



**mediated
youth**

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Girl Wide Web 2.0

Revisiting Girls, the Internet,
and the Negotiation of Identity

EDITED BY Sharon R. Mazzarella



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Looking into the Digital Mirror

Reflections on a Computer Camp
for Girls by Girls

KRISTINE BLAIR, ERIN DIETEL-MCLAUGHLIN &
MEREDITH GRAUPNER HURLEY

“Hey, Sarah, what color underwear today?” In this version of a recent public service announcement series “Be Careful What You Post,” teenager Sarah is increasingly alarmed as men and boys, all strangers, comment on her online activity. As the scenario progresses from high school boys to athletic coaches, to theatre ushers, and finally to the tattooed custodial staff at her own school, the message is clear: “Anything you post online, anyone can see: family, friends, and even not so friendly people. Think before you post.” A similar PSA in the series portrays an increasingly distraught teenager repeatedly attempting to remove a sexually provocative image of herself from a hallway bulletin board that keeps reappearing, an analogy to what happens to girls online who do not consider the consequences of their online content. As with the first PSA, this scenario ends with the suspicious male custodial worker surreptitiously removing the image, presumably for future viewing pleasure.

According to the Pew Internet and American Life Project, “the use of social media—from blogging to online social networking to creation of all kinds of digital material—is central to many teenagers’ lives” (2007, p. 4). Despite the statistics that suggest that girls are an ever-growing presence on the net, particularly with blogging and photo posting (Pew Internet, 2007), there remains a culture of fear where girls are often told that digital spaces are not safe for them. This is the case particularly given the legitimate concerns about cyberstalking and the way the

Internet can become a presumed site of online victimization, as cases such as the 2006 suicide of a Missouri teenage girl bullied by a neighborhood mom clearly suggest (Steinhauer, 2008). Nevertheless, as Stern (1999) suggests, girls must have opportunities to experiment with computer technologies in safe instructional environments and that “the growing number of girls’ home pages lends credibility to the notion that the Web may present a new and much-needed forum for girls’ ‘safe’ self-expression” (p. 23). Equally important, the American Association of University Women (AAUW) (2001) has also contended that the need to develop and sustain digital literacy initiatives for girls is vital to leveling the technological playing fields within these arenas in order to foster a view of technology as an important form of both academic and professional development.

This chapter profiles our own technology and gender-equity efforts through a four-day residential computer camp for middle school girls titled *The Digital Mirror*, a space in which girls receive instruction and mentoring in new media literacies such as blogging, Web-authoring, digital imaging, and video and audio editing. During the camp, girls work in a state-of-the-art computer lab housed in the Bowling Green State University School of Art, and they experiment with such software as Adobe Dreamweaver and Photoshop, Apple iMovie, and GarageBand, as well as Web-based technologies such as blogs. In addition to functional literacy skills acquired through experimentation with these and other technologies, the girls receive opportunities to reflect on the role of communication technologies in both school and family life, creating a personal Web portfolio that documents technological growth and reflects the ways technology helps maintain connections with family and friends.

To help prevent the exclusion of girls from lower-income backgrounds, we set the family contribution at just \$20 for each girl, which includes meals and materials for the duration of the four-day camp. We recruit girls from a variety of socioeconomic contexts, and girls enter the camp with varying degrees of technological literacy. In an effort to preserve the woman-centered, feminist approach of the camp, all instruction and chaperoning is provided by women, and student-to-student mentoring is encouraged. Funded in part by a national grant from the AAUW and now in its third year, the camp, as its Web site (<http://www.bgsu.edu/departments/english/digimr08/USB20FD>) details, has evolved into two separate tracks, one for new girls and one for returning girls in order to sustain both the interest and the skill sets obtained the previous year in a team-development model. Returning girls develop a professional Web presence for the camp itself, conducting interviews and writing for various audiences about elements of the camp, including safety concerns as well as curricular benefits and social opportunities. In this sense, the Digital Mirror Camp has aimed to foster positive experiences with technology at a formative age and to provide girl-centered spaces to foreground both

the social and educational aspects of computing, particularly for girls from diverse cultural backgrounds or for girls whose access to technology has been limited because of class, gender, ethnicity, or a range of home and school constraints.

Because our overall goal is to help our female participants develop an understanding of the role of technology in their own identity formation as young women in personal, academic, and professional contexts, in this chapter we first articulate the theoretical rationale behind the camp and its emphasis on multimodal literacy narratives in foregrounding technology’s role in connecting the girls to friends and family. We then document the important connection among digital media, reflection, and identity formation in adolescent girls through several first-year camper profiles, as well as the migration from a personal to a professional, collaborative form of identity development in our second-year camper curriculum. Finally, we argue that making such technological opportunities more accessible to girls from a range of social and cultural backgrounds aligns with the need for feminist researchers within digital spaces to engage in activities that responsibly blend theory and practice to ultimately benefit the populations we teach and study and to positively impact both the cultural rhetorics and local realities of women and girls’ online lives.

REFLECTING ON WOMEN AND TECHNOLOGY: WHY A COMPUTER CAMP FOR GIRLS?

Girls and Computers

In its role as a equity-advocate for women and girls, *The AAUW* (2001) has called for safe, hospitable instructional environments for women to experiment with technologies the larger culture has often prescribed as male (Kearney, 2006). Such cultural messages are distributed and consumed within both global media and desktop systems that often reinscribe the view of technology as a gendered enterprise—consider, for example, Microsoft PowerPoint clip art under the search topic of “computers” that continues to portray male as opposed to female users. A better known example is the popular Apple Computer advertising campaign featuring a young, hip twenty-something male as “MAC,” and a more stodgy male complete with business suit as “PC,” notably both White. Such characterizations initially begged the question: Where are the women? In more recent ads, the Mac and PC characters have been joined by a female portraying the Mac Genius device that enables file-transfer between the Mac and the PC, and as such, a symbolically “peripheral” figure with subordinate status. Regardless of the cultural assumptions surrounding women and computers, both Apple and Microsoft have reached out to the female consumer with a number of ads featuring female computer users articulating their

preferred technology specifications.

