



technology, children, schools and families

Identity, community and selfhood: understanding the self in relation to contemporary youth cultures

Sarah Riley

University of Bath

December 2008

Abstract

This paper discusses some of the key factors that shape young people's identity in relation to contemporary youth cultures. It describes a tightening of relationships between identity, leisure and consumption that have interacted with developments in communication technologies and an understanding of the self as being dynamically (re)produced in interaction, constructed from the range of subject positions that may be contradictory or only partially formed. These identities may be personal or social, with the latter being associated with neo-tribal theory. This context has opened up the possibility for young people to engage in a playful pick-and-mix approach to identity as they move through a kaleidoscope of temporary, fluid and multiple subjectivities that often celebrate hedonism, sociality and sovereignty over one's own existence. Multiplicity and sovereignty, however, involve complex interactions between contradictory values and are associated with a variety of stressors and inequalities that are strengthened through neo-liberal rhetoric of risk, responsibility and individualism. Furthermore, both neo-liberalism and neo-tribalism provide a context in which political and social participation shift to the local, informal and personal. For future education to provide environments where schools are fun, interesting, relevant and safe, a personalised portfolio model of education is recommended, where educators act as facilitators for the successful management of the self as a project; provide alternative discourses to neo-liberalism by working as 'community enablers'; and act as protective stewards, shielding young people from some of the more aggressive aspects of technology, surveillance and commercialisation.

Keywords: young people, culture, neo-liberalism, consumption, leisure, politics, participation, society, individualism

The context for this paper are the changes in the structures and institutions of advanced industrial societies over the past 50 years that include the decline in manufacturing industries, changes in family structures and increases in communication media. These changes have resulted in profound shifts in how we make sense of ourselves. Young people must attempt to accomplish and negotiate an expectation of multiple identity management within a context of powerful social forces that include consumerism and a neo-liberal emphasis on risk, responsibility and individualism. This paper explores these three factors - consumption, multiplicity and neo-liberalism - in the shaping of young people's identity in relation to contemporary youth cultures.

Leisure and consumption

Traditional anchors for identity, such as occupation or region, now compete with, or are replaced by, identities based upon consumption, lifestyle and leisure (Giddens, 1991). Leisure-based activities have increasingly become important indicators of who we are and our place in society, including how we understand civic and political participation. A series of shifts have occurred which have further strengthened the relationships between consumption and identity for young people. These include delaying responsibilities associated with adulthood and independent living, an increase in communication media, and developments in advertising and marketing.

The cost of living and of higher education are two factors that have led to British youth delaying their participation in responsibilities associated with adulthood, such as independent living, home ownership or parenthood. Depending on their socio-economic status, on average, young people remain either financially dependent on their parents, or contribute financially to the parental home, until their late twenties (Parker, Aldridge & Measham, 1998). Without the need to pay for mortgages or children this delayed access to adult responsibilities means that young people often have more time and money for leisure than had previous generations.

The ability to consume has been further enhanced through developments in technology that have given young people unprecedented access to information on a multitude of consumption and leisure practices and to the people and communities who participate in them. Such technologies include the internet, increases in the number of television channels, and changes in publishing that have reduced production costs, making specialist smaller readership magazines commercially viable.

Young people are also targeted by those interested in commercially exploiting youth markets, including, for example, regional governments who have seen young adults' consumption in bars and clubs as the solution to city centre regeneration (Chatterton & Hollands, 2003). A range of aggressive and insidious marketing techniques have been developed and used to target young people, including, for example, giving popular children free products to promote to their peer group. So while there has always been a complex interaction between the media, consumer interests and 'authentic' youth culture (Riley & Cahill, 2005) young people today experience unprecedented exposure to commercial pressures (see, for example, discussions of 'ethnographic marketing', 'viral advertising' and 'KGOY' (Kids growing older younger)).

Branding and other marketing practices have intimately linked identity with consumption. For example, young men may identify as a 'rebel' by buying particular clothes rather than having participated in any act considered rebellious (Gill, Henwood & McClean, 2005). There is considerable debate over the agency young people have regarding consumption and identity. Young people are not necessarily passive consumers and while they may be attracted to particular identities associated with

branded materials they may take these items and rework them in various ways, including parody. Others argue however, that the notion of agency is itself an illusion of discourses of consumption, or at the very least, subversion through consumption has limitations. (For an example of the debates on agency and consumption in relation to young women and sexualised clothing see Duit & van Zoonen (2006, 2007) and Gill (2007)).

The relationships between traditional anchors of identity and those produced through consumption and leisure are also disputed. Indeed, analyses of 'changing times' tend to be anecdotal, with limited empirical work available (www.identities.org.uk). It is likely, however, that young people's subjectivities are constructed through a variety of identities shaped by 'traditional' orientations to class, region, family and gender, and more 'liquid', flexible ones orienting around leisure-based activities, such as sports or shopping. Thus, leisure and consumption-based identities may not have replaced traditional anchors for identity, rather, when young people had access to them these identities may sit alongside each other, being drawn upon when contextually relevant (Riley, Griffin & Morey, 2008). Having access to, and being able to participate in, both traditional and liquid identities is subject to a complex interaction of personal and social variables, but is linked to social inequality. For example, working class children are more likely to have a TV in their bedroom, increasing the amount of advertising to which they are subjected (Mayo, 2005)¹.

