

CONFESSIONS OF AN ANONYMOUS BARBIE:
AN IDENTITY LITERACY JOURNEY FOR INCREASING
DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP CAPACITY

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Identity and belonging, particularly expressed and maintained on social media, have become a paramount channel for the amplification and replication of directed ideas. Therefore, everyday composition in the 21st century increasingly correlates directly with digital citizenship capacity – the ability to authentically participate with original thinking in decoding and encoding multimodal messages affecting collective meaning making and understanding. Indeed, everyday people participate in the definition of a variety of topics from serious issues such as social justice, philanthropic, and political movements and causes, to fun activities such as entertainment and popular culture, personal identity creation and maintenance, and a variety of mundane matters regularly via social media engagement.

Every time a person likes, shares, or posts a comment, photo, video, or meme, for example, momentum is given or taken away from collective understanding on any given topic. Increasingly, digital citizens are operating in these new contexts and genres that are participatory, digital, visual, and entertaining, yet they continue to be loaded with rhetorical cultural narratives, power structures, and dualistic thinking. This chapter will juxtapose relevant academic theory with the more fun, creative, visual, and self-expressive activities of social media to guide readers through a personal identity literacy journey for the purpose of building digital citizenship capacity. Contents of this composition include: new theory, concepts, and language regarding digital citizenship; identity-based pedagogy for defamiliarizing implicit conditioning and rebuilding authenticity; and modeling of concepts.

Readers are invited to engage with the text by participating in an identity literacy journey – a journey that guides ordinary global citizens in unpacking and examining their own identity for the purpose of building digital citizenship capacities. This journey is a personal activity, but

also includes a step-by-step pedagogy with exercises, materials, and theory that can be utilized with college-level students in the classroom. The fundamental goal of this work is to poise readers, whether they are faculty, students, or citizens, to become leaders in employing and modeling multiliteracies that directly correlate to increased encoding, decoding, and reception of varied authentic original perspectives contributing to solutions to the world's multifaceted issues.

Theory: A Digital Humanities and Writing and Rhetoric Perspective on Identity

This chapter analyzes identity and digital citizenship from an American digital humanities and writing and rhetoric perspective. Romanticism, modernism, and postmodernism are western-based humanities terms that are used to describe and categorize dominant historical trends during the past few centuries in individual and collective thought and expression evident in literary, visual, and performing arts. Identity-focused scholars in the field of digital humanities (Gergen 1991, 6-17; Hayles 1999, 6-24; Turkle 1995, 36-49), employed historical categorizations to delineate and label tendencies in cultural mindsets and attitudes inherited from distinct time periods. This terminology offers common language and an anchor for the forthcoming discussion of identity and digital citizenship.

Nineteenth-century romanticist thought privileged the private emotional individual, morality, and expression of a unique inner depth or soul, passionate feelings, and inspired personal significance beyond the surface. Twentieth-century modernist thought leveraged pre-existing Enlightenment beliefs of reason and observation and romanticist beliefs of the virtuous autonomous individual, but further developed science, machine, business, and progress metaphors that privileged rigid absolute objective truths, logic, ways of being, and knowing. Twenty-first century postmodern tendencies, which are currently unfolding, embody a

technologically represented public comprised of a highly-influenced and contradictory multiplicity of identities and personalities muddled by the additive ideas of romanticism and modernism.

Historically, the private singular moral individual inner self prioritized by romanticism evolved into a postmodern highly-exposed public comprised of exponential visual-based representations of individuals' identities that continue to be predisposed to absolute modernist truths and romanticist ideals, yet they are now conveyed through ever-evolving high-tech modalities and media. In sum, the postmodern condition is cumulative by retaining key attributes and ideas from earlier periods such as individuality, morality, and absolute truths, but expression of individual identities is multiple and contradictory due to exposure to vast technological representations, reach, and remnants of conflicted romantic and modernist beliefs.

The reach of historical categorizations, particularly "postmodern," has been extended beyond the arts by multidisciplinary scholars (Barthes 1977, 15-20; Baudrillard 1994, 160-161; Gergen 1991, 6-17; Hayles 1999, 6-24; Turkle 1995, 36-49; Ulmer 2003, 5-7) as they have sought to forecast and understand the ways technologies continually influence culture, identity, self, experience, and perspective in the time period unfolding following modernism. Much postmodern analysis has focused on criticism and forecasting utopian and dystopian disembodied, simulated, image-based representations of multiplicities of identity and experience. Indeed, a multiplicity of identities and imitative personalities are evident online as individual physical bodies have become visually-enhanced exponential representations leveraging technologies such as photo, video, filters, etc. Furthermore, extending a "postmodern" categorization and label to digital culture is relevant and useful to discussions of identity and

digital citizenship because the arts have historically served as an effective medium for creative expression and reception of connotated meanings.

More recent digital humanities scholarship (Gries 2015, 3; Jenkins 2006, 19-21; Knobel and Lankshear 2007, 205; Milner 2013, 2357; Ntouvlis and Geenen 2023, 1193-1211; Potts 2014, 11-13; Shifman 2014, 131-139; Vie 2014, 4; Wiggins 2019, 144) has shifted from forecasting what the “postmodern” will be to analysis of social media content creation and consumption such as that of memes, popular culture, political and philanthropic movements, disaster response, etc. In this sense, digital content can be considered postmodern creative expression(s) of identity, thought, ideas, experiences, and perspectives. Pieces of digital content serve as disembodied public representations of identities. Further, any individual consumes and creates numerous, often exponential, visual-based representations of personal selves.

Purpose and Organization

This chapter will juxtapose the concepts of romanticism, modernism, and postmodernism, as well as content consumption and creation, as a framework to elucidate digital citizenship multiliteracies for an undergraduate-level audience. A digital humanities and writing and rhetoric academic approach views college composition courses as a significant site for fostering multiliteracies to prepare students for citizenship and professions in a digital age (Cambre and Arshad-Ayaz 2017, 64-80; Knobel and Lankshear 2007, 219-225; Miller 2022, 199-230; Selber 2004, 24-26; Selfe 1999, 9-10). Therefore, impactful composition classroom pedagogy must bridge literacies for decoding and encoding ideas, thoughts, experiences, perspectives, and ultimately identities, creatively and artistically via a multitude of technological modalities and media.

