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Analyzing an Online Game for Media Literacy:
My Pop Studio's Popstar Producer

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Analyzing an Online Game for Media Literacy:

My Pop Studio's Popstar Producer

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Abstract

My Pop Studio (www.mypopstudio.com) is an online game to teach "tween" girls (aged 9-14) media literacy skills in response to media, popular culture, and advertising messages. In an initial study of this website, this paper seeks to analyze user produced content in the Popstar Production section of the My Pop Studio Website. The study examines user's popstar constructions and postings on the message board. Among significant findings are trends in thin body type selection and the function of the message board as a chat room.

In today's rapidly changing technological society, girls are flooded by an array of media messages and imagery that serve as a socialization agent in shaping their values, beliefs, and identity. Media as a social influence has been argued as more powerful than the role of family, church, and school (Buckingham, 2003). Media contribute to girls' cognitive, social, and emotional development, spreading pervasive messages about femininity, body image, relationships, and health issues.

As a way to educate girls about the influence media have on their lives, educators, parents, advocacy groups, and the government are turning to media literacy. Media literacy is "the ability to access, analyze, evaluate and communicate messages in a wide variety of forms" (Aufderheide, 1993, p. xx) in which "a media literate person . . . can decode, analyze, and produce both print and electronic media" (Aufderheide, 1997, p. 79). Media literacy education includes both the ability to analyze media messages, but also the knowledge and skills to produce media messages. Incorporating media literacy curriculum in the United States has been a grassroots movement in K-12 schools and after-school programs.

Most media literacy curriculum is taught in the classroom, after-school programs, or occasionally in the home, but media literacy education aimed directly to kids through the medium of the Internet is a novel and innovative venture. My Pop Studio is the first known online interactive game to teach media literacy skills. The website (www.mypopstudio.com) was created by a team at the Media Education Lab at Temple University and launched in July of 2006. Created for the "tween" girl audience (ages 9-14), My Pop Studio is an engaging online multimedia experience that aims to strengthen the critical thinking skills of girls in response to media, popular culture and advertising messages (Hobbs, 2006). There are four modules, or "studios," within the website:

Music, TV, Magazines, and Digital. Each module engages girls in a series of games, quizzes, or re-mixing media activities that help users understand the constructed nature of media messages. The website aims to strengthen critical thinking skills through a play experience, as Jenkins (2006) notes, "My Pop Studio has a high entertainment quotient to attract kids while it is providing important learning opportunities" (Jenkins, quoted in Goodheart, 2006, p. 2).

Because My Pop Studio has just recently been completed and launched, there has been no evaluation of the site. Before conducting any formal analysis on whether My Pop Studio strengthens girls' media literacy skills, initial patterns of how girls are using the Website need to be examined. An excellent starting point to explore user interaction is the Popstar Producer section of My Pop Studio. The Popstar Producer is a section of the Music Studio module where girls get to create their own popstar and song. They also get to view the performances of other girls' popstars, rate them, and comment about them in a message board. Girls first start by choosing a value message, then create their popstar in a paper-doll activity where they can choose physical characteristics such as body shape, skin color, hair, and clothing. Girls then create a song by choosing lyrics, voice, beat, sound track, and music effects. Finally, girls can watch their popstar perform the song they created. In addition, girls can view popstars that others have created, rate them, and respond by submitting a posting to a message board.

This analysis seeks to explore how girls are using Popstar Producer. The focus is on two areas: the popstar productions and the message board. Three research questions guide the analysis:

1) What are the patterns of choices users make in creating their popstars?

2) What are patterns within the comments of the message board?

3) What can be inferred from the patterns found in popstar constructions and message board comments?

The analysis first covers the methods used to code and examine popstar constructions and message board comments. Then, the significant findings of popstar constructions are presented and the implications of these findings are discussed. Next, patterns found in the comments of the message board are shared, along with a discussion of the patterns and implications of the comments. Recommendations for My Pop Studio follow, and the paper concludes with directions for future research.

Method

This study combined a quantitative content analysis of the characteristics of popstars that users created and a qualitative textual analysis of the comments in the message board section. To examine popstar characteristics, a manifest content analysis was performed on all the popstars created over a one week period from September 30, 2006 to October 6, 2006. This convenience sample was chosen to take in consideration any fluctuation in traffic on the website during different points of a week (Reinard, 1998). An entire weekend was included in the sample to account for the possibility of subjects to be on the site more during hours outside of school. Monday, October 2, was Yom Kippur, which may have accounted for an atypical trend in website use as some children may have been home from school on that day. In addition, project timetable limitations prevented drawing from a larger sample or using a random sampling technique.

To begin, each variable the producer could use to create the popstar was given either a number or letter designation. Body type, hair style, clothing (including tops, bottoms, and outfits), and shoes were all given a number signifier to show what variable was used. The popstar's value message was also coded this way. If there was an option to select "none" as

in the outfits or makeup, a "0" designation was assigned. Multiple accessories that could be worn together (belt; microphone; beret; gold necklace; black necklace; glasses; sunglasses; acoustic guitar; electric guitar) were given a "0" if not selected and a "1" if selected. Hair color and skin color were designated with letter signifiers, and due to the numerous options of hair and skin colors, some very similar categories were collapsed into larger categories. For example, skin tone had five variables, but was placed into three categories of light, medium and dark. Hair color had six choices but was divided into four categories of blonde, brown, red, and black. Makeup was coded by either having makeup (1) or not having makeup (0) because of the difficulty in discerning and coding the subtleties of makeup style on each popstar. Music beats, vocal styles, and musical genres were also categorized into collapsed groups for the same reason.