Multiplicity

As well as opening up opportunities for leisure and consumption increases in communication media have offered a plethora of ways of understanding ourselves. In having access to, for example, history programmes about life in ancient Egypt, soap operas with evil twins, or channels dedicated to extreme sports, young people grow up in a world in which they have literally seen it all before. Thus, the proliferation and globalisation of near instant forms of technological communication make available a dynamically-shifting range of stories and forms of knowledge that can inform young people's identity management. Subjectivity, then, is not considered to be constructed from pre-formed essences which exist independently outside of time, talk or other social activity, but are constantly (re)produced in interaction, constructed from the range of subject positions available to the individual, which may be contradictory or only partially formed.

Developments in communication technologies have intensified relationships between subjectivity and technology. There has always been a link between subjectivity and technology, for example using a hammer allows a person to experience their arm as a lever (Burkitt, 1999). However, distinctions between bodies, selves and technology have increasingly blurred, leading analysts to talk of cyborg as a metaphor for understanding contemporary subjectivity in which the boundaries between organism and machine are transgressed and from which new senses of self emerge (Gergen, 1991). For example, mobile phones can give us the sense of never being alone, of carrying with us the potential of always being able to connect to others.

For contemporary young people, exposed to and consuming a range of communication media, consumption and leisure practices, the traditional move from identifying with one's family to one's peer group is now one that is likely to involve multiple peer groups. It is therefore more appropriate to think of youth cultures in the plural in order to foreground the multiplicity of identities that orient around the notion of youth and to

¹ Although this effect may be negated by the steady increase in young people's private access to the internet.

think of young people moving dynamically between these communities. In previous eras, subcultures, such as hippies or punks, bestowed meaningfulness on those who clearly identified with one group, locating authenticity in those who most closely approximated the permanent alternative lifestyle that reflected the norms associated with this group (McKay, 1998). Now such an understanding of authenticity may be less valued and meaningfulness may be as easily located in temporary, fluid and multiple identities, identities facilitated through technology and consumption practices. So while some people may still strongly identify with one group, others adopt a more playful pick-and-mix approach, moving through a kaleidoscope of fractured scenes and taste cultures (Muggleton & Weinzierl, 2004).

While youth cultures have multiplied and fractured, other, homogenising forces have come into play, including the globalisation of youth cultures and the blurring of adult and youth activities. Communication technologies have aided the globalisation and commercialisation of youth cultures, working as homogenising forces that enable youth cultures to be formed and communicated almost instantly in more or less similar ways across the world (see, for example, Studdert's (2006) discussion on African Chelsea football club supporters). There has also been a blurring of adult and youth interests and activities. Just as young people delay taking on adult responsibilities and so extend their adolescence into adulthood, older generations too have been less inclined to relinquish youthful activities. The music video game 'Guitar Hero', for example, recently advertised itself as cross-generational entertainment for parents and their teenage children to use while queuing together for a festival. Successful movement across these boundaries is not, however, a given. Instead, scenes usually fracture and multiply to accommodate niche markets, for example 'Baby Raves' - electronic dance music daytime events held for parents with small children.

Having a range of identities has traditionally been understood as psychologically healthy, since a person can maintain positive self esteem by drawing on other aspects of self if one aspect experiences failure (see, for example, work on Social Identity Theory by Tajfel & Turner, 1986). The increase in opportunities to experience multiple identities may therefore be considered to have positive potential. Creating different identities, such as online avatars or Bluetooth monikers, allow people to construct different senses of selves that represent or allow them to engage in different behaviours and activities. For example, different DJ names can represent different types of music played by that person, freeing the DJ from being pigeon-holed while also allowing him/herself to communicate to his/her potential audience what kind of music to expect on a particular night. However, concern has been raised that the number of identities a person may be expected to dynamically and, in a 24 hour culture, perpetually, move through, can create over-demanding situations, causing stress. Furthermore, some understandings will inevitably clash with others, so that multiplicity is associated with contradiction. For example, young women are expected to both have 'girl power' and to be heterosexually attractive, thereby reproducing traditional expectations of femininity (for examples, see Gill 2006, or <http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/newFemininities/>).

Problems associated with consumption are also implicated in the management of multiple identities, since these different aspects of self are often facilitated through the ability to consume. Participation requires, for example, entrance to clubs, appropriate clothes, or technological equipment. School children regularly use social networking sites after school to communicate with each other, creating social exclusion for those without access to the internet at home. Thus, there are significant structural inequalities in the ability to adopt a playful 'pick-and-mix' stance. Indeed significant inequalities may be produced at the most basic level of self-storying, since the most excluded in society may struggle even to tell one, let alone, multiple narratives about themselves.

