

# Exploring Online Experiences of Young People in Rural Areas

**Fatimah Awan & David Gauntlett**

Research Fellow

Professor of Media  
and Communications



**University of Westminster**

IAMCR Conference  
18-22 July 2010



## Young people's creative understanding of their mediaworlds

- Year 10 students (age 14-15) from schools in Newcastle, Manchester, London, Southampton, Christchurch and Cumbria.
- Asked to create identity boxes using metaphors to express their identity and the place of media in their lives.



## Exploring methodologies

- Our previous work with creative methods had demonstrated the importance of:
  - Making an artefact
  - ... in a process involving *time* and *reflection*
  - ... which participants can subsequently explain and discuss



## Exploring methodologies

- Especially valuable aspects of the process:
  - Taking time
  - Making with the hands
  - Presenting something whole
  - Using metaphors



## Exploring methodologies

- Previous experience with Lego (construction bricks) . . .



## Examples of identity boxes



## Examples of identity boxes



## Examples of identity boxes





## Examples of identity boxes



## Alston, Cumbria



## Alston Cybermoor project

- Connect rural communities to the world wide web
  - Every household in Alston given a free PC and internet connection (limited period)
  - Offered practical training on how to use the internet
- Encourage more people to utilise the internet for public services
- Provide fast broadband internet connections to households
- Encourage people to acquire new skills through distance learning

## Alston Cybermoor project

The screenshot shows the Alston Cybermoor website. At the top left, it says "Alston Moor, Cumbria: England's Last Wilderness". To the right is the "my cyber moor" logo. Below the logo are two buttons: "Log in to your email" and "Log in to your account". A "STOP PRESS:" section is visible. The main content area has a "Cybermoor news" header with a search bar. A left sidebar contains navigation links: home, news, what's on, local directory, discussions, gallery, travel, market place, cybermoor, and contact us. The main news section features two articles: "Crafts for Christmas at Alston" dated Friday, 04 December 2009 08:26, and "Celebrating Alston Moor" dated Monday, 30 November 2009 12:35. The "Crafts for Christmas at Alston" article includes a photo of people in traditional costumes. A "sign up for our e-newsletter" button is present. At the bottom right, there is a "discussions" section and a logo that says "together we can improve the community".

## Findings

- Traditional media
  - Television functions as a tool for communication with family and friends
  - Television viewing seen as a passive activity
  - Low cinema attendance
  - Few magazines read, regarded as too costly
  - Books are seen as an indicator of intelligence
  - Music is a very popular activity and used to articulate own 'authentic' feelings, emotions and experiences

## Findings

- New media
  - Social networking websites used as a tool for communication with family and friends
  - Disengagement with the internet/computers:
    - Interviewer: So it sounds like you don't actually use the computer that much.*
    - Khloe: Not much, not really. I used to, like when I first got it I'd be on it like every night, all night, but the novelty's worn off, it's just boring now.*
  - Outdoor activities preferred
  - Create own social spaces and need to feel physical connection with others

## Findings

- Preservation of rural culture:

*Gerrard:* But some people will come out and, you know, and they'll come to the Dale and they'll state their views and they try to change our culture.

Like I think the ban on hunting is completely wrong, but people from inner cities, they just said 'oh, hunting's wrong because it's all inhumane', but it's *our* culture, why should we stop our culture?

And we don't tell them what to do in the cities. We don't get a say.

## Findings

- For many, media has little relevance in their lives:

*Interviewer:*

But does the media [have any relevance]//

*Gerrard:*

//erm, not really, not in my, not in my big world, not in my bigger picture, you know.



## Findings

- Connection problems and 'slowness':

*Interviewer:* Did you get one [computer]?

*Rowan:* Yeah, they're really rubbish ...

Yeah, well they are about four years old now but they're really rubbish. They're like the worst network ever because it just like constantly doesn't work.

## Findings

- Internet compounds feelings of isolation:

*Interviewer:* When you see things on the internet, like concerts in London or fashion shows, does it make you feel closer to it or do you feel more isolated?

*Danielle:* More isolated. Just like because there's nothing like that where we are, up like round here.

- Online identity is 'true self'
- Two different worlds

## In conclusion

- Not just about the issue of access, but about making young people understand *how* and *why* new media technologies are *relevant* to their lives.
- Academic research community and practitioners must consider how new media technologies can be used to improve the conditions of young people's lives.

## Further information

- [www.artlab.org.uk](http://www.artlab.org.uk)

University of Westminster  
Creative Visual Research on media and identities

**artlab**

**rae 2008**  
Research Excellence Framework  
University of Westminster  
ranked 21 for Arts and Social Sciences Research

**INTRODUCTION**

- The ArtLab uses creative and artistic activities as research tools. [Discover how the team operates](#)
- [The ArtLab in the News](#) - New videos from Richard Adams (Jan 2009)
- [Media in the Classroom](#) - New site & videos (Feb 2009)
- [Interdisciplinary Cultural Creativity & Social Change](#) - New videos available (Jan 2009)
- [ArtLab in the Studio](#) - Using creative and metaphorical methods (2009-10), with [Katie Galloway](#) (Nov 09)
- [Higher education: Collaboration with Practice and Lego](#) (Feb 2009) with [Liz West](#) and [Liz Jackson](#) (Oct 2009)
- [New Media in the Classroom](#) (2007-08)
- [Lego Serious Play](#) projects (updated July 2009)

**PROJECTS** **FEATURES** **PEOPLE** **CONTACT**

University of Westminster  
Creative Visual Research on media and identities

**artlab**

**HOME & NEW**  
**PROJECTS**  
**FEATURES**  
**PEOPLE**  
**CONTACT**

**FUNDED RESEARCH PROJECT (2008-2010)**

**Young people's creative understanding of their mediaworlds**

We have been awarded funding for a two-year project, which runs from September 2008 to August 2010, to develop and use new creative and metaphorical methods to explore how young people make sense of their complex mediaworlds.

**Project outline**  
Some info about the project

**About the process**  
Project diary including videos of work in progress

**Previous study with Lego and identities**  
This project partly builds on David Gauntlett's work with Lego

**Previous study with collage and young people**  
and partly builds on Fatimah Awan's work with collage

We are asking teenagers to make 'identity boxes' reflecting their identities and exploring the place of media in their lives.

In early 2009 we are conducting fieldwork at schools in Newcastle, Manchester, London, Southampton, Christchurch, and Cumbria.

Research Fellow on the project is [Dr Fatimah Awan](#).  
Principal Investigator is [Prof David Gauntlett](#).

Arts & Humanities Research Council  
The Arts and Humanities Research Council funds arts and humanities research in the UK.