The forthcoming pedagogy explicates “identity literacy” as an original concept and concurrently asserts that identity literacy is an overlooked, yet critical, facet of the multiliteracies necessary for global citizenship in the postmodern digital age. Readers are invited to complete the following exercises in order to experience identity literacy personally and gain the experience necessary to foster identity literacy in citizens and students in their network. Teachers and everyday citizens alike may cultivate identity literacy in others by modeling the product of identity literacy – sincere relational expression of authentic original perspective.

Pedagogical materials are marked by the “Choose Your Own Adventure” headline borrowed from the “Choose Your Own Adventure” book series of the 1980’s (Packard 1979, 1) to similarly extend a participatory invitation to readers. These sections are organized with prompts, exercises, and literacy descriptions. Supporting theory and accessible explanations for an audience of college-level students and/or adult citizens are also woven throughout the chapter and are marked by “Theory” headlines.

Choose Your Own Adventure: Start Here/Baseline

Imagine you are playing a game as you begin your journey with this reading, and you need to choose an avatar. Consider a character, celebrity, historical figure, or childhood toy that you would say you are most drawn to or identify with. For me, this avatar was the Barbie doll (Wikimedia 2025) – hence, this is why Barbie is referenced in the title of this writing. Search for and save a visual digital representation, photo, of your avatar in a word processing document titled “My Adventure.” This document should be considered your personal space for identity literacy journaling.

Next, think about how you would introduce yourself in a variety of situations: at school; work; among new friends; etc. For most people, they start by describing where they are from, their profession, their role in family, hobbies, likes and dislikes, etc. This is how you would introduce yourself if you were to sum up “Who am I?” Take a look at your social media profiles and posted content to help pinpoint your identity. This activity, as the first of a series, is presented as casual journaling, however, pedagogical background, instructions for use as assignments, and more examples are accessible in a prior publication (Miller 2022, 199-230).

Baseline Journal Prompts:

- 1) First, choose an avatar (see above for clarification).
- 2) Think about your identity. Look at your social media profiles as guides.
- 3) Write “I am” statements for how you could introduce yourself to strangers. “I am a teacher, I am a mother,” etc.
- 4) Identify 4-6 photos that represent your favorite “I am” statements.

Baseline Products:

- 5) First, find and save a photo or digital representation of your avatar.
- 6) Compile a list of “I am” statements.
- 7) Create a collage with 4-6 photos to introduce yourself visually (tech advice below).
- 8) Start a journal by saving these items in a document titled “My Adventure.”



Figure 1: Examples of baseline products.

Baseline Multiliteracies:

Functional Literacy

Certain computer skills are required for the task of creating aesthetic multimodal content such as a collage, meme, or photo/video-based social media post. Functional literacy is the academic term ascribed to these technological abilities (Selber 2004, 24-25; Selfe 1999, 3). Smartphones and social media applications, such as Photos, Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook, etc. provide functional tools for creating multimodal content. If you are not familiar with the native smartphone photo applications and tools of social media, take some time to explore and experiment with them to build your functional literacy. Additionally, smartphone app stores and Internet search bars are also good places to search for “free collage maker,” “free meme maker,” “free content creator,” etc. The example collages, memes, and content shared throughout this

chapter were created with free applications available in the app store, on a smartphone, or in social media platforms.

Theory: I am a Writer and Creator

For the purposes of our discussion about digital citizenship, social media will be a main focus. Social media have become mundane composition genres for most people since their inception early in the 21st century due to their participatory nature; everyone can be a writer and content creator. Particularly college students are familiar with many social media applications and use them daily since these platforms have existed most, if not all, of their lives. Arguably, the activity that garners the most attention in social media composition, engagement, and participation is identity based. Everyday posts often showcase photos, videos, text, ideas, activities, people, places, memes, etc. that a person identifies with.

Young people, in particular, have embraced social media and participate personally and professionally with many striving to become social media content creators and influencers. Posting on social media resonates personally for many users and is generally held in high regard due to a felt sense of potential. Yet, social media are still relatively new composition genres increasingly worthy of new research, analysis, and theory to more fully develop their potential.

Digital Citizenship

Digital citizenship involves active participation, decoding and encoding, in collective meaning making and understanding regarding any given topic, but how can meaning making be defined? Meaning making ideally entails the expression, reception, and amalgamation of many individuals' authentic non-influenced perspectives to contribute to and shape collective

understanding of an idea. The term meme describes how ideas have the potentiality to constantly be in flux.

You are likely familiar with the Internet meme and how, as a genre, Internet memes humorously have the capacity to negate or change the meaning of an original idea. The root term meme (Dawkins 1976, 245-260) updated to online materializations (Jenkins 2006, 2-4; Knobel and Lankshear 2007, 199-225; Lessig 2008, 69-71; Milner 2013, 2357-2390; Shifman 2014, 17-35; Varis and Blommaert 2014, 1-21; Wiggins 2019, 1-20) refers to how all ideas are versions of earlier ideas that continuously morph with additive meaning as they are replicated, supplemented, recontextualized, remixed, etc. In this discussion, we can view any topic, concern, cause, etc. that digital citizens weigh in on as a participatory idea in flux with potentiality - a meme.

Generally, digital citizens express their support or opposition to ideas by composing and posting multimodal messages on social media platforms ranging from likes, emoji reactions, and comments, to original textual, photo, or video posts. Every post, whether it is textual, visual, or increasingly multimodal either contributes to or takes away momentum from a collective understanding of any idea. You, as a digital citizen, are likely familiar with the mechanics of how ideas are presented to you in a range of daily feeds on the social media platforms you choose to engage with. Regardless of whether the posts originate from friends or family, various groups, news entities, advertisements, etc., we are all conditioned to respond in certain mundane ways that convey support or opposition: like, emoji reaction, comment, post a photo or video, etc.