Neo-liberalism

The need to story oneself with multiple narratives, whether drawn from traditional- or consumption-based identity markers, is particularly relevant because of the dominance of neo-liberalism. Identity has always been an important marker for young people, and engaging in leisure and consumption, such as in choices around appearance and clothes, has played a significant role in this. What is different for today's youth is the tightening of meaning around identity and consumption that has been facilitated through neo-liberal rhetoric of risk, responsibility and individualism.

Neo-liberalism describes the idea that people are encouraged to see themselves as if they are autonomous, rational, risk-managing subjects, responsible for their own destinies and called "to render one's life knowable and meaningful through a narrative of free choice and autonomy - however constrained one might actually be" (Gill, 2006, p.260; see also Kelly, 2006). From this position, the social context in which a person lives is reduced to their immediate interpersonal relations, and any personal, social or health problems, and their attendant solutions, are located within the individual. Neo-liberalism allows people to make sense of themselves in individualistic and psychological terms, understanding their consumption practices as freely chosen markers of their identity (Cronin, 2003). Neo-liberal rhetoric of individual choice and responsibility now dominates much of post-industrial sense making about what it means to be a good person. Such changes have been identified as powerful new forms of governance (Rose, 1989). For example, being asked to work excessive and low paid hours may not be considered exploitation but accounted for in terms of a worker's psychological characteristic of being a helpful person (Walkerline, 2002). Thus, young people are developing their sense of self in a context in which wider discourses in society encourage them to understand themselves through psychological and individual discourses, rather than those that are communal or sociological.

Neo-liberal subjectivity has been associated with an increased focus on the body as an important site for identity management. For example, there has been a coupling between neo-liberal values of rationality and responsibility and the cultural valuing of slenderness, so that a slender and toned body has come to represent a person who has rational control over their appetites and who acts responsibly in relation to maintaining a healthy body. These associations mean that body size has come not just to signify physical health, but also mental health and morality (Riley, et al, 2008).

The relationship between the body and identity may be particularly important for young people, given that in comparison to adults, young people tend to have less control over other aspects of their lives. Young people may employ a range of body modification techniques, from dieting and weight training to cosmetic surgery or body art. As an example, body art, an umbrella term for a variety of practices including tattoos and piercings, has become increasingly popular as a way of articulating personal and social identities (Riley & Cahill, 2005) and with continued developments in technology and cosmetic surgery may produce ever more creative forms of body modification (for example, the use of implants to create horns).

Youth cultures are often associated with pleasure and hedonism, and the body is central to these issues. For example, electronic music dance culture (also known as 'rave') employs technologies such as sound systems, lasers, electronically manufactured music and 'designer' drugs to produce hyper real communal and embodied experiences (Wilson, 2006). These experiences allow participants to develop identities and experiences of self that may be incorporated into neo-liberal narratives of self. Neo-liberal rhetoric can also be employed to justify such pleasures, as it can be argued that the individual has the right and freedom to engage in escapism through extreme but pleasurable intoxication (Riley, Morey & Griffin, 2008). Given the excessive weekend drinking seen across Britain's city centres such a 'culture of intoxication', in which people

collectively seek and celebrate a loss of control, may be considered normalised for many young people (Measham & Brain, 2005). Paradoxically then, neo-liberal rights and responsibilities discourses may be employed to justify embodied, communal, intoxicated and even 'mad' selves, selves that are the antithesis of the rational neo-liberal subject.

Neo-tribalism

Neo-liberalism has arguably come to dominate much of contemporary western thinking about subjectivity, however, it is not without competing discourses. For example, sociologist Michel Maffesoli, while also emphasising the informal and local, argues that contemporary social organisation is highly social. Maffesoli's theory of neo-tribalism challenges notions of society as increasingly alienated and individualistic and instead characterises daily life as a continuous movement through a range of small and potentially temporary groups that are distinguished by shared lifestyles, values and understandings of what is appropriate behaviour (Maffesoli, 1996). These groups give a sense of belonging and identity, examples of which include gathering to watch football in a bar, participants on service user websites or regular commuters sharing public transport. What distinguishes neo-tribal social formation from traditional social groupings is that people belong to a variety of groups, many of them by choice, so that neo-tribal memberships are plural, temporary, fluid and often elective (Riley, Griffin & Morey, *in submission*).

Within neo-tribal theory people are understood as moving dynamically through a series of groups, some more partially formed than others, which are in the person's locality. However, technologies such as the internet make the notion of being 'local' relative, since people may share physical or virtual proximity. That neo-tribes are distinguished by the grouping, however temporary in time or space, of people who share lifestyles, values and understandings of what is appropriate behaviour leads Maffesoli to analyse such groups as engaged in moments of 'sovereignty over one's own existence'. Neo-tribal gatherings provide sovereignty because they create temporary pockets of freedom to engage in behaviours and values associated with that group, which may be different from the values and expected behaviours of other groups (that participants may or may not also be members of). For example, a person may shout aggressively when watching football in a bar, but would not raise their voice at a family meal.

