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‘Doing’ and ‘displaying’ family in polymediatric environments: conceptual tools for the analysis of teenagers’ digital practices

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[title 1] Introduction

The diversification of contemporary family forms is challenging the standard, institutional model of the family featuring a white, middle-class, heterosexual couple with two children (Morgan 2011), where family members are tied together by physical co-presence and the privately-owned house that contains them (Baldassar & Merla, 2014). The recomposed, transnational (Baldassar et al. 2014), and multilocal (Duchêne-Lacroix, 2013) family forms that have integrated the scientific and, increasingly, the everyday vocabulary have made particularly visible the increased mobility that characterizes contemporary families and wider societies. They have raised awareness about the fact that physical co-presence is not necessarily continuous but rather, co-exists with episodes of absence that can be temporary, prolonged or intermittent.

Furthermore, as Smart and Neale had already outlined in 1999, some teenagers routinely spend time in ‘separated, yet connected’ households (Smart and Neale 1999: 67). In other words, teenagers and their relatives are connected by relationships that are today in large part mediated by information and communication technologies (ICTs). ICTs profoundly influence everyday life and social relations (Lupton, 2013), by enhancing possibilities of maintaining ‘virtual proximity’ across space and time (Urry, 2002). The possibility to be simultaneously ‘here’ and ‘there’ allows for the development of a register of action that goes beyond localization or mobility (Torre, 2009). It has been highlighted that ICTs play a key role in the maintenance of social relations across distance and national borders, including among friendships, family and intimate relations (Madianou, 2012). More broadly, communication technologies such as the smartphone and the internet, and social networking websites have acquired a central role not

¹ Acknowledgements: we would like to thank Dr Sarah Murru (University of Louvain) for editing and proofreading this chapter.

only in the maintenance of teens' family relations, but also in their wider sociability and friendship practices (Ito et al., 2013). Through their appropriation of the affordances created by these technological tools, teenagers navigate within 'polymediatric' environments (Madianou and Miller, 2013) and they develop creative practices that bring forward their position as social actors that can, to various extents, exercise agency and influence on their own lives as well as on the lives of the people surrounding them, while being constrained by institutions such as the Family or the State (James and Prout, 1997). These "everyday" forms of creativity (Richards, 2007) encompass the innovative practices developed by social actors in "the process of navigating decisions, dilemmas, resource procurement, and relationships in commonly occurring situations" (Pachucki, Lena & Tepper, 2010: 125), but happening in the wider context of the transformation and diversification of family forms and modes of functioning.

The mobility turn (Urry & Grieco, 2012) is intimately connected to the rise of the internet and social media, and these phenomena challenge the way social scientists conceptualize families and requires them to re-design their conceptual tools. This chapter aims at contributing to this project by highlighting recent conceptual developments emerging from a dialogue between family and digital studies². We do this by articulating two important aspects of teenagers' lives where ICTs play an important role: (1) the everyday management of presence and absence in family life, and the practices that support how family continues to be 'done' in this context; and (2) the construction and production of self in a context where family and peer relations are in large part mediated by digital media. Throughout this chapter, we highlight the creative practices in which teens and their relatives engage in their everyday lives, and pay particular attention to the gendered dimensions of these processes.

In order to do so, we first define the polymediatric environment generated by the digital revolution. Then, we discuss how families are 'done' in this context and examine the new forms

² This chapter is informed by the theoretical framework that we are currently constructing in the context of 'MobileKids', an ERC Starting Grant project on children aged 10 to 16 who are living in physical shared custody arrangements, thus alternating periods of residence between their fathers' and mothers' homes.² One of our key hypothesis is that, for children aged 13 to 16 in our project (which we will call 'teenagers' or 'teens' in this chapter)², the smartphone represents (1) an important tool to maintain family relations and manage their daily lives ('doing family'), and (2) a symbolic resource for the 'production of self' and for 'displaying family' – in other words, a symbolic resource of mediatized identity construction which leads to an almost permanent multimodal connectedness (Schroeder, 2010). See www.mobilekids.eu. This project has received funding from the *European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation program* under grant agreement No 676868. This chapter reflects only the authors' view. The European Commission is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information it contains.

of co-presence that have been identified in the literature by bringing together insights from transnational families and childhood studies. Third, we focus our attention on processes of identity construction in relation with teenagers' uses of ICTs with their peer groups, and connect this discussion with practices that sustain a sense of family belonging through the concept of 'displaying family'. Here, we approach socialization as operated through daily experiences and practices that represent important means of learning and transmission, and support the construction of social ties (Sirota, 2006). Our conceptualization is in line with the work of Corsaro (2011: 20-21), who sees socialization as 'interpretive reproduction'. That is, a process involving the 'innovative and creative aspects of children's participation in society' and their active contribution to cultural reproduction and change, but where children are also 'constrained by existing social structure and societal reproduction'.

