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Final Project

<div align="center">Log-On</div>

Cyber-bullying is frequently noted as a contributing factor for teen suicide. My question was: why? Why does cyber-bullying have such an incredibly profound psychological effect on teens? What is happening on a social media application such as Facebook that leads to deep psychological scarring and depression and cause a teen to choose suicide as the solution? I had to believe that there must be something more to a status update than merely self-expression. There must be deeper meaning to the status update than the surface level meanings of a selfie, a photo of a delicious meal, and the activity of performing for an audience that the term self-expression implies. It is through my questions and research that I discovered the concept of self-writing and how it relates to the Facebook status update.

Facebook is a popular social networking site where, at its base, users create profiles and can interact with other users. It has evolved to become a digital world where users convene to exchange and comment on the self-writings of one other. It is through these exchanges of self-writing that identities are shaped, communities are assembled, and culture is defined. Facebook, in essence, is a tool to render identity, community, and culture to the extent that it can transfer to and shape physical world counterparts. The exchanges that occur on Facebook are incredibly complex and meaningful. The objective of my research was to reveal why this is the case, so I chose the sensitive subject of cyber-bullying to demonstrate it.

Self-writing was identified and defined by Michel Foucault. Self-writing includes activities such as journaling, writing letters, and religious exercises of confession. Each activity constitutes an individual processing or digesting her goings-on of a typical day. The process has an air of simplicity—it is seemingly inconsequential. However, this digestion—this cogitation—is an incredibly complex process. What did you do today? How did you feel about it? How does this compare to others who may have had similar experiences? Do you accept or reject the guidelines of what is socially acceptable in your community?

"Selfhood is thus a contingent process that is intricately intertwined in the complex networks with other actants and entities. Through processes of self-formation, such as self-writing, people establish acceptable ways of acting and demarcate what is to be known. (Foucault, 1991: 75)" (Sauter, p. 826)

In other words, self-writing is a process that shapes identity through the interactions with others from an individual's community and reinforces socially acceptable norms—an exchange of culture.

Theresa Sauter applied Foucault's history of self-writing to the modern day equivalent: the Facebook status update. The average, human technology user no longer employs archaic forms of communication such as writing letters, speaking in person, or even using the telephone for interacting with other individuals. They are utilizing social media applications such as Facebook to communicate, to interact.

"Self-writers do not simply present or perform a self that already exists within them. They form relations to self and others by exposing themselves to others and obtaining their feedback." (Sauter, p. 836)

This is exactly what a Facebook status update is. Users can post a summary of an experience they had. Users can share a link to an article and comment on how they do or do not agree with the subject. Users can seek advice from their friends. Users can solicit recommendations on public services from their friends. Each of these actions can be executed through the form of a Facebook status update. When the users receive likes, comments, or no response at all, they are processing the reactions to their activities in a way that shapes their identity. The reactions or non-reactions can affirm beliefs and behaviors, or they can modify them.

I proposed my research as a need for approaching Facebook and the interactions between users with an active presence. The Internet is not a game. Facebook is not an application that remains within the confines of an iPhone, within the confines of a digital world. The exchanges, the interactions do not stop because parents have instituted family rules to define when a child can look at a screen and for how long. There are effects from these exchanges that permeate through the digital world and into the physical world. The individual is processing them through emotional and psychological manners that are shaping identity, defining roles within communities, exchanging culture, and reinforcing social norms. These are processes that cannot simply be shut off, or logged out of. We need to play active roles and participate in these digital worlds—expand the physical world to a depth that *includes* the digital worlds instead of enforcing a limitation that excludes them and shuts them off. We need to develop digital community safety—both physically and psychologically. We need to develop a digital culture that defines etiquette, morals, kindness, and inclusion. And in order to do this, we all need to log on.

REFERENCES

Sauter, T. (2014). 'What's on your mind?' Writing on Facebook as a tool for self-formation. *New Media & Society, 16*(5), 823-839. doi:10.1177/1461444813495160