Intercoder reliability was checked by having all four coders work together on the first day of data compilation to ensure everyone was coding in the same manner, and to provide a time to work out questions and concerns. Despite this training exercise, several coders experienced difficulties in distinguishing skin color, some musical genres, and body size as represented in certain clothing options. To address these difficulties, coders re-created some of the popstars in a new Popstar Producer window in order to compare with the data and discern what skin color or body type they were. However, problems coding for music genre could not fully be resolved. These difficulties with coding in these areas will be explained further in the popstar discussion section.

Next, the comments made on the message board section of the site were evaluated. A latent content analysis was used to examine the underlying meaning of the text (Esterberg, 2002), using interaction analysis based on Robert Bales's Interaction Process Analysis (Reinhard, 1998). During the same sample frame time period, each line of text was

logged exactly as it appeared on the website.   After the data set was complete, the coders discerned together topical categories that generated from the comments.   These categories include requests for interaction; responses; closing statements; gibberish (nonsensical words or letters); ambiguous meaning (comments that could not be placed or coded in context); critiques of popstars; critiques of popstar producers; praise of popstars; praise of popstar producers; discussion of pop culture; self-chat (commenting as if to oneself in a public manifestation of intrapersonal communication); comments about the website (such as ease of use, likes or dislikes); and policing comments provided by the filtering administrator. The coding of message board comments was processed together as a team so intercoder reliability would be maintained.   In this way, coders could also access knowledge of popular culture references to extract meaning from the producer's language. (Please note that throughout the results section, the term "user" or "producer" is used rather than "girls" since it is unknown whether users were actually girls.)

Finally, note the coding sheet used for the popstar analysis is in Appendix C.   Also included is a record of group work for this project, illustrating minutes for meetings (see Appendix A).   This can help one to assess the way the project was thought through and carried out, including the use of research and coding methods.

<div align="center">Results</div>

The results section is broken down into two parts: popstars and message board. Within each part, the results will be shared and a discussion and interpretation of the patterns is provided.

Popstar Characteristics

Popstar Producer users created a total of 77 different popstars during the sample period. The following section reports on all coding results found in the analysis. The results include total percentages of each variable in the entire data set. In addition, interpretations and trends will be addressed in a discussion section. This section looks at the most significant results of the analysis. specifically at the popstar's appearance (body type; makeup; hair color; hair style; clothing; shoes; accessories) and musical style (beat; vocal style; music genre; song title). Refer to Appendix D for a comprehensive summary of all the popstar data results.

Body type

One of the most significant findings was that 86% of popstar producers preferred the slimmest body type. Only 10% chose the average body type, and only 4% of chose the largest body type.

Makeup

Another significant finding appears in makeup category, with 79% of producers choosing to create popstars with makeup, and 21% of producers creating popstars without makeup. However, this category is problematic, as makeup is correlated with skin and eye color, which is discussed as a recommendation later in the report.

Accessories

Producers are free to choose as many accessories as they like, but some of them cannot be worn at the same time (e.g., glasses and sunglasses; belt and a guitar). The most significant accessory patterns were that 68% of the producers chose a microphone, whereas only 4% chose glasses. (See Appendix D for a complete summary of accessory statistics.)

Value messages

Thirty percent or producers chose the value message "I'm popular and I want you

to like me," whereas 27% chose "I'm all natural and up for excitement." Value messages "I'm independent and I'm the best" and "I'm playful and conflicted about relationships" were each chosen by 12% of the producers. Only 6% chose "I'm smart and I need freedom" and only 5% chose "I'm a little crazy and a little jealous." (See Chart C2 in Appendix C.)

User names

Many of the usernames consisted of a name and number combination (*molly2004; randy33; danny1011; lily55*). Some of the usernames were clearly based on popular performers or characters (*greenday; greendaygurl; .:lostprophets:.; wolverine*). It was not possible to create a useful coding system for usernames, as there are likely many names that are based on popular culture references with which the coders have little or no familiarity. There were several names that may have been male names: *randy33; danny1011; bobby; dannym; levi Allysa's boy*. There were also some names that may have problematic implications: *dwi* (may be initials or may stand for "driving while intoxicated"); *i_luv_devil*; and *Sexy Lexi*.

The most common theme in popstar names was a tendency for stand alone female first names (*Allison; Theresa; Ella; Isabel; Julia*). Only a few popstars had last names (*Kelly Steling; Kate Millo; hannah cyrus*). Many of the popstars had celebrity names (*JoJo; Tyra; Lil Bow Wow; Raven; Shakira*). Again, it was not possible to decode how many popstar names were based on current teen celebrities due to coders' limited knowledge of current teen icons, but imitation and intertextuality are not uncommon for children when creating their own texts (Buckingham, 2003). The creation of usernames could be seen as an expression of individuality, which will be discussed later in the patterns of message board comments.

Usage patterns

Sunday and Monday were the most popular days in this sample. Most users made two to three popstars, either on the same day or on alternate days. Only three users in our sample (*molly2004, Phee "Da" Bee,* and *randy33*) made more than three popstars over the course of the sample.