[Title 2] Polymedia

In this chapter, we define ICTs as the devices and tools 'used to access, produce, consume, and exchange information in a digital form, especially for supporting social interactions' in teenagers' social networks (Quan-Haase et al., 2018: 60). These include 'computers (laptops and tablets), the internet (the web, email, social media, social networking sites), and mobile phones' (Barbosa Neves & Casimiro, 2018).

The explosion, development and variety of these ICTs offer a new 'polymediatric' environment of communicative opportunities. The polymedia concept developed by Madianou & Miller (2013) was originally based on ethnographic fieldwork among transnational families of Filipino migrant mothers working in the UK. Both researchers were interested in understanding how these mothers maintained close relationships with their so-called 'left-behind' children and close relatives, and found that smartphones played a key role in this regard. In addition, they observed that new ICTs don't simply replace older channels and modes of communication like letters or phone calls, but rather form together an 'environment of affordances' where users can choose to exploit each medium differently and in combination. ICTs thus form an environment of polymedia, offering individuals a large range of applications (Skype, WhatsApp, etc.), devices (smartphone, laptop, etc.) and communication modalities (text, audiovisual, voice recording, etc.). People can use these to communicate and share emotions, needs, or desires, depending on the specific relation they have with their interlocutor, the location where the communication takes place, or the content they wish to share. This follows the idea that mediated communication should be approached by questioning '*What* to communicate about

as well as the *modes* of communication and the *ways* in which different technological devices and infrastructures are appropriated (or not)’ (Jansson, 2015: 35).

Furthermore, smartphones make this integrated environment of affordances particularly salient, as they materialize the convergence of mobile phones and personal computing. They can be seen as a polymedia itself (Madianou, 2014). Madianou emphasizes that the fluidity, accessibility and portability of smartphones intensify the practices of switching between media platforms to express emotions or to manage relationships. Smartphones further strengthen what Boyd called an ‘always-on lifestyle’ (Boyd, 2014) to describe the constant connection we live in, and which is especially important in the everyday lived experiences of the younger generation.

According to the UNICEF (2017), 71 per cent of children worldwide aged 13 to 17 are indeed online. This proportion is higher in countries in the Global North, including the EU where only 4 per cent of children at this age are not online (as compared to 60 per cent of African youth). Several studies further attest to the widespread penetration and use of smartphones amongst teenagers in the EU and the US. The Net Children Go Mobile survey, conducted in 2013-2014 with approximately 3500 respondents aged 9 to 16 years in seven European countries (Belgium, Denmark, Ireland, Italy, Portugal, Romania and the United Kingdom), put forth that 48 per cent of children owned their own smartphone, a proportion ranging from 26 per cent in Romania to 84 per cent in Denmark. No significant gender differences in ownership were observed. On average, 41 per cent said they use their smartphone several times per day or at least every day to go online. The study also showed that the probability of children owning a smartphone increases by 58 per cent for each year they grow older (Mascheroni & Olafsson, 2016).³ In the US in 2013, 88 per cent of teenagers aged 13 to 17 owned or had access to a cellphone and 91 per cent accessed the internet on cellphones, tablets and other mobile devices at least occasionally (Lenhart, 2015).

As we will further discuss in this chapter, the opportunities provided by the polymediated environment in which children navigate offer them the possibility to actively take part in everyday family practices (‘doing family’). This environment also contributes to shaping a ‘connected presence’ which is, according to Licoppe, the base of the interpersonal relational

³ A survey conducted in 2016 in French-speaking Belgium with 1600 adolescents aged between 12 and 18 confirms this trend: nearly 96 per cent of respondents owned a smartphone and reported using it on average around four hours per day (Pateson, 2016).

attachments of our time (Licoppe, 2012). Finally, polymedia is also involved in teenagers' identity construction which in turn influences the way they enact, experience and display their interpersonal relationships ('displaying family').

[title 3] 'Doing family' and co-presence in polymediated environments

By stating that young people are nowadays living in a condition of 'autonomy without independence', de Singly (2006) and Galland (2010) question the relationships they maintain with significant others who participate in their construction of self and of their world views (Berger and Kellner, 1988). Teenagers build their identities in a plurality of ways, through a fragmented puzzle of (sometimes contradictory) norms and references, social ties, educational relations with adults, and through processes that involve sharing and re-interpreting these different experiences within their peer group (Nunes de Almeida, 2006). It is in these various contexts of life and through a multitude of roles, skills, knowledge, and perceptions that contemporary teenagers develop meaningful emotional ties (Nunes de Almeida, 2006 : 120-121).

