Not at all true
I would like to make my own music record.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would like to perform on stage.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would like to be on TV	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would like to be famous online.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would like to be in a movie.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would like to be on a magazine cover.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would like to become famous, like a celebrity.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



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