Discussion of Popstars

Patterns for body type

By far, the most significant finding was that users overwhelmingly chose the thinnest body type. (See Chart C1 in Appendix C.)   This is especially significant because the default body type was the average body, so producers made a conscious choice to change the body type from the default (average size) to the slimmest body type.   Perhaps this speaks to what the producers see as an ideal body type for pop stars. Producers could be mimicking what they see in the media, which consists of primarily a thin body type.   Studies show that appearance-related media consumption, particularly television, is correlated with body image satisfaction in young girls (Dohnt & Tiggean, 2006), which could account for an internalization of a thin body ideal (Harrison & Hefner, 2006).   Although the media can be seen as a dominating force in girls' lives, there are other factors to consider such as changes in family structure, extra-curricular activities, and education patterns (Buckingham, 2003).

Although the message board comment analysis has not yet been covered, it is significant to note that negative connotations with a larger body type was a topic of discussion, as in the following exchange:

candy1995@mypopstudio.com: 　　　Commenting about Dan:　your song wow your girl wow just a little chubby (10/4/06, 5:23 p.m.)

katieq: 　　　Commenting about Dan:　she doesn't look very chubby to me… (10/5/06, 10:18 a.m.)

molly2004:   U got something aginst chubby people   U…...!!

(10/5/06, 2:27 p.m.)

molly2004:   Na I' m kidding LLOLOO (10/5/06, 2:28 p.m.)

This excerpt from the message board helps to reinforce the negativity associated with the larger body type.   However, no postings ever mentioned that a star was too thin.

Patterns for appearance

For the most part, users showed no sizeable trends in appearance decisions aside from body type.   However, there are a few notable appearance patterns that warrant discussion.   Makeup was chosen very often by producers but it is difficult to determine if they chose makeup because they wear (or would like to wear) makeup, or if it correlates with an expectation that pop stars generally wear it. This category was also problematic due to the correlation of makeup with eye color as a built in choice of the Website, and will be discussed later in the limitations section.

Another significant finding was a noticeable aversion to short hair, which only one user chose. It is possible that this relates to current fashion trends.   It is also possible that short hair is perceived as too masculine for a female popstar.

Users overwhelmingly chose to equip their popstars with microphones, which may coincide with their image of a popstar requiring microphone technology.   The least popular accessory choice was glasses (not sunglasses).   Glasses may be correlated with a stereotype of the smart, nerdy individual that is possibly undesirable for popstars and tween girls alike.

We did not find significant trends in clothing choices, which indicates that users are comfortable experimenting with fashion choices. However, it is interesting some choices

were neglected entirely: blue jeans, and both choices of collared black and white shirt dresses. Thus, overall users seem to be making a wide variety of choices in terms of appearance, aside from body type and the aforementioned appearance choices.

Patterns for value messages

The most popular value messages were "I'm popular and I want you to like me" and "I'm all natural and up for excitement." The users possibly associate popularity with being a popstar. Additionally, they choice a value message that is seeking approval ("I want you to like me"). This choice could refer to tween girls being at an uncertain time in their lives where the desire for popularity and acceptance from peers is important.

The second most popular value message ("I'm all natural and up for excitement") appears to contain a contradiction. It was unclear how "all natural" relates to tween girls' perceptions of popstars. The desire for excitement, however, seems easily applicable to girls of that age group, who are constrained by rules, parents, teachers, and other forces beyond their control.

The least popular choices were "I'm a little crazy and a little jealous" and "I'm smart and I need freedom." The "crazy/jealous" value message has obvious negative connotations and perhaps users were reluctant to classify their popstars with loaded value choices. However, considering that so many users chose a value message about being "up for excitement," it is interesting that so few of them chose a value message about freedom. Perhaps users did not want to associate freedom and smart in the same value message. Or perhaps they do not see pop stars as very smart. This could potentially be correlated to the lack support for glasses as an accessory. Being considered smart (potentially "nerdy") may be an undesirable designation for tween girls.

It was difficult to draw conclusions about value messages without knowing whether

users are reflecting themselves in the popstars, or whether they are creating popstars based on their perceptions of what a popstar should (or should not) be. Without having any knowledge or contact with the users, it was not possible to discern their actual motivations. It was also not clear how much thought girls put into their value message choices, as it is significant to note that only one discussion exchange related to value messages on the message board was found: *preppy_princess693*, "Commenting about jessica: U'r somg did not match u'r message!" (10/03/06, 3:43 p.m.).

To sum up the discussion of the popstar body type, appearance, and value message, it is useful to draw from Buckingham (2003). He explains an example from a study of student produced media where he found teen girls parodied *Cosmopolitan* magazine by creating *Slutmopolitan* magazine, where they parodied the "sluttiness" of Cosmopolitan and its ads in various photos of themselves. At first it may seem problematic that girls were copying and emulating the slutty stereotype, however, Buckingham claims the meanings are not so clear. By allowing girls to play with the roles, however negative or stereotypical, it "permitted the girls to become those other people, or at least to recognize (and indulge) the 'otherness' in themselves" (p. 168). Thus, perhaps in Popstar Producer allows users a space to play with role and identity, where meanings cannot be fixed and users are permitted to "try on" a variety of roles though appearance, music, and value message. Media production, according to Buckingham (2003), may "provide a means for students to explore and reflect upon their changing positions in contemporary culture. It allows a space in which 'unspeakable' desires can be spoken and totalizing discourses transgressed and undermined" (p. 171-172).