Interestingly, digital citizens often successfully affect meaning making by leveraging photo, video, and textual representations of bodies, faces, names, and voices. In this way, the digital offers a disembodied multiplicity of identity expression and reach beyond a single physical body. As a form of passive indifference or polite resistance, we may also choose to not respond or engage at all.

The amalgamation of all responses to any given idea shapes its collective meaning and understanding. Imagine how artificial intelligence (AI) might draw meaning or how contributors on Wikipedia continually revise meaning. In this sense, meaning making is participatory and influenced by a push and pull or ebb and flow of digital responses from digital citizens to ideas presented on social media. The mundane activity of responding on social media to various ideas is the work of digital citizens, so as a social media user, you hold great potential to shape the collective meaning, response, and action regarding any idea, big or small. With this potential, also comes a responsibility for developing literacies and capacities for decoding rhetorical ideas and encoding original thinking.

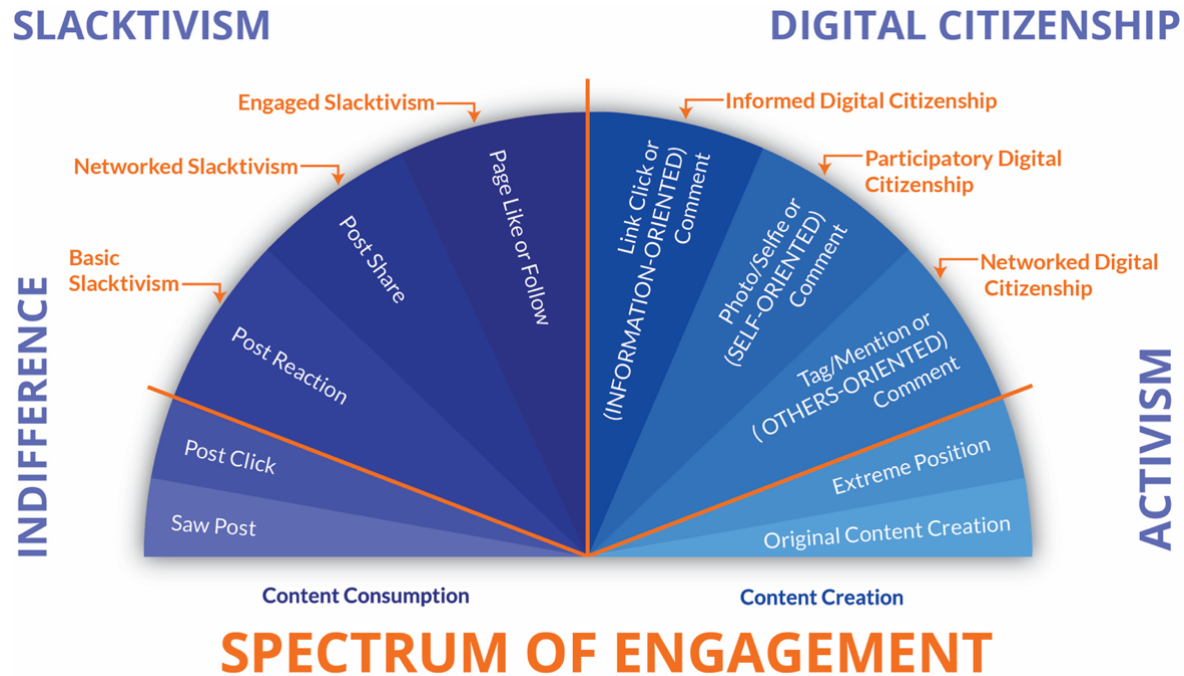


Figure 2: Spectrum of Engagement Model (Miller 2018, 81).

This visual model illustrates a spectrum of digital citizenship engagement actions and any potential action's influence on collective meaning making and understanding. A line, representing a continuum, from consumption of ideas to creation of ideas runs along the bottom of the diagram. Each action represented as a pie shape piece of the semicircle situates the range of its function from consumption to alteration to opposition to creation of a new idea. This spectrum only includes actions that were witnessed from a prior research study, and certainly more actions could be added to the spectrum respective to how they embody content consumption, supplementation, alteration, opposition, or creation.

Considering the actions represented on the diagram, if a digital citizen saw a post, for example, but did not respond, the action represents sole consumption of an idea. However, if a digital citizen responds by posting a like, emoji reaction, photo, symbol, meme, or comment,

new content has been added to supplement or alter an idea; that new content pushes and pulls on the collective meaning or understanding of the idea. New content as slight as an emoji reaction, hashtag, adopting a symbol, or even a share has generally been criticized in the past as slacktivism, trivial identity-enhancing behavior, yet evolving scholarship (DeArmas et al. 2019 126-150; Miller 2018, 82; Varis and Blommaert 2014, 7-8; Vie 2014, 4) argues that slacktivist actions offer incremental meaning making value because they recontextualize an idea in new networks adding additional meaning.

Creativity and art in the visual remix of ideas, perhaps as an Internet meme or a relevant personal photo, for example, become increasingly additive to meaning. Also of significant interest is that extreme positions in activism tend to be primarily dualistic and oppositional, inciting stalemate, so the mild actions that incrementally push and pull on meaning making offer thought-provoking value in digital citizenship. This chapter further probes this “sweet spot” of digital citizenship potential and responsibility.

Responsibility

Along with the significant potential digital citizens possess to participate in meaning making comes substantial responsibility for uncovering, safeguarding, and expressing a distinct individual authentic perspective; but authentic perspectives are mysterious because they exist outside cultural conditioning. Critical literacy is a concept you have likely encountered throughout your education that strives to foster authentic perspectives through critique of invisible influences on mainstream approaches to life, solving problems, and “truths” (Lanier and Hassel 2018, 195-196; Palczewski et al. 2019, 129-138; Selfe 1999, 24). Further, critical theories urge people to consider the power structures behind socially constructed mainstream

cultural beliefs, practices, and narratives. Though useful, critical literacy and theories don't immediately transfer because they tend to remain highly theoretical and also dualistic in their critique of what becomes more approachable when illustrated as cultural lenses.