ICTs play an important role in maintaining frequent and/or ritual contacts that create family routines which transcend physical absence and nourish a sense of belonging (Duchêne-Lacroix, 2013: 20). Richard Ling's work demonstrates that the microscopic ritualistic exchanges that mobile phones allow to produce participate to the creation of 'bounded solidarity' or social cohesion in the intimate sphere (family members and friends) (Ling, 2008).

These family practices lie at the heart of Morgan's (2011) concept of 'doing family'. In his perspective, families are defined by what they do, rather than by what they are. Instead of an institution, family is conceptualized as a facet of social life, characterized by fluidity and diversity, and where the multidimensional practices of family members are intertwined. Thus, the practices that teenagers develop to communicate and stay connected with their parents, (step) siblings, grandparents, or others, throughout the different spaces they inhabit, form an integral part of how family is 'done'.

If the desire, need (and obligation) to be connected varies from one person to another, according to their gender, age, occupation, position in the family and the history of their family relations (see for instance Neustaeder, 2013), the importance of understanding 'family connections' is not just about communication issues between each member of the family. It is also about identifying the creative practices they develop to coordinate and organize family life, to share experiences and feelings of their daily lives, to develop new routines, to negotiate the fact of

‘being together’ or ‘being separated’, and to maintain different degrees of intimacy to feel close to each other. At the same time, virtual contacts can also help to maintain remote links with the extended family, to be aware of major changes in their lives, to share good and bad news, and so on. These concrete, creative ways of “dealing with life’s daily rhythms and realities” (Eisler, Donnelly & Montuori 2016: 17) thus participate in the way family members, including teenagers, adapt to, and coordinate their family lives.

[subtitle] Moving beyond physical co-presence

Physical co-presence has largely been considered as the bedrock of family relationships (Baldassar & Merla, 2014). But what happens when this physical co-presence becomes intermittent? And how do we bring ICTs into this picture?

The digital revolution has actually led a number of social science researchers to question and re-visit the notion of co-presence, which was until then mainly conceived as physical and embodied. John Urry played a leading role in this regard. In a paper entitled ‘mobility and proximity’, he identified four forms of travel that involved various forms of co-presence (Urry, 2002: 256): (1) corporeal travel that involves the movement of bodies and creates physical and immediate co-presence, which can also be occasional and intermittent; (2) the physical movement of objects; (3) imaginative travel which consists of being transported elsewhere through images of places and people and creates imagined forms of co-presence; and (4) virtual travel, a form of travel through the internet that transcends the physical, as well as geographical and social distance, and generates virtual co-presence. He calls for a further investigation of the sociabilities involved in these varied forms of co-presence, and in their articulation. Furthermore, he does not conceive face-to-face corporeal co-presence and virtual co-presence as mutually exclusive but, rather, as complementing each other, particularly in situations of intermittent co-presence, which represent in his view an important part of contemporary sociality.

This notion that virtual and physical forms of co-presence combine to create a sense of continuity of relationships that transcend space and time was further supported by Licoppe. She developed the notion of ‘connected relationships’, sustained by communication technologies, where ‘the (physically) absent partly renders himself or herself present by multiplying mediated communication gestures up to the point where co-present interactions and mediated communication seem woven in a seamless web.’ (2004: 135)

Over the past decade, transnational family studies have been particularly critical in providing further elaborations on the identification, specificities and inter-twining of various forms of co-presence (Baldassar et al, 2014; Baldassar et al., 2016). This is largely related to the focus of this body of literature on the practices that sustain the maintenance of familyhood across national borders, and that (increasingly) heavily rely on the use of communication technologies. In her study of care relationships between migrants and their elderly kin 'back home', Baldassar (2008, 2016) identifies four forms of co-presence that largely echo Urry's seminal work: physical co-presence, virtual co-presence, imagined co-presence (also included here are acts that do not rely on the use of ICTs, such as remembering family in prayers), and co-presence by proxy – a form not coined as such by Urry, but that can be associated with the physical movement of objects in his typology of forms of travel. Co-presence by proxy can be attained through the exchange of photos, postcards, gifts, by objects in the home that represent the absent-other (a phone, a computer) or by visiting persons who act on behalf of physically distant relatives.

These various forms of co-presence are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, in the absence of physical contact, members of transnational families sometimes engage in creative practices that blur the distinction between forms of co-presence. For instance, Roberston, Wilding and Gifford (2016) explain that it has become common practice amongst young Karen refugees from families dispersed in refugee camps on the Thai-Burma border and in Melbourne, to "take digital images of themselves and their family members and repurpose them to create various imagined scenes and scenarios. These re-posed images are kept as private photographic objects as well as uploaded and circulated among friend and kinship networks via social media platforms such as Facebook" (Roberston, Wilding and Gifford, 2016: 226). By crafting with image manipulation softwares, fictive photographs of themselves surrounded by their parents in a room or at key events such as their graduation ceremony; by displaying them in their rooms; and by sharing them with their dispersed relatives, these young people create connected forms of co-presence that are at the same time digital, imagined and embodied in material objects representing the absent others.