But despite living in an era of mp3 players, texting, and social networking, Twenty-first century girls don't seem to get the same message about technology-based career options within the larger culture, as the gap between women and girls as users of technology versus women and girls as producers of technology continues to be a wide one. For Claudia Herbst (2009), "gender imbalances in coding translate into gender imbalances in the use of the Internet. Those who write code and create virtual spaces inadvertently have a different relationship to cyberspace than those who merely visit it after construction is completed" (p. 138). As Takayoshi (1994) has noted, cyberspace has been imbued with masculine values of sterility, logic, and impersonality; professions and careers in technology marked as "hard" and unfeminine. As a result, it is little surprise that just as adolescent girls are being socialized within the larger culture to adopt specific gender roles, they begin to lose interest in technology around the middle school years, a phenomenon that the AAUW (2009) contends has led to a range of consequences:

- ~ By 2010, one in four new jobs will be "technically oriented," or involve computers. However, women still lag far behind in earning computer technology degrees and working in computer technology-related professions.
- ~ High school girls represent only 17 percent of computer science Advanced Placement (AP) test takers.
- ~ College-educated women earn only 29.1 percent of bachelor's degrees in mathematics and computer science (down from 39.3 percent in 1984) and 24.7 percent of doctorate degrees in mathematics and computer science.

With these numbers in mind, many academic and corporate institutions have made efforts to increase the female demographic in science, technology, engineering, and math via specific training and mentoring programs. Such concerns about gender equity in computing, however, extend to humanities and social science specialists as well, specifically those of us who embrace feminist theories and pedagogies. As feminist scholar-teachers, we embrace opportunities to theorize the material conditions that impact women's experiences with technology, as well as opportunities to develop action-based research projects designed to benefit those communities in which we are not just teachers and researchers, but also mothers, daughters, sisters, and friends. This latter goal led to a working group of women at BGSU that included representatives from departments of Art, American Studies, Communication, English, and Higher Education. Together, our group recruited middle school girls for Year 1 of the Digital Mirror Camp, its title meant to represent an emphasis on personal reflection about technology's importance in our participants' personal and academic lives.

The need to raise critical awareness of technology's socioeconomic role is certainly not limited to female users, but is perhaps especially relevant to girls and women as they are often defined by and through such technologies and are "typically acculturated to accept discourses that privilege males, often at the expense of females" (Lalik & Oliver, 2007, p. 49). Because the girls in our camp and those of similar age have never known a time without computing, email, streaming video, and instantaneous information, it is virtually impossible for these "digital natives" (Prensky, 2001) to identify the bias, limitations, and even opportunities for boundary blurring available through technology. While many users are aware of the consequences to both safety and reputation resulting from posting private or sensitive information in online forums, many do not realize the ways technology and media help define and delimit self-identity. These definitions and representations of self-made possible by computing are inescapably tied to gender. Judy Wajcman's *Technofeminism* (2004) reminds us of the "mutually shaping relationship between gender and technology" (p. 7), and this awareness of technology as a force contributing to both personal and cultural identity mandates continued outreach to encourage young women like those at the Digital Mirror Camp to take more active, critical positions as technology users and consumers.

Indeed, in our collective roles as technofeminists, we share a similar recognition that, as Wajcman (2004) notes, "the enormous variability in gendering by place, nationality, class, race, ethnicity, sexuality and generation makes a nuanced exploration of the similarities and differences between and across women's and men's experience of technoscience all the more necessary" (p. 8). In the next section, we weave several theoretical strands to articulate the goals behind the Digital Mirror Camp. The resulting tapestry foregrounds a multimodal literary acquisition that, as we will argue, allows our camp participants see themselves as producers of and consumers within new media, as opposed to mere consumers of it. Such a shift in subjectivity ultimately involves an equal emphasis on narrative and story as a form of articulating women and girls' experiences with technology, enabling broader potential for identity construction within digital spaces.

Safe Spaces

Despite this potential, a range of girls studies scholars have acknowledged a dichotomy in the way in which digital spaces are perceived in relation to young women. On one hand is the notion of the Internet as a "safe haven" (Stern, 1999; Thiel, 2005; Tully & Blair, 2003) for girls to experiment with expressions of identity; on the other is the notion that Internet spaces not only reinscribe traditional assumptions about gender identity (often by mirroring traditional media's emphasis on body image and appearance), but also prey on women and girls' status as consumers of

these assumptions. Shayla Thiel (2005) concludes that the result of this dichotomy is “a culture of adolescence that is often confusing for girls who may seek alternative discourses from which to construct alternatives identities or who wish to construct a comfortable identity while still attempting to fit in with peers and attain a media-perfect version of reality” (p. 183). For these reasons, an expanded definition of technological literacy is equally necessary to provide girls with a skills set not only to interrogate the messages about girlhood they encounter online but also to consider the role of audience and purpose as they construct their individual representations of self. Relevant to our discussion is Stuart Selber’s (2004) tripoint continuum of technologically literate practice: (1) functional—the users of technology; (2) critical—the questioners of technology; and (3) rhetorical—the producers of technology. Speaking of these modes, Selber contends, “the goal is not to endorse one over the others, but to help students learn to exploit the different subjectivities that have become associated with computer technologies” (p. 25).

Certainly, the concept of a safe-haven to develop these important literacies can appear utopic, and within our own discipline of Rhetoric and Writing, various scholars have called for all students, regardless of gender, to experiment with technologies in ways that establish reciprocal mentoring models among students and between students and teachers. At the same time, we have recognized that deploying electronic pedagogies does not guarantee a utopic egalitarianism rhetoric (Hawisher & Selfe, 1991) that presumes each and every student or citizen has a voice and is empowered by sheer virtue of access to online forums. As a result, a major goal of the Digital Mirror Camp has been to develop an educational outreach program in which we might theorize the possibilities and constraints of digital identity development in a range of multimodal spaces where adolescent girls do more than just learn “how” to use digital tools, but to consider how these literacy tools play an important role in developing their stories of personal reflection and interpersonal connection to friends and family, as well as professional connection to external audiences. In many ways, girls are functionally literate users of technology in their daily lives; through their use of texting and instant messaging, along with social networking, many girls across cultures are comfortable communicating online. What they are perhaps less comfortable doing is reflecting upon the possibilities and constraints of technology in their understanding of themselves and their connections to others.