Figuratively, cultural lenses are the "eyeglasses" citizens are conditioned to see the world through and developing the multiliteracies to not only "see" without the cultural "eyeglasses," but also to "see" the "eyeglasses" themselves is an important missing link in digital citizenship capacity. These metaphors illustrate a critical literacy gap I termed "identity literacy." Identity literacy takes a step back from critical literacy to first illuminate cultural lenses personally and separate them from identity. Separating, naming, and visualizing lenses outside the body or mind affords the opportunity to examine them less defensively.

Additionally, identity literacy, draws from the philosophical approaches of "cultural memetics" (Dawkins 1976, 245-260) and "ecological thinking" (Code 2006, 4-9) to reconceptualize static "truth" or knowledge as fluid meaning making shaped by overlaps in the pursuit of diverse authentic perspectives and objectives. Therefore, self-understanding including and excluding cultural lenses is critical for nurturing digital citizenship capacity. The forthcoming section unpacks an amalgamation of cultural lenses inherited from romanticism and modernism to further develop multiliteracies to "see" beyond cultural "eyeglasses."

Binaries

Let's begin exploring one of the most significant romanticism- and modernism-based lenses that affects social media engagement and digital citizenship. The romanticist idea of the righteous self and modernist idea of objective truth have been reconciled in early postmodernism as binary thought. United States (and increasingly global) digital culture tends to favor dualistic

thinking as a lens. Every day, we are presented with binary (two oppositional) choices such as true/false, right/wrong, good/bad, like/don't like, support/oppose, etc.

A list of familiar binaries could go on indefinitely. You are likely familiar with binary choices, but what you likely haven't directly considered is the role duality plays in the illusion of choice. Binary choices make it seem like you have choices, but at the same time they only give you two choices – two controlled predetermined choices. Rarely is any topic or idea as simple as right or wrong or true or false, yet cultural pressure to identify with one side of a polarized binary is intense. Dualistic thinking is a programmed belief system that poises citizens to take sides in support or opposition on issues rather than engage in and express original thinking and diverse authentic perspectives that could broaden collective understanding and generate more potential solutions to the world's big problems.

A useful allegory for understanding this conundrum involves a train. Think about a high-speed train that will travel across tracks from point A to point B. You board the train and you have a choice to sit on the right side (choice 1) or left side (choice 2) of the center aisle. You think you have personal choice to sit on either side and, yes, you do have a controlled choice limited to choosing a seat on the right or left. However, ultimately that train is rushing along the tracks to the same predetermined destination regardless of what side you sit on.

Just like this train, many of our choices as digital citizens are controlled and limited by dualistic thinking and binary choices. The primary choice on social media is to click like/love/share (like) or ignore/be silent/criticize (dislike) something. Support or oppose a (good/bad) idea. Adopt the idea or reject it. Dualistic programming obfuscates other actions that could better supplement participatory collective meaning making. By explicitly defamiliarizing

the ideas of the virtuous singular inner self prioritized in romanticism and absolute objective truth stressed by modernism, the affordances of postmodernism can be more effectively leveraged for digital citizenship.

The spectrum of engagement model is an original thinking tool that helps digital citizens envision additional creative actions beyond sole binary consumption or rejection of ideas. The actions in between complete consumption or outright rejection of ideas are where collective and participatory meaning making, understanding, equality, and solutions reside. When citizens express a perspective (choice) outside of choice 1 or 2, they disrupt the volume of both choice 1 and choice 2 and ultimately steer the issue (train) in a slightly different direction.

Social Institutions

A looming curiosity builds in this discussion concerning what the implicit power structures referenced in critical literacy are. An entire body of scholarship (Lanius and Hassel 2018, 101-102; Palczewski et al. 2019, 129-138) is dedicated to unpacking dominant cultural belief systems and power structures controlling cultural “truths.” Hegemony is a scholarly term ascribed to general mainstream cultural beliefs, approaches to life, and social institutions. Social institutions represent ways to group and name hegemonic beliefs, structures, and mechanics. The main agreed upon social institutions, representing the postmodern global human condition, include: family, education, work, religion, and media.

Below are very brief, and purposely loose, descriptions of social institutions based on conversations that have arisen in scholarship and the classroom that will likely help you begin to contemplate how these social institutions function personally in your life. These descriptions are American or western-culture oriented, so readers from other cultures may want to adapt them to

better fit their own culture. The intent is to give you a starting point from which you can begin to separate cultural conditioning from your own authentic self understanding. Self understanding is the prerequisite or starting point from which original thinking and expression of your own authentic perspective can arise.

Family

Traditional nuclear family values
 Hierarchical gendered roles, child rearing, codependence
 Shared identity, future, love
 Dating, romance, heteronormativity

Education

Truth, knowledge, history, hidden curricula
 Quantitative, logical, STEM (science, technology, engineering, math) and achievement -oriented
 Gendered and hegemonic socialization rewarded with privilege
 Corrective enforcing and patrolling via judgment, bullying, shaming, harassment

Work

Progress, capitalism, American dream, purpose
 Truth, knowledge, hegemonic masculinity
 Quantitative, logical, STEM and achievement -oriented
 Gendered, raced, and classed jobs, wage gaps, subordination

Religion

Belief in a higher divinity, infallible power
 Hierarchical gendered roles, child rearing, codependence
 Heteronormativity, love, service, morality
 Link to nationalism, ethnicity, colonialism

Media

Consumption, consumerism, entertainment, popular culture, and multimodally-focused
 Replication of identity and beauty norms and gazes
 Hegemonic socialization rewarded with privilege
 Corrective enforcing and patrolling via judgment, bullying, shaming, harassment
 Replicates and amplifies all social institutions

Choose Your Own Adventure: Externalizing Identity

Ulmer (2003, 5-7) explicated a blueprint for a “mystory” exercise to externalize and visualize the mystery of an individual’s natural home standpoint, arguably identity, which he asserted is shaped by four discourses: career; family; entertainment; and community.

Mystory Discourses

1) Career Discourse: Think about your university major or a field of disciplinary knowledge in which you have some interest or have worked in. What are the distinct values and beliefs of that discipline? What drew you to the field? What do you admire about professionals working in that field?

