

sociology, medicine, and women's studies), suggest that the negative effects of the media on girls (along with other social effects) can potentially result in devastating outcomes (Kilbourne, 1999; Pipher, 1994; Wolf, 1991). Moreover, Cortés (2001) posits that the media do more than entertain and inform, the media persuade, package, and sell ideas:

More than simply providing information, media also influence viewer and reader structures for perceiving, receiving, thinking and remembering—the way people process and organize information and ideas as they construct their personal cultural knowledge. (p. 172)

Although there are a number of approaches to educating youth about how to understand the media, one of the key methods is media literacy. Media literacy is a tool that is used to analyze, evaluate, and create messages in a variety of forms from print to television/film and digital media, like the Internet (Silverblatt, 1995, 2001; Strasburger & Wilson, 2002; Aufderheide & Firestone, 1993; Thoman & Jolls, 2004). Today media literacy is acknowledged in various regions throughout the world, including the U.S. Although the educational approach is not supported universally, and has many critics, it has proved to be successful for educating many children as well as adults about the media. Media literacy is facilitated through several different avenues including school-based programs, community-supported programs, independent councils, and national organizations that advocate for greater media awareness and education.

Although media literacy curricula have been implemented in grades K-12 throughout all 50 states (Baker, 2000), there are vast differences in the approaches to teaching media literacy and the amount of emphasis and instruction each state has dedicated to the subject. Moreover, although there are media literacy curricula in place

throughout the nation, there is no guarantee that school-aged children are acquiring the media literacy skills necessary to thrive in a media-driven society. As a result, of the inconsistencies in media education, and the lack of school-based media literacy efficacies, and the lack of non-school-based outlets of media education, many youth are uneducated or unaware of media literacy and how to apply its education tools to their everyday experiences with the media. However, with the creation of fun, exploratory, didactic Web sites like My Pop Studio media education scholars, like Renee Hobbs and Sherri Hope Culver, hope to provide youth, especially girls, with interactive activities that promote media literacy.

Purpose & Rationale of the Study

The emphasis of this research was to investigate how My Pop Studio is working to educate girls about media literacy. My Pop Studio is an innovative Web site created by renowned media literacy scholars, Renee Hobbs and Sherri Hope Culver, that includes interactive games, activities, quizzes, and message boards that are intended to promote media literacy and help girls, (aged 9-14 years-old), become more critical of the media they are exposed to on a daily basis. Hobbs and Hope Culver use the theme of popular culture to attract girls to the site and teach them about popular culture and media literacy. My Pop Studio debuted in 2006 and estimates that approximately 1,000- 6,000 registered- members visit the site monthly. The Office of Women's Health (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services) fully funded the development of the site. The URL for My Pop Studio's online site is www.mypopstudio.com.

The first objective of this study will be to outline each My Pop Studio activity, discuss the media literacy concepts the activities illustrate, and examine how the My Pop Studio (MPS) content areas relate to the cognitive processes of attention and comprehension.

The second objective is to note and discuss a series of research questions related to how adolescent girls acquire and/or develop their media literacy comprehension via on-line initiatives on My Pop Studio. Each research question relates to Bandura's (1967) social learning theory and concepts.

In particular, this research project is bound by two core social learning concepts: attention and comprehension. The attention is essential for comprehension, and relates to how a person concentrates on the media content they select. Comprehension relates to a person's ability to understand and cultivate meaning from selected media content. In light of the social learning concepts attention and comprehension; the research questions that will shape the direction of the study include: 1) What understanding of media literacy do the participants' reveal before and after interacting on My Pop Studio?; 2) What are the attentional patterns of the girls as they interact with the My Pop Studio (MPS) site? What activities do the adolescent girls' attend to and favor most and least; and how, if at all, do the participants attribute their media literacy learning to these activities?; 3) What comprehension of the material on My Pop Studio (MPS) is shown by the girls? What, if anything, is confusing? Does preference relate to comprehension? How, if at all, are their activity preferences indicative of their levels of comprehension?; 4) How, if at all, do the participants' comprehension and attention levels relate to the participants' acquisition of the central objectives or media literacy goals addressed through the My Pop Studio activities?

In order to guide the site analysis, the researcher will apply the media literacy concepts from both the Center for Media Literacy, and the primary and secondary media literacy learning outcomes from My Pop Studio Web site.

The Center for Media Literacy (CML) concepts were used in this study because they serve as standard media literacy concepts that are recognized by media literacy scholars and media education organizations nationwide. The CML concepts include the following:

- 1) Concept #1: All messages are ‘constructed’;
- 2) Concept #2: Media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules;
- 3) Concept #3: Different people experience the same media messages differently;
- 4) Concept #4: Media have embedded values and points of view;
- 5) Concept #5: Most media messages are organized to gain profit and/or power. (Center for Media Literacy, 2003, 2005)

The Center for Media Literacy (CML) pairs each concept with an abbreviated keyword to identify each objective. Furthermore, the following keywords correspond to the aforementioned Center for Media (CML) concepts: 1) CML Keyword for concept one: *constructedness*; 2) CML Keyword for concept two: *format*; 3) CML Keyword for concept three: *audience*; 4) CML Keyword for concept four: *content*; 5) CML Keyword for concept five: *purpose*. In addition to the CML’s core media literacy concepts the researcher also discussed the learning outcomes (related to media literacy) that the My Pop Studio authors’ provided for each of the sections (music, television, magazine, and digital).

In addition to the CML concepts, the My Pop Studio media literacy learning outcomes were discerned by the researcher, (by comparing the CML concepts to the My Pop Studio learning objective to measure for consistency), to examine how the site activities demonstrate the specified media literacy learning outcomes. The media literacy learning outcomes for each My Pop Studio content area, (music, TV, magazine, and digital), are divided by the different types of media.

For the music section, the media literacy learning outcomes were: 1) to recognize that media messages may present ideas that glamorize harmful behaviors, such as substance abuse; 2) to understand that media messages help create and elicit a wide range of moods, feelings, and emotions for audience members; 3) to understand the economic value of “popularity” in the media marketplace and how music is used to sell products; 4) to understand that media producers are responsible for making different decisions about music production, how to construct media messages, and how to develop the artist’s image.

In the television section, the My Pop Studio media literacy learning objectives were: 1) to recognize that people make media messages with specific goals and intentions in mind; 2) to understand that television shows, including reality programming, are constructed with intentional editing to tell a story; 3) to learn about how celebrity culture glamorizes traits and qualities that are different from traits valued in real life; to recognize that youth have the power to make choices about their media diet; and 4) to recognize how media messages are distorted to depict social relationships that are often unrealistic.

For the magazine section, learning outcomes were: 1) to recognize that fashion magazines and advertising create unrealistic, unhealthy, and impossible ideals; to understand how celebrities image is constructed through the media; 2) to understand that print media often present conflicting messages (especially about health, food, and nutrition) that are not true or accurate; and 3) to understand how to assess the credibility and authenticity of media messages.

Finally, for the digital section, the media literacy learning goal was for girls to recognize that youth have the power to make effective choices about their online media consumption behavior.

Although, the researcher realizes that one of the criticisms of this body of research is its descriptive nature, the researcher believes that this line of research will be beneficial to the site directors, who are continuing to improve My Pop Studio; the developers of other divergent online girl-centered media education programs, who are interested in advancing their media literacy enrichment efforts through observation of current initiatives; and growing body of authors, such as Mary Celeste Kearney (2006), who continue to write extensively about the development of girls' media education programs in the United States.

The research project will identify and address the aforementioned research questions; examine how the processes of comprehension and attention affect the participants' first visit to the site, as related to the My Pop Studio activities; and pair site activities with Center for Media Literacy concepts and the My Pop Studio learning outcomes.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Media Literacy Background & Development

Media literacy as a formal body of scholarship is defined within the context of broad parameters (Hobbs, 1996). While many scholars agree that media literacy has several unifying concepts there remains contention about what direction the loosely sketched media literacy movement is headed in the future, especially given the movements' perplexed historical development in the U.S. (Silverblatt & Enright Eliceiri, 1997; Brown, 2000; Kubey 2003, 2004; Thoman, 1999; Hart, 1998).

The development and origins of media literacy and education in the U.S. reflect a relatively short history (Considine, 1995, 2002). However, in a larger global context media literacy's foundations were developed throughout the world, (particularly in the Scandinavian countries, England, and Australia), decades before many American scholars began to take notice of its educational value and potential (Considine, 2002). The two components of media literacy, media and literacy, are important to recognize as both coupled and separate terms to understand the historical development of the movement. Literacy, as a basic principle, is the ability to use language to communicate verbally or through written texts (Oxford Dictionary, 2004; Straburger & Wilson, 2002). However, over time literacy has come to encompass a broader range of collective literacies, such as computer and information literacy, multimedia literacy, visual literacy, and health literacy (Christ & Potter, 1998; Considine, 2002).

Moreover, The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) adopted the definition of literacy as:

[...] the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts.

Literacy involves a continuum of learning enabling an individual to achieve his or her goals, develop his or her knowledge and potentials, and to participate fully in the community and wider society." (LAMP, 2004, p. 2)

While the general definition of literacy, (in accordance with skills such as language comprehension, reading, and writing), has an extensive historical presence dating back thousands of years Before the Common Era (BCE.); our present literacy movement requires comprehension and scrutiny of a greater range of texts.

Today, newer forms of mass communication include media such as the modern computer, the Internet, television, film, radio, and traditional print media such as magazines, newspapers, and books. The growing multitude of media exemplifies the growing need for literacy regarding the diverse array of emerging media (Buckingham, 2003; Tyner, 1998; Frechette, 2002; Alvermann, 2002). One of the major events that led toward a more affirmed media literacy movement was the Aspen Institute's 1992 National Leadership Conference on Media Literacy. In fact, it was during this critical meeting that 25 of the country's most prominent media literacy scholars were able to collaborate and develop a consensus about media literacy's emerging definition(s), basic principles, and foundational concepts (Aufderheide & Firestone, 1993). As a result of this intellectual gathering media literacy educators were able to generate, compile, and

document media literacy concepts and principles that are still widely used and routinely referenced today.

Although media literacy is expressed in multiple ways, notable scholars such as Hobbs (2003), Thoman & Jolls (2004), Kubey (1997) and Considine (2002) comply with the idea that a significant part of becoming media literate relates to an individual's ability to proficiently, "decode, evaluate, analyze, and produce both print and electronic media" (Aufderheide & Firestone, 1993).

According to Hobbs (2002) media literacy addresses a broad range of objectives and ties into a variety of themes and subjects that reach beyond the tradition goals to improve "reasoning and communication skills" (p. 19). Many media literacy educators use their work to address subjects relating to race, class, and gender (Lewis & Jhally, 1998); confront issues concerning public policy (Carnes, 1996), civic development (Kubey, 2003), democracy and citizenship (Lewis & Jhally, 1998; Masterman, 1997; Davis, 1992; Considine, 2002); or to advocate for greater awareness concerning adolescent substance abuse or violence prevention (Thoman, 1999; Kumar, 1992).

Although there dozens of other objectives and goals media literacy educators select as topics of discussion, (under the umbrella of media education and literacy), there are also several branches within media literacy. For instance, television literacy, an abandoned term briefly used to identify media literacy in its early stages (Anderson, 1980).

Furthermore, visual literacy (Metalinos, 1994), which was originally addressed as a misnomer for media literacy, now represents literate individuals who are able to assess visual media information (Zettl, 1998). Last, there is information literacy, which relates to the developmental training of one's personal information infrastructures and the

process of developing one's "characteristic expertise" (Marchionini, 1995, p. 31) through cognitive information seeking (Marchionini, 1995).

While some scholars conceive media literacy as a cognitive developmental process (Potter, 2000; Sinatra, 1986; Gross, 1973; Fiske, 1987; Carey, 1988) others characterize it as a necessary skill set (Thoman, 2000) or a conscious raising stratagem for a greater democratic citizenry (Lewis & Jhally, 1998). One of the major emphases of media literacy is to promote the cultivation of analytical skills in hope of inciting a more critically aware and democratic citizenry (Masterman, 1997; Lewis & Jhally, 1998). Moreover, Lewis & Jhally (1998) suggest that, "the goal of media literacy is to help people become sophisticated citizens rather than sophisticated consumers" (p.109); in this manner, the expectation is to develop a rationale for understanding the influence and of media production as constructs of larger institutional, social, political, and economic structures. While several scholars assert that the major focus media literacy should be building a more informed citizenry (Lewis & Jhally, 1998), other scholars respond that media literacy should serve other interests such as building self-esteem (Piran, Levine, & Irving, 1999; 2000) or promoting health and wellness as a primary goal.

Although there are existing discrepancies within the media literacy camp about media literacy, (regarding disagreements on some the core media literacy principles and definitions (Hobbs, 1998; Aufderheide & Firestone, 1993), educators frequently concur that there are some fundamental concepts that apply to all media. The media staple media literacy concepts include the following:

Media are constructed and construct reality, media have commercial implications, media have ideological and political implications, form and content are related in

each medium, each of which has a unique aesthetic, codes and conventions, and receivers negotiate meaning”(Aufderheide & Firestone, 1993).

In addition to the aforementioned core media literacy principles, scholars also cite four critical skills that promote independent decision making, problem solving, effective communication skills, and an inquisitive and continual attitude toward life long learning; they are they are abilities to access, analyze, evaluate, and create media messages and information (The Center for Media Literacy, 2003, 2005; Considine, 2002).

Each media literacy skill purports an essential tool with a specific goal. Moreover, the concept of access refers to deciphering and decoding messages to extract and gather meaningful information and make sense of the messages. The analyze component involves contextualizing the message by examining facets of the message’s design, such as the sequence, form, and theme. For the evaluate skill learners use their own personal experiences and knowledge of the world to assess the authenticity, quality, and validity of the messages. Last, the create skill encourages learners develop their own production expertise by actively creating messages and learning the techniques of media communication. Fluency regarding the key media literacy skills and the core media concepts allows learners to establish a foundation which that they can draw from critically process the media information they are bombarded by on a daily basis. Although there are alternate goals, concepts, and principles supplied and supported by various media literacy advocates, scholars, and programs the noted core concepts are generally accepted as standard in media literacy communities across nation. Beyond the concepts and goals of media literacy a detailed outline of the movement’s progression is important to develop greater understanding media literacy.

The media literacy movement primarily developed during the late 1970s and early 1980s when it experienced considerable growth and participation (Alvermann & Hagood, 2000). Although the general consensus is that the U.S. media literacy framework grew out the 1970s, researchers Heins & Cho (2003) assert that a group of educators were applying, what is currently described as, media literacy skills as early as the 1930s in the U.S.:

A group of English teachers, working in cooperation with the pioneers of public radio, founded the Wisconsin Association for Better Broadcasting.

They circulated a list of “good” radio programs, along with “helps” to increase listeners’ “awareness, critical evaluation, and appreciation.” In 1953, this group became the American Council for Better Broadcasts. In the early 1960s, it drafted a basic syllabus for analyzing TV shows and conducted summer workshops in curricular development. (p. 7)

While the fact remains that the media literacy movement largely grew out of the 1970s and 1980s the story of the development of the American Council for Better Broadcasts (ACBB) evidences the presence of media literacy and education concepts in earlier times. During the 1970s the sheer volume of research developed on the subject grew as well as the actual “nature of the topics investigated” (Alvermann & Hagood, 2000, p. 195). Furthermore, during this period grassroots media literacy and education organizations/publications began to spring up across the nation (Silverblatt & Enright Eliceiri, 1997). Despite media literacy’s promising beginning, the movement experienced stagnation during the 80s as a result of a “shift in the focus of American education toward a ‘return to the basics’” (Silverblatt & Enright Eliceiri, 1997, p. 189; Hein & Cho, 2003)

ideology. Although the substantial decrease in funding and support in education system stunted the progress of media literacy education, the movement regained momentum by the beginning of the 1990s for several critical reasons. While there are several speculations about why the media literacy movement regained strength in the 90s, Silverblatt & Enright Eliceiri (1997) detail four specific conclusions from their own observations and experiences:

- 1) the increasing pervasiveness of the media made media literacy more of a national issue; 2) there was increased communication with international scholars and media literacy scholars and activists; 3) a national network of media literacy educators and activists developed; and 4) teaching resources and methodologies became available. (189)

The fluid movement in the 90s allowed the media literacy movement to reach new heights within a more formal educational structure. One of the highlights of the decade resulted from the Media Commission of the National Council of Teachers of English's (NCTE) agreement to outline and document a series of media education recommendations (that were later applied to build some of formal tenets of media education in our current school systems) (Silverblatt & Enright Eliceiri, 1997). Following the media leadership conventions in 1991 and 1992 (at NCTE and Aspen Institute conferences), prominent media literacy scholar, Renee Hobbs, along with 100 other media literacy advocates, educators, and professionals gathered to further "discuss issues in media literacy, to design curriculum, and develop implementation plans for integrating media literacy concepts into existing curricula" (Silverblatt & Enright Eliceiri, 1997, p. 191). Currently, every state in the U.S. has a media literacy initiative in place (Kubey,

2004). Although the media literacy standards differ according to state, all 50 locations share a commonality in one central area of their education frameworks, the English language and communication arts element (Kubey & Baker, 1999). While there is 100% confirmation for the English language and communication arts element in all states (Kubey, 2004) health and consumer skills follow with 94% implementation; and social studies and history trail behind with 72% implementation rate (Baker, 2000). Among the states with the most comprehensive media literacy initiatives New Mexico, Minnesota, California and Massachusetts have demonstrated the highest achievement in media literacy education (Silverblatt & Enright Eliceiri, 1997; Hobbs, 2003).