Creating spaces in which to practice one's group values requires a turning away from other groups in order to 'do your own thing'. The resultant lack of engagement with other groups, in particular more dominant groups, often leads to youth cultures being constructed as problematic. First, because it is read as a sign of young people failing to engage with adult groups or adult led activities deemed good for the young people. Second, these groups are often understood as challenging the dominant culture or celebrating values at odds with the dominant culture, creating moral panics that construct young people as 'folk devils'. However, analyses of these groups often show a complex blending of values that both reflect and challenge dominant values. For example, pro-ana websites, which are created by young women to promote the concept of anorexia as a lifestyle choice, are an example of young women engaging in valued practices of being pro-active and employing technological skills. However, they are applying themselves to the promotion of a cause that can lead to serious illness or death. Similarly, setting up an illegal rave requires the bringing together of a diverse set of resources that include entrepreneurial, organisational, musical and electrical engineering skills, skills used to facilitate parties that are unlicensed, held on other people's property and involve high levels of illicit drug use.

Dominant values themselves are, of course, constantly being negotiated and Maffesoli (1996) argues that there is currently a general move by the 'masses' away from the institutional power and rational organisations that defined the modern age to a zeitgeist that celebrates sociality, proximity, emotional attachments and hedonistic values. Thus, when groups create opportunities to practice sovereignty over their existence they are creating spaces in which to engage in values that orient around sociality, emotionality and hedonism. In relating neo-tribalism to young people, it may be useful to recognise the similarities between Maffesoli's concept of sovereignty and Hakim Bey's 'Temporary Autonomous Zones' (TAZ), a term he uses to describe transitory unsanctioned self-governing sites (Bey, 1991). In coming together to participate in acts of sociality and hedonism, TAZs or neo-tribal gatherings can be understood as providing sites of resistance to a neo-liberal sensibility based on rationality, rights, responsibility and individualism.

The creation of temporary and fluid spaces in which to participate in one's own values, can be understood as an emerging form of political engagement, an 'everyday politics' that focuses on the local, informal or personal, rather than engaging with official organisations and institutional power. Personal lives have been used previously as the basis for political activism (examples being the 'identity politics' of feminism, gay/lesbian liberation and black power). However, such forms of political activism, like traditional political activities, often focus on a social change agenda. What distinguishes the new personalised form of politics is that the focus is on creating temporary spaces in which to participate in one's own values and associated behaviours - to be able to 'do your own thing' - thus participants do not necessarily need to engage with other groups or organisations of governance. Everyday politics is thus about creating spaces in which to live out alternative values, shifting political participation to the 'everyday' individual or informal group level.

An 'everyday politics' may be particularly relevant for young people because of a perceived lack of attention from those involved in traditional politics to issues of concern for young people (eg the environment). Furthermore, as Harris argues, when young people engage with state institutions to effect social change, their action problematically works to both endorse these systems and to locate themselves in a subordinate position within them: "young people may well have their own ideas about how states and citizenry should operate, and to ask to be included or to participate in the current order is to endorse a system that may be fundamentally at odds with these other visions. Further, it is to accept one's subordinate position as a fringe dweller who can only ever hope to be invited or asked to participate, but who can never do the inviting themselves" (2001, p.187). Like Maffesoli, Harris argues that one solution is not to engage with institutions associated with governance and power, but to create one's own spaces of autonomy. Harris's (2001) work on girlzines is such an example. Harris (ibid.) argued that the young women involved used internet magazines to create their own space from which to negotiate, redefine and reclaim politics, citizenship and novel gender subjectivities. Harris's work suggests that leisure and entertainment based activities can provide sites for young people to engage in practices that relate to participation and citizenship, providing the opportunity to produce 'counter stories' that act as "forms of politics, often misrecognised as entertainment" (Harris, Carney & Fine, 2001, p.12). Neo-liberalism is implicated in 'everyday politics' since neo-liberal rhetoric of focusing on the personal through discourses of individual choice and personal responsibility provides the ideological context in which locating political participation at the individual or informal group level makes sense. However, arguments for these forms of political engagement are controversial and empirical work is scattered and underdeveloped (a special issue of 'Youth' on everyday politics edited by Anita Harris is currently underway; also see Riley et al, *in submission*).

Implications

Adolescence and early adulthood are traditionally conceptualised as making up an important time in identity development. Today's youth experience this time in a context in which the culturally dominant model of the self is of an autonomous, rational, psychological subject who bears ultimate responsibility for the self and who must manage multiple identities, many of which are made available through consumption and technology.

This context provides a range of opportunities for pleasurable and playful engagement with identity, allowing the young people who can take these opportunities to construct a sense of place in the world. However, this construction of self also creates certain stressors. First, locating every success or failure at the personal or psychological level absents other ways of making sense of oneself and masks the impact of structural inequalities on life 'choices'. Second, the constant pressure to (re)make yourself and manage multiplicity is both demanding and requires the management of contradictory identities. Third, structural inequalities mean that some people do not have the resources to do this kind of identity management.

In masking the impact of structural inequalities neo-liberalism sets the scene for a shift towards a personalising of politics. Locating oneself at the personal and psychological level, coupled with a general move away from engaging with traditional institutional power, creates the context in which it may make sense for young people to focus their political energies on informal acts, such as recycling or benefit gigs for small charities. This shift can be read as reflecting an alienation from traditional politics that is a part of the contemporary British political landscape (Colman & Götze, 2001; Harris, 2001), or more positively, as a sign of a zeitgeist swing away from one form of political engagement to another (Maffesoli, 1996).

