Who am I Online? Understanding the Meaning of Online Contexts for Identity Development

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Existing literature on identity online.

## Implications For Stakeholders About

Researchers

# Abstract

Research concerning the function of online contexts in adolescents’ everyday lives adds important pieces to the understanding of their identity development. Specifically, online contexts are distinguished from other everyday contexts with regard to the conditions for identity explorations, self-presentations, and social interactions. Understanding the meaning of these aspects of online contexts for identity development is thus an important research area. This review of research of identity online shows that research has so far primarily focused on identity expressions and less on identity development. Conversely, developmental identity research rarely includes online contexts. Thus, there is a gap between research about identity development and research about identity online. This article, therefore, aims to review research on identity online from a developmental perspective and to suggest directions for future research. The reviewed literature was structured around aspects where online contexts have brought about substantially changed conditions for identity development: the opportunities for identity explorations, means for self-presentations, and requisites for social interactions. The conclusions are that research on identity development may further the understanding of adolescents’ online activities and that research on identity development needs to include online contexts to see the whole story of identity development for adolescents today.

# Outcome

"In short the reviewed articles revealed that identity explorations may be facilitated by access to contexts online (Crowson and Goulding 2013; DeHaan et al. 2012), but also that characteristics of some online contexts, particularly SNS such as Facebook, may make individuals more cautious about what they reveal about themselves (Page et al. 2013; Strano and Wattai Queen 2012) and even make them hide salient aspects of their identity (Rubin and McClelland 2015). The reviewed research also implied age differences in how much individuals worry over what they display online (Jordán-Conde et al. 2014) and in strategies for impression management (Strano and Wattai Queen 2012). These findings indicate that the meaning of online contexts may vary by developmental periods. Finally, the reviewed literature showed the strong influence of other people on adolescents’ identity development online (Davis 2014) and how online identity narratives are constructed together with other people (Page et al. 2013). Thus, as we have argued throughout this article, online contexts bring about changed conditions with regard to the opportunities for identity explorations, the means for self-presentations, and the requisites for social interaction." (Authors, 147)