

Youth Culture Lesson
Finding Teachable Moments in Culture
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Putting on a Good Face(book)
Being Aware of Your Online 'Brand'

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What Happened:

Teens and young adults have no sense of privacy. That's what many people believe, anyway. With the notion of modesty supposedly fading in our Twitter-filled, hyper-confessional society, not as many people care who knows what they're saying or doing—all the time.

However, that's not altogether true. According to a new study from the Pew Internet & American Life Project, youth are actually far more careful about what they say or do online than their parents are.

"I have to present a public face that doesn't have the potential to hurt my image," says 21-year-old Marlene McManus, who scoured her Facebook page for any photos or comments that might hurt her during her ongoing job search. Teens and young adults looking for jobs this summer are aware that employers often check the social networking sites of prospective employees before hiring them, which makes any profane status updates or incriminating photos all the more risky.

About half of youth ages 18-29 have deleted comments others have added to their profiles—far more often in fact than folks ages 30-49 or 50-64. Seven of every 10 youth recently strengthened their social networking privacy settings—again, a rate far higher than their elders'.

About 28 percent of teens and young adults also say they "never" trust social networking sites such as Facebook or MySpace. Folks ages 50-64 were twice as likely to place their trust in these online hubs.

Experts say youth, who have been raised to be extraordinarily brand-conscious, also understand they have their own "brand" to protect, embodied by their name, image and reputation. "Increasingly, it's the advice that young people get from counselors and elsewhere," says Fred Stutzman, who founded the online identity management firm ClaimID.com: "'You need to have your own brand, and you have to watch that brand.'"

Youth also are more familiar with social networks' pros and cons. "Young adults in many ways have been forced to become experts in their own form of social revision," says Pew researcher Mary Madden.

Talk About It:

Do you have a profile on Facebook, MySpace or another social networking site? What have you posted there? Do your parents have access to it? Is there stuff on there you'd rather they didn't see?

Do you have or are you looking for a job? Do you know if any of your employers or prospective employers have checked your Facebook or MySpace profiles? Do you know of anyone who's been turned down for a job because of what they've posted online?

What is your "brand" or reputation? How do you see yourself? How do you think people see you? Do your friends see you differently than your parents do? How important is your reputation to you?

What the Bible Says:

"A good name is better than fine perfume ..." (Eccl. 7:1).

"A good name is more desirable than great riches, to be esteemed is better than silver or gold" (Prov. 22:1).

"As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:1-3).