Although neo-liberalism has come to dominate our understanding of the subject it is one concept amongst many. One alternative to neo-liberalism that also has political potential is neo-tribalism (Maffesoli, 1996). Neo-tribalism argues that our identities are made from moving through a variety of local groups to which we have an emotional attachment, these groups are conceptualised as creating temporary pockets of sovereignty in which to celebrate values of hedonism and sociality. Youth cultures can be conceptualised as neo-tribes, in which young people carve out temporal spaces in which to practice particular sets of values and behaviours. In creating these spaces neo-tribes can be considered as new forms of political participation, since they allow alternative values systems to survive. Young people may therefore create their own neo-tribes in which to celebrate identities that offer an alternative to the rational risk managing neo-liberal subject, the 'culture of intoxication' being one such example.

The moral panic that ensued from today's culture of intoxication is part of a long history of representing 'youth as problem' and can be seen to inform tensions around how contemporary young people appropriate space and technology. While being youthful is a valued commodity, young people themselves are often represented as deviant, representations that are classed and gendered - sexually active females, criminally active males, for example (Griffin, 1993). (For a contemporary example, see the very particular and narrow reading of youth in the World Bank's World Development Report, which locates solutions to problematic youth in formal institutions, absenting the possibilities that youth cultures themselves provide positive spaces for identity development (Luttrell-Rowland, 2007)).

Hedonistic youth cultures can, however, be analysed as attempts to use pleasure as a vehicle for creating positive social alternatives. Rave culture, for example, exhorts the values of PLUR - peace, love, unity and respect (Wilson, 2006). Similarly, excessive weekend drinking in city centres has been analysed as a sign that working class youth

have the confidence to use these public spaces in a way that previous generations did not (Chatterton & Hollands, 2003).

However, such forms of resistance may reinforce the overall dominance of neo-liberalism. For example, engaging in intoxicated excesses at the weekend may release tension created by the stress of being a neo-liberal subject, facilitating participants to return to work on Monday. Participants of hedonistic resistance to neo-liberalism often account for their behaviour with neo-liberal rhetoric of rights and risk, arguing that if one is ultimately responsible for oneself then one also has a right to do what one wants with that self (Riley, Morey & Griffin, 2008). There is therefore a complex interaction between alternative and dominant discourses of self since one may be enabled by the other. Young people may be snatching spaces to be 'free' but they are using the masters' tools to do so. Thus, while neo-tribal memberships provide participants with a sense of belonging they may not challenge the neo-liberal construction of self as a project. Furthermore, neo-tribalism still requires the subject to manage multiplicity (in this case of group/tribal based identities) with the attendant stressors of multiplicity described above. Neo-liberal constructions of the self and multiple subjectivities are thus likely to continue into the future as significant ways of understanding oneself and place in the world.

There are examples of young people participating in collective action, a recent example being the anti-Iraq war 'Not in My Name' campaign. However, it has been argued that the impact of locating responsibility at the personal level has reduced young people's ability to make collective challenges since they are less likely to be exposed to discourses of collective experience and struggle, including, for example, those of feminism (McRobbie, 2008). Neo-liberalism may also foster a culture in which the social contract between citizen and government is weakened - if successes or failures are reduced to the interpersonal, then the citizen owes the state nothing.

The proliferation and globalisation of near instant forms of technological communication combined with the multiple and fragmented nature of social lives means that we have available to us an ever shifting kaleidoscope of understandings from which we can draw on in the (re)production of neo-liberal subjectivities. These subjectivities are reduced to their immediate interpersonal relations, to the realm of the personal and psychological, but not necessarily to the private. Communication technologies allow the self to be (re)produced in the public sphere, for example through entries in social network sites such as Facebook, blogs or personal and work websites. Just as every aspect of life can already be seen on TV, so we replay it back using technology to make partial and fractured narratives of ourselves that span space and time. See, for example, 'FutureMe.org', an online resource for sending emails to yourself in the future. The 'best' of these messages are made public in an anonymous form for entertainment. Indeed it may be that communication technologies are creating a situation where people understand aspects of themselves as only truly meaningful when offered up for the consumption of others. It is possible therefore that communication technologies, such as Web 2.0, are creating a new shift in which the private may only be meaningfully experienced when in the public.

Developments in technology are likely to enhance this process. For example, the ability to store a lifetime of video on an iPod will allow an individual to consume their own life experiences (Cliff, O'Malley & Taylor, 2008). Fear of social exclusion if one doesn't participate in these technologies, plus surveillance technology, such as CCTV and the use of finger print scanners to ID children in schools², means that there is only limited opt out from these forms of technology. Furthermore, communication technologies do not provide unlimited ways of self-storying. Rather the technologies themselves and the

² This is being used for example at a City Academy in Bristol to replace taking the register and for ordering lunch.

cultural valuing of particular traits create powerful scaffolding around which people build their self-narratives. For example, there are international internet dating websites that require participants to describe the colour of their hair and eyes, despite these being primarily defining features for Caucasian people. Similarly, research on online gaming shows that participants regularly create avatars that fulfil conventional definitions of heterosexually attractive gendered attributes (for example, women create female avatars that have slender, toned bodies) (Waskul & Edgley, 2000).