Beyond the school education landscape a series of media literacy organizations also offer community services, programs, and national publications. Some of the major organizations include: The Nation Telemedia Council (NTC), The Association for Media Literacy, The New Mexico Literacy Project (NMLP), Center for Media Literacy (CML), Action Coalition for Media Education (ACME), The National Alliance for Media Education (NAME), Citizens for Media Literacy (CML). While the majority of the aforementioned organizations were established in the early 1990s; two groups serve as outliers, The National Telemedia Council, which is the oldest U.S. media literacy organization (founded in 1930) and The Center for Media Literacy (CML) which began in 1989 as an extension of the Media & Values publication, which was first issued in 1977 (Heins & Cho, 2003; The Center for Media Literacy, 2007). As media literacy continues to grow, as a national effort, more organizations, educational policies and initiatives, and innovative programs are beginning cultivated to address the need from more awareness about media literacy and media education.

Similar to the efforts of the ACBB, media literacy was initially viewed as a precursor “for teaching children about media—how advertising works or how to analyze the nightly news telecast” (Thoman & Jolls, 2004). However, as the movement evolved academicians began to address media literacy and education in more complex ways (Thoman & Jolls, 2004). In particular media scholar, Tyner (1998), views the current media literacy model as more expansive and innovative: “media literacy expands literacy to include reading and writing through the use of new and emerging communication tools. It is learning that demands the critical, independent and creative use of information” (196). Moreover, this literacy expansion is accelerating as the body of media texts continues to grow. In fact, today the media literacy discussion embraces a wide range of topics that were virtually non-existent two decades ago. This newer volume of media literacy studies involves the critical analysis of new media, digital media, and online literacies (Andersen, 2002; Tyner, 1998; Frechette, 2002; Alvermann, 2002).

While there are several notable approaches to media literacy two of the most prominent approaches in the movement are the cultural studies/contextual perspective and inoculatory/textual perspective (Kubey, 1998; Lewis & Jhally, 1998). The inoculatory and cultural studies approaches have both sustained a presence as a part of U.S. media literacy education process. Moreover, one the main attributes of cultural studies perspective is that it focuses on “... unifying concerns about representation with the purpose of ‘denaturalizing’ the media” (Kubey, 1998, p. 64). Consequently, the cultural studies/contextual approach reflect a more diverse and “student-centered” model, which is designed to promote a more autonomous, production-oriented critical thinking process. In contrast, the inoculation/textual approach aims to support a protectionist view

of the media, much like an intervention plan to protect one from the potential harms of the media:

It was from the outset, a paternalistic, defensive movement whose function was to introduce popular forms into the classroom only to dismiss them as commercial, manipulative, and derivatives... Media education was, thus, in its earliest manifestation education against media. (Masterman, 1997, p.64)

The textual/inoculation perspective primarily focuses on the reading and comprehension of media texts. While a firm understanding of textual analysis is valuable to media literacy, Lewis & Jhally (1998) refute the textual approaches' narrow and limited concentration solely on texts. Furthermore, Lewis & Jhally's (1998) recommendation is to also be critical of the production elements of media by posing informed questions that address who the content producers are, why the content was produced, as well as the circumstances of the production process, itself. While there are several other media approaches that ground the media literacy movement the cultural studies and inoculation paradigms reflect two of the central media literacy approaches.

In addition to debates about the various media literacy approaches, the issue of media literacy in contrast to media education is also a widely discussed topic. While some scholars chose to address media literacy and media education as synonymous terms (Sholle & Denski, 1994) many others scholars have opted to discuss the two terms separately (Buckingham, 2003; Kubey, 1998; Hobbs, 1998; Feuerstein, 1999). Moreover, media education and literacy separatist such as Buckingham (2003) and the Action Coalition for Media Education (ACME) (2006) describe the distinctions between the two terms as follows:

Media education... is the process of teaching and learning about media; media literacy is the outcome- the knowledge and skills the learners acquire.”

(Buckingham, 2003, p. 4)

Media education is an educational process/pedagogy designed to help individuals gain the knowledge and skills needed to access, analyze, interpret, and create media—to help them become "media literate." Media literacy education is a natural extension of "text literacy," but goes far beyond the skill of reading and writing text. In an age when most people get most of their information visually—through television, film, computers, video, etc—citizens need to know how to think critically about what they see and hear, not just what they read, and feel encouraged to engage our media culture as citizens and media producers, not just as media consumers. (Action Coalition for Media Education, 2006)

Although the definitions of the terms reflect different processes, they complement each other which such close proximity that some authors equate them as equals. In the U.S. media literacy scholars typically use less discretion distinguishing the terms.

However, abroad, particularly in European nations, media education advocates and academicians maintain a unique historical allegiance to the term media education. The divide between the phrases is primarily a conceptual issue (Kubey, 1998). However, it is one topic that serves as another debate among media literacy writers.

In recent times media literacy has experienced substantial growth since its inception in the early 1970s. Media literacy has been sought with a greater urgency in last decade primarily because there is a heightened sensitivity to indecency and censorship issues in our media landscape (Considine, 2003). Moreover, recent incidents of youth

violence (related to the media's supposed influence on behavior) have encouraged parents, educators, policy makers, and other civic officials to become increasingly aware and concerned about the influences of media on children and youth (McBrien, 1999; Wehmeyer, 2000). Currently, The Kaiser Family Foundation (2005) estimates that youth's daily media exposure exceeds eight hours and has steadily increased over the past five years. While scholars generally discuss issues of violence in the context of boy culture (Katz, 1999), adolescent girls also have social and health related concerns that more progressively affect their lives (Wolf, 2004; Kilbourne, 1999; Pipher, 1994). While all citizens interact with media of some kind on a day basis it is inherently important that youth begin to sharpen and build their critical thinking and media literacy skills, (at early ages), (Kubey, 2002) through academic instruction, family interactions, and individual navigation. As increasing numbers of youth continue to use newer media it will also become important for educator to use practical and structure measure to educate about media literacy and learn from youth's behavior with media. Moreover, with interactive media literacy sites like Hobbs and Hope Culver's My Pop Studio (2006) scholars are able to address specific media literacy curricula to cater to the needs of female youth audiences.

Adolescent Girls Media Use

Adolescent girls' ages 10-14 years-old represent a population of over 10 million individuals (U.S. Census, 2005). In recent years girls have become one of the leading groups of Internet and Web site users (Gross, 2004). In fact, girls out-number boys in use of e-mail, instant messaging, online chatting, and message board correspondence (National School Boards Foundation, 2005; Raphael, Bachen, Lynn, Baldwin-Philippi, &

McKee, 2006). According to Rickert & Sacharow (2000) the number of girls (12-17 years-old) using the Internet grew exponentially 125 percent within the course of one year (during the years 1999 to 2000). Girls' level of activity and interest in typically male-dominated cyberspace activities such as online computer gaming and Web site production have also experienced influx in recent years (Mazzarella, 2005). As girls begin to delve into digital media activities that have been previous deemed male-oriented, such as computer gaming and Web site creation (Subrahmanyam, Greenfield, Kraut, & Gross, 2001), girls, like their male counterparts, will need to be equipped with the media literacy tools necessary to interpret messages disseminated by new, diverse media.

Girl-Centered Media Literacy Web sites

The first formal media literacy program was developed by media pioneer and expert, Marshall McLuhan in 1959 (Kearney, 2006, p. 96). At the close of the 1950s McLuhan proposed a media literacy curriculum to educate high school student about the influence of television messages. Soon after McLuhan produced the first formal media education program in Canada, scholars in the U.S. began to vie for media literacy programs in the states regarding television's effects on children (Kearney, 2006).

There are several online media literacy sites that provide girls with resources about media literacy (www.mediaandwomen.com, www.girlsinc.org, and www.bygirlsforgirl.org); however, there are few sites that actually promote learning through play with games, quizzes, and other interactive activities, like My Pop Studio. The majority of the media literacy sites for girls include extensive resource pages with Web site links, articles, books, and media facts. For instance, the Girls, Women, + Media

Project (www.mediaandwomen.com), includes a comprehensive list of resources that provide site visitors with information about topics such as children's media use and media and popular culture. While information about media literacy is helpful for girls' acquisition of media literacy skills, Kearney (2006) suggest that the methods and curricula that several organizations use to teach media literacy, "reproduce the problematic notion that realism is the most progress aesthetic strategy" (93). In this way, Kearney (2006) suggest that girl-centered media literacy programs and online learning Web sites should extend their narrow focuses, "on developing girls' critical viewing skills" (95) and build girls' interest in active production of media. Moreover, Kearney states that programs like the Girls, Women, + Media Project guide and instruct girls instead of allow them to explore and create:

[...] for Girls, Women, + Media Project's 'What Can I Do?' program, the only ways in which girls can participate in today's media culture are establishing a media literacy group, going on a "media diet," making intelligent decisions about media consumption, and giving feedback to media industry professions via letters. (95)

The systematic and monolithic structures of several of the online media literacy efforts promote an analysis-only approach that may restrict or sanitize the learning experience for site visitors. Moreover, scholars like Tyner explain that the problem with a perfectionist form of media literacy is that it supports an apolitical and theoretically antiquated pedagogy (Kearney, 2006, p. 98). The perfectionist pedagogy suggests that children can be prescribed media literacy skills, similar to medicine for colds that will prepare them to, "uncover the manipulative strategies of media" and "to discern the good

media from the bad media and recognize the bad media from the unmitigated trash that it really is and summarily reject it.” (Tyner, 1998, p. 147)

While sites like the Girl, Women, + Media Project conform to an analysis-only approach, About-Face.org follows the model, but also allows women and girls to make creative contributions to the Web site. Moreover, About-Face.org teaches girls and women the fundamental principles of media literacy by providing them with a bevy of resources and facts about body image, children and media, eating disorders, and media messages. In addition to the resource materials and factual information, the site provides women and girls are also to submit and post their personal essays, art projects, published work and poetry related to issues various issues that affect women and girls lives. One of the most popular attributes of the site is the gallery of offenders and winners. The gallery project is a collaborative initiative that allows site visitors to upload advertisements that are both assaulting and empowering to women. The offenders are ads that feature demoralizing, sexually denigrating, and unhealthy images of women and the winners are ads that show appreciation for the beauty, strength, and diversity of women’s minds, bodies, and spirits. In last call to action, About-face.org encourages women and girls to write the companies that solicit unhealthy messages about women and reminds visitors to adopt the motto, “don’t fall for the media circus!” (About-face.org, 2007)

The By Girls for Girls’ Web site is, an online initiative actually created by young female students who were invited to produce the site at Smith College. Although the site duplicates some of the standards that model that Tyner (1998) critiques includes, one of advantages of the site is that the target audience was responsible for the production of the site, thus furthering their own media literacy skills through their active participation as

executive creators. Moreover, the site includes informative Web pages work to educate adolescent girls about a wide range of topics including sexual reproduction, sexually transmitted diseases, peer pressure, and eating disorders.

The last site Girls, Inc. follows the analysis-only approach; however, unlike the previous sites, Girls, Inc.'s project focuses activities that guide, "youth through a series of viewing and listening exercises, as well as questions designed to increase their awareness of television representation" (Kearney, 2006, p.92).

Although Kearney does not discuss My Pop Studio as a part of her case study of girls-centered media education programs, several of the critiques she makes about the programs and sites she analyzes are relevant to My Pop Studio. Kearney (2006) specifically notes that many girl-concentrated media literacy programs,

[...] are not committed to facilitating girls' involvement in forms of creative expression and communication that might increase their audience and expand their cultural experiences beyond stereotypical female activities that result in them being seen and not heard. (94)

Furthermore, although the sites that Kearney (2006) addresses lack creative outlets for the girls they serve, My Pop Studio is invested in rousing girls' creative sensibilities and executing production oriented activities.

Theoretical Perspective

The exploratory design of this research project made social learning theory a useful theoretical perspective for addressing the research topic. Social learning theory is based on the assumption that, "most human behavior is learned by observation through modeling" (Bandura, 1986, p. 47). Given the research premise of this study, to observe

how girls interact and learn about media literacy on My Pop Studio, Albert Bandura's (1977) social learning theory was a constructive framework for interpreting how the girls' acquired knowledge from the site.

The classic Bandura (1967) Bobo doll experiment included observations of young children who were exposed to videos of the dolls being violently hit. The children in the study were either shown videos where the aggressor was punished for the violent behavior or was not reprimanded at all (Van Evra, 2004). Following the viewing of the aggressive behavior the children were allowed to play with the Bobo dolls in an observation session (Van Evra, 2004). During the observation period Bandura (1967) found that, "the children imitated the model unless they were deterred through the effects of vicarious learning" (Van Evra, 2004, p. 3). Bandura's (1967) study demonstrated one way that exposure to and observation of certain media and behaviors can promote learning.

An extension to social learning theory is the social cognitive learning perspective. According to Van Evra (2004) social cognitive learning posits that, "novel behaviors are acquired either directly through experience or indirectly through the observation models" (4). In alliance with social learning, social cognitive theory and observational learning, (a fundamental tenet of both perspectives), includes of four main processes: 1) attentional process; 2) retention process; 3) production process; and 4) motivational process.

The attentional process according to Van Evra (2004) "determines what is observed and what information is extracted from the modeled events" (4). Factors such as the observer's values, preferences, and "the event's salience and functional value of it to the viewer" (Van Evra, p.4, 2004) are influences of the attentional process.

The second process, retention, “involves the active transformation and restructuring of information about events” (Bandura, 1986, p. 56). Thus, the retention process requires learners to, “transform what they observe into succinct symbols to capture the essential features and structures of the modeled activities” (Bandura, 1986, p. 56).

The next process, production, “involves translating symbolic notions or ideas into appropriate, specific behavior or courses of action” (Van Evra, 2004, p. 4). According to Van Evra, (2004) the behavior production process, “is influenced by a person’s actual ability to enact what has been observed and may necessitate skill development” (4).

The final process, motivation, relates to the distinction between acquisition and performance. Motivation, Van Evra (2004) posits, identifies, “whether learned behavior is actually performed depends on one’s motivation to perform, and this motivation can be direct, vicarious, or self-produced” (4). The motivation process according to Bandura (1986) suggests that individuals are more inclined to perform modeled actions that are rewarded with external or internal incentives as opposed to acts that result in punishment or are discouraged.

Although all of the cognitive processes associated with social learning and social cognitive theory are relevant to the study, the attentional process is most pertinent to the research project objectives.

Attention

The concept of attention relates to one’s ability to visually and auditorally attend to media content. While the majority of mass media studies on attention (and

comprehension) reference television as the medium of study, the focus for this study is Web site information processing.