A significant component of this reflective process involves the use of narrative as a rhetorical practice. Thiel (2005) notes that narratives are crucial to “shaping personal and social identity and...shedding light upon the social relations that create and maintain gender norms and power structures” (p. 187). Our own field has valued technological literacy narratives for their potential to foster student reflection “on how their attitudes and beliefs develop, both socially and individually” (Kiralong,

Bridgford, Moore, & Selfe, 2003, p. 219). But equally significant, narrative aligns with both feminist and technofeminist practices that foreground “women’s lived experiences in a respective manner that legitimates women’s voices as sources of knowledge” (Campbell & Wasco, 2000). In the context of the Digital Mirror Camp, such practices involve both a “coming together of many diverse voices engaged in dialogue, influencing each other and each being modified in the process” (Wajcman, 2004, p. 8). Thus the following profile of three first-year campers suggests, while we must certainly acknowledge the important work of technofeminist and girls studies scholars, we must not forget the stories girls themselves tell about their technological literacy history. As Henwood, Kennedy, and Miller (2001) conclude in their collection *Cyborg Lives: Women’s Technobiographies*, women’s stories help us make sense of our experiences with a range of technologies, particularly, in our case, the new media tools that the girls used to represent themselves and the social and material conditions that limit the role of these tools in constructing girls’ digital identities.

COMING INTO FOCUS: FUNCTIONAL AND CRITICAL LITERACIES ONLINE

The Digital Mirror camp is designed with the above issues in mind as we work to create a safe, girl-centered, technology-rich environment where girls can develop functional, critical, and rhetorical technoliteracies. We encourage campers to express their individual identities through their Web portfolios, for which the girls make a variety of choices about navigation, color scheme, content, and overall look and feel. Many campers extend this personalization by including pictures of friends and family, links to their personal blogs and favorite Web sites, and audio and video material. Throughout the Web portfolios, a number of themes emerge with respect to how the girls represent their identities visually through their connections to friends and family, their increased sense of audience awareness, and an increased awareness about the visibility of technology. Similar to Stern’s analysis of youth online authorship (2008), our emphasis is upon paying “serious attention to youth online expression, as sites of meaning making and identity production” (p. 114). Specifically, we’ve chosen three Web portfolios to demonstrate how these themes manifest themselves in the expression of an online girlhood identity. Like other campers, these girls receive instruction on the basic fundamentals of Web authoring (utilizing tables, choosing color palettes, creating links, inserting images, and so on) and video creation (storyboarding, filming, and editing), while they are also encouraged through several reflective activities to consider the ways in which their design and content choices reflect certain aspects of their identity.

Marissa!

Marissa is an African American 7th grader from a large, blue-collar family in northwest Ohio. Though Marissa comes to the camp with fewer socioeconomic resources and preexisting technological literacies than some of the other campers, her family is a strong source of support and enthusiasm about her participation in the camp. This enthusiasm is particularly evident when Marissa's entire family—including the family dog—drops by midway through the camp to visit Marissa and show their support for her developing technological literacies. Given these strong family ties, it is perhaps not surprising that Marissa maintains a consistent emphasis on family throughout her Web portfolio, evident in both her design and content choices. On her site's index page (see Figure 7.1), for example, under a banner of "What You Should Know About Me," Marissa writes, "I love spending time with my family and my dog!" In keeping with this family-centered expression of her identity, one of the most prominent sections of Marissa's portfolio is the "My Family" section, which contains multiple photos of family members, as well as photos of the family dog. Further, when asked to discuss her favorite technology in a blog entry, Marissa cites texting family and friends as being "THE MOST AWESOME? THING IN THE WORLD!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!" before noting that this activity "usually makes a rely big bill, unless you have unlimited texting." Thus, Marissa demonstrates her understanding of technology as a means for maintaining close family connections, while also demonstrating her critical awareness of the economic implications of those technologies.

Marissa finds family connections to other camp experiences, as well. When discussing a painting she viewed during our camp's field trip to the Toledo Museum of Art, Marissa writes in her blog that "[t]he piece called New York 1 reminded me of my past, because every year my family and I go to New York to visit relatives and we always drive on the Brooklyn Bridge!!!" In this way, Marissa used the Web portfolio project as an opportunity to reflect on and critically harness the experiences of the camp for the purposes of reinforcing strong family ties—which, for Marissa, constituted the key aspect of her identity she wished to share with site viewers.

Indeed, throughout Marissa's Web portfolio, the emphasis is placed on foregrounding the individuals she sees as being most significant in her life—from family members to pop star Beyoncé—as opposed to foregrounding specific details about herself. In another blog entry, Marissa touches on this reluctance to reveal details about her personal identity when she writes, "I would not use a real picture of myself, because I do not want my real identity to be revealed EVER!!!!!" While the exact motivation for wanting to conceal her identity remains unclear, Marissa nevertheless demonstrates her understanding of the Web portfolio project as being a place where she can control which messages get disseminated, thereby facilitating a sense

of agency and rhetorical savvy not always cultivated among girls of her age group. In other words, Marissa's Web portfolio demonstrates what the Pew Internet & American Life Project has termed "self literacy" (Rainie, 2008), as Marissa effectively manages her online identity by choosing which aspects of her life to share and how much personal information to disclose.