In the future young people will therefore have to negotiate a self that is splintered off into a series of surfaces that reflect both the technologies that enable them and the cultural mores in which they are located. Sociologist Norbert Elias argued that changes in social structures during the Middle Ages led to a shift in human subjectivity in which the public and private became compartmentalised. Responses to actions such as public defecation changed, so that people moved these behaviours to the private sphere. These changes led to a shift in consciousness in which thoughts could also become private, making, for example, the experience of 'repressed anger' a possibility, since previously anger was a public act and not a private experience (that one may or may not express). Changes in contemporary social organisation, enabled through communication technologies, have the potential to create similar radical changes in subjectivity. Notably, a fractured and multiple self experienced in the public sphere and reflected through technology across a range of temporal physical and virtual locations.

Already the internet has produced a situation in which aspects of our selves are created through technology and distributed across time and space. Some of these selves have connections to each other, as in the past selves communicating with future selves as via FutureMe.org. With other selves the connections to the original source(s) are broken or new connections are made, such as forgotten photographs uploaded onto public domains and re-appropriated by friends, colleagues or people unknown. An example of re-appropriation I found was a young girl's homepage that had a photograph of another (attractive) child on it, with the explanation that 'she looks a bit like me'. It may be that young people will experience fractured and multiple subjectivity in the same way that they are encouraged to consider high street clothing – as tools of identity to be temporarily appropriated, experienced and then cast off in favour of some new look or experience. Future subjectivity may therefore be conceptualised as a collection of multiple, diffuse selves existing across time and space, that have differing degrees of relationships with each other and perhaps no longer needing to be held together by the concept of a 'core self'.

It is likely, therefore, that in the future young people will need to find ways to exist in the plural. In a preferable future they will be able to develop a sense of being valued and of having opportunities to participate positively in the many social worlds that will be potentially available to them. Schools and other educational institutions will have a duty to help facilitate this.

One way to increase young people's access to traditional and liquid identities from which to story themselves would be through the creation of more personalised education. In the same way that technologies are enabling increasingly more individually tailored medical interventions, a personalised educational system could be developed in which each student would in effect be their own portfolio manager, managing themselves as a project. The aim for educationalists would be to help young people identify their values, interests and talents and to find ways of using these to develop the various skills they need to become critical and engaged citizens who feel valued and located in their world.

By drawing on young people's own interests educators may use leisure and consumption as a way to excite them about education, creating holistic ways to develop young

people's understanding and engagement with their world³. Pop music, for example, is often a key site for young people's interest and identity. Music technologies now allow people to compose music without needing knowledge of musical theory. Creating music with this technology can be used as a starting point for students to gain a sense of self-efficacy, from which they might develop their education holistically, exploring a range of associated subjects including musical theory, socio-political history and practical learning through organising and performing in a concert. It may therefore be an advantage to blur education with entertainment, particularly given the expectation, at least in some sections of society, that work should be enjoyable (Tapscott, 2008).

Future education may require different relations of authority between educational institutions and their students. Already communication technologies have reduced teachers' control over pupils. For example, school pupils have created a mobile phone ring tone that their teachers cannot hear by recording the 'mosquito', a high pitched noise used to keep teenagers away from public amenities like late night shops. Technologies are likely to increase young people's autonomy, like some contemporary adults they may work (or study) from home, or in the future, they may use biologically embedded technologies only viewable to themselves (Cliff, O'Malley & Taylor, 2008). A personalised education system that incorporates the values and interests of the student is likely to enhance self-motivated study and create more egalitarian relationships with educational institutions. However, respecting the values and interests of students may bring challenges, given that youth cultures are often a complex blend of dominant and counter cultural values. After all, one can confidently predict that young people will sometimes do things not expected or approved of by their elders.

Communication technologies mean that educators and students can draw from a huge range of resources of expertise. For example, lectures from world renowned academics are available on 'YouTube'. The role of future educators in a personalised educational setting would then be to help young people identify which sites may help them develop the skills they most need to meet their educational interests, values and needs. Educators would also have the role of helping students make links between their personal portfolios and the wider world. For example, identifying transferable skills, connections to the job market and developing critical analytical skills that would help them negotiate their way through their virtual and physical worlds. One way to do this is for students to be encouraged to explore the power of language in structuring the way people understand their world, so that students can critically evaluate the texts that they use through the analytics of argument, reflection and doubt (Gergen with Wortham, 2001; Postman, 1995). Postman (1995), for example, argues for a curriculum that constructs knowledge as historically multiple, borrowed and intermingled. Such a curriculum would introduce plurality and set a framework for understanding one's own multiplicity, contradictions and socio-historic context.

Drawing on Postman would allow future educators to help young people develop a critical framework to negotiate and manage both their personal and social identities, while challenging some of the individualism of neo-liberalism and allowing young people to explore the impact of taking up particular identities in particular ways. This approach would prepare young people to both positively engage with the requirements of neo-liberal subjectivity, while also having the critical skills to explore alternative discourses, such as those associated with collective identities or spirituality.