In a study monitoring children's viewing and listening engagement while watching television Lorch, Anderson, & Levin (1979) found that when children, "note something of interest and something they can understand, they give it their visual" (Van Evra, 2004, p. 36) and auditory attention. However, if the content the children view "becomes redundant or incomprehensible" (Van Evra, 2004, p. 36) they significantly reduce or seize their visual and auditory attention. Although the activities on My Pop Studio are intended to be fun, they also require visitors to pay attention to the site's didactic intentions in order for media literacy learning to occur. One important note that Van Evra (2004) mentions is that although visual attention may be a reliable indicator of viewing habits, it is often not a valid indication of viewing (36). Consequently, although a child observing an online source of information, such as My Pop Studio, may appear to be visual attentive the child may not actually be focused on content they are listening to and viewing (Van Evra, 2004). Moreover, Lull (1998) provides the example of television viewers who in actuality are daydreaming about something else in the process of watching. In addition to observing the level of attention Van Evra (2004) also suggests that, "the nature of the stimulus and its complexity" (37) provide important insights about the attentional process. The two categories of stimuli Van Evra (2004) discusses in-depth are holistic and linguistic stimuli. In addition to stimuli Van Evra (2004) also supplies two modes of processing: analytic and holistic.

Linguistic stimuli indicate stimuli that are primarily verbal, informational, objective in nature, and rely on rational thought and reasoning (48). In contrast linguistic

stimuli, holistic stimuli depend on visual imagery and rely on moods and impressions as opposed to verbal content (48). In addition to stimuli it is also important to mention the process by which stimuli are delivered. The first process, holistic processing, “is associated with a more automatic kind of process” (Van Evra, 2004, p. 52; Smith & Kemler Nelson, 1988). The other process, analytic processing, “is associated with controlled and effortful cognitive processes” (Van Evra, 2004, p. 52; Smith & Kemler Nelson, 1988). In order to further interpret the interaction between the information processes (analytic and holistic) and the stimuli (holistic and linguistic) Van Evra (2004) categorizes the processing activities into four divisions: analytic- linguistic/auditory, analytic-linguistic/visual, holistic-holistic/visual, holistic-holistic/auditory.

The analytic-linguistic/visual (1) category involves reading printed text; the holistic-holistic/visual (2) category demonstrates viewing salient visual content, such as in observations of scene changes; the analytic-linguistic/auditory (3) category implies listening to verbal dialog and explanations; and the holistic-holistic/auditory (4) category involves observations of salient auditory messages, like in slogans or jingles. Each fused category represents a possible processing activity that youth experience interacting on My Pop Studio. Van Evra (2004) suggests younger children employ processes (2) and (4) while older children make use of (1) and (3) to, “effectively gain experience with the medium as they develop generally more mature cognitive abilities and strategies” (52).

As a part of this project the researcher will identify which processes were most evident in the observations of the research participants in conjunction with My Pop Studio activities. The processing activities will aid the researcher addressing the questions concerning activity preference and attention level.

One key element that affects children's attentional development and process is age. Moreover, as children become more familiar with media and less influenced by salient media features, (such as animation, peculiar voices, lively music, rhyming, and auditory changes, in the case of television), "they tend to use more highly developed conceptual skills to guide their attention and response to content" (Van Evra, 2004, p. 37). As a result, Van Evra (2004) suggests that "older children do not require the same focused attention" (37) that younger children need to select and obtain information from media. In Miron, Bryant, and Zillmann's (2001) study on arousal level, attention, and pace of television programming, the scholars linked information load with the pace of educational television programming and found that although fast paced programming boost children's arousal, the pace also affects children's ability to process information. One of the possible educational benefits of My Pop Studio is that site's format allows visitors to self-impose their own pacing as they advance through the activities, and thus potentially maintain higher levels of attention. Similar to attention, the cognitive process of comprehension also requires consistent pacing in order for youth to more readily understand content.

Comprehension

Comprehension involves a person's abilities to understand and acquire meaning from the content they listen to or view. For television, comprehension is marked by an understanding of the formal features of television, taking note of important content, and being able to transmit and apply meaning (Van Evra, 2004). In this research project the researcher sought to examine the relationship between youths' comprehension (of the media literacy concepts communicated on My Pop Studio) and the participants' Web site

activity preferences. Formal features include content characteristics such as pace and format. In television studies with children, Wright et al., (1984) found that formal features affected youth's attention and comprehension of media content. In particular, Rolandelli, Wright, Hurston, & Eakins (1991) found that children attend best when they are exposed to both visual and auditory content. Rolandelli, et. al. (1991) also found that narration was particularly helpful enhancing children's comprehension and visual attention and appears to make programs more comprehensible and engaging for children. My Pop Studio activities, such as *Pop Star Producer* which allows visitors to create their own unique pop star, allow visitors to create their own narratives through song and script, and in turn teach site visitors about the constructiveness of media messages.

One learning concept that is particularly interesting, in regard to comprehension development, is Salomon's (1983) amount of mental effort invested (AIME) concept. The amount of mental effort invested (AIME) concept suggests that children's, "assessment of how much effort is needed to understand material, either printed or televised, affects the depth of information processing that they actually use and thereby fulfills their expectations" (Van Evra, 2004, p. 39; Salomon & Leigh, 1984). Therefore, there may be a possibility that youth's perceptions about the ease of game play may affect their AIME, and thus affect the depth of information processing they apply to the activities they play on My Pop Studio.

While both attention and comprehension are separate processes the often function dually inform and affect learning. In fact, Van Evra (2004) contends that the two processes are so inherently linked in a way that makes their relationship reciprocal:

[...] attention is guided actively by the child's assessment of the comprehensibility of the content and attempts to comprehend it, situational and contextual variables including the presence of other viewers, and other activities in which the child may be engaged. (Van Evra, 2004, p. 36)

Consequently, it will be interesting to examine how attention drives comprehension and vice versa in the context of the participants' experience on My Pop Studio.

In summary, the comprehension and attention processes will serve the study as a tool that will be employed to observe which media literacy concepts and My Pop Studio activities the participants comprehended, how the participants attended to the activities, and how comprehension and attention together relate to the participants' acquisition of the specified media literacy concepts and learning objectives.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This research project employed a qualitative research methodology comprised of a group interview, a questionnaire, a website session, and observations.

Qualitative & Quantitative Research Overview

The purpose of the methodology is to explain the way(s) in which the researcher plans to, “approach problems and seek answers” (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, p.3). In the social sciences there are two primary methods of choice that are repeatedly used by researchers in diverse disciplines. The two primary research classifications are quantitative and qualitative research methods. The latter was the basis for my preliminary study and data analysis. Qualitative research according to Taylor & Bogdan (1998) has origins rooted in the phenomenological theoretical perspective. According to qualitative research scholars (Ferguson, Ferguson, & Taylor, 1992; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998) the phenomenologist upholds an affirmed dedication to better understanding social phenomena from a personal visage and is also invested in exploring how people experience the world, in general. In contrast to the phenomenologist in the qualitative camp, the positivist quantitative approach presented by Auguste Comte (1896) implies that the researcher, “seeks the facts or causes of social phenomena apart from the subjective states of individuals” (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, p.3). Moreover, to reference Baronov (2004), the positivist is concerned with empirical data that merits, “experimental verification of hypotheses and theories” (12).

Therefore, quantitative methods include research approaches such as surveys, experiments, and content analyses that are often based on statistical data and empirical evidence (Dominick & Wimmer, 1994; Jensen, 2002; Jensen & Jankowski, 1991; Lindlof, 1995; Meyer, 1988) while qualitative methods include research approaches, “such as participant observation, in-depth interviews, and others, that yield descriptive data” (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, p. 4).

Although quantitative and qualitative methods have different methodological processes both approaches have several similarities (Jensen, 2002; Jensen & Jankowski, 1991). Moreover, Jensen & Jankowski (1991) assert that, “the qualitative-quantitative distinction in a narrow sense loses its relevance at the level of theoretical frameworks, even if qualitative and quantitative traditions tend to emphasize different types of theory” (7).

The qualitative nature of this piece allowed the researcher to examine, observe, and evaluate, “descriptive data, people’s own words, and people’s behaviors” (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, p. 4) in relation to their experiences using the media literacy website, My Pop Studio. This exploratory study included observations, an in-depth group interview, and a pretest/posttest questionnaire. A group of five girls between the ages of 9 and 14 years-old were observed, interviewed, and questioned about their experiences using the media literacy site, My Pop Studio on Tuesday, June 15, 2007. The research endeavor took place on the University of Georgia campus in large conference room/ computer study lounge in the Journalism and Mass Communication department. The research participants were recruited from the researchers’ personal and academic contacts, and were therefore selected on the basis of a convenience sample. In order to maintain

confidentiality of the participants' identities the research used the synonyms names listed on the U.S. Social Security's official Web site as the most popular girl baby names for 2007 (moreover, none of the names listed were the names' of any of the participants). Each participant and the participants' parent/legal guardian were required to submit a signed, formal consent form drafted by the researcher and approved the University of Georgia's Institutional Review Board prior to participation in the study.

Site Analysis: Description of Case Study

A case study was used in this research project to fully examine and describe the content areas on My Pop Studio. The case study is an intensive study that includes in depth observations of a phenomenon or case (or multiple cases) that are used to shed light on the case at hand (Gerring, 2007):

The basic idea is that one case (or perhaps a small number of cases) will be studied in detail, using whatever methods seem appropriate. While there may be a variety of specific purposes and research questions, the general objective is to develop as full an understanding of that case as possible. (Punch, 1998, p. 150)

In addition to each case study being defined according to the research objective (or research questions) of the study it serves, a case may also be studied at one point in time or over the course of an extend period of time. There are a number of different kinds of case studies, (such as the intrinsic case study and collective case study); however, for this research project the instrumental case study was most applicable. Stake (2000) defines the instrumental case study as a study, "[...] in which a case is examined mainly to provide insight into an issue or to revise a generalization [...]" (437). The issue at hand in this research project is to examine how comprehension and attention play role in girls'

learning experiences on My Pop Studio (MPS). For this project the Web site case study will outline each My Pop Studio activity, discuss the media literacy concepts the activities illustrate, and examine how the MPS content areas relate to the cognitive processes of attention and comprehension.

Group Interview

The group interview was approximately thirty minutes long and was audio-taped to assure accurate transcriptions of the participants' ideas, beliefs, and statements. The group interview is one of the most common strategies for conducting qualitative research (Frey, 1991; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998).

Group interviews in the social science field dates back to the early 1920s when researchers began using the group interview approach to examine the social effects of racial, ethnic, and gender diversity (Frey, 1991). For this study the group interview was employed to gain further insight about the sentiments and conclusions that the group of adolescent girls' had about My Pop Studio and the media literacy principles fostered through the website activities. The group interview was a formal, yet relaxed, semi-structured procedure that allowed the girls' to openly express their ideas while collaborating with friends and peers in their age group.

The participants were all adolescent girls between the ages of 10-14 years-old. The research participants were recruited through the researcher advisor's personal contacts, and included the advisors' daughter and a group of four of her friends. Therefore, the participants were solicited based on a convenience sample. Moreover, the girls all came from the same peer group, attended school together, and were all Caucasian with the exception of one minority participant, who was Indian. Due to the confidentiality

of the research project the girls' we're given the alias names: Ava, Sophia, Madison, Isabella, and Hannah. All of the names were selected from the U.S. Social Security's list of the 2006 most popular girl names. The number of participants was limited to five participants so that the researcher was able to observe and record the girls' accounts accurately. Furthermore, the researcher did not want to host a larger group of participants because it would have been increasingly difficult to watch more than five participants interact on My Pop Studio simultaneously.

The researcher employed the group interview as opposed to the focus group interview for a number of reasons. In particular, group interviews differ from focus group interviews in that one of the primary aims of focus the group interview is to reach a group consensus, whereas this not the aim of the group interview research (Frey, 1991; Agosto, 2001, p. 19). Furthermore, because individual attention, comprehension, and personal preference are the theoretical underpinnings of this study, a group consensus, which in effect would prevent a difference of opinions (Agosto, 2001). Through the use of the group interview methodology the research planned to shed light on differences of opinion the participants had in reference to personal preferences in Web-based decision making and individual attention and comprehension processes.

Prior to the interview the researcher created a itemized list of probing questions as well as an interview protocol, which both had to be reviewed and accepted by the University's Institutional Review Board.

There are several types of interviews and approaches to interviewing; however, the type of interview that most closely related to the one conducted for this research study

was the formal group interview. The formal group interview according to Frey (1991) allows the researcher

[...]to arrange for a group of respondents to meet in a location within the field setting that can accommodate several persons and that is free of distractions. In this setting the researcher is free to ask probing question, to allow interpersonal dynamics to play out to their fullest extent, and to become an empathetic observer. This type of interview also makes it possible for the interviewer to play a more directive role and it certainly will solidify and legitimate the researcher's role [...] (8)

In addition to providing the researcher with verbal and non verbal insight the group interview also encourages peer interaction, promotes stimulation of new ideas, and potentially helps increase the variety of participant responses. Despite the numerous benefits of group interviews there are also several disadvantages. One of the most prominent drawbacks to the group interview is the potential for an opinion leader or talkative group member to dominate discussion, interrupt or argue with other participants, or sway the opinions of other group participants (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998; Frey, 1991).

The group interview was the most appropriate design for the project because the researcher was interested in investigating a specific research topic and was not invested in learning about the private personal accounts of the participants involved (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). Through the group interview session the researcher learned about how the group of adolescent girls perceived media literacy and what media literacy skills and lessons they were able to discern after exploring My Pop Studio.

Similar to Lewis & Fabos (1999) presentation on girls' use of instant messaging (IM) and how the IM technology shapes their social contexts, the researcher found that reviewing the audiotape (from the group interview) and identifying reoccurring patterns and themes was helpful in producing a method of analysis for the project. Moreover, the researcher used the criteria in Agosto's (2001) model to answer the questions: What are adolescent girls' Web site preferences on My Pop Studio and how do their preferences affect their learning experiences using the site? Agosto's (2001) Design and Content model served as a tool in the present research project. Although Agosto's (2001) model was used to evaluate adolescent girls' Web site preferences, the current research sought to employ Agosto's (2001) primary and secondary criteria to examine female youth's experiences and reactions interacting on the media literacy site, My Pop Studio. Agosto's (2001) model categorized aspects of the website design or content, (on websites visited by study participants), based on primary and secondary criteria. The primary criteria reflected aspects that participants "consistently favored when selecting websites for leisure and school-related use" (p. 246) and the secondary criteria included website attributes that were valued, "used less frequently and consistently" (p. 246-247). The primary criteria Agosto (2001) accounted for included social connectivity, flexibility, motility, contextuality, personal identification, and graphic/multimedia concentration. Social connectivity related to girls' preference for websites that allowed them to maintain social connections; flexibility was associated with girls' preferences for websites that had easy, unrestricted navigation; motility was related to girls' desire to design on sites; contentuality was related to girls' preference for sites with narrative and story formats in contrast to charted or formal text information (as in dictionary or a formal textbook);

personal identification was correlated with sites that reflected two one or more aspects of the girls' personal or family lives; and graphic/multimedia concentration was related to girls' preferences for sites that had vibrant graphics, video segments, and audio clips in contrast to plain text sites.

The secondary criteria that Agosto (2001) identified were collaboration and inclusion. Collaboration was connected to girls' preference for sites that promoted collaboration; however, this criterion was considered secondary because girls' interest in collaboration was primarily related to tasks involving school work. According to Agosto's (2001) findings the research participants preferred the inclusion criterion in limited numbers; inclusion was associated with girls' favor for websites that promoted diverse representation (by sex, race, and ethnicity). For the purpose of this study the research applied Agosto's (2001) eight criteria to evaluate participants' initial experiences exploring My Pop Studio.

Pretest-Posttest Questionnaire

The questionnaire segment of the research project was used to further detail the participants' media use and media literacy comprehension. The basic elements of the questionnaire were derived from the researchers' independent points of interests and observation of the My Pop Studio site.

The initial portion of the questionnaire, (the pretest), involved a series of three queries about the participants' basic understanding of media literacy. The questionnaire included both open-ended responses, with blank spaces for the girls to write their independent responses to the questions, as well as five-point Likert scales that allowed the girls to rate their media literacy knowledge and media use. During the questionnaire

segment of the group meeting the girls had approximately 15 minutes per section, (therefore, the participants had a total of thirty minutes to complete both the pretest and posttest section). For the first question the participants were asked to supply any information they could think of relating to their media literacy knowledge, and parameters in which they learned the about the term. Following the general question, (about the participants understanding of media literacy), the respondents had the opportunity to use a Likert scale, (where “1” indicated the lowest level and “5” indicated the highest level), to rate the level of importance that media literacy served in their everyday lives (if they had any remote knowledge of what media literacy encompassed).