2) Family Discourse: Think of a few memories that stand out from your childhood. Prominent memories often represent significant learning moments, paradoxes, problems, or traumatic events. What do you think is significant about your family memory? How did you feel? Was there conflict? What did you learn from it?

3) Entertainment Discourse: Think of favorite movies, gaming storylines, advertisements, tv shows, or books you have watched or read. Think about any favorite characters. Think about common problems/resolutions. How do these narratives make you feel? Then relate these findings to what you discovered from the other discourses. Is there any overlap or any theme?

4) Community Discourse: Think about community events, leaders, heroes, and activities that embody the communities you are a part of. Religion, race, nationality, and ethnicity represent communities we may belong to. What are the values and beliefs of the community? What are the problems, conflicts, and ideal resolutions for the community? What did you learn in school about the beliefs, values, and history of your local community, nation, the world? Do any historical events stand out?

You should now revise your introduction collage to include four new personal photos that illustrate your relationship with each of the four mystory discourses. You may use past photos or take new photos to illustrate your natural home standpoint. Please avoid using generic Internet photos, because this exercise is about self understanding.

Mystory Journal Prompts:

- 1) Learn about binaries, social institutions, and Ulmer's four discourses in this reading.
- 2) Revise your collage into a mystory with one personal photo representing each of the four discourses: career, family, entertainment, and community.
- 3) Look for and journal about themes, patterns, conflict, contradiction, paradox, or discomfort in your mystory. The questions in the four discourses section are a guide.

Mystory Products:

- 4) Revise your collage into a mystory with one personal photo representing each of the four discourses: career, family, entertainment, and community.
- 5) Add a tagline highlighting any identity theme, pattern, conflict, contradiction, discomfort, or paradox you discover.



Figure 3: Example mystory.

Mystory Multiliteracies:

Functional literacy
 Semiotic literacy
 Identity literacy
 Critical literacy

The mystory is a tool to extract subconscious personal conditioning by supplying a genre to externalize and visualize it in a collage. Scaffolding from the functional literacy skills employed to create a collage, now the focus shifts to experiencing semiotic, identity, and critical literacies. Discovery of how cultural narratives and binaries are illustrated visually in personal photos provides a dramatic opportunity to experience the nuances of these multiliteracies.

Semiotic literacy involves the capacity to recognize, interpret, and leverage patterns of repeating visual signs in decoding or encoding multimodal messages (Miller 2022, 199). Identity literacy works in tandem with semiotic and critical literacies to personally recognize the presentation, consumption, and replication of cultural narratives and binaries in a person's life and small circles. Finally, critical literacy is the critique of hegemonic cultural narratives and structures (Lanius and Hassel 2018, 195; Palczewski et al. 2019, 129-138; Selfe 1999, 24).

Theory: Conditioning to Authentic Original Perspective

The necessary hallmark of the mystory activity is to experience a degree of discomfort when a theme, pattern, contradiction, conflict, or paradox among the visual signs contained in your collage is discovered. Discomfort marks the “aha moment” when deviation becomes accessible, because it represents a crack, fissure, gap, or hole in the promise or authenticity of the hegemonic narratives (Palczewski et al. 2019, 116 -124). Discomfort and access often originate from exploring otherness, defensiveness, shallowness, inequality, or traumas such as bullying or harassment.

How might the hegemonic narratives have let you down, not served you well, privileged, or limited you? How might they appear fake or shallow in relation to real life? Do not move on from the mystory until you have uncovered and articulated a theme, pattern, contradiction, conflict, or paradox. Take a look at figure 3 for a mystory example. A more detailed textual explanation of this example is explained in the conclusion of this chapter to provide additional direction if you are having trouble identifying your “aha moment.”

The mystory exercise is often uncomfortable. Some people feel very defensive of what they see in their mystory at first glance. Conversely, comfort is offered when hegemonic ideas

are consumed and replicated. Indeed, the rewards of privilege and praise feel good. Performing your natural home standpoint will always feel comfortable, like coming home.

As a simple example, I love to shop, especially for beauty products. I often describe the purchasing and use of beauty products as retail therapy, because it feels good to look the way my culture deems a “pretty” woman should look. I also enjoy the privilege of being seen as attractive. However, more purposeful active choices become comprehensible with an awareness of when privilege, praise, and comfort are offered in exchange for consumption and replication of hegemonic ideas.

To ease any defensiveness you may feel, know that being aware doesn’t mean your conditioning has to be disregarded altogether. Yet, a weighing of the consequences and consideration of slightly alternative choices become possible through this often uncomfortable work. Some uncomfortable “aha moments” in the mystory, for example, center around hierarchical relationships in religion and family, unrealistic or conflicting ideals, or staged cliché social media posts. Growing from this discomfort involves reconciling, rather than fully rejecting, conditioning.

Change is surprisingly “typically the result of sly, subtle adjustments that somehow meet the needs of both the operations of power and the needs of the vulnerable” (Cintron quoted in Grabill 2007, 4). The spectrum of engagement is a tool that aids digital citizens in envisioning minor adjustments in the messages they encode moving from sole consumption or opposition of hegemonic ideas to slightly and incrementally enriching those ideas. In other words, authentic original perspectives resonate most effectively when slight incremental and purposeful

adjustments to dominant narratives are illustrated such as portraying equality in spiritual and family activities or authentic posts featuring raw natural beauty and presence.

New Language Resignifying Identity and Belonging

Romanticism prioritized an individual noble interiority and modernism retained the idea of sovereign identity, but added the notion of rigid, absolute, and objective truth in what is deemed true and false, good and bad, right or wrong, etc. These hegemonic elements prevail in postmodernism. However, continuously advancing technologies catapult exponential visual representations of identities into an increasingly public social sphere.

While these historical dominant approaches to identity stressed individualism, a collective element has always existed in varying degrees across cultures. Relationship and interaction among others have continuously contributed to constructing and solidifying identity by offering the privilege of belonging, yet social circles of influence and acceptance have grown significantly larger in reach, magnitude, and power increasingly from romanticism to postmodernism. The forthcoming section employs new language to explicate implicit social dynamics of identity and belonging.