In helping young people locate themselves as persons in relationships, embedded in a range of local and global communities educators would act as 'community enablers'. An example of using communication technologies to develop positive social identity based

³ See Gergen with Wortham (2001) for a discussion of social constructionist approach to education, which includes the principles of making education relevant to student's lives, taking a holistic approach, encouraging reflexivity and making links to activities and actions outside the classroom.

narratives comes from California, where young Hispanic pupils, living in a context in which their families have lower socio-economic status in comparison to their white counterparts, worked with Web 2.0 technology to produce positive narratives of their ethnic identity, which were then shared between themselves and with their wider community (Rodriguez, 2007). A similar project could, for example, be used with young people in the UK who struggle to find positive self-narratives in their communities (for example, young unemployed working class men in post-industrial Britain (Winlow, 2001)).

Helping young people form positive relationships with their community could be enabled through setting assessments that connect individuals together to demonstrate the values and necessity of group cohesion. Efficacy of group work would be further enhanced if assessments were directly linked to involvement in community action, either in the school or wider community, so that young people were encouraged to consider themselves as having meaningful connections to their communities (see action research and social constructionist approaches in education, eg Gergen with Wortham, 2001; Reason and Bradbury, 2008). Such projects would explicitly or implicitly teach students about social citizenship, and have the potential to tap into neo-tribal values of sociality, emotionality and the pleasures associated with creating pockets of sovereignty over one's own existence.

Neo-tribal theory argues that as people move in and out of the various groups to which they are affiliated their understanding of what is right and acceptable behaviour becomes relative, since it shifts for each group (Maffesoli, 1996). This form of relativist morality replaces the universal distinction between 'right' and 'wrong' on which modernist notions of morality are based. Maffesoli's argument is that such a relativist perspective facilitates tolerance, since it allows for, and indeed normalises, a diversity of values and practices across different communities and social groups. If this hypothesis is correct it would be possible for educators to help young people identify their various memberships and to facilitate pride and positive identities in these memberships, without the need to negatively construct out-groups. An ideal outcome of neo-tribalism, then, is to enjoy confidence in one's own memberships while maintaining an interest in others, a standpoint that may protect young people from being attracted to more fundamentalist orientated identities that provide a sense of security through the creation of a negative 'Other'.

Future educators could therefore value and work with what students bring to their classes, facilitate successful management of the self as a project and act as community enablers. In a preferable future they would also take on the role of protector. Young people will need protection and guidance in terms of managing their public selves, including the implications of how they present themselves online, as well as managing the stresses of multiple identities (which may include class related expectations of over- or under- achievement). Students will need support in how to engage with technology without getting lost or consumed by it. Young people will also need to be protected against bullying facilitated by technology (eg mass 'hate' texts), privacy invasions (by both individuals and government institutions) and virulent advertising.

A preferable future then, is one where schools are fun, interesting, relevant and safe. Places where it is recognised that young people bring a range of interests and values to their educational setting, which are engaged with in order to facilitate the development of positive personal and social identities. A personalised portfolio model of education in which the educator acts as a facilitator may help students gain the skills for successful management of the self as a project, so that they may enjoy the rights and responsibilities attached to neo-liberal subjectivity. However, educators would also need to provide alternative discourses to neo-liberalism, helping young people develop critical faculties and to explore other ways of understanding themselves, in particular as persons in relationships embedded in communities. Educators will also need to act as protective

stewards, shielding young people from some of the more aggressive and insidious aspects of technology, surveillance and commercialisation, helping young people develop skills to safely negotiate their identities across the various mediums they will inhabit.

This document has been commissioned as part of the UK Department for Children, Schools and Families' Beyond Current Horizons project, led by Futurelab. The views expressed do not represent the policy of any Government or organisation.