The last pretest question began with a current definition of media literacy from a reputable media education organization, The Media Awareness Network. The definition was provided to offer the participants a clearer definition of media literacy. In addition to reading the provided definition the girls also had the opportunity to watch a short, one-minute, video segment about media literacy courtesy of the Media Education Lab Web site (www.mediaeducationlab.com). (following the completion of the pretest segment). After the girls had the opportunity to read the media literacy description they were able to complete the final Likert scale in the pretest section, in which each participant was asked to indicate the level of media literacy comprehension they felt they had for each of the media featured on the My Pop Studio Web site [television, magazines, music, Internet (digital media)].

The second portion of the questionnaire was a posttest that accounted for how the girls’ felt about their media literacy knowledge after visiting the My Pop Studio Web site. More specifically the posttest included questions that attempted to trigger participants’

thoughts about the importance of media literacy training for girls. The concluding Likert scale, in the posttest, addressed the participants' overall media use tendencies.

The questionnaire served as an alternate way for the researcher to gain more information about the participants' thoughts about media literacy without the pressure of a directed dialog (in an interview session). Furthermore, the structure of the questionnaire was also helpful guiding the direction of the final research analysis. In particular, the Likert scales questions which included specific classifications, (e.g. low and high media literacy per media), were beneficial to the researcher for analyzing and evaluating patterns for the research findings.

Web Site Session: Research Study Observations

Observational research methods are used to collect data on verbal and non-verbal responses in both field (natural) settings and formal (artificial) settings (Gunter, 2000). As Gunter (2000) describes, observational studies are typically associated with three specific criteria: "(1) whether the observer participates or not in the activities of the observed individual; (2) whether the observations are structured or unstructured; and (3) whether the observed behavior occurs in a natural or artificial setting" (48). The observational research method that most closely related to the method applied in this research study was the non-participant, semi-structured observational study. As Gunter (2000) notes, in non-participant observations "the observer does not participate in the activities being observed" (49), however, the observer may demonstrate overt or covert observations in which the observer is either visible or not visible to the research participants.

In the case of this research study the researcher was an overt non-participant observer. The semi-structured study combines elements of both the structured and unstructured. Furthermore, Gunter (2000) explains that, “a researcher wishing to capture the rigor and ability to quantify that is afforded by the structured study, but not wishing the accompanying artificiality, might conduct a study in a natural setting using a structured observational instrument” (51). Although it was not the intention of the researcher to quantify the findings, the nature of the research setting conforms to qualities inclusive in both natural and artificial settings. For instance, the although the observational research did not take place in an artificial laboratory and instead took place in an academic building, the setting was both natural given the fact that the participants are school-aged youth and spend much of their time in a school setting; and artificial given that, a) the environment was setup and structured according to the researchers’ facilitation plans to make the study more conducive for the participants.

During the website observation session the research participants were able to freely navigate My Pop Studio for one hour. Although the participants were seated next to one another in the computer lab each participant was able to use a separate computer to independently investigate the website. As a result of the placement of the desktop computers and the participants’ seating arrangement the youth were invited to interact, share, and discuss ideas with one another during the website session. Due to the exploratory nature of the study the researcher did not set many limitations or boundaries for the participants. However, the researcher did advise the participants to try to visit each section and divide the time spent in each section according to the time allotted for the interaction session. More specifically the researcher requested that the participants

attempt to spend roughly ten to fifteen minutes in each of the four My Pop Studio sections (music, television, digital, and magazine). The researcher employed this advisory requirement in order to ensure that the participants were able to evaluate and comment on elements in each of the sections. In addition to the time specification the researcher also prohibited the participants from interacting two activities (*Magazine Publisher* and *Your Digital Life*), which required more completion time than amount of time allotted during the Web site interaction session. Furthermore, these activities required additional procedures that were not available at the time of the Web site session (e.g. a scanner to scan hand written documents).

During the Web site observation period the researcher recorded the verbal communications between the girls and took copious notes on each of the participants' reactions, behaviors, and navigation patterns using the site. In fact, for each participant the researcher created a note-taking log sheet that was useful to categorize both the sections (of My Pop Studio) that the girls spent time playing in as well as their reactions to the activities in the different sections. Moreover, during the Web site observation the researcher observed the participants' activity visitations; noted the participants' possible confusions about the site activities, paid attention to the girls' Web site preferences; watched how the girls attended to reading intensive activities; and recorded group patterns, such as the use of the discussion boards and the rate of activity imitation (i.e. number of times the girls followed each other to the same site activities).

In summary, the methodological procedures consist of a host of qualitative measures including an in-depth group interview to gain personal insight about how the participants' react to the site; a questionnaire to provide the participants' with the

opportunity to answer pretest/posttest questions about their media use and media literacy knowledge; a Web site analysis to investigate how the My Pop Studio activities operationalize the central media literacy concepts and to deconstructs the site activities, in detail, page by page; and a Web site session which provides the researcher with an opportunity to observe how the participants' explore and interact on My Pop Studio.

CHAPTER 5

MY POP STUDIO: WEB SITE ANALYSIS

As mentioned previously, My Pop Studio (www.mypopstudio.com) is an online interactive site that exposes visitors to media literacy through a series of interactive games, quizzes, and activities. Although the site is available to anyone the creators built the site with a specific audience in mind, girls ages 9-14 years-old. The site creators/production leads, media literacy experts Sherri Hope Culver and Renee Hobbs, created the site in response to their belief that girls are in need of more media literacy training that is palpable, interesting, and engaging for their age group. The creators of My Pop Studio used popular culture as a theme throughout the site to elicit a point of interest that is relevant to youth's lives. In doing so, youth are able to learn about how they can become more critical of popular culture and the media channels that direct and delivered messages about popular culture and cultural icons to them. The site includes four primary content areas, (music, television, magazines, and digital media), that represent the primary avenues of media that girls favor and spend the most time using, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation's study on youth's media use (2005). Each of the content areas includes three to five specified activities that relate to the media they address. Youth are encouraged to engage in a number of activities for each of the media division such as web correspondence with other youth, games, and quizzes that test their popular culture and media literacy knowledge, and creative production activities that allow them to incorporate their imaginative visions about media production.

The objective of this case study is to identify and explicate the various offerings in the specified content areas included in the site. In doing so, this case study will profile My Pop Studio in its entirety to fully examine the options and choices that users can make in the content areas as well as the educational (media literacy) goals included or implied within each content area.

Section I: My Pop Studio Music Section

Music is an omnipresent part of popular culture and a prevalent part of youth's lives. In fact, besides sleeping and watching television there is not a single activity that youth engaging in doing more often than listening to music (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2005). My Pop Studio's music section includes four general activities that youth can do while accessing the section, they are: *Pop Star Producer*, *Truth or Rumor*, *Selling with a Song*, and *Poll: Song Lyric*.

Section I: My Pop Studio Music Section

Pop Star Producer is an activity that allows visitors to create their own pop music icon and/or listen to other users' pop star performances. For this activity the visitor can select from a number of traits to create their pop star's image, music style, and lyrics or they can opt to venture to the *Pop Star Producer* music billboard charts. The opening page for the activity allows visitors to choose to either create their own pop star or other view users' pop stars. If the visitor chooses to view other people's pop stars she will be directed to the song charts. In the song charts section the user can listen to and rank other people's pop stars' performances based on a five-star rating system (five stars is the highest rating and zero stars is the lowest rating). Moreover, users may only rate a pop star performance after listening to the song in its entirety. In addition to the star ratings

users may also provide feedback on pop stars via the pop star message board. On the message board users can use to make comments about the pop star concerts they view (or anything else they decide to write because there are not set prohibitions about what users can post on the message boards).

For users who choose to create their own pop star *Pop Star Producer* begins with an opening clause (statement) about the role of the music producer as the artist's image and music style designer. Following this introductory statement visitors choose a value message, about the type of persona they want their pop star to invoke, from a list of pre-scripted statements (such as, "I'm smart and need freedom," "I'm a little crazy and a little jealous," "I'm natural and up for excitement," "I'm popular and I want you to like me," "I'm independent and I'm the best," and "I'm playful and conflicted about relationships"). In the next step producers are prompted to personalize their pop star avatar's physical traits and characteristics such as body shape, hair color, make up, skin tone, hair style, attire including top (shirt) style, bottoms (which include pants, skirts, Capri pants, and shorts), outfits (which include an array of dresses, pants suits, and long shirts), foot ware (shoes), and accessories (including jewelry, eye ware (sunglasses), headset microphone, hats, and belts). Next, producers are prompted to provide a name for their pop star.

Following the name selection producers can select a vocal style for their pop star's debut song, the beat selections range from metallic rock rhythms to urban hip hop sounds, (more specifically they include the following music genres/titles: club, straight up, dance, dreamy, brassy beat, slow beat, upbeat rock, funky beat, and bubbly beat). In addition to selecting a beat producers are also able to choose an instrumental track to

accompany their eclectic beats (they include true rocker, Emo's edge, crystal clear, synth hop, deep swirl, lofty bliss, electro ripple, country wail, and island bounce). The next vocal style selection is choosing the lyrics for the artist's song. The song lyric selection is broken down into three stanzas: the verse (which includes two lines of verses), the transition (which includes a one line verse), and a chorus (which includes three lines of verses).

The first component of the lyric selection process enables users to select the opening verse. For the verse selection the producer is able to select two of twelve the pre-scripted verses for her pop star's song (such as, "You're running through my mind, I just can't be set free. / I'm on this roller coaster. What'cha doing to me?" or "Kick open the door, turn on the lights./ Me and my friends are going to party tonight"). After selecting the verse producers are prompted to choose the song's transition verse. At this stage users are able to pick one transition verse from five different transition choices they are offered (such as, "You and me, we got a cosmic connection./ I'll follow you in any direction" or "KrunK it up, baby, it's a party tonight./ Time to get wild, yeah, time to get right"). The last verse selection is the chorus. For the chorus producers may choose from eighteen different chorus verses (such as, "Breakout! You better get out of my way," "Crushin', I wish I had a clue," or "KrunK it up! Further than anyone"). For the chorus, unlike the other two stanzas, users are able to repeat selected phases more than once if they desire to do so.

Following the verse selection process producers continue to develop their talent by selecting a vocal style for their artist. The vocal style options are categorized by musical genre and include: hip hop, rock-pop, and country. The next vocal process users

are able to manipulate is vocal effects. The vocal effects allow users to stylize their artist's vocal using various sound techniques, (although users have the option to choose an effect they may also have the option to leave their pop star's vocals natural). The vocal effects include natural vocal, telephone, live concert, and enhanced studio. For each line of the song producers must include their desired vocal effect to move forward in the music production process. Producers may select the same vocal effect for each verse or use multiple vocal effects and organize each in any order they choose.

The final step of the activity is to listen to and view the pop star's simulated music concert. At this point the producer is able to listen to the final product of her musical construction. In addition, the user is able to see her pop singer perform the song she created and is able to follow along with the musical talent phrase by phrase (moreover, the lyrics are provided as the pop star performs the song). Following the song performance the user may choose to share her pop star with other *Pop Star Producer* visitors. Users may share their pop star by choosing from three options, they include submitting the pop star's song to the pop charts (which is a music billboard chart that allows visitors to rate and comment on pop stars that other producers submit to the charts), downloading their pop star's song onto their computer and/or a CD-ROM, or sending an e-mail to friends to urge them to view the pop star's performance on My Pop Studio via the *Pop Star Producer* charts (which anyone can access as an option at the introduction of the *Pop Star Producer* activity).

At any stage during the selection process producer can return to any part of the activity to change a selection. Moreover, a general menu bar divided by the sections allows users to retreat to previous sections. The menu bar is organized as follows: Star

Maker (which includes the pop star avatar stage), Song Maker (which includes the song selection process), Showtime (which includes the pop star concert performance), Share Concert (which includes sharing pop star's performance), or Song Chart (which include the song ratings and message board section)]. When the user returns to previous sections the selections completed in other parts of the activity are not erased or changed if the producer chooses to modify any one part of her pop star's design. The only time that changes occur is if the user decides to make additional alterations or leaves the activity to move on to another activity.

Music Activity II: Truth or Rumor

Another activity in the music section is *Truth or Rumor*, a quiz game that allows users to test their pop culture knowledge about female music, film, and television stars. This activity includes a series of statements that correspond to different celebrity icons. A picture of the celebrity is included above each of the provided statements and it is the user's the task to identify whether or not the statement about the celebrity is true or false. There are eight featured celebrities including actress Angelina Jolie, pop singer Rihanna, actress/singer Jennifer Lopez, singer Kelly Clarkson, actress Brenda Song, singer Avril Lavigne, actress Jessica Alba, and singer Jessica Simpson. Each statement is about some aspect of the celebrity's life relating to either their background or position as an artist or their personal activities. For instance for television actress, Brenda Song's statement is about her personal activities (the statement says that she has a martial arts black belt) while Jessica Simpson's statement is about her position as an artist (Simpson's statement describes her record promoters' use of payola to get her album "Irresistible" heavily promoted on the radio). Once the user declares the statement true or false the answer

appears on the screen next to the statement with an explanation of the answer. For instance, Jessica Simpson's statement was true and the answer explanation provides a summary of the incident in which the authors describe payola as well as when, why, how the situation occurred. The *Truth or Rumor* activity reinforces the idea that users must be critical of what they read, hear, or see in the media, (even if it appears to be a true statement).

Music Activity III: Selling with a Song

The *Selling with a Song* activity allows users to pair pre-recorded songs to a variety of commercial items such as a pair of athletic shoes, a lip gloss, a bottled water, a cell phone, and a backpack. The music selections vary for each item; however, there is generally one classical selection, one country selection, one urban pop or hip hop selection, and two rock or alternative pop selections.

Once the user begins the activity she the directions instruct her to select an item and then pair the item with a song choice that she believes will encourage consumers to buy the product. When the user selects the product a video for the object will automatic play showing several of clips of the product and/or person(s) using the product? For each song selection the visitor clicks she can see explanations about why the song would be beneficial for promoting the product (or lacks potential of promoting an item). Besides the song pairing activity users can also vote for the song they predict has the highest selection rate (for each item) on a poll. The primary objective of this activity is to teach visitors about the media production choices and how they affect the sentiments attached to consumer products. The process of playing with this activity allows girls to better understand how certain products are primed and marketed through use of song to deliver

messages about products. In addition, this activity is a structured lesson in both advertising and media production.

Music Activity IV: Poll: Song Lyric

The last section, *Poll: Song Lyric*, is a voting poll that asks girls to read lyrics from a pop song, (entitled “Happy Endings” by Avril Lavigne), and make a voting selection about the meaning of the lyrics. Once the users read through the lyrics and select an answer choice, (the answer choices include: “I adore Avril’s voice, I don’t listen to the lyrics!,” “This song is called ‘Happy Ending?’ Why? I don’t get it!,” “She is way too into this relationship! She needs to get a life,” and “The words to this song are just too sad” the users is directed to another page that tallies percentages for each of the voting selections (and shows where the users’ answer falls in the percentage breakdown). In addition to the percentage rankings of the poll there is also a message board that girls can use to further explicate their comments about the activity. The polling activity allows users to think critically about the music lyrics and how they shape and define a song.