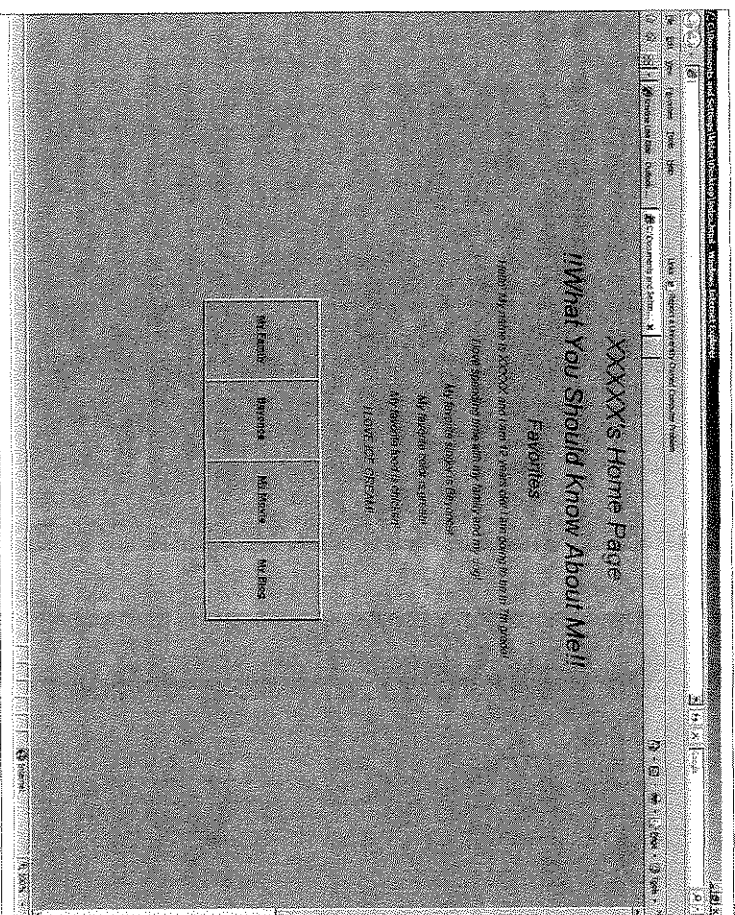


Figure 7.1 The index page to Marissa's Web portfolio emphasizes family as being key to Marissa's identity.

Jordan

Jordan is an Asian American 7th grader from northwest Ohio. An only child and the daughter of university employees, Jordan makes it clear throughout her Web portfolio that she is no stranger to using technology for a variety of purposes. In contrast to Marissa, Jordan came to the camp having already acquired much technological literacy, presumably as a result of greater access to technologies throughout her childhood and adolescence. In a blog entry, for instance, Jordan describes her parents giving her opportunities to experiment with technology from the age of three and insists that she "cannot live" without a computer.

While she comes to the camp already possessing some basic HTML skills, Jordan expresses in a blog entry her desire to learn more Web design skills as part of the camp curriculum. Additionally, when asked to discuss what identity she hopes to reflect in her Web portfolio, Jordan writes that she hopes visitors to her site can tell that “I’m more or less a sarcastic person, that I love RENT, and that I enjoy my iPod but have no qualms about making fun of them.” Interestingly, Jordan mentions these goals several times in her blog and seems especially concerned with making sure the content of her portfolio reflects her sarcastic attitude. Jordan later expresses her satisfaction with developing projects that she saw as meeting this criterion and makes a specific reference to her video about iPods: “iPods: MP3 technology changing the lives of otherwise apathetic teens. What does that imply to you?” While Jordan’s sarcasm may not be immediately apparent to the viewers of her site, it is nevertheless clear that Jordan sees humor as being a means for creating “a speaking space in the crowded World Wide Web” (Killoran, 2001, p. 127). As Jonathan Alexander (2006) has noted, experimentation with satirical strategies also suggest that Jordan understands “the constructedness of self as Web commodity” and uses her attempts at satire “to mock the surrounding world of representations and media constructions or to hold up the self for mockery and self-irony” (p. 119).

In another blog entry, Jordan references her existing technological skill and her desire to reflect her identity with an aesthetically pleasing Web site: “I mostly tried to make everything look nice—like, I have an issue with backgrounds. If the image doesn’t flow (like you can tell where the image stops and starts) then I get a tenny bit ticked. So I just tried to make everything look really nice.” Consistent with this concern with design aesthetics, Jordan chose a simple, patterned image to serve as a seamless background for her portfolio images (see Figure 7.2). Jordan’s site features four sections that seem to each correspond to a different aspect of her identity as showcased through one of the camp projects—the filmmaker (linked to her iMovie), the lawyer (linked to her blog), the song writer (linked to her GarageBand track), and the dancer (linked to a page of external links). The images for each section are taken from promotional materials for the Broadway production, *Rent*, thereby integrating Jordan’s identity with that of her favorite play, while also demonstrating a rather sophisticated integration of webbed and offline documents (Alexander, 2006).

Jordan’s Web portfolio reflects not only her functional literacy with Web authoring, image manipulation, and multimedia composition, but also her growing capacity to critically reflect on those literacies at the same time that she asserts and executes a specific plan for how she wants her Web portfolio to be received by visitors. Jordan also demonstrates what Cynthia Selfe and others have termed “visual literacy” (2004, p. 69) by creating, combining, and using visual elements (including her choice of background texture, color, and images) to communicate key aspects

of her identity—a practice that she reflects on in her blog narratives. Like Marissa, Jordan avoids using specific information about or images of herself in her Web portfolio; rather, Jordan’s Web portfolio reflects her desire to express her online identity through text and images related to her interests, as well as her desire to experiment with humor as a means for challenging the very notion of the Web as constructed self-representation.