On the other hand, the overwhelming choice of the thin body type and the aforementioned aspects of appearance, music, and value messages signals larger issues that

shape a user's willingness to play with identity.   While users created a variety of popstars, this variety had boundaries because users avoided choosing certain characteristics into their popstar identities.   Perhaps this limitation was because the popstars would be posted on the website and other users would be able to vote on them.   Or perhaps popstar producers are willing to go only so far in challenging media stereotypes, particularly about body image.   Buckingham (2003) warns against claiming that playing with positive and negative aspects of identity "empowers" students and offers them a "safe" space where a range of identity characteristics can be explored, because if students are not offered a chance to reflect on their choices, there is little opportunity for dialogue about it.   User postings on the message board, as will be explained, did serve in some ways as a dialogue about popstars, but it also served other purposes as well.

Message Board

There were 146 total message board comments during the sample frame.   On Sunday, there were 37 comments (25%), and Monday included 35 (24%). The fewest number of postings (8 comments, 5%) took place on Friday. The remaining days ranged from 14-20 comments per day.   Most of the comments over this period were requests for interaction with other users, or comments about other users' popstars, which was the original intent of the message board.   There was also a lesser trend of the message board as a means to discuss popular culture.

Requests for interaction

Forty-four percent of the comments were classified as requests for interaction, which means that users were soliciting the desire to chat or interact with other users, or to receive feedback on their popstars.   Below are examples of typical requests for interaction:

greenday: ARE YA THERE? (10/1/06,   5:33 p.m.)

magona:　　　　is any 1 here? (10/2/06, 2:26 p.m.)

singgal:　hay wazz up?　　(10/5/06, 3:02 p.m.)

kenna kutie:　　is anyone there? (10/5/06, 3:13 p.m.)

Some users wrote a more specific or detailed request for interaction, for example, *nelie* wrote: "hi im nelie and I whant to jon the club" (10/2/06, 11:29 p.m.). *New_Girl* wrote: "vote 4 me plz iam new iam the New_Girl." (10/06/06, 6:32 p.m.). Some of the requests for interaction touched upon possible real life connections. For example, *Lil Bow Wow* wrote "Commenting about tasha:　hey iam i think i know you if you go to W.P.S." and later: "Commenting about mia:　if u r to people i know u." (10/01/06, 12:29 a.m. and 12:32 a.m.).

 Comments about popstars

 There were almost twice as many compliments as there were criticisms directed towards popstars. There were 29 compliments and 15 criticisms. Compliments included:

sarah1: Commenting about Kate Millo: wow!!!! That was great!!!!!

   (9/30/06, 1:22 p.m.)

victoria: I LOKE YOUR POP STAR A LOT PHEE'DA'BEE!I LOVE HER

   SONG!!!!!!!!!!!!1 (10/2/06, 11:55 a.m.)

 On the other hand, several the criticisms seemed to be exceptionally harsh. For example:

olive oil: Commenting about Jazmin: I hate that it was so bad. I whant to herl.

   (9/30/06, 11:27 a.m.)

molly2004: Commenting about Mandy: what the fu#@ was that? (10/1/06, 2:08 p.m.)

shanxy: Commenting about Alex: ur concert suked royal Ii am dissapointed in the

way you made it totally suxxx (10/1/06, 6:48 p.m.)

shanxy: ur singer looks like a peice of turd (10/1/06, 6:49 p.m.)

Additionally, there were some criticisms that were couched in compliments. For example, *Mady Darling* wrote: "Commenting about Kate Millo: That was great. I thought but it would be better if the tune and the beay was different." (9/30/06, 2:51 p.m.). *Airbear2* wrote, "Commenting about Beu77uuuucryt*:* Nice job! Pretty good song! I rated it a 2 because I thought a ton of people made similar songs!" (10/01/06, 3:21 p.m.) These positive, constructive criticisms reflect the analysis and critical reflection synonymous with the media literacy goals hoped for by the creators of this website.

Popular culture comments

Seven comments made obvious pop culture references, including a conversation about reality show *So You Think You Can Dance* initiated by *greenday*. Two of the comments indicated that popstars were modeled after characters on *So You Think You Can Dance*. For example, *mrstraviswall* (a name based on *So You Think You Can Dance* character Travis Wall) wrote: "Commenting about *natalie:* i loved her on so you think you can dance and i love her here! great job." (10/01/06, 4:50 p.m.) At 4:52 pm, *greenday* wrote: "Commenting about donyelle: donyelle was fantabulous in so you think you can dance, and she was just as good here! i loved it." The next day, at 12:06 p.m., *greenday* wrote: "did anyone here watch so you think you can dance?" and three minutes later, "I LOVE TRAVIS WALL from so you think you can dance!" *greenday* did not receive a response and wrote again, three days later, "anyone here know who travis wall is?   I know some people do, but not many.:(he's real cute!" (10/25/06, 5:26 p.m.).

Discussion of Comments

Although the message board was designed to discuss pop stars, many of comments did not explicitly refer to the creation and execution of the pop stars. The majority of the posting on the message board expressed a desire for a community and an outlet for expression. It was found that the message board was used partly as a forum to comment on popstars, but partly as an Instant Messaging (IM) function. The Internet is commonly used by people of all ages to express themselves openly and to create a virtual community to link peers with similar interests and backgrounds that would otherwise be separated by geography (Weinberger, 2002).

Desire for community

Many comments were explicitly seeking interaction from other members in order to use the message board as a chat or instant messaging (IM) type of function. There were also a number of users utilizing self-chat and gibberish, which could signal an announcement of presence and a search for interaction with other users. This pattern links directly to the frequently chosen value message of "I'm popular and want you to like me" as many users appeared to be seeking out friendships and chatting through the message board. In addition, users talked about popular culture as a way to create a shared community based on similar media consumption and shared interests.