Each and every one of us innately possess potential power if we can understand and express, through composition, our own unique authentic perspective and original thinking on any given idea. Cultural belief systems that prioritize dualistic thinking and certain narratives work to coopt citizens' power and direct perspectives. Replication, amplification, illusion of choice, privilege exchange, nodes of enforcement, small circles of codependence, codependence, and codependent activism are new language that help explicate the sophisticated and obfuscated mechanics of how citizens' power is regularly collected and coopted. New language regarding

safeguarding personal power includes: identity literacy; content consumption
 continuum/spectrum of engagement; authentic original perspective; sincere relational expression;
 interdependence; overlapping objectives; and allies for interdependent flow.

The Problem

Replication

Power structures collect and stockpile citizens' power when individuals are successfully influenced to consume and spread ideas in the form controlled by the structure.

Amplification

Controlled ideas become louder, omnipresent, and dominant when a critical mass of individuals consume and spread ideas in the form controlled by power structures.

Illusion of Choice

Dualistic thinking and binary choices direct individuals' energy at safeguarding controlled ideas. The illusion of choice pigeonholes individuals in support or opposition of controlled ideas and limits the expression of an array of authentic original perspectives. Dualistic ideas can be easily controlled by two powerful opposing entities.

Privilege Exchange

Privilege, usually in the form of opportunity, praise, or belonging, is the social reward for adopting, replicating, and enforcing ideas in the form controlled by power structures. Sometimes people receive privilege based on ways they look or behave. For some people, privilege can be acquired by modifying looks or behavior to adhere to mainstream preferences. For others, modification is more difficult or not possible. Identity is a performative opportunity for privilege.

Nodes of Enforcement

The illusion of choice and polarity of binary choices directs individuals who have bought in at enforcing controlled ideas. Privilege, praise, shame, and judgment (through relationship) become

the limited work of individuals after individual power has been coopted. Bought-in individuals become nodes of influence replicating, amplifying, and enforcing controlled ideas in their own smaller networks of reach.

Small Circles of Codependence

The small social circles we are a part of (communities, families, schools, work teams, churches, social media networks) are made up of members that believe and uphold the values of the social institution it respectively represents. The shared homogenized identity and values are enforced and behavior is socially patrolled in the form of awarding or revoking privilege – opportunity, praise, belonging, judgment, shame, or bullying, etc. Social enforcement and patrolling are usually subtle and camouflaged behind blind truths of the circle, yet these actions are very effective in limiting expression of authentic original perspectives outside of controlled ideas, as well as in encouraging downplaying less favorable dimensions of identities.

Codependence

A culture of codependence involves social pressure to be overly concerned with enforcing and patrolling the uptake of hegemonic ideas, actions, and performative identity by others. Codependent behavior relies on belief in modernist objective truths. Codependent conduct also involves an element of romanticist-based morality in that the singular, good, right, objective, and absolute truth should be advanced and enforced. Codependence fuels the networked behavior of nodes of enforcement and small circles of codependence in awarding or revoking privilege.

Codependent Activism

Activism tends to remain stuck in dualistic thinking influencing others to join in solely supporting or opposing an issue. The problem is a range of other non-dominant authentic original perspectives is drowned out by the amplification of only binary (supporting/opposing) voices. Codependent and hierarchical activists, additionally, leverage privilege to speak for others.

The Solution

Identity Literacy

Identity literacy works in tandem with functional, semiotic, critical, and rhetorical literacies, to personally recognize the presentation, consumption, and replication of hegemonic cultural narratives and binaries in a person's life and small circles.

Content Consumption Continuum – Spectrum of Engagement

The introduction of the spectrum of engagement, particularly the content consumption continuum, as a model, provides a tangible multiliteracies tool to enable engagement beyond sole consumption or rejection of the ideas we are bombarded with every day.

Authentic Original Perspective

Authenticity, or self understanding, beyond cultural conditioning informs original thinking, and original thinking informs the expression of an authentic original perspective. Original thinking is independent of identity, but does involve approach to life or authentic perspective informed by lived experiences outside of conditioning. The responsibility is delineating outside influence, safeguarding coopt, and maintaining sincere relational expression.

Sincere Relational Expression

Sincere relational expression of authentic original perspective is each individual citizen's equal raw unit of expressive power that exists outside cultural conditioning. As a utopian ideal, each citizen is worthy of an equally valued authentic original perspective contributing to collective meaning making regarding any given matter. However, a multiplicity of digital representations can exist for any perspective amplifying some over others, contributing to a disparity in perspectives being equally relational. Sincere relational expression is interdependent rather than codependent in that it resists influencing and coopting others' expressive power.

Interdependence

Collective versus individual, or "we/I," is a powerful limiting binary, because "we" cultivates codependence and "I" promotes opposition and stalemate. Broadening this binary to valuing a sincerely relational amalgamation of an array of authentic original perspectives fosters equality in collective meaning making, understanding, and digital citizenship. Further, a safe, peaceful, and productive, rather than controlled oppositional collective could materialize as interdependent allies express authentic original perspectives to pursue authentic overlapping objectives and interdependent meaning making.

Overlapping Objectives

Overlapping objectives is a concept drawn from activity theory representing intersections of shared interests among individual actors (Kaptelinin and Nardi 2006, 31-32). Interdependent allies identify common interests while valuing the authentic expression of varying approaches and

perspectives, because they have confidence in a higher outcome resulting from increased manpower toward overlapping objectives. Interdependence is the work of genuine allies who speak for themselves to express their own authentic original perspectives, goals, and thinking safely and peacefully to equally contribute to collective meaning making, understanding, productivity, and solutions.

Allies for Interdependent Flow

Research identified “love” as language that served to amplify hegemonic ideals and thereby bury non-dominant perspectives (DeArmas et al. 2019, 126-150). Altruistic words like “love,” “kindness,” and “service” reflect romanticist and modernist absolute pleasant moral truths that limit dialogue. “Allies for interdependent flow” is honest new language promoting unobstructed sincere relational expression of gritty authentic original perspectives between allies aimed at overlapping objectives.