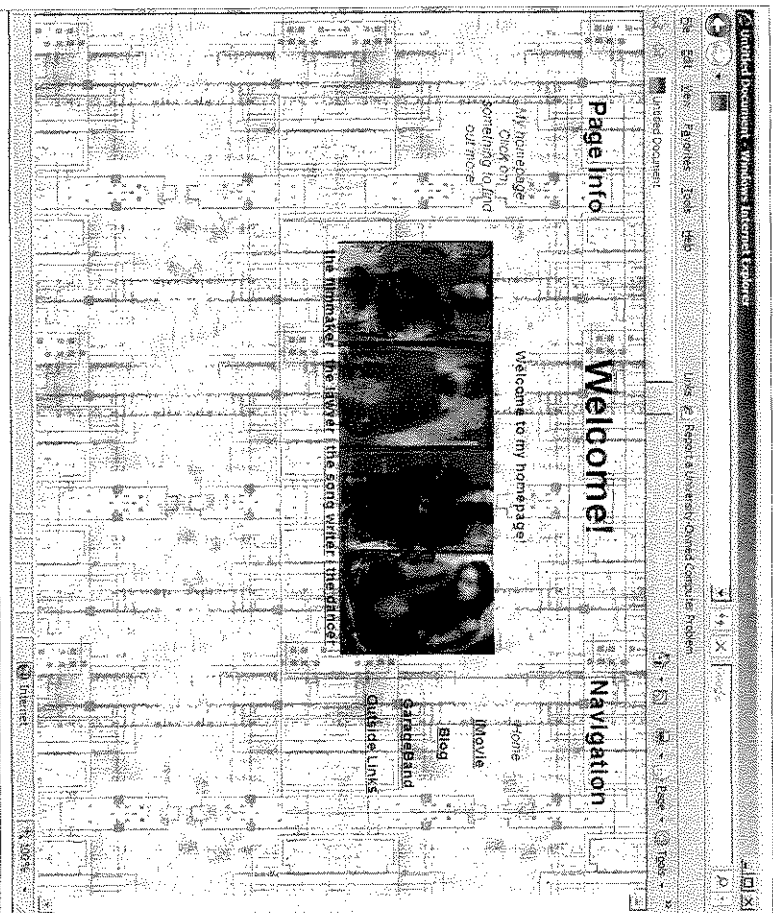


Figure 7.2. Jordan’s Web portfolio utilizes images and color to convey meaning.

Claire

Claire is a Caucasian 7th grader, also from northwest Ohio. Like Jordan, Claire describes her parents teaching her to use technology from a young age, her earliest memory being interaction with a Barbie computer game. Claire recognizes technology as being a significant component of her daily life, as she admits being able to spend up to four hours on the computer playing games such as *The Sims* without realizing how much time has passed. In a blog entry, Claire writes that she looks

forward to the camp activities as a means for cultivating her own expertise, as well as that of her friends: “I know that I will keep learning new things and hopefully i will be able to pass them onto my friends.” In fact, Claire seems keenly aware of her technoliteracies as being situated within her larger community of friends and family, and she perceives technology as being a means for maintaining those relationships. This attention to the use of technology as a communication tool is evident in Claire’s video clip, in which she discusses the many technologies she uses on a daily basis to interact with friends and family, including e-mail, instant messenger, her blog, a cellular phone with text messaging capabilities, and social networking sites like YouTube. In this way, Claire seems to be developing a “cyborg literacy” (Inman, 2004, p. 163) by making visible the many real and virtual systems that constitute her meaning-making practices. Interestingly, while Claire’s video is composed under the title of “My Favorite Technology,” the resulting discussion reflects Claire’s recognition that she in fact interacts with multiple, something overlapping technologies on a daily basis—a reality made visible to her through the technology autobiography project.

Claire’s growing awareness of the complexity of her relationship with technology, community, and identity can be seen in other parts of her Web portfolio, as well. When asked to discuss plans for her digital identity early in the camp, Claire writes that she sees herself as being “digitally sophisticated”; by the end of the camp, however, Claire expresses a more complicated understanding of her evolving technoliteracy and the rhetorical nature of a Web identity:

At first, I wasn’t really sure what i was getting myself into and why i wanted to be here. When i got here, i realized that there was so much technology that i haven’t used and i haven’t heard of. It really was a great experience getting familiar with a new computer and new technology. We were on the computers almost all day but it was worth it because we came out with great finished products. When i was putting together my web page and blog, i really had to think how i wanted it to be set up. Like what kind of colors go with each other and what readers could take out of the blog and web page. I also had to think what i wanted to put on the internet because anyone can see what i wrote or what i put out there. Overall it came to be a wonderful experience and i found out that there are many different ways to express yourself through technology.

In this blog entry, Claire recognizes the multifaceted nature of constructing her girlhood identity online—from the overwhelming process of learning to use new technologies in service of a functional literacy, to the critical literacy involved with questioning the ways in which an identity can be expressed through technology, to the rhetorical literacy involved with moving toward the more audience-centered enterprise of content creation.

GIRLHOOD IDENTITY AND THE DIGITAL WEB PORTFOLIO PROJECT

The emphasis on audience awareness as represented in the Web portfolios is demonstrative of the girls’ emerging critical and rhetorical literacy skills and further characterizes the representations of those identities with an audience of friends and family in mind. Collectively, these Web portfolios demonstrate each girl’s desire to experiment digitally with her identity in a multitude of roles rather than solely as a stereotypical adolescent girl. Further, these examples and other digital artifacts from the camp show how the Web portfolio project functioned as an ideal space for first-time campers to “negotiate and construct their self-representations in purposeful ways” (Alexander, 2006, p. 105) at the same time that they critiqued the role of technology in their lives. These portfolios show girls identifying themselves as friends, sisters, and daughters, which further situates them in communities beyond the online spaces of their Web portfolios. Moreover, their careful choices regarding the use of images speaks volumes as to the ways in which girls are often represented by others, as opposed to how they actually choose to represent themselves, using technology to tell their individual stories. Of the portfolios discussed here, only Claire’s includes pictures of the girl herself; even then, Claire is always pictured with friends or family in photos manipulated with Adobe PhotoShop, thereby drawing the focus more to Claire’s technological skill than to the presence of her bodily image on the Web. In short, Jordan and Claire’s narratives about community and family in their portfolios reflect many trends we see in how girls work in and construct identities in online spaces. Stephanie Rosenbloom (2008) of the *New York Times*, for example, explains how girls create online content to express themselves and to create and maintain social relationships more often than boys.

Yet, as Jane Margolis and Allan Fisher (2002) note in *Unlocking the Clubhouse: Women in Computing*, despite the fact that women “make up a majority of Internet consumers...few women are learning how to invent, create, and design computer technology” (p. 2). As a result, women and girls continue to be left out of the computing loop, which results in considerable personal, professional, and economic ramifications. It is with this reality in mind that we approach extending our camp’s initial focus on individual identity construction to a more professional orientation.

CREATING A PROFESSIONAL, COLLABORATIVE IDENTITY

In the second-year curriculum, the shift between developing a personal identity to a professional, collaborative identity takes place as campers create digital materials to publicize the camp. Practicing feminist pedagogy, which includes “the decenter-

ing or sharing of authority, the recognition of students as sources of knowledge, and a focus on processes (of writing and teaching) over products” (Jarratt, 2001, p. 115), continues to be a crucial part of the second-year curriculum. Thinking as a team, with the goal of reaching out to potential campers and their parents, the returning girls focus on their critical and rhetorical literacy skills (Selber, 2004) as they develop a professional, collaborative identity. This section discusses the efforts of these nine returning campers, who together develop a Web site and a logo to publicize the Digital Mirror Camp as a camp that is not only *for* girls, but is also designed *by* girls. Working in groups of three for the majority of the camp, each group showcases their collaborative identity through the creation of a single Web page and video—a project that is then presented to parents and campers alike on the final day of the camp.