Outlet for expression

One way users expressed themselves was through their username, which could include popular culture references (as in *greenday*, *Lil Bow Wow*, *nelie*), expression of interests (*ShoppingManiac, karatekate92*), personality (*preppy_princess693*), or social status (*New_Girl*).

In addition to username expression, many of the positive comments about pop stars

on the site were one word answers (such as "awesome!" or "wow!") with limited elaboration. However, negative comments appeared to be at a much higher level of intensity. This could be interpreted as a way for users to express aggression or hostility. This is an anonymous forum that lacks face-to-face interaction, so users can express themselves without the repercussions of direct contact. With the exception of some policing from My Pop Studio's web content filterer *katieq* and the employment of a "naughty word filter," users are able to freely criticize each other in pretty much their own terms. The anonymity of the web allows for freer and more open expression among users because there is no fear of retribution or policing of ideas (Weinberger, 2002).

To explain the desire for community and outlet for expression patterns, it is useful to draw on Thiel's (2005) study of teen girls identity construction through Instant Messaging (IM). Thiel found that IM was more popular than using the phone for out-of-school communication and that IM provides a space for girls to shift from identity to identity to "better understand who she is and play with who she wants to be in the future" (p. 197). Perhaps that is why there were so many solicitations for communication on the message board—because users favor and desire this form of communication.

One of Thiel's (2005) findings was that IM served as a space free from adult supervision and interferences, so girls were free to experiment and challenge cultural expectations by using profanity and aggression, challenging the "perfect girl" notion of passive femininity, and exemplifying a new form of meanness. My Pop Studio could be serving as this kind of space—free from adult supervision and free from making one's identity explicit. This freedom allows users experimentation, nonconformity, and expression, even if it is mean. For instance, although some language was filtered out of Popstar Producer's message board, it is noted that some users experimented with

expressing profanity in other ways, such as *molly2004*'s, "Commenting about Mandy: what the fu#@ was that?" (10/1/06, 2:08 p.m.).   It is important to emphasize, however, that the majority of comments about popstars were positive in tone, so negativity and aggression was not the norm.

Thus, the message board provided a space to comment on and critique popstars, allowing users to try on the role of critic.   However, this space also served as an IM arena for users to communicate freely.

Limitations

Problems with coding and project constraints contribute to the limitations of this analysis.   Problems occurred with coding in a few categories. To begin, it was difficult to discern the difference between Body Type 1 (thin) and Body Type 2 (average), depending on the clothing choice. In addition, skin tone was occasionally difficult to code depending on hair color, clothing and makeup selections. Most of these issues were dealt with by re-creating the pop star and comparing to the user's popstar.   Music genre, on the other hand, was difficult to code due to the large variety of effects, styles, and beats, thus there was issues with coding consistency in music genre. As a result, this category was not analyzed for any relevant trends due to the lack of reliable data.

Additionally, there were problems with analyzing comments on the message board, particularly with decoding sarcasm. For example, in response to *Jamielyn Ton*, a popstar with a country vocal style,   *sarah1* wrote: "Commenting about Jamielyn Ton: yeah haa!!!" (9/30/06, 1:18 p.m.)   This comment may have been a genuine compliment, or it may have been sarcastic. Without asking *sarah1* directly, it is not possible to discern the actual tone.

Website policing was another factor that limited coding comments in the message board. My Pop Studio's web content filterer *katieq* would periodically delete postings that

were inappropriate or divulged too much information about the user and may create an unsafe environment. Also, *katieq* also occasionally made comments of her own on the message board. This filtering and policing could be seen as affecting the data set, and the inclusion of the eliminated data could have offered a more full comment analysis.

Finally, due to time constraints, there was a limited sample size of one week's worth of popstars and message board comments. Although this provides a snapshot of patterns and user trends, it is not possible to generalize findings from this data.

Recommendations for My Pop Studio

In addition to the results of this analysis, there were some limiting options to users in creating a range of different popstar identities. Within the popstar producer section, users were given limited options to portray ethnic characteristics (besides skin tone). For instance, if a popstar has light skin, blue eyes were the only option if a user wanted to choose no makeup. In addition, all facial features are quite Anglo Saxon. There are no options for variation in eye, nose or mouth shape. Also, the clothing options offered somewhat generic expression of fashion trends. One recommendation to the popstar producer section is to add more options for girls to create a wider variety of physical characteristics.

Recommendations for Future Research

Although this paper explored two major research areas: the creation process of pop stars and the subsequent interaction facilitated by the message board; it must be noted that future research is needed to fully capitalize on the significance of the relationship between My Pop Studio and the media literacy skills of the "tween" users of the site.

One element that should be explored in future research is a more extensive content analysis over a longer period of time. As previously discussed, this project had very strict time limitations and could not extrapolate generalizable results from such a limited sample. In order to fully make inferences about the development of pop stars and their characteristics, a more appropriate timetable for this type of research would be six months. In this way, other factors of use could be taken into account such as holidays, weekends, after school, before school, interference from other media, schoolwork, and new releases of all music genres.

Another pressing factor that should be addressed is the use of primary research (interviews, surveys, focus groups) to determine actual motivation for using the site. This research should be used to test research hypotheses. This data can also be utilized to compare researcher inferences with the thought processes of the users. This data would provide a better understanding of the users of My Pop Studio.

In order to continue to garner an understanding of the users, future researchers will need full access to the comments on the message board. As previously mentioned in the paper, My Pop Studio web administrator *katieq* removed pertinent pieces of data from the message board. Researchers were left with holes in the assessment of data, which could lead researchers to developing inaccurate patterns. With this information, future researchers will be able to further determine if users are utilizing the space for two primary reasons: 1) to either create a sense of community, or 2) to further enable self expression of the user.

