Youth and intimate media cultures: Gender, sexuality, relationships, and desire as storytelling practices in social networking sites

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200 profiles of youngsters within the region of Flanders, the Dutch speaking part of Belgium between 13 and 18
years of age

# Abstract

This paper investigates how young people give meaning to gender, sexuality, relationships, and desire in the popular social networking site (SNS) Netlog. In arguing how SNSs are important spaces for intimate politics, the extent to which Netlog is a space that allows contestations of intimate stories and a voicing of difference is questioned. These intimate stories should be understood as self-representational media practices; young people make sense of their intimate stories in SNSs through media cultures. Media cultures reflect how audiences and SNS institutions make sense of intimacy. This paper concludes that intimate stories as media practices in the SNS Netlog are structured around creativity, anonymity, authenticity, performativity, bricolage and intertextuality. The intimate storytelling practices focusing on creativity, anonymity, bricolage and intertextuality are particularly significant for a diversity of intimacies to proliferate.

# Outcome

"Although Facebook is the most popular SNS, Netlog forms an interesting platform as space that allows
contestations of intimate stories and a voicing of difference.
The way the cited texts address their audiences, makes clear how intimate stories on Netlog . Intimate stories in self-introductory texts are carefully produced while thinking of all those who will read it. They seem to continuously transgress the very personal and intimate to the public. Sexual preferences observed by heterosexual boys fit within a hegemonic masculinity maintained through the production of a clearly defined heterosexual identity. Other sexual identities are quite clear in self-introductory texts and in a rather explicit way (\*gay\*, \*lesbian\*).
Contrary to Facebook, anonymity is an important element of online communication. In the Netlog community, nicknames are important, as they function as primary identification. Consequently, nicknames could be seen as the most important signals of identity identify the self with other groups, such as gendered identities, ethnicity, and sexual identities. Nicknames often reflect conventional male and female gender characteristics, such as fashion and football.
Intimate storytelling as a media practice introduces an intertextual self, a self that appropriates the texts and aesthetics popular culture provides to create a story. It forms a combining of a number of intertextual references to texts from popular culture. Intimate stories are examples of a postmodern bricolage: music, film, and celebrity industry, Western popular media cultures played an important role." (De Ridder Van Bauwel, 2015)