Use of Color in Identity Construction

Instead of using color to represent their individual identities in the design of the Web site, as they did in the first year of the camp, the returning girls must determine how to use color to represent their collaborative identity as campers from the Digital Mirror Camp. This proves to be a challenge for the girls because their initial thoughts were to borrow a color scheme (orange and brown) from BGSU since that is where the camp is held. This initial choice reflects how the campers associated their collaborative identity with their location. Though location is a component of the camp’s collaborative identity, using colors that only represent that component hides the girlhood identities of the campers themselves. To incorporate the BGSU component of the camp, the girls decide to use a pastel orange rather than a bright orange color for the background of the sidebar and the headings on each page of the site (see Figure 7.3).

After maintaining some aspect of BGSU with the collaborative identity the girls were representing online, the returning campers then determine how to represent their identities in response to the traditional colors used to represent girls. Shades of pink and purple are the stereotypically girl colors, so the girls consider these as choices for representing their collaborative identity online. At the same time, the girls do not want to use these colors primarily because, by themselves, those colors do not reflect a girlhood identity that is also tech-savvy and interested in computers—qualities that are still predominantly seen as masculine. To strike a balance between a girlhood identity and the stereotypical masculine identity, the girls ultimately choose to use a light pink color for the background of each Web page and royal blue as the background for the heading. Even more representative of this balance is the choice to include white polka dots in the blue heading and a whimsical font for the camp’s name. In the case of color choice, the girls have developed a col-

laborative identity that feminizes a stereotypically masculine space, thus further shaping their rhetorical literacy skills as they negotiate traditional female and male stereotypes.

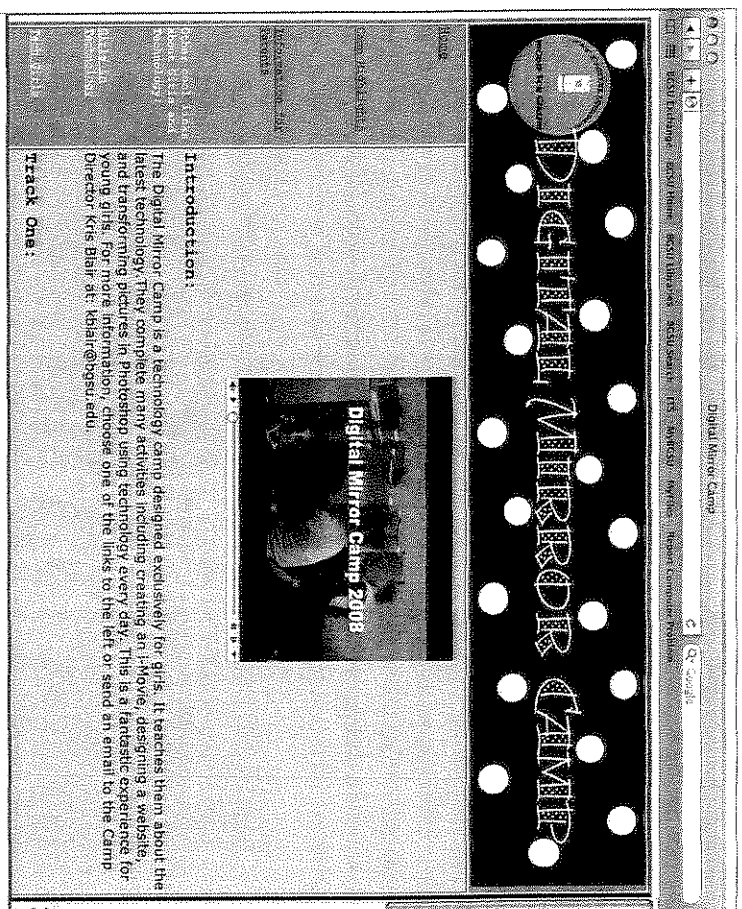


Figure 7.3 Campers use color to convey a collaborative camp identity.

Use of Audience in Identity Construction

Knowing that the Web site would be viewed by the parents and potential campers, the campers must keep the perspectives of those audiences in mind when deciding how to represent their collaborative identity online. Therefore, the returning girls create two pages in addition to the home page, one for parents and one for potential campers, with corresponding videos to communicate their identity. This choice shows the development of the second-track campers’ rhetorical literacy skills and an increased understanding of their collaborative identity. Not only do they have to think about how their own parents and friends would perceive their identity, but they also have to think about how other parents and girls in their age group would perceive that identity.

Information for Parents

On this page (see Figure 7.4), the girls represent their collaborative identity by including the educational and safety components of that identity in response to the perspectives of parents. The embedded video begins with interviews of the campers from each curriculum regarding what they learned. Across these interviews is an emphasis on teamwork and learning new digital literacy skills—both attributes of the camp's identity that are valued by campers' parents and parents of potential campers. At the end of the video is a segment on safety in the dorms where the girls enact a scenario that shows how the dorms are restricted to residents only through the use of keys and personal entry devices (PEDs).

Aside from the embedded video, the girls include images showing the campers hard at work in the computer labs. Showing the campers' work ethic to parents shows their commitment to developing their digital literacy skills and the potential for professional application of those skills. Next to these images is a list of the names and credentials of the camp staff. Though not representative of the girls' identities directly, the names and credentials of the staff reveal how educated, female role models are incorporated as part of the collaborative identity.

Camp Highlights

On this page (see Figure 7.5), the girls have chosen to represent their collaborative identity by including the entertainment value of the camp by appealing to potential campers. As preteens, the prospect of leaving home to stay on a college campus for a few days is an important component of the camp's identity. For this group, it is appealing not only to have the independence of being away from home but also to have the independence of using digital media. In cases where computer access is limited in the home, the perceived identity of the camp can seem less limiting. In addition to the appeal of staying in college dorms, meeting new people and taking field trips to the Toledo Art Museum and the COSI Science Center are also significant components of the girls' collaborative identity formation. Working with other campers and taking field trips, as well as staying in the residence halls, show the community aspect of their collaborative identity as depicted by the camp. These community components challenge the perception that technology is isolating and make the collaborative identity and the camp more appealing to prospective campers. Technology therefore becomes more than just for entertainment but something that allows girls to make an impression on other girls through the presentation of that collaborative identity.