Virtual co-presence is also multi-faceted. Baldassar (2016) indeed later sub-divided virtual co-presence into three subtypes: (1) 'live or real time', 'streaming' and 'immediate' virtual co-presence through mediums such as Skype and FaceTime, and which provide a sense of 'being there all together in the moment'; (2) 'active', 'intermediate', 'selective' or 'discretionary' co-

presence generated by texting through SMS or WhatsApp, where individuals can decide when they will read and reply to messages and which can 'provide a strong sense that kin and friends are 'there for you''; and (3) 'passive', 'ambient' or 'continuous 'co-presence, also created by discretionary forms of co-presence, and that create a sense of continuous presence, but in the background. 'Ambient' forms of co-presence are also pinned down by Madianou (2016: 16), who defines them as 'the peripheral, yet intense, awareness of distant others made possible through the ubiquity and affordances of polymedia environments'. Ambient forms of co-presence provide information on daily activities without necessarily involving a conscious action or acknowledgement by the person herself, as posts can be re-posted and viewed by unexpected people. The locative function associated to a user's status update can provide important cues about a person's life, as statuses and posts are automatically associated with a specific geographical place (Madianou, 2016: 6).

These various forms of co-presence identified by Baldassar and Madianou can combine in what Nedelcu and Wyss (2016: 210) call 'omnipresent co-presence', especially when computers or smartphones are turned on and connected all day, giving people the possibility to interact at any moment. The conjunction of mobile phones and news feeds on social networking sites in particular creates an 'always on' lifestyle (Boyd, 2012). This becomes an integral part of teens socialization and encourages them to create a repertoire for the daily maintenance of social relationships that relies, among others, on their capacity to navigate between various forms and mediums not only of communication, but also of co-presences. This is done inside a polymediated environment where the choice of the means of communication is often as meaningful as the message itself. If, as Wellman (2018: Xix) reminds us, digital media 'have empowered family members with the ability to go their separate ways while at the same time keeping them more connected', this constant connectivity carries consequences that can be resented by teens, as opportunities for parental surveillance and control increase (Madianou, 2016).

Little research on ICT-based forms of co-presence has been conducted on teenagers and their own experiences. The transnational families literature has mainly taken adults' experiences as their main focus, including in studies of transnational mothering (Parreñas, 2005 ; Madianou, 2012), intergenerational relations (Wilding, 2006; Baldassar, 2008); or transnational grandparenting (Nedelcu, 2017). In addition, there is a surprising scarcity of gendered analyses of new forms of co-presence in this literature. Although it recognizes the importance of factors such as gender (and class, ethnicity, age...) in the access and uses of media environments

(Baldassar, 2016), it has mainly failed so far to apply a gender lens to the dynamics of co-presence, even though this dimension takes an important place in research on transnational family dynamics and long-distance care relationships. Research in this area however suggest that ICTs have a transformative potential for the gendered division of roles and tasks in the family. For instance, kin-keeping (or the work of facilitating and maintaining family relations), a task traditionally defined as feminine, tends to be performed mainly by women in transnational families (see for instance, Zontini & Reynolds, 2007; Merla, 2012). But, as Baldassar, Kilkey, Merla and Wilding (2014) note, “Interestingly, new technologies have tended to increase the direct role and engagement of both men and younger generations in transnational family care exchanges in part because of their general tendency to be more familiar and proficient at using them. While the kin work (di Leonardo, 1987) involved in keeping in touch with transnational family members was often the preserve of women, particularly mothers and daughters, who wrote the letters and made the phone calls, it is not uncommon for fathers and sons, as well as grandchildren and cousins, to be directly involved in setting up the e-mail and Skype systems, coordinating and managing their use, and maintaining their upkeep” (p. 166-167). However, gender influences the ways in which males and females communicate with their relatives. For instance, in their study of female Filipino migrant workers, Madianou and Miller (2013) explain that the women they interviewed discussed at length the different uses that men and women make of texting, influenced by a wider set of cultural norms around men and women’s modes of communication (and the place of expressions of feelings and emotions) in Filipino families and wider communities.

