

## Social Networking Sites: Early Identification, Prevention & Postvention

- *“Silence is dangerous when we pretend the problem is not there...communication is a healer to break the silence.”*
- *“Naming things, breaking through taboos and denial is the most dangerous, terrifying, and crucial work.” - Eve Ensler*



## Past shapes the future

- The term “teenager” did not exist a century ago. It was most likely coined in the 1920s or 1930s; and it first appeared in print as a marketing term in 1941.
- The notion of young adult did exist and it primarily referenced young people who were entering the workforce.
- The workforce was a critical site of socialization into adulthood for young people; very few went to high school or college.
- Great Depression changed this w/fewer jobs

## Past shapes the future



- Too few jobs + too many adults needing employment = labor movement joins the social reformers and urges the government to require high school attendance for young people.
- While social reformers believed that young people were not mature enough to be entering the workforce, the labor movement was more interested in keeping young adults out of the workforce (and off the streets).
- Together, they were able to convince Congress to pass compulsory education and child labor laws.

## Past shapes the future



- While appropriateness can be debated, its effect was clear: young people were neatly segregated from adults in all aspects of their lives.
- Idealists viewed high school as a place where youth could mature both intellectually and socially, but age segregation meant that young people were being socialized into a society that did not include adults.

## Past shapes the future



- While peer socialization is obviously valuable and important, it is fundamentally different from being socialized into adult society by adults themselves; generations emerge and norms rapidly change per generation.
- By segregating people by age, a true dichotomy between adult and teen emerged.
- The development of an age-segregated group also created a target demographic for marketers.
- These are arenas for the formation and enactment of social identities for young people.

## Why go online?



“If you’re not on MySpace, you don’t exist” – Skyler, 18,

“I’m in the 7th grade. I’m 13. I’m not a cheerleader. I’m not the president of the student body. Or captain of the debate team. I’m not the prettiest girl in my class. I’m not the most popular girl in my class. I’m just a kid. I’m a little shy.

*It’s really hard in this school to impress people enough to be your friend if you’re not any of those things.*

But I go on these really great vacations with my parents between Christmas and New Year’s every year. And I take pictures of places we go. And I write about those places. And I post this on my Myspace page. Because I think if kids in school read what I have to say and how I say it, they’ll want to be my friend.”

-Vivien, 13

## Social Development: Physical Settings

- **Impression Management:** In everyday interactions, the body serves as a critical site of identity performance. In conveying who we are to other people, we use our bodies to project information about ourselves.
- **HOW:** Movement, clothes, speech, and facial expressions. What we put forward is our best effort at what we want to say about who we are. While we intend to convey one impression, our performance is not always interpreted as we might expect.

## Social Development: Mediated Environment

- Bodies are not immediately visible and the skills people need to interpret situations and manage impressions are different.
- People must learn to write themselves into being.
- While text, images, audio, and video all provide valuable means for developing a virtual presence, the act of articulation differs from how we convey meaningful information through our bodies.
- Digital bodies are fundamentally coarser, making it far easier to misinterpret what someone is expressing.

## Social Development: Mediated Environment

- Teens are inclined to present the side of themselves that they believe will be well received by their peers.
- The desire to be cool on MySpace is part of the more general desire to be validated by one's peers.
- In Indian communities, most youth grow up in emotionally invalidating environments. For some, SNS become areas where youth can foster an identity and a sense of community when they cannot find one in their actual physical community.

## MySpace: Early Identification, Prevention & Postvention

The screenshot shows a MySpace profile for 'Honor Your Life'. The profile is for a user named 'Honor Life', 28 years old, male, from Mesalero, New Mexico, US. The profile is active and has 105 friends. The user is currently online. The profile features a logo for 'MSP Mescalero Youth Suicide Prevention' and a bio stating 'is working funously!'. The profile also has a 'Latest Blog Entries' section with three entries dated January 26, 2010, and an 'Activity Stream' section showing a post from February 08, 2010. The MySpace navigation bar is visible at the top, and the search bar is on the right.

## SNS: Suicide Contagion

- After the death of a young person by suicide, SNS often become emotionally charged gathering sites for young people to express their thoughts, ideas and questions, raising concerns about the potential for these sites to inadvertently glamorize the person who died.
- After a suicide, a person's MySpace page or Facebook profile will stay online – often becoming a memorial for that person.

## Myspace Postings: Messages of Hope

- With help, this loss of life might have been avoided. The best way to honor \_\_\_\_ is to seek help if you or someone you know is struggling.
- If you're feeling lost, desperate, or alone – please visit <http://www.suicidology.org/> or <http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org> <http://www.sprc.org/> or call 1-800-SUICIDE (784-2433). The call is free and confidential, and crisis workers are there 24/7 to assist you.
- You can also visit <http://lifelinegallery.org/> which is a site that offers stories of hope and healing.