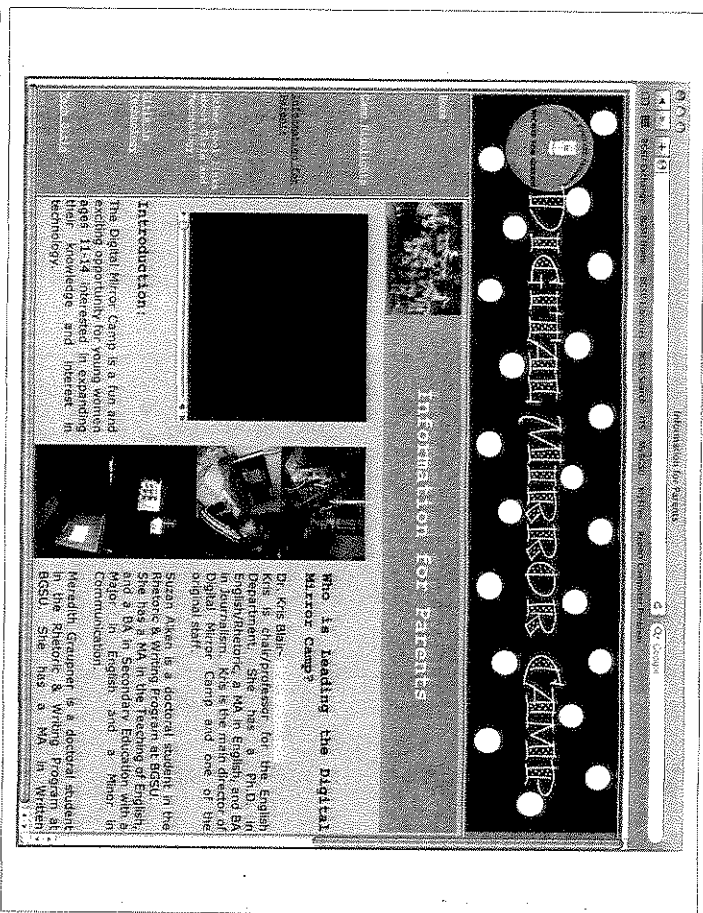


Figure 7.4 The "Information for Parents" page is one of three pages created collaboratively by returning campers to reflect a camp identity.

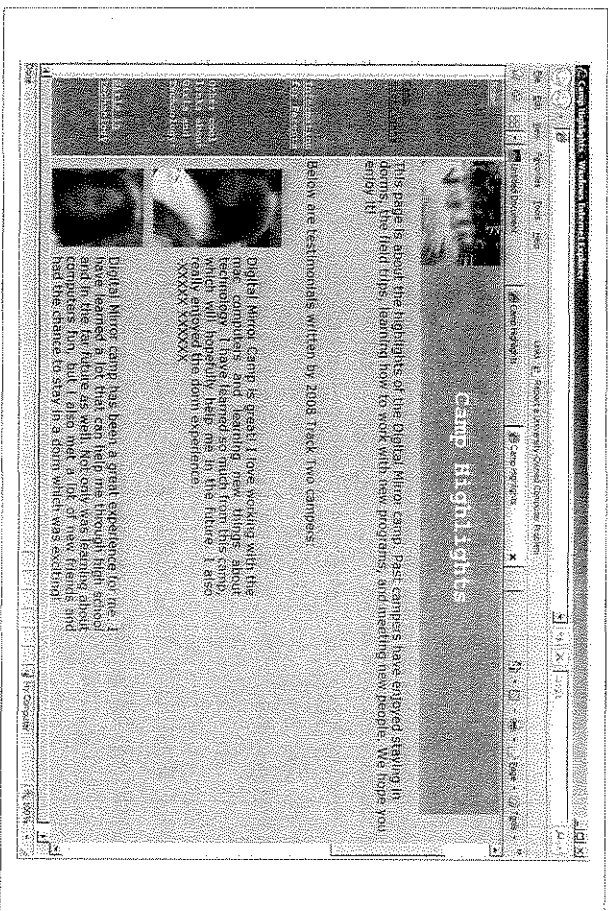


Figure 7.5 The "Camp Highlights" page features testimonials from campers to convey fun and educational camp experiences to parents and future campers.

Representing a Collaborative Identity Online and Offline

Part of developing a professional, collaborative identity for the camp involves being able to confidently project that identity to those within and outside the camp. By the end of the camp, the girls have created a Web site that represents their online collaborative identity to a variety of audiences. Offline, however, the girls need more preparation before making an informal presentation of their identity to parents and campers from the first-year curriculum. Without the use and guidance of public speaking strategies and presentation software like PowerPoint, the offline presence of their collaborative identity has not been as reflective of the online presence as it could be. In response to the need for the girls to develop a stronger professional, collaborative identity online and offline, the camp staff has decided to more directly incorporate the use of such strategies and presentation software in the future.

Adopting this component of their collaborative identity will help the girls think more about how they can become more than users of technology—they can be content creators, as well. Though the collaborative identity that the girls created in the second-year curriculum represents a move in the direction of technology creation, there is still evidence of their identities as primarily technology users. One example of this can be seen in the decision to place a cell phone on the camp's logo developed by the second-year campers for use on future camp T-shirts. Kearney (2007) notes that historically, the telephone has frequently been identified as a technological trope in the identity formation of adolescent girls in ways that both liberate and constrain larger cultural constructions of modern girlhood. While the emphasis on cell phone use is attached to technology and to community (i.e., the need to stay in regular contact with family and friends), the image of the cell phone does necessarily represent the creative aspects of technology in their collaborative identity that are evident in the Web site and video projects. Helping the girls more directly develop a professional, collaborative presence online and offline is a component that the camp staff needs to improve upon to better assist girls with their identity development.