The topic of teenagers’ experiences of polymediated environments and new forms of co-presence is only recently emerging in research that combines childhood and digital media studies. In this literature, the focus has not been placed on co-presence itself, but rather on teens’ digital practices in the context of family life, and the active role these young people play in this context. Indeed, as du Preez (2018) notes, several researchers highlight the active role played by teenagers in managing their online activity. If teenagers often don’t dare to refuse invitations to befriend their parents on Facebook because of the power relation that ties them, they creatively engage in a series of activities to manage and control the information available to them. This includes changing their privacy settings (Child and Westermann, 2013), using ‘prison code’ or ‘subliminal tweeting or subtweeting’ (Agger, 2014 and Boyd, 2014, cited by du Preez, 2018) to evade parental tracking online. For instance, this translates into the use of

acronyms or emoticons that are unfamiliar to adults, or scheduling late-night interactions when parents are offline. Research also highlights that the pre-existing quality of relationships (level of conflicts, stability and strength of ties) plays an important role in determining the extent to which online communication between parents and children can be satisfying and meaningful, and/or experienced as a form of surveillance and control (de Preez, 2018: 88 ; Madianou, 2016). The work of Ito et al (2013) is also of particular relevance here. In their typology of modes of participation with ‘new’ media, based on ethnographic fieldwork with US teenagers, ‘hanging out’ offers interesting similarities with the new forms of co-presence we have discussed so far. Motivated by the desire to maintain connections with their friends, teenagers mobilize new media (SNS profiles, instant messaging, phone conversations, and so on) ‘to construct spaces for co-presence where they can engage in ongoing, lightweight social contact that moves fluidly between online and offline contact’ (Ito et al., 2013: 38). This contact can take the form of ‘ambient virtual co-presence’ (checking profile updates) or of ‘sustained and direct conversation’ (by phone call or chat) (Ito et al., 2013: 39). A survey conducted in 2018 with 1600 adolescents in Wallonia and Brussels (Belgium)⁴ reveals that teens also mobilize a large series of platforms to communicate with their family members. Facebook and WhatsApp/Skype/FaceTime⁵ are the two most popular types of platforms amongst both boys and girls. But the study shows that Snapchat (a photo and video messaging app) in particular is more used by girls than boys to communicate with relatives, whereas chat through multi-player online gaming is almost exclusively used by boys. In addition, nearly 50% of all girls indicated that their parents did not allow them to engage in multi-player online gaming or spend time in virtual worlds, whereas this was the case for only nearly 25% of all male respondents. Interestingly, these two environments support different types of virtual co-presences in Baldassar’s typology: rather active, selective and discretionary in the case of Snapchat, and live and immediate in the case of online gaming platforms.

As Merla argues elsewhere (Merla, 2019), these two platforms also participate in the reproduction of stereotypical gender norms and practices. Snapchat is based on “performative

⁴ See: <https://uclouvain.be/fr/chercher/cirfase/leuven-louvain-adolescents-survey.html>. The Leuven/Louvain Adolescents Survey (LAdS) was collaboratively designed in 2017 by a team of researchers from the Interdisciplinary Research Centre on Families and Sexualities (CIRFASE) at the University of Louvain (UCLouvain) under the supervision of Prof. Laura Merla and Prof. Jacques Marquet, and from the LAGO and IMS teams of the University of Leuven (KULeuven) under the supervision of Prof. Koenraad Matthijs and Prof. Leen D’Haenens. The Brussels-Wallonia survey was conducted in 23 secondary schools and includes a balanced number of boys and girls aged between 11 and 19, with varied socio-economic profiles, as attested by the distribution of respondents along the four main educational tracks (general, professional, technical and artistic).

⁵ These mediums are used respectively by 68% and 63% of the respondents.

showing off” of one’s face and body, in a creative environment where users customize their pictures and videos with “funny” filters and lenses. This takes place in a context of temporal fastness and ephemerality, and where girls in particular are being exposed to a high risk of negative gossiping and judgement based on their physical appearance (Charteris & Gregory, 2018; Handyside & Ringrose, 2017). On the other hand, online gaming has been consistently described as a site for the reproduction of patriarchal, hegemonic masculinities based on violence and aggression (see for instance Disalvo, 2016).⁶ Yet, online video gaming is an important venue for parent-child interactions in families, especially for fathers who have been shown to invest this type of family time much more than mothers (see for instance Horst, 2013). Another study confirms this trend, while emphasizing that mothers and daughters who engage in those activities do it mainly in the presence of males rather than on their own (Siyahhan and Gee, 2016).

When they maintain virtual forms of co-presence with their relatives, teenagers engage with online platforms that also support their construction of self as individuals, as family members, and as community members. This brings us to the next section of this chapter, where we discuss in more details digitally mediated constructions and displays of self in adolescence.