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Appendix A

Record of Group Work

Group Meeting 10-1-06, 2:00-6:00pm

Bryan, Danielle, Katie, Kelly

Temple University, Media Education Lab

I. Kelly introduced group to background/history of My Pop Studio

II. Group members talked though the project, came up with ideas on how they should carry through with coding, writing, analyzing data, and sample frame.

III. Group decided on a sample frame (to fit into the constraints of the project time frame), and started looking at popstars from the first day of that frame. Popstars were examined to figure out all of the codes possible.

> -at the same time, Danielle started creating an excel sheet and correlating coding sheet. All of the codes were discerned and variables were created.
>
> -copies of a rough draft of a coding sheet was created from screen captures of the website so all group members could refer to it.
>
> -One by one, each pop star was analyzed and coded. Bryan, Katie, & Kelly observed the performance of each popstar, noting all the coding variables. Danielle entered in onto the data sheet the coding results.

IV. Group members discussed how the following week should proceed. Each day of the sampling frame was assigned to one person, who would be in charge of coding popstars for that day and recording the comments of the message board onto the excel sheet.

> -September 30 = already coded today by group
>
> -October 1 = Katie
>
> -October 2 = Danielle
>
> -October 3 = Bryan
>
> -October 4 & 5 = Kelly
>
> -October 7 = Bryan

Group members were in charge of coding for their assigned day and starting to find research and readings from class that were possibilities to include in writing the paper.

VI. Next meeting was scheduled for Sunday, 10-8, 2:00pm

Group Meeting 10-8-06, 2:00-6:30pm

Bryan, Danielle, Katie, Kelly

Temple University, Media Education Lab

I. Our data sheet is completed. Group discussed first impressions—things that stood out.

    A) Lots of "skinny" body types. This was a conscious choice because the popstar started on "average"—girls had to choose type 1.

    B) Skin tone –lots of light to medium, but saw little of dark tones

    C) Hair – not a lot of short hair types—not "feminine"? Not "popstar" quality?

II. Group Discussed Problems with Coding

    A) Music Genre—our categories of Pop, Rock, Alternative, and Hip Hop difficult to code—looking at the web design page, categories were based off of "pop" genre (

    B) Skin Tone (difficult to code medium compared to lighter dark in contrast with different hair color). Solution? Everyone had gone in and created a like star to match the star featured, to see if skin tones matched.

    C) Body Type (difficult to code in certain outfits such as the peasant shirt, or when holding a guitar).

III. Group tallied up the data and computed percentages out of the whole. Danielle sorted and reported numbers from the data sheet, Brian and Katie helped computer percentages and number fact checking, and Kelly recorded final results into one document.

IV. After figuring the data, patterns were highlighted:

1. skinny girls
2. tan/medium tone girls
3. most, 79%, choose makeup
4. shoes—white boots and ballet slippers dominated
5. Outfits: Approx 1/3 chose outfits over tops/bottoms
6. Approx 2/3 chose tops and bottoms (involved making more choices)?
7. Tops = blue midriff shirt and green tank top popular, 8% chose bra top—liked colors instead of top style? Most conservative (long sleeved) tops were in last place.
8. Bottoms = 14% chose black capris, 13% jean skirt, 12% cargo pants, 3% chose pink capris, 0% picked blue jeans
9. Outfits: 10% chose black & yellow dress, 0% picked "shirt dress"—conclude that skin tight outfits weren't popular.
10. Hair: 45% browns, 31% blonde, 16% black, few 8% red-heads
11. Value messages: Most popular: popular/like, natural/popular, versus Crazy/Jealous, & Smart—conclude—popularity and independence important issue for girls at this age, or in how they view construction of popstars. Crazy/jealous sounds negative? Smart—does not come in mind as a value message when thinking about popstar construction

-all natural message all chose wavy hair or up in pony tail.

V.   Group went through comments and read them over.   Comments were coded as a group based on an emerging theme system and group consensus.

VI.   Initial coding patterns:

1.   User *greenday*—lots of request for interaction, 29% of all comments

2.   Most comments on Sunday, during times before school, after school (not much during day)

VII.   After popstar data and comments were coded, we looked at the latest popstars on the site.   Found problematics with popstars "Crap" and "ugly-n-fat"—both darkest skinned, biggest body type, and blonde hair.   A form of flaming, or negative stereotyping?

VIII.   Assignment for the week: Write or detailed outline of various parts of the case study.

1.   Overview & Rationale (Kelly)

2.   Methods (Bryan)

3.   Results (Katie)

4.   Discussion (Danielle & Katie)

5.   Future Research/Recommendations (Danielle)

Kelly will compile all sections into one, start formatting for APA.

IX. Scheduled meeting for Thurs. 10/12, 4:30PM.   Will write together as a group.

Group Meeting 10-12-06, 4:30-10:00 p.m.