Summary of Media Literacy Objectives- Music Section

The classic media literacy objectives that were explored in the music section (as agreed upon by the media literacy community and asserted by the Center for Media Literacy) were:

- 1) All messages are ‘constructed’;
- 2) Media messages are constructed using a language with its own rules;
- 3) Different people experience the same media messages differently;
- 4) Media have embedded values and points of view;
- 5) Most media messages are organized to gain profit and/or power. (Center for Media Literacy, 2007)

In addition to the media literacy concepts that the Center Media Literacy (2007) provides as a guideline for its media literacy initiatives, My Pop Studio's Web site also lists a set of learning objectives related to media literacy. Although, there are some objectives that do not specifically address media literacy, the ones that do include the following: 1) to recognize that media messages may present ideas that glamorize harmful behaviors, such as substance abuse; 2) to understand that media messages help create and elicit a wide range of moods, feelings, and emotions for audience members; 3) to understand the economic value of "popularity" in the media marketplace and how music is used to sell products; and 4) to understand that media producers are responsible for making different decisions about music production, how to construct media messages, and how to develop the artist's image. As previously mentioned the activities in the music section include: *Pop Star Producer, Truth or Rumor, Selling with a Song, and Poll: Song Lyric.*

The first activity, *Pop Star Producer*, is a production learning activity that addresses all of the CML media literacy concepts except the last principle and the My Pop Studio learning objects (2) and (4). *Pop Star Producer* allows visitors to serve as an executive producer, create music, and design the image of a pop star avatar. Consequently, visitors are learning how music lyrics convey messages and how as producers they are responsible for constructing those messages. The pop charts, which display other visitors' music creations, allow visitors to see how different producers use the same content to construct and deliver messages differently. Furthermore, visitors are also able to learn that media have different embedded value and points of view by observing how their genre and lyric selections emphasize certain points of views about what it means to independent or in a relationship. In addition to discussing the media

literacy skills that are emphasized in *Pop Star Producer*, it is also important to address how the activity highlights the concepts of attention and comprehension. For *Pop Star Producer* attention is a key concept because a large part of the activity involves processing auditory and visual content. Likewise, comprehension is significant in this activity because visitors must understand and realize that the activity that they are playing actually renders the types of arrangements that occur in the music production industry to produce some of their favorite artist. Moreover, it is the comprehension aspect of the activity comes into play when visitors have to make the connection that the *Pop Star Producer* game actually reflects real aspects of the music industry.

For the activities, *Selling with a Song* and *Poll: Song Lyric*, visitors are encouraged to envision how music can influence the delivery of media messages and how music lyrics shape the meaning of songs. Furthermore, both message delivery and lyrical construction relate to the concepts, [CML concepts (1) and (2)], the Center for Media Literacy (CML) describes as central tenets of media literacy. In addition to the message construction concepts the activities also address how messages are designed to influence selling products to gain profit and/or power. In particular for *Selling with a Song*, visitors are able to test how music affects selling merchandise, thus emphasizing MPS objectives (2) and (3). In terms of processes of comprehension and attention *Selling with a Song* and *Poll: Song Lyric* require visitors to concentrate on visual material (and listen attentively to audio content for *Selling with a Song*) to better understand how verbal messages affect how people interpret and make sense of the media.

For the last music section activity, *Truth or Rumor*, expounds on the MPS learning objectives (1) and (4), which suggest that media messages can present ideas that

glamorize harmful behaviors and artist's image is constructed by producers and enhanced through the media. The *Truth or Rumor* activity asks visitors to identify truthfulness of statements about celebrities. As a result, one of the key media literacy objectives the activity addresses is for visitors to understand that messages can be constructed to misconstrue the truth, and possibly distribute harmful messages to the masses. In discussion of attention and comprehension the activity calls for visitors to attend to the visual content and to understand that written statements (in magazines about celebrities) are also examples of media construction.

My Pop Studio- TV Section

Similar to the music section the television section of My Pop Studio also includes four interactive activities. Once a My Pop studio visitor enters the television section the user may choose from the following activities: *Teen TV Producer*, *Out of the Box*, *How much do you love the screen*, or *Poll: Who's your Favorite*.

TV Activity I: Teen TV Producer

The *Teen TV Producer* activity allows users to produce their own television show from a series of pre-recorded clips. Once the user proceeds to the main page of the *Teen TV Producer* activity the user may choose from one of two options: 1) to create and edit a new a show or 2) to view shows that other Pop Studio visitors have created. If the user chooses to view shows that were created by other users the visitor will be directed to a section of the activity that allows visitors to view shows that other Teen TV producers posted on the television showcase board. The showcase board includes a list of all of the shows that Teen TV producers have presented for viewing. If a visitor decides to view a TV producer's show they have the opportunity to play, rewind, and stop the show they

view. In addition, viewers also have the ability to select closed captioning if they desire to do so while viewing the show. The showcase board lists the programs that other Teen TV producers have uploaded onto the site. The visitor can review as many shows as are available on the showcase lineup. In addition to viewing television productions created by other users visitors may also post comments on a discussion board provided in the section. On the discussion board users may type their responses to television productions they viewed or relay additional comments that they choose to post.

The basic format for the *Teen TV producer* activity is similar to that of the Pop Star Producer activity in the music section, (where visitors may choose to review other productions or create their own). As mentioned before, *Teen TV Producer* visitors may also choose to create their own television show. For the editing part of the *Teen TV Producer* activity the user is able to sequence a story from the provided video clips. There is a prompted storyline that provides the user with a general idea about what the overarching story should be about. For instance, one storyline reads as follows: “Dance Plans in Chaos- Kelly’s teacher, Mr. Jackson, will be visiting the dance committee in moments to check on the plans for the dance. Wonder what he’ll find!” Although users do not have to adhere to the storyline, the storyline is provided to help users get started creating their productions. There are six possible storylines, (“The Perfect Couple,” “No Team Spirit,” “Friendship Fiasco,” “Mom Worries about Melanie,” “Dance Plans in Chaos,” and “Who Loves Who?”), for the *Teen TV Producer* activity. One storyline automatically generated each time a user enters creates a new television show (Note: the user cannot select or change the pre-selected storyline that appears on the activity).

The first selection process on *Teen TV Producer* is choosing and sequencing the provided video clips. There are eight potential characters for the show; they are Melanie, Tanya, Kelly, Allie, David, Jason, Mr. Jackson, and Ms. Jacobs. Each character has a series of individual clips that the user can select to insert into the show's video sequence. Moreover, each character has four to seven clips that include characters acting out dialog scenes. Once the user selects a video clip they may choose to drag the clip to the video timeline. The video timeline on *Teen TV Producer* is similar to the timelines featured on Final Cut Pro and Avid Technology. For the *Teen TV Producer* activity the My Pop Studio site producers have created a simple, easy to use non-linear editing system that allows users to edit and sequence video clips into a short story. The timeline fits approximately 4-19 clips depending on the length of the clips the user selects. In addition to the clips with characters the user also has the opportunity to insert title cards into the video production. The title cards primarily serve as transition phrases or sequences between character dialog. *Teen TV Producer* includes eight title cards with phrases such as, "Then suddenly," "Meanwhile," "That following week," "Later that day," and "Uh oh---look who's coming". At any point during the production process the user has the opportunity to play or rewind the production, select closed captioning, or flip the direction of the clip.

In addition, being able to play or rewind (using the buttons below the screen) the user may also use the timeline dial to stop or fast-forward a clip. The video production may be rendered at any time on the video screen so that the user is able to see the development of the production. When a user flips the direction of the clip the direction the character on the clip is facing or the wording on the title card will be reversed to the

opposite direction. For instance, if a character is facing to the right and the user selects the flip icon the character will be switched to facing to the left side. In order to delete a clip or an entire sequence of clips the user must drag each clip to the trash can.

Following the video production and editing sequencing the user is prompted to make a music selection to sync with the video sequence. The music selections include the following music genres: classical, rock 1, rock 2, rock 3, hip hop 1, hip hop 2, piano ballad, country 1, country 2, and break beat. For genres that had more than one selection there are numbers that correspond to the number of representative music samples for each genre. For the music selection users may select 1-3 different (or the same) music clips depending on the length of each music sequence. During the music selection process the user may play, stop, or rewind the entire production to examine how the music and video clips by using the dial on the timeline or the icons on below the video screen. After the user sequences the music clips the user may see the completed video production.

During the showcase of the video production the user may rewind, play, stop, or select closed captioning options. In addition, the user may also go back and make changes to the video production or choose to showcase the video production on the showcase board. Similar to the *Pop Star Producer* activity, the *Teen TV Producer* activity allows users to share the television show they create. Users may share their television show by choosing from three options, they include submitting the Dance Party showcase (which is a television show display that allows visitors to rate and comment on pop stars that other producers submit to the charts), downloading their television show onto their computer and/or a CD-ROM, or sending an e-mail to friends to urge them to view the

television production on My Pop Studio via the *Teen TV Producer Dance Party* showcase,(which anyone can access as an option at the introduction of the *Teen TV Producer* activity). At this point, the user may also choose to view television shows created by other users and/or comment on other productions on the showcase discussion board.

The remaining activities in the television section (of My Pop Studio) are quizzes and polls. The first activity, *Out of the Box*, asks visitors to take a TV personality quiz that gives them feedback about what media selections, (such as the types of books, movies, TV programs, and music), fit their unique personality.

TV Activity II: Out of the Box

The quiz includes eight questions that determine the personality profile of the visitor taking the quiz. The first question inquires about the visitors' movie scene preferences and requires the visitor to complete the following statement, "Your favorite scene in a movie when". For this question the visitor may choose one of six answer choices to complete this statement, they are, 1) a crazed lunatic jumps from behind a tree, 2) a cute guy admits he secretly has a crush on the quiet, shy artsy girl, 3) you learn something factual that blows your mind, 4) a medieval princess discovers a magic spell that will save her kingdom from an evil sorceress, 5) some of your favorite characters sing a song from the soundtrack, or 6) someone goes to sit on a chair and they find out it is broken...once they've fallen flat on their butt.

For the second question, My Pop Studio users are asked to identify what their favorite class is in school by selection one of the following answer choice: 1) choir; you love getting to sing between math and science, 2) lunch; you know it's not technically a

class, but hey, it's still at school!, 3) english; you can wait to read your latest mystery to your class, 4) science; you love learning how things work; 5) theater; you just love the spotlight, or 6) math; you are really good with numbers and solving problems. The next question asks visitors about careers that would be most interested in pursuing; the options include, 1) a detective, 2) a veterinarian, 3) a lawyer, 4) a tour guide in Italy, 5) a booking agent at a comedy club, 6) a famous pop star. The next question asks visitors about their personal interests are on the weekends; the answer selections are as follows: 1) going to the mall. If you're lucky the cute guy from Pac Sun will be working, 2) going to a zoo or museum, 3) going to a play or Broadway show, 4) going to see an Adam Sandler movie, 5) renting all the Happy Potter movies and having a sleep over, 6) having a video game marathon.

The following question asks about the visitors' favorite types books. For this question the answer choices include: 1) a teen novel that focuses on current teen issues like sex and social situations, 2) a light-hearted novel that makes me laugh out loud, 3) a biography about women who have made great accomplishments, 4) a Broadway show adapted into a book, 5) a classic mystery series, 6) a story of true love. The sixth question asks visitors to identify kinds of movies that they think are best. The answer choices for question six include the follow: 1) make you laugh so hard your stomach hurts, 2) inspire you and make you think about your future, 3) are imaginative and take you to a far away place, 4) make you believe in true love, 5) are so moving they bring you to tears, 6) you can sing along with your friends. The seventh question asks visitors to complete the statement, "The primary reason I log on to the internet is to" by selecting one of the following answers: 1) to stay in touch with friends and maybe make some new ones, 2) to

research something you learned at school, 3) download new music, 4) to update your blog and read others peoples', 5) to watch funny clips and snag new jokes, 6) to get tips and codes for your favorite video games.

The final question asks visitors to complete the statement, "one thing I cannot live without is my". Each visitor may selection one of the following answers in response to question eight: 1) cell phone. I need to be connected, 2) computer. I'm on it all the time, 3) my collection of books. Knowledge is power, 4) c.d. player or mp3 player. Music is my life, 5) my gaming system and video games. Gaming is such a release, 6) my DVD collection. I know most of the lines by heart. For each question the visitor has the opportunity to change the answer selections by going back or forward to previous questions. After the visitor completes the questions the results from the quiz are tallied and a section is made about the type of personality the visitor presents based on her answer selections.

The personality titles include: Romantic, Fantasy Girl, Comedienne, Music Maven, Drama Girl, and Knowledge Seeker. For each of the personality types there are four recommended television shows, movies, books, web sites and video games that offer media selections related to the corresponding personality traits. For instance, for the Romantic personality type all of the movie selections are films with romantic themes, such as *The Princess Bride*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Dance with Me*, and *The Sound of Music*. All of the recommended selections (movies, television shows, books, web sites, and video games) include brief descriptions. In addition to the personality type the quiz projects for the visitor, the visitor also has the opportunity to view all of the other

personality types. In the final step of Out of the Box activity the visitor has the opportunity to send the results of the quiz to a friend via e-mail.

TV Activity III: TV: How much do you love the screen?

The next quiz, *TV: How much do you love the screen?*, includes a series of questions that identify how much of a role the television plays in the lives of visitors. Each question has a series of activities with a corresponding time amount that the visitor may list to identify the amount of time she spends doing the particular activity. The time amount for a given question ranges from none, (which implies no time spent on a particular activity), to the entire evening or afternoon.

For the first question which states on a typical week morning, how do you spend your early hours before school?, the activities listed for the answer choices include: 1) Doing homework; 2) Practicing and/or rehearsing for extra-curricular activities; 3) Helping my brothers, sisters, and family get up and out the door; 4) Watching T.V. In addition to the activities, there are specified amounts of time listed for all of the activities that allow visitors to select the amount of time spent on the aforementioned activities; the time frames for question one include: 1) None; 2) About half an hour; 3) About an hour; 4) More than an hour.

Each visitor has the opportunity to select one time amount per activity. For instance, if a visitor spends a half an hour in the morning doing homework then that person would select the half an hour time option for that particular activity. In addition to the question about activities that site users' engage in during the morning the other two questions ask about the amount of time My Pop Studio visitors' spend time engaging in activities after school (from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.) and during the night hours.

The second question asks about what activities users engage in after school. The different activities listed for the after school time period include: 1) Doing homework; 2) Participating in organized after school activities (such as team sports, a musical instrument, dance, theater, band, chess club, etc.); 3) Watching TV (with friends or family or by yourself); 4) Doing my own thing (reading, hobbies, crafts, etc.); 5) Going on the computer or online (with friends or family or by yourself); 6) Hanging out with friends; Just talking; and 7) Taking care of my brother or sister. Similar to the first question the user is asked to select the amount of time spent doing each activity; however, the time frame is different from the previous question.

The time selections for the second question are: 1) None; 2) About half an hour; 3) About an hour; 4) About two hours; and 5) The whole time. On the last page the user is directed to the final page of the activity. The last page includes a pie chart that attributes how the user spends her time during a typical (according to the responses from the questionnaire). The information on the pie chart is generated from the answers that the user presents for the question component of the activity. Therefore, if a user states that homework as one of the activities that she spends time doing daily then the relative percentage of time that she spends engaging in doing homework will appear on the pie chart diagram. In order to read the pie chart there is a key below that identifies the different possible activities and their corresponding color codes. The key presents the following activities by color: 1) In School (blue); 2) Doing homework (red); 3) Extracurricular activities (light blue); 4) Doing my own thing (magenta); 5) Watching T.V. (green); 6) Online (purple); 7) Hanging out (yellow); and 8) Caring for siblings (brown). In addition to the pie chart of the user's findings, the percentage break down is

also supplied for eight girls, (who are hypothetical characters), who participate in a diverse array of activities. The each girl has a title and a name; they are: 1) Tennis Player (Morgan); 2) Thespian (Desiree); 3) Pianist (Christine); 4) Activist Blogger (Zoey); 5) Class President (Aaliyah); 6) Babysitter (Nabendu); 7) Singer (Regan); and 8) Gymnast (Molly).

Users may click on the highlighted icon for each of the girls to view their pie charts and read about their daily activities. The pie chart for each person illustrates the percentage of time they spend on their daily activities. Although the format of the pie chart is same for each person, the results and the activities listed in the key change for each person as a result of their involvement in certain activities. For example, while, Zoey, the Activist Blogger, has doing homework, writing for blog, in school, eating meals, watching TV, and researching and playing listed for her activities, Nebendu, the Babysitter, has activities such as babysitting, preparing games for babysitting, and online in addition to doing homework and in school, and eating meals listed for her activities. In addition to providing information about the ways that site visitors spend their time, the activity also provides users with twenty interesting facts and statistics about television and other related media such as advertising, video game use, and book readership.

TV Activity IV: Who's your favorite?