[title 4] ICTs and the construction of ‘self’ during the adolescence

Identity is a paradoxical concept (Dubar, 2005): it is defined, on the one hand, by what makes people different from each other (identity is something that we possess and that distinguishes us from others), and on the other hand, it is also based on the definition of similarities with others, and thus implies relationships and feelings of belonging to, families, social groups or broader collectives. Identity is therefore both difference, distancing, and common belonging. Giddens (1991) sees identity as fluid and malleable, and points out the need for modern individuals to be ‘self-reflexive’ about the construction of their own identities: ‘What to do? How to act? Who to be? These are focal questions for everyone living in circumstances of late modernity - and ones which, on some level or another, all of us answer, either discursively or through day-to-day social behavior’ (Giddens, 1991 : 70). The self becomes a ‘project’ where

⁶ If the number of female users is increasing, research shows that women and girls tend to privilege social games on mobile devices while men and boys specialize in multi-player games based on violence and/or competition, and first-person shooter games (Siyahhan & Gee, 2016).

people create, explain, stage their ‘biographical narratives’ and choose a ‘lifestyle’ to maintain a sustainable and coherent identity (Giddens, 1991).

Identity can also be understood as a social process of ‘being’ and ‘becoming’ through ongoing individual and collective interactions as well as negotiations with other people. Jenkins sees social identity as a framework of multiple identifications through biological, social, cultural and institutional relationships (Jenkins, 2014). Bauman also highlights the fluidity of identity in a fragmented world, where identity is an almost infinitely negotiable process (Bauman, 2004).

In this perspective, adolescence represents a crucial and precarious period for identity formation. Young people experience an ‘identity crisis’ as they are engaged in self-reflection and self-definition as individuals, while they also seek recognition by others (Erikson, 1994). They experiment different hypothetical identities in a process where social contexts and interpersonal relationships play a central role (Erikson, 1994). For teenagers, identity is about achieving a self that makes sense across different social contexts (Berkonzy, 2003) in order to provide ‘a basis for making stable, coherent and consistent choices’ (Baumeister, 1993 : 182).

Several factors and influences come at play during this period of transition, including parental models, friendships with peers and wider interactions. Before the digital age, family and school environments were considered as the primary spheres for the construction of teenagers identities, but this is challenged today by our ‘culture of connectivity’ (Van Dijck, 2013). ICTs contribute to an increased diversity of experiences and practices, in a context where social connections are in addition fragmented through time and space (Elliot and Urry, 2010). Digital media technologies have indeed created new social contexts where young people interact with each other through multiple systems (see for instance Shifflet-Chila, 2016). Several scholars consider that these contexts offer teenagers the possibility to gain in ‘relational autonomy’ (Metton-Gayon, 2009) and intimacy (Balleys, 2012) in a transition phase where they need to distance themselves from their parents. Through ICTs, teenagers access and create new ways of producing and displaying to adults and peers the boundaries that shape their identities, including in complex and sometimes contradictory ways.

[subtitle] ICTs as a new source of identity construction?

It is largely accepted now that social networking and video-sharing sites, instant messaging platforms, internet and virtual worlds have achieved an expressive dimension that provides young people symbolic resources to construct, and experience their own identities (Buckingham, 2008). The smartphone in particular is seen as a tool of 'identity exploration' (Allard, 2014 : 141) that accompanies teenagers in their everyday practices and routines. Teenagers tend to develop a strong emotional attachment to the presence of this object because of the amount of intimate materials and memories it contains in the form of pictures, videos, text messages, music, and so on (Lachance, 2013).

Parents and peers do continue to play an influential role in developing young people's sense of identity (Davis, 2013), but online interactions also create new relationships outside their family and immediate community. Scholars from media and communication studies tend to consider that the internet profoundly changes the way that teenagers construct their identity, opening them almost unlimited windows to the world. For Buckingham (2018: 14), technology creates 'new styles of communication and interaction', 'new means for constructing community', 'new forms of literacy', 'new ways of forming identity', and 'new forms of personhood'. For him, 'by offering communication with different aspects of the self, it enables young people to relate the world to others in more powerful ways' (Buckingham, 2008: 14). According to this vision, the new opportunities offered by digital media lead to new modes of socialization and can expose teenagers to alternative models, due to the enlarged access to a diversity of information, opinions, lifestyles they enable, from anywhere in the world. Digital media therefore seem to become crucial in processes of identity development, individuation and autonomy, to the point that they allow teens to 'create identities that are much less similar to their families of origin and close community than ever before' (Shifflet-Chila, e.a., 2016: 367).

However, this vision of the impact of ICTs on social relations and socialization must be nuanced. Sociological research has shown that teenagers communicate and interact online first and mainly with the people they already know (Boyd, 2008, Livingstone, 2008, Cardon, 2008, Balles, 2012). In her longitudinal study of American teenagers, Boyd argues in addition that the young people of today are not so different than the past generation: they engage in similar activities, and have similar goals, wishes, values and needs. If they strive for more freedom and want to hangout and socialize outside the adults' supervision and control, for her, social media do not profoundly change social relations. But they provide teenagers with new avenues to do these things and express themselves in creative ways (Boyd, 2014).