A funk band is a useful metaphor (Banks 2005, 5-6) for understanding the concepts of sincere relational expression, interdependence, and overlapping objectives. The sincere relational and authentic overlapping objective of the members of the band is to make remarkable music, yet each member plays a different instrument making eccentric sounds each in their own unique way. Each member of the band is concerned with their own instrument and sound – authentic original perspective. However, when valued and heard in unison, the unexpected sounds combine to make richer meaning – music. A patchwork quilt is similarly comprised of disparate fabrics that join in collective purpose and meaning (Banks 2005, 5-6). The analogies woven throughout this chapter aim to exhibit the potential of creativity and play in communicating connotated authentic original perspectives to shape meaning making.

Postmodernism and a New Language of Play

Play, in particular, has become a central tenet of the postmodern condition. A significant portion of the mundane activities people engage in online are entertaining and fun. From gaming

to social media engagement, an invitation to play with the self construction of identity is extended from the start by selecting a profile photo – creating an avatar.

Avatars, disembodied semiotic representations of selves, can range from real photos and symbols on social media to animations in gaming. In any case, the accessibility of postmodern high-tech tools inspires a significant element of imagination, fantasy, creativity, and artistry for everyday citizens that before was reserved only for the media. Postmodernism, more than ever, heightens our capacity to serve as actors playing parts in the privilege-centered theatre, cinema, dramas, and games of life.

Multiple and simultaneous roles and representations, often conflicting, can be tried out and played with in the digital much like a child playing with a Barbie doll. The early stages of postmodernism have wrestled with simple identity play fixed in entertainment, content consumption, and replication. Some noteworthy manifestations of postmodern play have been named by scholars interrogating serious play: “pastiche personality,” “strategic manipulator” (Gergen 1991, 149-150), “identity play” (Turkle 1995, 11-14), and “participatory culture” (Jenkins 2006, 2-4).

Early postmodern tendency, performing as a pastiche personality and strategic manipulator in identity play, has been to strategically observe, draw from, manipulate, construct, and present multiple contradictory representations of varying identities for personal advantage and privilege. Another early postmodern inclination involves a shift to a participatory culture of citizens that consume content and experiment creating content in a primarily entertainment and popular culture context such as fandom – fans participating in the continual development of plot-related content such as for Star Wars (Jenkins 2006, 135).

Postmodernism has undeniably extended a meaningful invitation to play, which digital citizens have embraced to date for identity and entertainment purposes, yet a call for serious play beckons. Serious play, intentional play employed as a digital citizenship skill, offers the potential to unlock a range of authentic original perspectives broadened beyond the inheritances from romanticism and modernism to enrich collective meaning making. The final section of the identity literacy pedagogy shared in this chapter engages serious play to aid citizens in discovering their authentic original perspective for digital citizenship.

Choose Your Own Adventure: Serious Play for Discovering Authentic Original Perspective

Your mystery visualized and externalized the cultural lenses or conditioning that influences identity. Now, the final journal activity will help you comprehend yourself beyond conditioning to identify and sincerely express your authentic original perspective on any given idea or relational situation. Authenticity, the quality that informs original thinking and authentic original perspective, refers to raw outlook outside of cultural conditioning and is a prerequisite for original thinking.

A parallel can be drawn between the deep inner self prioritized in romanticism, yet postmodern authenticity and original thinking strive to strip away the problematic remnants of romanticism and modernism, particularly codependent individual morality and absolute truths. Your “aha moment” in the mystery is the access point to your authenticity. What have your life experiences in relation to your mystery allowed you to understand personally? How could you express that unique perspective sincerely in order to push and pull on meaning making regarding the issues you care about? The following playful exercises may further open that access point to your authenticity.

Take some time to revisit and play with your list of “I am” statements. Add as many more “I am” statements as you can. Then make a list of statements describing your “best life” (Editors of O, The Oprah Magazine 2005, 8) – what would your fantasy life be like if you had no limitations. Then list your “joys” – what makes you happy? You can continue to make lists of anything you want here, but these prompts are a good start. The purpose is to explore yourself deeply beyond your conditioning. Exchange truth and purpose for perspective, play, and imagination. These lists should be casual, a relaxed and fun creative brainstorming activity.

Now analyze each statement and cross out any that are influenced by social institutions, binaries, or Ulmer’s four discourses. The goal here is to see what is left. Circle or highlight the statements that are left. This often is an iterative process where you cross statements out, but then add more statements and check them for influence.

Writing from directed prompts in a journal is one way to explore your authenticity, but creative writing, poetry, art, and anonymity are other tools for self exploration. Play with these tools to creatively and multimodally express “What am I really?” In other words, what’s left on your list of “I am” statements that isn’t influenced by social institutions?

Multimodal arts offer significant potential as a medium for the indirect expression of original ideas (Barthes 1977, 15-20; Ulmer 2003 43-44). Further, other scholars such as Turkle (1995, 11-14) found anonymity, removing your body, face, or name from expression, to be a significant tool for exploring or expressing non-mainstream facets of authenticity or potential identity. Anonymity fosters authenticity by offering a buffer, degree of freedom, and more safety from revoked privilege – judgment, harassment, bullying, etc.

Serious Play for Discovering Authentic Original Perspective Journal Prompts:

- 1) List more statements of “I am,” “Best Life,” and “Joys.”
- 2) Iteratively analyze and cross out any that are influenced by social institutions, binaries, or Ulmer’s four discourses.
- 3) Circle or highlight “What’s left?” Consider “What am I really?”
- 4) Play with authenticity by experimenting with creative writing, poetry, art, and anonymity.

Serious Play for Discovering Authentic Original Perspective Product:

- 5) Create an original piece of multimodal content - a social media post, meme, art, or poetry, for example, exploring the relationship between your authenticity and conditioning. Consider circling back to your avatar to make a meme or write an “I am” poem about “what’s left.” Highlighting a conflict you uncovered in your mystery or inventing new language may give you inspiration, and remember anonymity may provide safety as you explore and express your authenticity.



