

Social networks and social life

danah boyd'' is one of the world's leading experts in social media. She is a senior researcher at Microsoft Research and has studied the role that social network sites play in the lives of teenagers. For her PhD, she travelled around the USA for two years talking to young people about how they use social network sites. But what did she discover?

danah found out that when you decide to use social networks, you have to create your own online presence. This is your 'digital body'. People **accessorise** their digital body in an attempt to define themselves and often spend a lot of time making sure their online profiles reflect their real personalities.

The comments section or 'wall' is a key feature of social network sites, as this is where public conversations take place. Interaction on the wall can be vital in establishing and maintaining friendships. If someone writes 'Hi, what's up?' on your wall what they are actually saying is 'I'm thinking of you and I want you to publicly say that we are friends'. If the **response** is positive, the writer is confirming to the world: 'Yes, we are still friends and I'm thinking of you too.'

danah's research shows that young people usually use the online environment to interact with friends they already have. She considers hanging out online to be a valuable activity and a place to learn life skills. Most teenagers told her that they would prefer to spend time with their friends in real situations, but there are several reasons why **online socialising** is so popular. Many students have such busy schedules with school and organised activities that they have very little free time to spend with their friends. Sometimes their parents don't allow them to hang out with their friends in the evenings or at weekends as they worry about their safety. A third factor is that many people live too far away from their friends to be able to physically meet up frequently. Socialising online is one way to get around all of these problems.

danah is also studying people's visibility on the web and what their **digital footprints** look like. She asked teenagers questions about their privacy settings on social network sites and how they felt about being tagged in other people's photos. danah discovered that many were becoming aware of their online **visibility**. One girl talked about a situation where her mother became her friend on a social network and discovered that her daughter hadn't been doing her homework at her friend's house the previous Saturday as she thought. She had been at a party instead, and the photos were there for the world to see!

When teenagers get older and their groups of friends change, will their online habits change as well? Only time will tell, and if danah continues her research in this field she will surely be one of the first to find out.

danah boyd's name is legally lower case. She does not use capital letters in her name.

b 1.2 Read the text again and listen. Are the sentences right (✓), wrong (X) or doesn't say (-)?

1 .Danah did a lot of her research face-to-face.	Right(✓)	Wrong(✗)
2 .Most people try to reflect their personalities online.		
3. Teenagers mainly use social networks to make new friends.		
4. Many teachers believe social network sites are dangerous.		
5 .Most teenagers prefer communicating online to real situations.		
6 .Many parents in the USA don't allow their children to hang out with their friends in real		

life		
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