In this line of thought, Balley's (2015) proposes to understand ICTs in a relational dynamic, offering spaces of recognition where teenagers stay connected with peers, and share intimacy and complicity. According to her, smartphone uses support processes of autonomy in adolescence. She emphasizes how teenagers document and stage themselves in social media through sociability practices in order to reinforce close friendships or love relationships. On communication platforms like Facebook, the purpose for young people is to develop and valorize intimacy as a resource of prestige and maturity, through their capacity to establish and maintain strong ties with their peers. However, the validation of their online publications by the audience of their peers is also crucial. These marks of legitimation strongly depend on the popularity of the teenager in his/her everyday life spheres of interaction, particularly at school (Balley's, 2015). Furthermore, this representation of their intimacy helps them manage their social and symbolic capital and valorize a 'numerical individuality' through a variety of 'self-expressions' (Granjon 2011), something particularly important in a period where teenagers try to shape an identity that is both unique and socially conform (de Singly, 2006).

Teenagers indeed increasingly display their different lifestyles and identities in construction on social networking sites. These sites offer them many possibilities to choose how to appear and stage themselves. They represent spaces in which identity is "enacted, edited, and made visible" (Robards and Lincoln, 2017: 2). Day Good (2012) draws an interesting parallel between activities on Facebook and scrapbooking, which she both sees as spaces where users post and create 'personal media assemblages', that is, 'individualized collections of media fragments both original and appropriated, including notes, messages, photographs, symbolic tokens, and snippets of meaningful items' (Day Good, 2012 : 559). Facebook is also a 'personal media archive' of social activities, interactions, mediated communication, expression of personal taste and identity performance' (Day Good, 201: 560).

But social networking sites are highly gendered. As we noted earlier in our discussion of Snapchat and online video games, social media capture, reflect and produce gender (Marwick, 2013). In addition, for teenagers, "gender is (...) a central dimension in the modes of presentation and self-definition, particularly in social media" (Balley's, 2017: 39).

Research does indicate that online profiles customizations and online video performance are highly gender-stereotyped (Livingstone, 2008; Balley's, 2017). For Balley's (2017), video

performance on YouTube indeed exacerbates highly heteronormative gender-based attitudes and self-assertions, in the sense that they (re)produce a binary vision of gender based on the naturalization of differences between men and women. In addition, girls' performance of femininity largely relies on physical considerations enhancing body control and conformity to stereotypical representations of women, when boys focus more on sexual desire and its manifestations, while also emphasizing stereotypical expectations about "desirable" girls. Other studies however suggest that social media can also provide a safe space for youth's exploration of alternative masculinities and femininities. Lucero for instance shows that digital spaces like Facebook allow minoritized LGBTQ youth to explore issues of gender and sexuality (Lucero, 2017), whereas Jacksons' (2018) research on youth and digital feminism highlights how teenage girls use social media perceived as safe and supportive – in this case, closed Facebook groups - to denounce and challenge gender-based injustices.

The YouTube videos crafted by teenagers can be considered as forms of everyday creativities that "bring[s] together at least one active human mind, and the material or digital world, in the activity of *making* something which is novel in that context"⁷ (Gauntlett, 2011: 76, our emphasis). Creativity however does not necessarily involve a rejection of dominant ideologies and normative models, as in the case of LGBTQ minorities or young feminists. Indeed, "studies of creativity reveal tensions between conformity and individuation in social interaction, between conventions and novelty (...) individuals must negotiate a balance between distinctiveness and individuation and adaptation to their social context—including roles, obligations, norms, and conventions (Patchuki, Lena and Tepper, 2010: 127 & 135). Beyond practices and discourses based on a quest of individuality, social media participate in the creation and validation of teenagers' sense of belonging and conformity to the common (mainstream or alternative) gender identity of their (online) community.

[subtitle 2] Displaying family online

Building, sustaining and displaying strong ties with peers is fundamental in the way teenagers socialize and locate themselves outside the family sphere (Metton-Gayon, 2009). We have seen

⁷ In his original definition, Gauntlett adds that everyday creativity "is a process which evokes a feeling of joy" (Gauntlett, 2011: 76). However we have preferred not to include this reference to joy in our chapter. It is indeed difficult to assess how teenagers feel when creating and posting virtual artefacts, particularly when this dimension is not investigated or documented in the studies we build on.

that social media represent for teenagers a channel to test and portray their identities and, as such, also represent a place where they negotiate together their relational strategies, in a process of valorization and affirmation of community belonging. However, the diversification of family forms and the increasing experience of distance, separation and intermittent co-presence create a context where it becomes important for teenagers to portray their families online, in order to maintain feelings of belonging and family connections, as well as to being recognized as members of a kin group.