The last activity for the television section is a voting poll. The poll for the television section is entitled: *Who's your favorite?* For this activity the site visitors is able to vote on the young female star that she believes is most deserving of her admiration, laughter, or loyalty. The voting choices include the actress Dakota Fanning, the actress/comedian Amanda Bynes, the pop singer Jojo, and the actress Kyla Pratt. Each

visitor may only choose one answer per visit to the poll. Once the visitor selects an answer she is directed to a second page that shows the tallies (in percent) for each of the celebrities. For instance, as of May 24, 2007 at 10:00 p.m. EST, Kyla Pratt and Dakota Fanning have 22% while Jojo and Amanda Bynes tie with 28% of the votes. Similar to the polls in the other sections the visitor has the opportunity to post comments on a message board.

Summary of Media Literacy Objectives- Television Section

In the television section the My Pop Studio (MPS) media literacy learning objectives were: 1) to recognize that people make media messages with specific goals and intentions in mind; 2) to understand that television shows, including reality programming, are constructed with intentional editing to tell a story; 3) to learn about how celebrity culture glamorizes traits and qualities that are different from traits valued in real life; 4) to recognize that youth have the power to make choices about their media diet; and 5) to recognize how media messages are distorted to depict social relationships that are often unrealistic. The Center for Media Literacy (CML) concepts that the television section activities addressed were: 1) All messages are ‘constructed’; 2) Media messages are constructed using a language with its own rules; 3) Different people experience the same media messages differently; and 4) Media have embedded values and points of view.

The television section activities include *Teen TV Producer*, *Out of the Box*, *How much do you love the screen*, and *Poll: Who’s your Favorite*. For *Teen TV Producer* the primary media literacy objectives and concepts relate to understanding the constructiveness of messages. Moreover, the CML concepts that guide the activities are:

1) All messages are ‘constructed’; 3) Different people experience the same media messages differently; and 4) Media have embedded values and points of view. The *Teen TV Producer* allows visitors to create their own reality program and in turn helps visitors understand how messages are constructed by allowing them to put together their own television episode. Similar to the *Pop Star Producer* activity the *Teen TV Producer* activity gives visitors the option to view other site users’ work and as a result better understand the concept about how different people experience the same media messages differently. By viewing the same content and posting messages on the activity message board the visitors are able to comment on how other users view the same messages they are viewing themselves.

For the last three activities, *Out of the Box*, *How much do you love the screen*, and *Poll: Who’s your Favorite*, the CML concepts that are most apparent are concepts *audience* and *content*. For instance, for *Poll: Who’s your Favorite?* Visitors are viewing the same media images, but have the choice to discern which celebrity they favor most according to their media presence and reputation. Moreover, the ‘*Poll: Who’s your Favorite?*’ highlights CML *content* concept, states that different people experience the same media messages differently; however, in this case the media messages are about the teen celebrities in the poll. Furthermore, the poll scores and message board comments evidence the different points of view that the visitors were sharing about content that was the same. For the *Out of the Box* activity the media literacy concept that is most apparent is about how media have embedded view points. For this activity, the media discussed 1) to recognize that people make media messages with specific goals and intentions in mind; 2) to understand that television shows, including reality programming, are constructed

with intentional editing to tell a story; 3) to learn about how celebrity culture glamorizes traits and qualities that are different from traits valued in real life; 4) to recognize that youth have the power to make choices about their media diet; and 5) to recognize how media messages are distorted to depict social relationships that are often unrealistic. are categorized by genre in a way that reveals how media have embedded view points.

The MPS learning objectives (1), (2), and (5) relate to the *Teen TV Producer* in several ways. First, *Teen TV Producer* includes an optional storyline objective that provides the visitor with a scripted media message that they may choose to follow while producing their reality television episode. In the second instance, *Teen TV Producer* allows visitors to understand how television show are created with intentional editing by being able to sequence television clips into a cohesive story using a program similar to Final Cut Pro. Last, the media literacy object to teach youth how media messages are distorted to depict unrealistic social relationships comes into play when the visitors are able to see the range of clips with actors portraying relationship in ways that may not reflect the reality of the activity users.

The activities *Poll: Who's your Favorite?* and *How much do you love the screen* depict My Pop Studio learning objectives (3) and (4). For learning objective (3) *Poll: Who's your Favorite?* visitors are able to vote on their favorite teenage celebrity and discuss their selection process on the activity message board. In doing so, visitor may also discuss how celebrity culture glamorizes traits that are vastly different from traits valued in real life. While playing the activity *How much do you love the screen* visitors have the opportunity explore MPS objective (4), which concerns recognizing one's power to make effective choices about their media consumption. *How much do you love the*

screen allows visitors to rate their media use habits throughout the day, and therefore, attempts to educate youth about their daily media consumption patterns.

In comparison to the other media, television is the one medium that has a substantial body of literature on the attention and comprehension processes. In terms of attention the television studies suggest that TV content is best attended when it is comprehensible visually and auditorially. For the My Pop Studio television activities attention may suffice or deter depending on visitors' levels of comprehension of the activity directions and their actual interest in the activity. Therefore, if the activity is comprehensible, according to the literature on television, comprehension, and attention, visitors should attend to the activity better than if the activity is confusing or dull.

My Pop Studio- Magazine Section

The magazine section includes five activities ranging from magazine layout and design games to photo alteration activities. The five activities are titled *Photo Fakery*, *Celebrity You*, *Crazy for Advice*, *Magazine Publisher*, and *Poll: Ad or Article?* Each activity invites users to explore various facets of the magazine industry.

Magazine Activity I: Photo Fakery

In the first activity, *Photo Fakery*, users are able to experience the process of retouching photos. Site visitors are able to comment on the differences they notice between altered or unaltered photos and discuss which photos they prefer.

There are four pictures that visitors may select to view. Each of the photos has side by side presentation of the retouch photo next to the untouched photo. All of the photos are pictures of teen or pre-teen aged girls that vary based on ethnicity, body size and weight, and photo composition.

The first photo features a girl that appears to African-American or of African decent in a close-up head shot; she has a full face, curly shoulder length hair, and is smiling. The second photo is also a head shot that features a girl that appears to be of Latino or Hispanic origin; similar to the first photo the model in second picture is also smiling and has a full-looking face. The third photo has a different visual composition. Therefore, instead of showing a close-up of the person's face this photo shows the girls' profile (from the waist up). The girl in this photo appears to be White or of European decent and is wearing a bathing suit (bikini top) in a pool. Unlike the other photos the girl in this photo not smiling and has a medium build. In the last photo the picture composition returns to a close-up and the model in the picture is smiling softly. The girl in this picture appears to be Asian-American or of Asian decent and has a face that appear to be thinner than the models in first two photos.

Although visitors cannot actually retouch the photos themselves, they are able to express their comments. *Photo Fakery* visitors may type comments about the photos they view. For each photo there are five blank caption boxes that visitors may use to type their opinions and expressions about the picture. Two of the caption boxes prompt visitors to make comments about the model's skin and hair and the other three allow visitors to make comments that are not prompted by a theme. For each caption the typing space is limited and only allows the user to type 50-60 characters depending on the size of the caption box. The comment boxes that have prompted themes have the least amount of typing space and the caption boxes without a theme supply more typing space. The user may use all of the text boxes or opt to leave text boxes unused depending on the layout format she envisions for her photo.

Once the user completes the photo captions section she may proceed to view her magazine layout. After the user views the magazine layout she has a series of options she may select for her next step. The visitor may save her magazine layout and captions, return to previous screen to change her comments, or edit another model's photo by returning to the photo selection page. If the visitor chooses to save her layout she may use the magazine spread as an optional page in the *Magazine Publisher* activity.

Magazine Activity II: Celebrity You

In the next activity, *Celebrity You*, visitors are asked to create their own magazine celebrity profiles. At the beginning of the activity the user is presented with an example of a celebrity profile template. The example celebrity profile includes a photo of the featured celebrity (Usher) as well as a series of questions and mock answers on the page layout. The questions and statements include the following: 1) What is your celebrity name? (Insert name here); 2) What new presents have you bought yourself lately? (describe your new purchase here); 3) What's your latest look? (describe your style here); 4) Fans describe you as: (describe your personality here); 5) What other celebrities are you friends with and why? (List stars and why they like you here); 6) Your fans still talk about the time when (Describe memorable event here); 7) What does [celebrity name] say about you? (Describe gossip here); 8) Some fans think you'll transform from a celebrity into a role model or even a hero! What might you do in the future to accomplish that? (describe what you've done here).

On the opposite side of the page the user is able to fill out a profile. The blank profile includes a list of the aforementioned questions as well as space for the user to enter answers to the questions and statements. The only answer selection the activity

provides is the name choices for celebrities on the seventh question. The celebrities include a selection of popular music performers and Hollywood actors, they include the following individuals: Usher, Jennifer Lopez, Ashley Tisdale, Will Smith, and Gwen Stefani. Next to each question there is a small blank box that My Pop Studio visitors can use to respond to each question. However, for each answer box the space for typing is limited and visitors may, therefore, only type in responses that fit within the margins of the boxes. The first answer box only fits up to 15 characters while the next three boxes fit up to 25 characters. For the four remaining response boxes users may type up to 100 characters.

Before or after the user types a response for each statement or question the visitor also has the opportunity to upload a photo. Site visitors have three photo options: they may upload a picture of their popstar (from the Popstar Producer activity in the music section of My Pop Studio), upload a photo from their computer, or leave the photo section blank. After the visitor completes all of the components of the activity she may view the final layout of her celebrity profile. On the final page the visitor has the opportunity to save the layout or return to the previous page to make additional changes to the layout.

Magazine Activity III: Crazy for Advice

Another activity included in the magazine section is *Crazy for Advice*. For this activity the visitor is able to create her own magazine advice column.

The *Crazy for Advice* activity is designed similar to an interactive version of Mad Libs. Mad Libs is a word game where a player must fill in blank passages to make up a story; usually the game asks the player to write down different parts of speech (noun,

adjective, pronoun, verb, etc.) or other themed topics (name of a theme park, favorite color, etc) in the blank area. For instance, an example of a mad lib sentence would read as follows: ‘The sky was _____ (color) and _____ (person’s name) was eating _____ (type of food).’ In the case of this mad lib sentence the player would have to fill in the blank phrases to complete the story. Similar to the aforementioned Mad Lib example, site users who visit the *Crazy for Advice* activity also have to come up with words to fill in the blank passages. However, in the case of this activity the entire sentence is not revealed until the end of the activity. In fact, in each section users only required to type in words for the selected fields. The *Crazy for Advice* activity is divided into three sections: 1) Problem: School; 2) Problem: My Guy; 3) Problem: The Mall.

For the first section there are twelve categories; these categories include two adjectives, two verbs, two nouns, one school subject, three emotions, one holiday, and one school job title. For each category visitors may list one word in the blank box beside the category title. After site users fill out each of the boxes they may proceed to the next page to view the advice column. When visitors view the advice column they will be able to read and see the words they selected inserted into the sentence generated for the mad lib activity [See Appendix C for the paragraph format for the advice columns in each section]. After visitors view their advice column they may save their column, return to the previous page to edit the column, or proceed to the next mad lib activity, Problem: My Guy. At any point during the activity visitors may move forward to a different section or return to a previous section.

For the next section, Problem: My Guy, visitors may create an advice column with a relationship message. Similar to the previous section, visitors are prompted to type

in words that correspond to a series of categories and are able to view their columns on the proceeding page. For this section the categories are as follows: 1) noun 1; 2) noun 2; 3) something you did that was funny; 4) body part; 5) emotion 1; 6) something friends do after school; 7) something else friends do; 8) morning activity; 9) verb 1; 10) four words of advice you'd give a friend; 11) a place; and 12) a friend's name. One complication that visitors may arise while visitors are completing this section is the space limitation for typing words that correspond to each category. Furthermore, for the category that asks users to type four words of advice you'd give a friend there is limited space for entering four words in the blank box. This lack of typing space is also apparent for the previous and upcoming sections. Once visitors complete the fill-in-the-blank section and move on to the next page to review the column they may save their work, revise the column, or continue to the next advice column activity.

The last activity, entitled Problem: The Mall, follows the same format as the previous sections; however, the categories listed vary. The categories for this section are: 1) verb 1; 2) Job title; 3) adjective 1; 4) noun 1; 5) noun 2; 6) place 1; 7) noun 3; 8) place 2; 9) noun 4; 10) place 3; 11) verb 2; 12) verb 3; 13) person in family. Once visitors complete the fill-in-the-blank portion of the activity and view the column page they may save or edit their work or return to a previous page to make changes or view their other advice columns. Once users complete the last section of the activity they may return to the magazine main screen to begin another activity or they may visit a different section of My Pop studio, such as the music, digital, or television sections of the site.

Magazine Activity IV: Magazine Publishing

Following the *Crazy for Advice* mad libs activity the visitor may choose to play the *Magazine Publishing* activity. For this activity the site user has the opportunity to create a personalized magazine. Before the user is able to begin or select this activity she must complete and save the following activities: *Photo Fakery*, *Celebrity You*, and *Crazy for Advice*. The My Pop Studio site will not allow the visitor to proceed to this activity if the user is not signed on to the site and does not have her work saved from the previously activities. Once the user completes all of the activities and signs on to the site the user may begin the activity.

The *Magazine Publisher* activity includes a list of procedures the user should follow to complete the activity. The instructions include the following directions: 1) Design your own custom cover for your magazine; 2) Choose which *Celebrity You!* article to use (if you saved more than one); 3) Choose which *Photo Fakery* article to use (if you saved more than one); 4) Choose which *Ask Ad-Libby* column to use (if you saved more than one); and 5) Print your magazine on paper and follow the instruction.

Although the instructions proceed in a specific order the visitor may edit and revise her publication in any order. The site includes a panel of the selected activities, (*Magazine Cover Page*, *Celebrity You*, *Photo Faker*, *Ask Ad-Libby*), at the bottom of the page that the visit may use to move from page to page. For instance, if the user chooses to work on the *Photo Fakery* section first, she may select the Photo Fakery page shown on the panel. Once the user selects the activity page, (by left clicking the selected page with her mouse), she will be able to choose one of the saved articles she completed for the activity. At this time the selected page will be profiled in the top right corner of the page and below the activity page the user will be able to see her selection options. The

selection options below the activity page are the articles or page layouts that the user saved from the selected activity. For instance if the user selects the *Ask Ad-Libby* activity she will be able to view the advice columns she saved and select the column she wants to use in her magazine. If the user wants to change the layout of the activity she selects may return to the original activity via hyperlinks to the particular activity. For instance if a user decides to change her *Celebrity You* profile she would have to return to the *Celebrity You* activity to modify and save her work. *Poll: Article or Ad* is the only activity without selection options. Unlike the other activities in the magazine section the user is not able to amend the format or layout of the polling activity.

The page that is assembled the least is the magazine cover page. For the cover page the user is able to select photos and type captions, similar to the caption boxes in the *Celebrity You* activity. Although the magazine title, My Pop Magazine, and the catch phrase, Premiere Issue, at the bottom right corner of the page are structured and unmovable parts of the page layout there are several other aspects of the cover page that the user can design. The visitor may choose to layout up to four or five photos and/or up to seven caption boxes on the cover page. The photos include picture of the following celebrities: 1) Beyoncé Knowles; 2) Dakota Fanning; 3) Paula Abdula; 4) Raven Simone. The user also has the option to select a photo her Pop Studio popstar, from the Popstar Producer activity. The popstar photo option is only available if the user has completed the *Popstar Producer* activity and saved her work. The other option that the user has is to create and place captions on her cover page. The captions are limited in typing space and fit approximately up to 10 characters (of lower case lettering) without spacing between the letters for small text boxes and 32 characters for larger text boxes. After the user

types up the captions and selects her photos she may drag the selections to the page and layout her magazine cover.

Once the user edits the entire magazine to her satisfaction the user may print her Pop Studio magazine as the final option to complete the activity. When the visitor prints out the mini magazine there will be a standard back cover that shows the icons for each of the My Pop Studio sections, (television, music, magazine, and digital), as well as the publishers screen name and a title bar that reads: ‘Create. Comment. Control. Explore your media your way!’ The last page that will print out is the folding instructions for the magazine. The folding instructions illustrate the correct way to cut and fold the magazine. Once the magazine is folded the user may enjoy her magazine and share it with others.