References

- Bey, H. (1991) *T.A.Z.: The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism*. New York, Autonomedia.
- Burkitt, I. (1999) *Bodies of Thought: Embodiment, Identity and Modernity*. London, Sage.
- Chatterton, P. and Hollands, R. (2003) *Urban nightscapes. Youth Cultures, Pleasure Spaces and Corporate Power*. London, Routledge.
- Cliff, D., O'Malley and Taylor, J. (2008) Beyond Current Horizon's paper.
- Colman, S. and Gøtze, J. (2001) *'Bowling Together: On line Public Engagement in Policy Deliberation*. London, Hansard Society.
- Duits, L. and van Zoonen, L. (2006) Headscarves and Porno-Chic: Disciplining Girls' Bodies in the European Multicultural Society. *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 13 (2), pp103-117.
- Duits, L. and van Zoonen, L. (2007) Who's Afraid of Female Agency? A Rejoinder to Gill'. *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 14 (2), pp161-1
- Gergen, K. (1991) *The Saturated Self*. New York, Basic Books.
- Gergen, K.J. with Wortham, S. (2001) Social Constructionism and Pedagogical Practice. In: Gergen, K.J., *Social Constructionism in Context*. London, Sage.
- Giddens, A. (1991) *Modernity and self-identity: Self and society in the late modern age*. Stanford, Stanford University Press.
- Gill, R. (2006) *Gender and the Media*. London, Polity Press.
- Gill, R. (2007) Critical respect: The difficulties and dilemmas of agency and 'choice' for feminism: A reply to Duits and van Zoonen. *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 14 (1), pp.65-76.
- Gill, R., Henwood, K. and McClean, C. (2005) Body projects and the regulation of normative masculinity. *Body & Society*, 11, pp37-62.
- Griffin, Chris (1993) *Representations of Youth: The study of Youth and Adolescence in Britain and America*. Cambridge, Polity.
- Greener, T. and Hollands, R. (2006) 'Beyond subculture and post-subculture? The case of virtual psytrance' *Journal of Youth Studies*, 9 (4), pp393-418.
- Harris, A. (2001) 'Dodging and waving: Young women countering the stories of youth and citizenship', *International Journal of Critical Psychology*, 4 (2), pp183-199.
- Harris, A., Carney, S. and Fine, M. (2001) Counter work: Introduction to 'Under the covers: Theorising the Politics of Counter Stories'. *International Journal of Critical Psychology*, 4 (2), pp6-18.
- Kelly, P. (2006) 'The entrepreneurial self and 'youth at-risk': Exploring the horizons of identity in the twenty-first century', *Journal of Youth Studies*, 9 (1), pp17-3.
- Luttrell-Rowland, M. (2007) Gang soldiers and 'Idle Girls': Constructions of youth and development in world bank discourse. *Research in Comparative and International Education*, 2 (3), pp230-241.
- McKay, G. (1998) *DIY Culture: Party and Protest in Nineties Britain*. London and New York, Verso
- McRobbie, A. (2008) *Displacement Feminism*. London, Sage.
- Maffesoli, M. (1996) *The Time of the Tribes: The Decline of Individualism in Mass Society*. London, Sage.

- Mayo, E. (2005) *Shopping Generation*. London, National Consumer Council.
- Measham, F. and Brain, K. (2005) 'Binge' drinking, British alcohol policy and the new culture of intoxication. *Crime, Media, Culture*, 1 (3), pp262-283
- Muggleton, D. and Weinzier, L. (2004) *The Post-Subcultural Reader*. New York, Berg.
- Postman, N. (1995) *The End of Education: Redefining the Value of School*. New York, Alfred Knopf.
- Reason, P. and Bradbury, H. (2008) *Handbook of Action Research*. London, Sage.
- Riley, S., Burns, M., Frith, H., Wiggins, S. and Markula, P. (2008) *Critical Bodies: Representations, Identities and Practices of Weight and Body Management*. London, Palgrave.
- Riley, S.C.E. and Cahill, S. (2005) Managing meaning & belonging: Young women's negotiation of authenticity in Body Art. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 8 (3), pp261-279.
- Riley, S., Griffin, C. and Morey, Y. (2008) *Reverberating Rhythms: Social Identity and Political Participation in Clubland*. End of Award Report, ESRC, ref.RES-000-22-1171.
- Riley, S., Morey, Y. and Griffin, C. (2008). Ketamine: The Divisive Dissociative. A Discourse Analysis of the Constructions of Ketamine by Participants of a Free Party (Rave) Scene. *Addiction, Research and Theory*, 16 (3), pp217-230.
- Riley, S., Griffin, C. and Morey, Y. The case for 'everyday politics': evaluating neo-tribal theory as a way to understand alternative forms of political participation, using Electronic Dance Culture as an example. *Sociology, in submission*.
- Rodriguez, M. (2007) Transnationalism through the eyes of young people. Paper presented at the BSA seminar *Young people, new technologies and political engagement*, University of Surrey, 24-25th July.
- Rose, N. (1989) *Inventing our Selves: Psychology, Power and Personhood*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Studdert, D. (2006) *Conceptualising community: Beyond State and Individual*. London, PalgraveMacMillan.
- Tajfel, H. and Turner, J.C. (1986). The social identity theory of inter-group behavior. In: Worchel, S. and Austin, L.W. eds. *Psychology of Intergroup Relations*. Chicago, Nelson-Hall.
- Tapscott, D. (2008) *Generation Expects*. Guardian, 8th November, p.1. 'Work' section
- Walkerdine V ed (2002) *Challenging Subjects: Critical Psychology for a New Millennium*. London, Palgrave MacMillan.
- Waskul, D., Douglass, M. and C. Edgley. (2000) 'Cybersex: Outercourse and the Enselfment of the Body', *Symbolic Interaction*, 23 (4), pp375-397.
- Wilson, B. (2006) *Fight, Flight or Chill. Subcultures, Youth and Rave into the Twenty-First Century*. Montreal & Kingston, McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Winlow, S. (2001) *Badfellas: Crime, Tradition and New Masculinities*. London, Berg.

This document has been commissioned as part of the UK Department for Children, Schools and Families' Beyond Current Horizons project, led by Futurelab. The views expressed do not represent the policy of any Government or organisation.