Bryan, Danielle, Katie, Kelly

Temple University, Media Education Lab

I.   Compiled different sections each individual was assigned to complete.

1.   Overview & Rationale (Kelly)

2.   Methods (Bryan)

3.   Results (Katie)

4.   Appendices and Charts (Danielle)

II.   Found themes in our reports and used them to form the discussion section of the paper. We worked together as a group to rewrite and make a coherent discussion section. These include:

1.   Body type

2.   Accessories

3.   Value messages

4.   Names

5.   Usage patterns

III.   We also discussed comments on the message board in the discussion
   1. Outlook for expression
   2. Desire for community
IV.   Discussed limitations in coding and recommendations for MyPopStudio.com.
V.   Scheduled meeting for Sunday 10/15/06 where we were assigned tasks to polish
   up designated sections.
   1. Additional research (Kelly)
   2. Research and filling gaps in sources (Bryan)
   3. Future Research (Danielle).
   4. General copy editing (Katie). Everyone is to send their work for editing to
      Katie by Saturday night in their specific color-coded font. Katie will send to
      Kelly for APA editing Sunday morning.

<u>Group Meeting 10-15-06, 11 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.</u>

Bryan, Danielle, Katie, Kelly

Temple University, Media Education Lab

I.   Printed out individual copies of our draft and individually edited them.
II.   Made corrections together as a group.
III.   Deleted any data from results that did not present any significant findings.
IV.   Assigned final tasks:
   1. Finishing appendices
   2. APA review
   3. Final conclusion.
   4. Final Print!

Appendix B

Popstar Producer Coding Terms and Coding Manual

B1

My Pop Studio Coding Terms

(Refer to Excel data sheet)

Column A – Date

Column B – Producer

Column C – Pop Star Name

Column D – Skin Tone

Light = L

Medium = M

Dark = D

Column E – Hair Color

Blonde = BL

Brown = BR

Red = RD

Black = BK

Column F – Hair Type (numbers from website print out 1-8)

Column G – Make-up

Yes = 1

No = 0

Column H – Shirts (numbers from website print out 1-10, 0 if none)

Column I – Bottoms (numbers from website print out 1-10, 0 if none)

Column J – Outfits (numbers from website print out 1-10, 0 if none)

Column K – Shoes (numbers from website print out 1-9)

Accessories (Columns L – T, place a 1 if the accessory if present, 0 if none)

Column L – Red Beret

Column M – Black Necklace

Column N – Acoustic Guitar

Column O – Electric Guitar

Column P – Glasses

Column Q – Sunglasses

Column R – Microphone

Column S – Gold Necklace

Column T – White Belt

Column U – Body Shape

> Skinny = 1
>
> Average = 2
>
> Chubby = 3

Column V – Beat

> Fast = 1
>
> Slow = 2

Column W – Vocal Styles

> Rock/Pop = RP
>
> Hip-Hop = H
>
> Country = C

Column X – Instrumental Genre

> Rock = R
>
> Pop = P
>
> Country = C
>
> Hip-Hop = H
>
> Alternative = A
>
> Ska = S

Column Y – Song Title (type in song title)

Column Z – Value Messages

> 1 = I'm smart and I need freedom
>
> 2 = I'm a little crazy and a little jealous
>
> 3 = I'm all natural and up for excitement
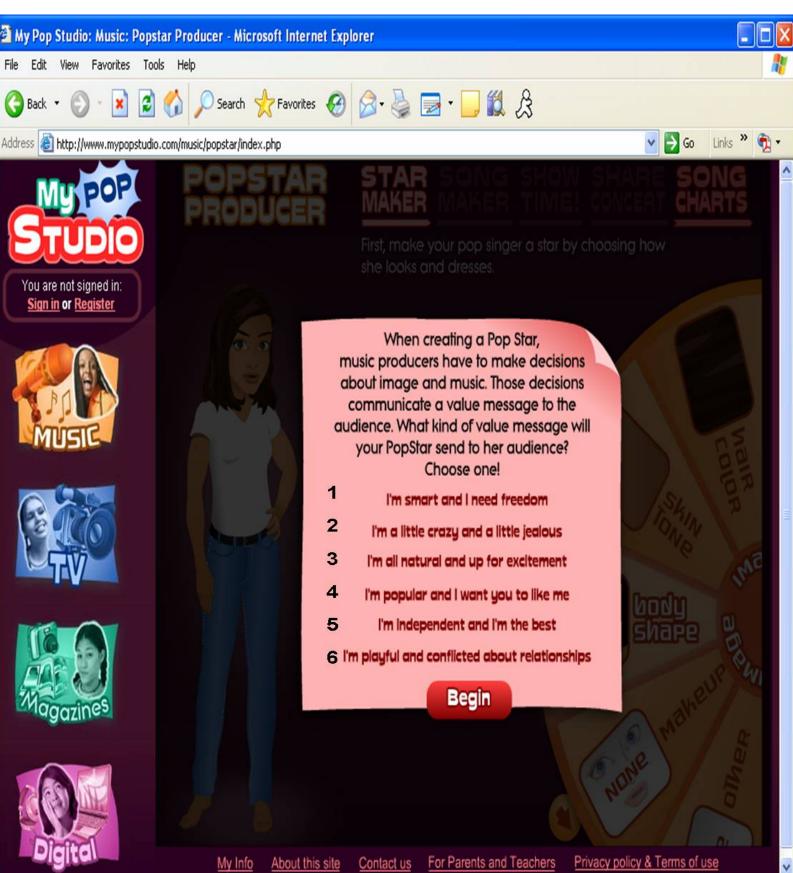>
> 4 = I'm popular and I want you to like me
>
> 5 = I'm independent and I'm the best
>
> 6 = I'm playful and conflicted about relationships

B2

My Pop Studio Coding Manual

My Pop Studio: Music: Popstar Producer - Microsoft Internet Explorer

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Address http://www.mypopstudio.com/music/popstar/index.php Go Links »

My POP STUDIO

You are not signed in:
Sign in or Register

MUSIC

TV

Magazines

Digital

POPSTAR PRODUCER
I'm smart and I need freedom.