This idea is central to ‘displaying family’, a concept theorized by Finch (2007) as a corollary of ‘doing family’. In contemporary societies, family life must not only be ‘done’, it also needs to be ‘seen to be done’ in order to be recognized as such. By displaying their family, people send the message that ‘This is my family and it works’ (Finch, 2007: 67) in order to feel recognized as belonging to a ‘legitimate’ family, whatever its form – a recognition that is tightly connected to the current diversification of family forms and of whom people today consider as ‘family’. Practices must indeed be admitted as ‘family practices’ by family members but also by the external environment. Therefore, the audience plays a crucial role in the successful recognition of a displayed activity. Posting a picture of themselves in a restaurant with their mother, her new partner and his children, tagging it as a ‘family dinner’, and receiving likes from relatives and friends; creating and/or participating in a ‘family’ group on Facebook; sharing a video featuring themselves with children referred to as ‘quasi-siblings’, are a few examples of the way teenagers can display their ‘family’ and receive feedback on, and confirmation of their family belonging. Young Karen refugees’ fictive photographs we mentioned earlier do not only sustain non-bodily forms of co-presence. They are also used to ‘display’ family online. Indeed, they send the message that ‘this is my family’, and the reactions they trigger confirm and nourish feelings of belonging and togetherness in spite of the distance that separates its members.

As reflexive selves, young people express their agency through a variety of choices in their uses of digital media and through the creative practices they display online. In doing so, they do not act in isolation but rather, in the framework of co- and inter- dependent relationships with their ‘relatives’ and their peers.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we articulated a series of concepts that can, in our view, constitute interesting tools for the study of teenagers' creative digital practices in the family sphere. By 'hanging out' online and engaging in innovative forms of co-presence with their relatives and friends, by actively displaying their distancing from, and belonging to a 'family', by asserting both their autonomy and conformity in online productions, teenagers exercise agency in creative ways. The everyday forms of creativity in polymediated environments that we presented here include both developing and managing new forms of co-presence and communication to deal and negotiate everyday life, and the making and crafting of virtual productions and media assemblages. We showed that these virtual artefacts sustain a sense of identity and belonging in an ongoing process of display/performance of self and (in)validation by online communities.

As we have highlighted, teenagers' relations with their relatives and their peers can hardly be approached separately. This is increasingly true in a polymediated context where teens can simultaneously be 'with' their parents and 'with' their friends, regardless of the actual material place where they stand. As Leonard (2015) notes, teen's agency is located at the intersection of their relationships with their parents and the array of peer relationships where teenagers adapt, discuss and sometimes reject the adult world through their interactions with each other. In doing so, they 'collectively produce their own peer worlds and culture' (Corsaro, 2005: 24).

These worlds are not separated but interrelated, as they feed into each other. Teenagers are located in asymmetrical positions that make them 'differently equal' (Moosa-Mitha, 2005) but they are at the same time co-constructors of intergenerational relationships and active contributors to everyday life practices. In that perspective, young people actively modulate the level of intimacy they engage in with specific actors. Livingstone (2008) emphasizes that many teenagers choose to express their personal experiences on social networks in a reflexive way, deciding what to say or not about their selves. Their online activities can therefore be understood as 'an agentic act to protect their identity and their spaces of intimacy' (Livingstone, 2008: 409).

At this stage, the question of how gender influences the way people, and specifically teenagers, navigate polymediated environments to 'do' family and maintain various forms of co-presence remains largely open. The studies we mentioned in this chapter seem to confirm that gendered cultures shape and constrain the way boys and girls, and mothers and fathers appropriate ICTs, influencing the mediums they use, their communication styles, as well as the types of elements

that are considered as appropriate for girls or boys to ‘display’ online. More attention has been paid to gender in relation with online communities and how these communities participate in teens’ socialization to gender. This literature seems to confirm that the availability of ICTs does not profoundly change gender norms but, rather, tends to support patriarchal constructions of masculinities and femininities in adolescence. But only little research has approached the various sub-cultures that are present in the virtual world and how these might support the construction and validation of alternative femininities and masculinities. There is thus an urgent need for research that applies a gendered lens to family everyday practices, processes of identity construction, and family display in polymediated environments.

More broadly, research on how teens ‘do’ and ‘display’ family in polymediated environments is only at its very beginnings. Their practices are still largely invisible in the bodies of literature that focus on family relations in contexts of mobility (such as transnational families) and, more broadly, in family sociology. Childhood and digital studies have tended to focus on digitally-mediated peer relation, leaving family dynamics largely untouched. This chapter advocates for research on children and family relations in the digital era that articulates concepts like polymedia, virtual co-presence, and displaying family.

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