Magazine Activity V: Poll: Article or Ad?

The last activity in the My Pop Studio magazine section is the voting poll activity, *Poll: Article or Ad?* The voting poll question asks the user to identify whether or not she believes that the article presented is an article or an advertisement. The article and/or advertisement on the page features actress/singer Hillary Duff wearing a garment (a dress) and picture of a shirt and a beaded bracelet displayed next to the photo of the pop icon. The bracelet and shirt on display are supposed to appear to be similar to the fashion and style that Duff is wearing in the photo. Next to both the bracelet and the shirt there are captions that state the prices of each item, the merchandise designer, and the caption for the shirt reads: ‘Sweet Baby Doll, top, \$199, Sue Wong, The Wardrobe, Davis, CA’ and the caption for the bracelet reads: ‘Wrist Ready, bracelet \$35, I Love Bracelets, ILoveBracelets.com’. Although Duff is not wear a shirt or a bracelet the style of the items on display are supposed to mimic the style of the popular singer/actress. The statement,

(‘sometimes magazine articles are just ad in disguise’), above the poll question, ‘what do you think about this article?’ illustrates the task of the activity for the user.

After the user views the advertisement/article and reads the question she is able to select one of the following polling answers: 1) It gives me helpful ideas about buying clothing; 2) I’ll bet Hillary Duff isn’t even wearing that stuff; 3) I think it should be labeled as an advertisement; or 4) I don’t care about fashion and wouldn’t even read this article.

Once the participant makes her choice she is directed to the next page which details the polling results. As of May 25, 2007 at 12:15 p.m. EST the answer response ‘I’ll bet Hillary Duff isn’t even wearing that stuff’ has the most votes with forty-four percent. The remaining answer choices ‘I think it should be labeled as an advertisement’ and ‘It gives me helpful ideas about buying clothing’ received twenty-two and twenty-one percent of the votes, the response ‘I don’t care about fashion and wouldn’t even read this article’ only had thirteen percent of the votes. After the user views the voting results she may post her comments, questions, and responses on the message board in the section.

Summary of Media Literacy Objectives- Magazine Section

The magazine section is comprised of the activities *Photo Fakery*, *Celebrity You*, *Crazy for Advice*, *Magazine Publisher*, and *Poll: Ad or Article?*

For the magazine section media literacy learning outcomes were: 1) to recognize that fashion magazines and advertising create unrealistic, unhealthy, and impossible ideals; 2) to understand how celebrities’ images are constructed through the media; 3) to understand that print media often present conflicting messages (especially about health, food, and nutrition) that are not true or accurate; and 4) to understand how to assess the

credibility and authenticity of media messages. In addition to the listed MPS learning objectives, all of the CML concepts were prominent in the magazine section.

The activities *Photo Fakery*, *Crazy for Advice*, and *'Poll: Ad or Article?'* relayed the all of the MPS learning objectives. For the *Photo Fakery* activity the visitor is able to learn about the first MPS learning outcome by comparing digitally retouched photos with unaltered photos to see how the retail industry, cosmetic companies, etc. and fashion magazines create unrealistic, unhealthy, and impossible ideals through advertising.

The next activity *Crazy for Advice* addresses the second MPS learning objective, to understand how celebrities' images are constructed through the media, by allowing visitors' to examine how magazine articles are often scripted and formatting so that magazine subscribers read information that reflect their views or what models their reading interests. For *Poll: Ad or Article?* two of the learning objectives are to understand that print media often present conflicting messages and to understand how to assess the credibility and authenticity of media messages. Moreover, in this activity the visitor is asked to determine whether or not a magazine spread is an advertisement or an article; in doing so, the learning objective is for visitors to understand that print media may be positioned as both an ad and article at the same time or one or the other at any given time. In addition, the activity works to inform visitors about how celebrities are used to validate the authenticity of merchandise in magazine, moreover, the celebrity featured in the magazine spread appears to wearing a garment that is supposed to be similar to the displayed retail item.

Although all of the activities explore at least one or more of the CML concepts, both *Magazine Publisher* and *Celebrity You* reflect concept that messages are

constructed. For instance, the *Magazine Publisher* activity allows visitors to create a succinct mini magazine with work saved from the other featured activities in the magazine section. In doing so, the message construction concept is realized when the visitor actively creates the content in the magazine from start to finish. Likewise, for the *Celebrity You* activity the visitor also participates in constructing messages by personalizing a magazine spread using her own messages and comments.

In terms of attention and comprehension, the magazine section highlights the importance of visual content for both processes. The visual aspect of the magazine section is particularly important given the amount of text in the section. Attention is informed, in part, by children's visual interests; therefore, without a strong or interesting visual presence children may not attend as well to activities lack visual imagery. In addition to visual elements and attention, comprehension is also important process to note in the discussion of the magazine section. Similar to the music section comprehension may be enhanced through the narrative forms. Narrative is one of the driving forces of the activities in the magazine section. In particular, activities like *Crazy for Advice* and *Celebrity You* encourage visitors to create their own popular culture narratives relating to magazine publishing. As a result, there is a possibility that the use of narratives will help the visitor maintain her attention and enhance her comprehension process playing the MPS games and activities.

My Pop Studio- Digital Section

The last My Pop Studio section, the digital section, includes three primary activities: 1) *Are you a Multi-Tasker?*; 2) *Your Digital Life*; and 3) *Poll: What Should She Do?*

Digital Activity I: Are you a Multi-Tasker?

The first activity is a matching game similar to the card game concentration. Concentration, also known as Memory, is a card game in which a deck of cards are laid face down on a surface and players turn two cards over per turn in hope of acquiring the most pairs of matching cards (the cards must have the exact same suit and color to match). The object of the game is to match as many pairs of cards together as possible and to remember where cards are placed to promote the matching of the cards.

For the My Pop Studio version of concentration the visitor is presented with the challenge of pairing pictures of popular television/film and music celebrities together. There are two components to the *Multi-Tasker* activity. The first challenge includes a timed matching game of concentration, in which the visitor must pair as many celebrity pictures together as possible. In the second part of the game the visitor is asked to match the photos again; however, in addition to playing concentration in this second round the visitor must also attend to screen that shows music videos and bins that have fun facts the uses has to sort.

The first half of the game begins with the visitor opening up to a page that has twenty-four cards laid out in rows. The first portion of the game measures how the visitor performs the task without distractions. This portion of the memory game is timed see how fast the visitor completes the activity. Once the visitor selects a card the game begins and the time clock starts to count the time that elapses before the activity is completed.

Once the visitor finishes the memory game, by matching up all of the celebrity pictures, she may continue to the next portion of the activity. At the end of the activity the visitor is able to see the amount of time that elapsed and the number of wrong guesses she had selecting the pairs. Some of the featured celebrities include film/television actresses like Halle Berry, Anne Hathaway, and The Olsen twins (Mary-Kate and Ashley) and recording artists like India Arie and Fantasia Barrino. After the visitor reviews her test results she may advance to the second part of the activity.

During the second part of the game the visitor has the two additional tasks: 1) sorting fun facts; and 2) attending to a music video reel. Beyond playing the memory game the visitor also has to sort fun facts by dragging each fun fact that appears on the screen to one of four category baskets. The four categories baskets include: music, style, health, and study. Each time a fun fact appears the visitor must select the corresponding category basket. The following statement is an example of a fun fact that would fit into the style category: girls can be stylish in jeans, sweats, or a skirt. In addition to the memory game and fun facts the third multi-tasking challenge is to keep track of the music videos that are displayed throughout the activity.

For the music video portion of the game the visitor must select the “new video” icon every time a different music video appears on the video screen (located at the bottom left corner of the page). Once the visitor selects her first card the activity will begin. Similar to the first memory challenge there is a clock that times the visitor’s pace completing the exercise. After the visitor finishes the memory portion of the activity the other multi-tasking games will stop along with the time clock. Similar to the first portion

of the activity the visitor will be supplied with results that indicate her level of multitasking expertise.

After completing the final activity the visitor will be able to see the amount of time that elapsed for both of the activities (both the concentration game alone and the multi-tasking concentration game), the number of wrong guess she had for the memory game for both parts of the activity, and her overall score as a multi-tasker. The score for multi-tasking ranges from 100 points (highest score) to 0 points (lowest). Each score is bracketed into levels of multi-tasking proficiency. The bracket for 0-25 points is the lowest level which indicates that the game player's results reflect a minimal level of multi-tasking skills and abilities. The low-intermediate level is 26-50 points; this level indicates that the player's multi-tasking skills were fair. Players that scored 51-75 points rank in the high-immediate level which indicates that are good multi-taskers based on their activity results. For the highest level a player must score 76-100 points. A player in this bracket is an advanced multi-tasker who proves to be excellent at multi-tasking based on her activity performance results.

After the visitor reviews her score she may choose one of the following options:

1) Play the game again; or 2) Compare her scores with other players. If the player chooses to play the game again she will be able to restart the game from the beginning and proceed as usual. However, if the player chooses to compare her scores with other players she will be able directed to another page that shows the scores of the other players and invites her to read interesting related facts and statistics about multi-tasking. In addition, the player will also be able to post her comments and opinions about the activity on the activity message board.

Digital Activity II: Your Digital Life

The next digital activity, *Your Digital Life*, asks the visitor to illustrate and describe a challenge she faced because of media in her own personalized comic strip.

When the user begins the activity she is directed to a page that allows her to view other completed comics and post comments on the site discussion board. This introductory page provides the visitor with some context about the types of topics that other users are discussing in their comics. The current topics explored in several of the profiled comics, as of May 25, 2007 at 3:25 p.m. EST, include themes such as Internet safety, R-rated film viewing, social networking safety, illegal music downloading, and film copyright policy (movie piracy).

After the visitor views the comics she has the opportunity to post comments on the message board or to begin working on her own digital life comic. The site message board is identical to the other messages boards displayed throughout My Pop Studio. Moreover, the site user is able to type in and submit her comments about the profiled comics and her general thoughts about digital media on the discussion board. The other option the user has is to create a personalized comic strip. In order to create a comic the user must select the 'Make your own comic' icon and follow a set of outlined directions. There are three steps that users must follow to complete the comic; they are: 1) Think First; 2) Draw Your Comic; and 3) Upload Your Comic. For the first step, Think First, the instructions ask the visitor to think about obstacles she has experienced related to digital media, such as computers, TV, cell phones, MP3 players, iPods, cell phones, and web sites.

Once the site visitor brainstorms ideas for the comic and makes a decision about the digital media challenge would like to discuss she may proceed to download the comic template. When the visitor downloads and prints out the template she may advance to the second step which advises her about drawing the comic. For step two it is recommended that the visitor use pencil to write legible print and draw simple pictures on the comic strip. Although the visitor should not use markers or pen for the initial sketch of her comic she may add color to her comic after she finishes drawing and writing in pencil. In addition the writing legibly in pencil the comic should also be written and read from left to right. As a note the author should not draw fine details that may become difficult to see when the visitor uploads the document.

Following step two the user may upload her comic to My Pop Studio. In order to upload the comic strip the author must first scan and save the comic document as an image file. Once the visitor completes the scanning and saving process she is directed fill out her My Pop Studio screen name, comic strip title, and e-mail address in field on the instruction page. As a note the e-mail address is requested so that the My Pop Studio staff has the opportunity to ask the comic author additional questions about the comic; however, there is a disclaimer that guarantees that the visitor's e-mail addresses will not be stored or used for any other reason. After the visitor completes the third step the visitor's comic will be uploaded to the new comics section and the author as well as other site visitors may comment on the comic strip.

Digital Activity III: Poll: What should she do?

The final activity in the digital section is *Poll: What should she do?* This activity requests that the visitor to address a problem concerning digital media. In contrast to the

previous My Pop Studio polls the digital poll has a video message that the visitor can play to hear the problem she will answer.

The video is a live action skit of a girl discussing her difficulty limiting her friend's cell phone calls. There are two characters in a bedroom speaking to each other about another friend, Sarah, who happens to be calling her friend fifteen times a day, beginning as early as 10:30 A.M. in the morning. While main character, the friend who is receiving the phone calls, states her problem the other friend in the scene suggests that she talk to the friend about the phone calls. The question the visitor is left with is what the main character should do to resolve the problem.

Although there are a number ways to eradicate the problem the poll activity provides the visitor to with the following solutions: 1) Turn off cell phone during school hours; 2) Tell her friend she's limited to two messages a day!; 3) Drop her IM crazy friend totally; or 4) Answer her. It could be something important. Once the visitor selects her answer choice she is directed to another page that shows the results (in percents) for each answer choice and allows the poll visitor to make comments about the activity on the provided message board.

Summary of Media Literacy Objectives- Digital Section

The digital section, includes three primary activities: 1) *Are you a Multi-Tasker?*; 2) *Your Digital Life*; and 3) *Poll: What Should She Do?* For the digital section, the media literacy learning goal, as suggested on My Pop Studio, was for girls to recognize that youth have the power to make effective choices about their online media consumption behavior. The primary CML concepts the activities address are that 1) All messages are 'constructed'; 2) Media message are constructed using a creative language with its own

rules; 3) Different people experience the same media messages differently; and 4) Media have embedded values and points of view.

The MPS learning objective is apparent in all three activities. In particular, the digital section activities encourage the visitor to understand her role as media user, producer, and consumer. For instance, in both the *Your Digital Life* and *Poll: What Should She Do?* the has visitor the opportunity to evaluate how to respond to using certain types of media in constructive ways. The '*Your Digital Life*' activity asks the visitor to make storyboards of her concerns using the mass media and allows the visitor to discuss some of the media choices she feels are most concerning, such as choice about chatting with strangers online or visiting social networking sites, like MySpace. The *Are you a Multi-Tasker?* activity encourages the visitor to think about her ability to juggle multiple media activities at one time, again, with this activity the idea is that visitors have the choices regarding their online consumption and behavior.

In terms of the CML media literacy goals, *Your Digital Life* informs the visitor about how messages are constructed. Furthermore with this activity the visitor is able to construct messages herself and share her media messages with other site visitors. In addition, *Your Digital Life* supports the CML concept about embedded values and points of view and different people experience the same media messages differently. The site visitor uploads storyboards with her own depictions of the media, consequently is sharing her ideas about the same media by showing how media have embedded view points.

Attention and comprehension are important to the digital section for a number of reasons. Comprehension is important to the section because the activities in the section rely on the visitor's ability to recognize her own experiences with the media and

construct stories from her media experiences. Therefore, the visitor has to first interpret (comprehend) her own experience and then present her thoughts in logically on a storyboard (for the *Your Digital Life* activity). In terms of attention, the visitor has to visually attend to the content she views and process the information according to her comprehension level.

In summation, this exhaustive site analysis was employed to examine how the My Pop Studio activities operationalize the media literacy learning objectives and the Center for Media Literacy (CML) concepts; to investigate how visitors are able to navigate through the site activities step-by-step to better describe the experiences the girls had interacting on the site, (as discussed in the Observational Study Section); to pair the site activities with the media literacy concepts and explain how the activities function to carry out the concepts; and to identify how the activities, in various content areas, relate to the attentional and comprehension elements.

CHAPTER 5

OBSERVATIONAL STUDY: WEB SITE USE BY GIRLS

The purpose of this research project was to observe adolescent girls' initial experiencing interacting on the didactic media literacy Web site, My Pop Studio. By using a series of qualitative research methods, (group interview, questionnaire, and observations), the researcher sought to address four primary research questions: 1) What understanding of media literacy do the participants' reveal before and after interacting on My Pop Studio?; 2) What are the attentional patterns of the girls as they interact with the My Pop Studio (MPS) site? What activities do the adolescent girls' attend to and favor most and least; and how, if at all, do the participants attribute their media literacy learning to these activities?; 3) What comprehension of the material on My Pop Studio (MPS) is shown by the girls? What, if anything, is confusing? Does preference relate to comprehension? How, if at all, are their activity preferences indicative of their levels of comprehension?; 4) How, if at all, do the participants' comprehension and attention levels relate to the participants' acquisition of the central objectives or media literacy goals addressed through the My Pop Studio activities?