LOOKING AHEAD: ASSESSING AND SUSTAINING THE DIGITAL MIRROR

The driving goals behind the Digital Mirror Camp include (1) increasing girls' understanding of the functional, critical, and rhetorical, literacies vital for success and safety in digital environments; (2) fostering a space to reflect on the role of technology in women and girls' personal and professional lives; (3) foregrounding the ways in which experiences with technology impact identity construction; and (4)

emphasizing the value of camaraderie and mentorship among women. While the camp's primary focus is on technological experimentation within the girl-centered lab space, the exploration of technological literacy is not limited to work done in the lab. In fact, the success of the camp is largely due to the involvement of individuals and community organizations outside of the core instructional team. During meals, campers meet and talk with several women currently involved in or pursuing careers in technology. The participants stay in campus residence halls with camp facilitators and additional volunteers to enhance the mentoring and training environment, along with the showcase session for parents. The benefits of the intensive community-driven approach to the camp become clear through the reactions from parents. During the final showcase session of our first camp, for example, one father, who previously would not allow a computer in the family home, indicated that he was so impressed with his daughter's work that the family would not only purchase a computer, but would also attempt to send both their daughters to the camp the next year. In fact, several girls and their families contacted us after completing the first camp to inquire about returning the following year, suggesting not only that our pool of campers and camp supporters will continue to grow as the camp thrives but also that family involvement in and responsibility for sustaining technological literacy is vital, particularly in a culture that continues to reinforce stereotypes about women in general and women and technology in particular.

To counteract the perception that technological careers are more male than female, our second track for returning campers builds on the functional and critical literacies cultivated during the previous year. Specifically, the curriculum encourages students to experiment with new technologies of print and digital media (functional literacy) in order to develop a collective camp identity for the purpose of communicating that identity to an audience of their peers (critical literacy), as well as advancing rhetorical literacy by bringing students into the realm of interface design (Selber, 2004). The second track also provides an opportunity to involve campers in a collaborative effort to assess and sustain the camp by facilitating individual and group reflections on camp experiences, benefits, and possibilities. By drawing from their own knowledge and experiences to collaboratively create a useful, meaningful, Web-based resource for a larger community of peers, the returning campers are immersed in a type of service-learning project that prompts "student writing to become both community focused and critically reflective" (Alexander, 2006, pp. 366–367). Additionally, involving campers in efforts to sustain the camp is not only important for emphasizing the relationship between technology, reflection, and girls' identity construction, but also for assessing the degree to which the first camp met its projected goals over an extended period of time in sustaining participants' technological literacy. Because the multimedia artifacts produced by new and returning campers provide opportunities for self-assessment in the form of res-

timonials as well as design choices and photo selection, they become key documents from which we can continue to assess and develop curriculum that continues to foster our goals.

Our efforts toward creating spaces that encourage girls to maintain an interest in technology use and production are similar to other outreach organizations across the country. Some of the organizations that the second-year campers chose to provide links for on the camp Web site include Girls in Technology (<http://girlsinotechnology.org/>), TechBridge (<http://www.techbridgegirls.org/>), and Girl Geeks (<http://www.girlgeeks.org/>). While these organizations are important for many of the reasons we've discussed, they are somewhat limiting for girls if they do not incorporate opportunities for reflecting on identity development. It is equally important for young women to be guided through the process of developing their identities while sustaining an interest in science and technology. Without this guidance, girls will be unprepared for how to challenge stereotypes in higher education and in the workforce. Though these stereotypes are breaking down as women continue to pursue degrees in science and technology, they are still sexualized. For example, *Newsweek's* article titled "Revenge of the Nerddette" describes how young women are challenging the "geek stereotypes" by "being just as proud of their sexuality as they are of their geekiness" (Bennett & Yabroff, 2008, p. 45). Bennett and Yabroff (2008) even refer to successful women, such as "Ellen Spertus, a Mills College professor and research scientist at Google—and the 2001 winner of the Silicon Valley 'Sexiest Geek Alive' pageant" (p. 44) to show how women are challenging these stereotypes.

Certainly, it is important to show young women that they can be feminine and interested in science and technology, but with role models like those discussed above, it seems as if some women are replacing one stereotype with another. For that reason, building a sense of community among girls and women as we individually and collectively construct digital identities is vital to disrupting "the male order of things" on the Internet" (Wilding, 1998, p. 9) through the development of women-centered spaces that enable girls to experiment with technology and to use narrative to reflect on their own use of that technology as they develop online identities in safe, empowering, and sustainable ways. Stern (1999) calls for more research to explore the "potential the Web may hold for granting girls a louder voice" (p. 38). Inevitably, we designed the Digital Mirror Camp with both the theoretical and practical goal of enabling girls to construct counter-narratives to larger cultural assumptions about gender and technology, to foster positive experiences for girls whose technological literacy acquisition, despite our best efforts at gender-equity, will continue to be mediated through inequitable cultural, material, and educational frameworks.

NOTES

1. Pseudonyms are used.
2. Quotes from the Web portfolios are exact. Grammatical and spelling errors were not corrected so as to be true to the exact content written by the girls.

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CHAPTER EIGHT

We Wanted Other People to Learn from Us

Girls Blogging in Rural South Africa in
the Age of AIDS

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Adolescent girls' blogs provide one entry point for examining how the activities of girls are renegotiating boundaries: the boundaries of their lives, their relationships, and of public/private space. Given the opportunities that blogs offer girls, to write and share personal experiences and opinions with potential public readers, their importance in the lives of girls needs to be addressed and better understood. (Bell, 2007, p. 108)

Bell's words are particularly relevant to the lives of girls in rural South Africa and to the issues of gender violence and HIV and AIDS that they face. Indeed, one of the most striking statements given by one of the girls in a rural secondary school in the province of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, during a focus group discussion after a series of workshops on blogging was the statement "we wanted other people to learn from us." Further, when asked how discussing HIV and AIDS in their blogs was different than talking openly about the subject in class, students in the group commented that they felt as though their words would have an impact on a greater audience, inspiring others to change at-risk habits and views about sexual practices they otherwise felt uncomfortable discussing openly. These comments, we believe, suggest a different way of thinking about the potential uses for new media in a section of South Africa that is regarded as the epicenter of HIV and AIDS infections. They also say something about the ways in which girls and young women, who are three to four times more likely to be infected than males of the