Figure 4: Serious play for discovering authentic original perspective product examples.

Serious Play for Discovering Authentic Original Perspective Multiliteracies:

Functional literacy

Semiotic literacy
 Identity literacy
 Critical literacy
 Rhetorical Literacy

Scholars have jointly continued to interrogate and deepen the understanding of the concept of multiliteracies in postmodern years (Cambre and Arshad-Ayaz 2017, 64-80; Knobel and Lankshear 2007, 219-225; Miller 2022, 199-230; Ntouvlis and Geenen 2023, 1193-1211; Selber 2004, 24-26; Selfe 1999, 9-10). This chapter has sought to explicate additional facets of multiliteracies in the age of social media. Functional, semiotic, identity, and critical literacies are facets comprising the ultimate goal of rhetorical literacy – ability to multimodally encode authentic original perspective creatively, artistically, and semiotically. To aid in further developing functional and rhetorical literacy skills, try searching for and experimenting with a “free content creator” or “free AI art generator” to bring creative ideas to life.

Closing Remarks from an Anonymous Postmodern Barbie

I am an anonymous Barbie. I am a postmodern pastiche personality and strategic manipulator. I receive and enjoy attention, comfort, and privilege for making myself look what is considered attractive for an American female and performing the role of a “good” traditional mother, wife, and family member. I simultaneously pursued the highest levels of education, scholarship, and career as a teacher. My mystory “aha moment” revealed contradictory and unrealistic narratives of traditional (patriarchal) family roles and girl power (female achievement through masculinity). I am married to an anonymous Ken. His mystory “aha moment” revealed a repetitive idealistic theme of “the heroic man,” yet one person carrying the weight of every family member’s personal responsibilities and all decisions is burdensome and creates an unequal hierarchical family structure.

Our mystories conveniently portrayed what it meant in our circles to be a “good” woman and a “good” man. Like many postmodern parents, we posted many perfectionist photos and videos of our “good” family and life on social media. Those multiple public visual digital representations of our constructed and relational identities were consumed, liked, reified, and amplified hegemonically by those in our networks.

However, our mystory realizations supplied us with a small glimpse into how unrealistic, inconsistent, and limiting those dominant narratives often are in comparison to how “real life” unfolds with messiness, chaos, and disparity. From that small peek into our fuller authenticities, a crack evolved to a fissure, from which we could begin to “unlearn” our conditioning to be only a “good” girl and boy (in a normative sense). Unlearning together with our children ultimately helped our immediate family relate more positively as interdependent allies. Together, we rebuilt a family culture of interdependent overlapping objectives, equality, personal responsibility, authenticity, and joy, which we model for our children and actively engage them in.

Romanticist and modernist lenses of an idealist objective singular truth in what is perceived as “good” and “true” slowly gave way to embracing previously obfuscated facets of our authenticities in the messiness, chaos, and disparities of postmodern life. While postmodernism is well underway, the remnants of romanticist and modernist offerings remain quite comforting to us. This anonymous Barbie confesses to subconsciously reverting to performing as a pastiche personality and strategic manipulator from time to time during these transitory times, but the goal is to consistently model sincere relational expression of authentic original perspective.

Your confessions won't be the same as mine, but your mystory revelation likely will center around objective or binary conceptions of "good" "truths" in your network. So I ask you this: do you consider yourself a "good" person like Barbie and Ken? What if I suggested performing "good" resulted in more harm than worth? More specifically, codependently upholding "good" "truths" can and often does subordinate, marginalize, oppress, limit, and stalemate solutions to the world's complex problems.

This chapter explored how privilege is awarded for performing what is deemed "good" and "true" by social institutions. In turn, the people most capable of performing cultural narratives of "good" behavior and "truth" hold great potential to either reify or disrupt power structures. This chapter served as an identity literacy guide; this process of defamiliarizing conditioning poises digital citizens to better model sincere relational expression of authentic original perspective, a purposeful interdependent (rather than codependent) act that disrupts power structures and more appropriately positions us all as interdependent allies for the overlapping objectives of collective meaning making, liberation, equality, and peace.

Three specific tactics for sincere relational expression of authentic original perspective for digital citizenship were modeled throughout this chapter:

- multiliteracies for uncovering and highlighting contradictions ("aha moments");
- resignifying, creating, and using new language; and
- embodied creativity, serious play, and incremental counter performances leveraging art and anonymity.

While our discussion has been social media oriented, these citizenship strategies have effect in both physical and digital spaces, which is why our bodies, physical and digital representations, are such effective canvases.

What I am hoping to inspire in you may seem daunting, but know this; the importance lies not so much in exactly what you communicate (no right/wrong binary), but rather in creatively relaying something, however slightly, different than the dominant narratives and binary choices (true/false, good/bad, etc). The central goal is to jam the hegemonic signal by lessening the amplification. In other words, impactful digital citizens move away from sole consumption and repetition of dominant messages in the form controlled by power structures. These playful, creative, and often artistic, incrementally different strategic expressions create space for more non-dualistic authentic original perspectives to be seen and heard to contribute to more equitable meaning making and solutions by lowering the volume of dominant messages.

Purpose and Passion

What a journey it is to peel back the layers of cultural conditioning, study yourself, and hone sincere relational expression of authentic original perspective with serious play for digital citizenship! The purpose and passion behind sharing this process, new language, and tools is to help alleviate the unnecessary pain of hegemony – control, codependence, judgment, and isolation. I've felt this pain myself and have witnessed and empathized with it in countless others. I've observed how the backlash manifests in different ways and outcomes, but ultimately it hurts us all – all genders, races, ethnicities, cultures, families, family members, ages, and communities. I hope you will come back to this process at different points of your life. Social construction and identity are parts of you that will often offer privilege and comfort, yet bring

discomfort at various stages of life too. This process is not only for digital citizenship; it is therapy. Each person who reclaims their innate power by fully discovering and embracing their authenticity and modeling sincere relational expression of their authentic original perspective helps heal families and communities, and increase freedom, equality, interdependence, flow, and peace.

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