STAR MAKER SONG MAKER SHOW TIME! SHARE CONCERT SONG CHARTS

First, make your pop singer a star by choosing how she looks and dresses.

L

M

D

NEXT: Make your Song

hair style
hair color
skin Tone
image
body shape
makeup

My Info   About this site   Contact us   For Parents and Teachers   Privacy policy & Terms of use

Done   Internet

My Pop Studio: Music: Popstar Producer - Microsoft Internet Explorer

File   Edit   View   Favorites   Tools   Help

Back   Search   Favorites

Address   http://www.mypopstudio.com/music/popstar/index.php   Go   Links

My POP STUDIO

You are not signed in:
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MUSIC

TV

Magazines

Digital

POPSTAR PRODUCER
I'm smart and I need freedom.

STAR MAKER   SONG MAKER   SHOW TIME!   SHARE CONCERT   SONG CHARTS

First, make your pop singer a star by choosing how she looks and dresses.

1   NONE

2   6

3   7

4   8

5   9

NONE   OTHER   MAKEUP

NONE   FOOT WEAR   IMAGE

NONE   OUTFITS   BOTTOMS
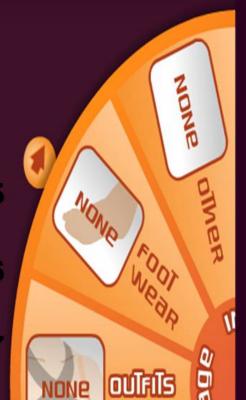
NEXT: Make your Song

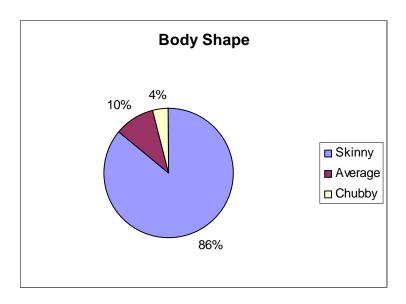My Info   About this site   Contact us   For Parents and Teachers   Privacy policy & Terms of use

Internet

Appendix C

C1

Body Shape

10% 4%

Skinny
Average
Chubby

86%

C2

Value Message

16%

30%

I'm popular and I want you to like me

I'm all natural and up for excitement

16%

I'm smart and I need freedom

5%

I'm a little crazy and a little jealous

6%

27%

I'm independent and I'm the best

I'm playful and conflicted about relationships

Appendix D

Comprehensive Summary of Popstar Data

Body Type	Skin Tone
Type 1 = 66 = 86%	Light = 25 = 33%
Type 2 = 8 = 10%	Med. = 45 = 58%
Type 3 = 3 = 4%	Dark = 7 = 9%

Hair Color	Hairstyle
BL = 24 = 31%	1 = 26 = 34%
BR = 35 = 45%	2 = 2 = 3%
RD = 6 = 8%	3 = 25 = 32%
BK = 12 = 16%	4 = 10 = 13%
	5 = 7 = 9%
	6 = 6 = 8%
	7 = 0 = 0%
	8 = 1 = 1%

Makeup	Tops
Y = 61 = 79%	0 = 24 = 31% (chose outfit)
N = 16 = 21%	1 = 4 = 5%
	2 = 6 = 8%
	3 = 11 = 14%
	4 = 2 = 3%
	5 = 4 = 5%
	6 = 5 = 7%
	7 = 2 = 3%
	8 = 4 = 5%
	9 = 6 = 8%
	10 = 9 = 12%

Bottoms	Outfit
0 = 24 = 31% (chose outfit)	0 = 53 = 69% (chose top and bottom instead)
1 = 0 = 0%	
2 = 5 =7%	1 = 1 = 1%

3 = 11 = 14%	2 = 1 = 1%
4 = 4 =5%	3 = 0 = 0%
5 = 5 = 7%	4 = 6 = 8%
6 = 4 = 5%	5 = 6 = 8%
7 = 9 = 12%	6 = 2 = 3%
8 = 2 = 3%	7 = 0 = 0%
9 = 10 = 13%	8 = 8 = 10%
10 = 3 = 4%	
Shoes	**Accessories (Y/N)**
1 = 2 = 3%	Red Beret = 7 = 9%
2 = 4 = 5%	Black Necklace = 34 = 44%
3 = 4 = 5%	Glasses = 3 = 4%
4 = 10 = 13%	Sunglasses = 10% = 13%
5 = 22 = 29%	Acoustic Guitar = 5 = 6%
6 = 4 = 5%	Gold Necklace = 16 = 21%
7 = 4 = 5%	Electric Guitar = 21 = 27%
8 = 4 = 5%	Microphone = 52 = 68%
9 = 23 = 30%	White Belt = 22 = 29%
Music Beat (1=Fast, 2 =Slow)	**Vocal Styles**
1 = 45 = 58%	C = 13 = 17%
2 =32 = 42%	H = 13 = 17%
	RP = 51 = 66%
Genre	**Song Title**
Alternative = 8 = 10%	Crushin' = 37 = 48%
Country = 2 = 2%	Breakout! = 28 = 36%
Hip Hop = 6 = 8%	Krunk it Up! = 12 = 16%
Rock = 16 = 21%	
Ska = 5 = 6%	
Pop = 40 = 52%	
Value Message	
1 = 5 = 6%	
2 = 4 = 5%	
3 = 21= 27%	

4 = 23 = 30%	
5 = 12 = 16%	
6 = 12 = 16%	