The specific media literacy concepts and objectives that guide this line of research include the Center for Media Literacy's five core media literacy concepts and the My Pop Studio media literacy learning objectives. The Center for Media Literacy (CML) concepts, (discussed throughout this research project), include the following core objectives:

1) Concept #1: All messages are ‘constructed’; 2) Concept #2: Media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules; 3) Concept #3: Different people experience the same media messages differently; 4) Concept #4: Media have embedded values and points of view; 5) Concept #5: Most media messages are organized to gain profit and/or power. (Center for Media Literacy, 2007)

The Center for Media Literacy (CML) pairs each concept with an abbreviated keyword to identify each concept. Furthermore, the following keywords correspond to the aforementioned Center for Media (CML) concepts: 1) CML Keyword for concept one: *constructedness*; 2) CML Keyword for concept two: *format*; 3) CML Keyword for concept three: *audience*; 4) CML Keyword for concept four: *content*; 5) CML Keyword for concept five: *purpose*. In addition to the CML’s core media literacy concepts the researcher also discussed the learning outcomes (related to media literacy) that the My Pop Studio authors’ provided for each of the sections (music, television, magazine, and digital) with the participants.

For the music section the media literacy learning outcomes were: 1) to recognize that media messages may present ideas that glamorize harmful behaviors, such as substance abuse; 2) to understand that media messages help create and elicit a wide range of moods, feelings, and emotions for audience members; 3) to understand the economic value of “popularity” in the media marketplace and how music is used to sell products; 4) to understand that media producers are responsible for making different decisions about music production, how to construct media messages, and how to develop the artist’s image.

In the television section the My Pop Studio media literacy learning objectives were: 1) to recognize that people make media messages with specific goals and intentions in mind; 2) to understand that television shows, including reality programming, are constructed with intentional editing to tell a story; 3) to learn about how celebrity culture glamorizes traits and qualities that are different from traits valued in real life; to recognize that youth have the power to make choices about their media diet; and 4) to recognize how media messages are distorted to depict social relationships that are often unrealistic.

For the magazine section learning outcomes were: 1) to recognize that fashion magazines and advertising create unrealistic, unhealthy, and impossible ideals; to understand how celebrities image is constructed through the media; 2) to understand that print media often present conflicting messages (especially about health, food, and nutrition) that are not true or accurate; and 3) to understand how to assess the credibility and authenticity of media messages.

Finally, for the digital section, the media literacy learning goal was for girls to recognize that youth have the power to make effective choices about their online media consumption behavior.

Description of Study Participants

The participants in the study were selected from researcher's academic advisor's personal contacts (i.e. the academic advisor's daughter and four of her friends). Therefore, the research subjects were selected from a convenience sample to participate in the project. The number of participants was limited to five for two reasons: 1) there were a limited number of computers in the computer lab where the observation was held;

and 2) five was the maximum number of participants the researcher felt capable of observing accurately while they interacted on My Pop Studio. The five participants in the study included: Sophia, Ava, Madison, Isabella, and Hannah.

- **Sophia** is an energetic, spirited 10 year-old child who enjoys extracurricular activities, such as dance.
- **Ava** is an amusing and joyful 10 year-old girl who is good friends with Sophia.
- **Madison** is a talkative and sophisticated 12 year-old youth who is opinionated and confident.
- **Isabella** is a mature, level-head 13 year-old adolescent who spend the bulk of her free time reading magazines, hanging out with friends, and watching television.
- **Hannah** is the eldest of the participants; she is a 14 year-old adolescent who is perceptive, sincere, and well-spoken.

The majority of the participants had a very limited understanding of what media literacy meant prior to visiting the My Pop Studio Web site. When the researcher mentioned the brief title, “My Pop Studio: Media Literacy Learning,” she noted the blank, apprehensive looks on the participants’ faces, that if put into words might sound something like this, “Media literacy? What the heck is that? Oh, well at least there are snacks and the facilitator seems nice.”

In order to accurately describe the girls’ thoughts about media literacy the researcher was able to review the participants’ questionnaires and tape-recorded comments during the group interview and Web site session observations to evaluate how

the girls interpreted media literacy before and after they were introduced to the Web site. Due to the voluntary nature of the project the girls were encouraged, but not forced to answer questions or reprimanded for leaving questions unanswered on the questionnaire or refusing to answer group interview questions.

Research Question #1: Prior and Post Media Literacy Understanding

For the first question regarding the girls' media literacy understanding prior to and after observing the Web site, the girls demonstrated a low prior knowledge of media literacy. The result of participants' low prior understanding of media literacy was an expected finding given that many adults, as well as children and teens, have little or no knowledge of what media literacy is or how to apply its central concepts. In fact, three out of the five participants indicated that they had never heard of the term media literacy before participating in the research project.

The girls that had heard of media literacy prior to viewing the site most commonly associated media literacy with computers and commercial advertising:

1. Have you ever heard of the term media literacy? If you have heard of the term please describe what you know about media literacy.

Madison (12 years-old): Yes, when you learn about computers and how they work and how to create things and setup things and how to look up things.

Isabella (13 years-old): Yes, it is a commercial, or how you respond to the commercial or ad. It is trying to get you to buy or get something usually. At least I think this is what media literacy is.

According to these documented statements the two participants both thought that media literacy was about either learning how media appliances, such as computers, work or how

one should respond to advertising in the media. One reason the girls may have felt that media literacy was associated with advertising is because advertising was a topic that the girls had prior knowledge about and felt was linked to the construction of media messages. In fact, 13 year-old, Isabella, who is an avid teen magazine reader, mentioned that she felt inspired by My Pop Studio to play closer attention to the ways that advertisers promote and sell products:

I'm definitely going to play closer attention to the ways magazines try to get you to do things, like buy make-up or look or dress a certain way. I think it might be cool to do a project where you could like cut out ads and talk about what the advertiser did to try to get people to want the stuff they advertise.

In addition to discussing how advertising as a major tenet of media literacy the girls also talked about what it meant to be media literate in greater depth during the group interview. Moreover, it was 14 year-old, Hannah, who explained that she did not really understand what media literacy, was before she interacted on the site because she had never heard of the term in or outside of school:

I never really even heard (of) it (media literacy) before now. I mean, I guess I knew some things about media literacy, but it's just that I didn't know what the correct name for it was. I mean, I really didn't know it had a special name beside advertising or learning about how advertising works. But now that I know more about it (media literacy), I'll tell other people about (friends) about the Web site (My Pop Studio) because it can help them learn about advertising and how they could be tricked into buying something they really don't want. You don't really

learn about this kind of stuff in school, like about how advertising works, but the games (on My Pop Studio) teach you about it in a fun kind of way.

One additional question the researcher posed to further the discussion about media literacy training was about whether or not the girls believed that media literacy was taught in school. The girls' replies to the question of media literacy training in school primarily coincided with, 13 year-old, Isabella's reaction:

Well, I don't think that we really learn that much about it (media literacy) in school. I mean, probably most teachers think, "we'll we've gotta teach math, science, writing, and a whole bunch of other stuff," and since media literacy is about advertising they might not have time to teach that or think it's as important because kids have to know how to read and write and do math to go to school and college and stuff, but I don't know if you have to know about media literacy to go to college or to get into the next grade. I mean it's probably important, but teachers have to teach math and writing because kids have to know that. They (teachers) probably think kids will learn about it (media literacy) somewhere else, like at home.

Interestingly, although school is one of the places youth are most likely to gain media literacy skills it was the one place that the majority of the girls felt was a place they were unlikely to learn about media literacy. In most instances the girls' felt that media literacy learning was a skill that could be acquired at home through discussions with parents about the why advertising exists. When the researcher asked how many girls had discussed advertising with their parents a few girls shared their stories. One participant, 10 year-old, Sophia, explained that she often would try to get her mom to buy her things

that were advertised in commercials like fruit snacks, cereal, or toys when she was younger, and her mom often would ask her why she wanted them and her response would be that she saw on the items TV so they had to be good. Contrary to Sophia's (10) belief that the majority of things advertised on TV are good, Sophia's (10) mom explained to her that the commercials she saw were meant to get her to want the things they showed and that the products they show were not always as "great" as they to be appear on TV. Therefore, instead of refuting the purchase without an explanation, as many parents do when their children pester them about buying products, Sophia's (10) mom took the time to get Sophia (10) to think more critical about her consumer behavior. Although, Sophia's (10) parental experience was reiterated by the other participants this is not the case for all visitors to My Pop Studio. Many girls do not have parents who actively engage in discussing their children's media habits or have the understanding of how the media function to educate their children. Therefore, it is important that a wider range of girls are informed about sites like My Pop Studio that teach girls about the construction of media messages. Although learning about the influence of media messages, (such as ones that are in advertisements), is one aspect of media literacy, it is only a small fragment of what youth need to know in order to become more critical of the ways that media influence their lives.

In addition to gaining insight about the girls' thoughts about the meaning of media literacy the participants also discussed their beliefs about importance media literacy and their ideas about the purpose of My Pop Studio.

As previously mentioned, the group interview provided girls with an additional opportunity to share their opinions, frustrations, and comments about My Pop Studio. In

terms of the importance of media literacy, girls' indicated that they perceived media literacy as being important. In general, all of participants stated that media literacy had a high level of importance in their lives except for, fourteen year-old, Hannah, who stated that media literacy was neither important nor unimportant. On the pretest questionnaire all of the participants used the provided five-point Likert scale, (with "1" indicating media literacy as unimportant and "5" indicating media literacy as very important), to rate the level of importance they believed media literacy had in their lives before interacting on the My Pop Studio Web site. While the majority of the girls felt that media literacy was an important to their understanding of the media (in particular advertising), they also felt that My Pop Studio was a purposeful site that enhanced their understanding of how the media shape their lives.

When asked what they thought the purpose of My Pop Studio was the majority of the girls said it was available to teach girls about how advertising affects the lives of girls, especially through the magazine media:

My Pop studio is really fun and it teaches you so much about how girls can become aware of the things that advertisers do to get girls to buy things [...] For instance, like in magazines, like Cosmo girl or Seventeen, like 99% of the pictures in them are probably airbrushed and some the articles might actually be ads like in the My Pop Studio activities (Hannah, 14).

Although parts of the site emphasize the need for greater media literacy regarding the advertising industry; there are several other areas of media literacy the girls did not discuss independently without probing from the researcher. For instance, when the girls were asked about other lessons the site emphasized the only one the girls self-identified

discussed was the intent of advertising in magazines. The activities relating to advertising on My Pop Studio were the most obvious areas of media literacy instruction for the adolescent girls; however, there were other site topics that addressed media literacy instruction, such as music and TV production. When the research mentioned music and TV production and asked the girls how the two were relevant to media literacy the girls discussed how they understood better how decisions are made in the music industry, such as how the artist looks or what types of songs they sing: “Yeah, like I’m sure Hannah Montana was regular before she was on the Disney Channel, but now that she has her own show she probably has like a special people pick out her clothes and hair styles for her. I love her show they make her look so cool, plus she has the best singing voice” (Madison, 12). In this statement, it may be indirectly inferred that Madison (12) is in some way explaining that she believes that producer as well as a number of other individuals construct the TV actress/singer’s image on Hannah Montana. Moreover, although the girls had a limited initial understanding media literacy, through the experience of interacting on My Pop Studio the girls were able to increase their media literacy knowledge, most readily, in terms of their understanding of advertising.

Research Question #2: Attentional Patterns

For the second set of questions addressing the theoretical perspective of attention, the observational findings support the literature on the attentional process.

The literature suggests that children’s attention is higher for media they enjoy and lower for media children dislike or enjoy less (Van Evra, 2004). The general pattern regarding attention among the observed participants was that the girls’ attention levels were heightened for activities that they favored and weakened for activities they disliked or

did not enjoy as much. Moreover, during Web site session the researcher saw the girls repeatedly returned to activities they enjoyed and dismissed activities that appeared to be less engaging for them. For instance, the girls, (especially the younger participant), spent average of up to thirty minutes or more on the *Pop Star Producer* activity and spent less than two minutes on activities like *Out of the Box*, *Celebrity You*, and even production activities like *Teen TV Producers*. In fact, 10 year-old Sophia, one of the younger participants, made several remarks during the Web site session that reflected her diminishing interest in some of the activities: “I don’t really like this TV one as much as the music one, it takes way too much time to listen to all of those talking people and stuff... I’m gonna go back to Pop Star ... that’s the funniest one.” Likewise, during the discussion the girls discussed how they were tired of some activities more quickly than others because their interests were not being fulfilled:

Yeah, the ones that were fun were things like where there was music and you could use your creativity, the stuff in the magazine part was okay, but it was kind of not as fun because you had to like just fill in stuff and then it was like really annoying when you couldn’t type in more stuff that you wanted to because it only let you type in a certain amount of words (14 year-old, Hannah).

While all of the girls attended best to the activities in the music section, their motivations for attending to the section were different. For instance, Ava (10) said that she motivated to go to music section because, “it (the music section) was really fun and everybody else was doing stuff there and I wanted to make my pop star as cool as everyone else’s.”

While Ava (10) suggested that her motivation to visit the site was influenced by her imitation of the other participants’ activity selections, especially the older girls’ activity

preferences; Isabella, (13 years-old), said that she was motivated to attend to the music section activities because, “[...] the music section had a lot of creative things to do like finding out about celebrity life and creating pop stars. And I just felt like I was learning about music production and messages in the media in a way that wasn’t like boring or pointless;” and Hannah (14) asserted that her motivation had to do with the girl-centered theme of the site, “I was happy to know that the site was for just girls- that really made me feel like accepted and included.” Although each participant’s motivation differed, girls’ personal motivations often influenced which activities the participants attended to and how they attended to those activities.

An additional topic of discussion regarding motivation was related to girls desire to score points on the activities they played. In particular, the younger girls were very competitive and attracted to the idea of “winning” and earning points on My Pop Studio. For instance, while Ava (10) was playing *Pop Star Producer* she noticed that Isabella (13) earned forty points and replied, “How did you get so many points? I want to get more points, I only have ten. I want to win the most points so I can have a really high score [...] I’m gonna keep playing this one until I score some more points.” In order to earn points, site visitors must either make comments on the activity message boards and/or save their activities. Although the point system served a motivator for the younger participants, it was also an area of confusion for the girls. The girls said the points were a perplexing part of the Web site because the site does not provide in-depth details about how site visitors can earn points other than saving their work in activity content areas, such as magazine section, and making comments on the site messages. While the younger participants equated fun with playing the activities to earn the most points and the older

participants equated fun with learning valuable information and playing the games: “I liked it. It was more fun than I thought it would be and you learn stuff about advertising” (Isabella, 13). Moreover, the primary reasons the youngest participants were motivated to attend activities was to score points, and for the older participants their activity motivation was shaped by desire to have fun and learn about how media affects their lives.

The relationship between attention and age was another pattern that was consistent with the research on children, media, and attention. Moreover, as Van Evra (2004) explained children’s age usually coincides with their attention development. In this case, the older participants were able to attend to activities and their media literacy learning principles in greater depth than young participants. Furthermore, younger participants also showed the same cognitive processing and stimuli patterns (Van Evra, 2004). Therefore, younger children employed holistic-holistic/visual and holistic-holistic/auditory process, which entails that youth are more likely to observe visual content and auditory messages. In contrast, older participants were more likely to apply analytic-linguistic/auditory and analytic-linguistic/visual processes to their Web site experiences by observing printed text and listening to explanations and verbal dialog. Moreover, the findings in this research merit the literature on attentional patterns by age, but go a step further by indicating that the older girls were able to attend to both audio-visual content and textual information in the activities.

While the older girls were more likely to spent equal amounts of time playing a variety of activities from all of the My Pop Studio content areas, the younger girls attended to fewer activities in select content areas. In particular, the younger participants

were not interested in attending to activities that were more reading or typing intensive: “I don’t like this one (*Out of the Box*) as much, (Madison, 10), it’s not as fun as *Pop Star Producer* and you have to read stuff and I just want to play.” As a result of not attending to more reading or text intensive activities the younger girls often asked for assistance, from the older participants, while working through the activities.

Another significant attention aspect applies to which activities the girls thought helped them advance their media literacy skills. Although the all of girls acquired more knowledge about media literacy, the majority of the younger participants (10) did not present a clear understanding of media literacy after viewing the short clip on media literacy and engaging on the site. In fact, before and after viewing the site all the girls felt that media literacy was primarily about advertising. Perhaps this lack of media literacy acquisition is related to the observation that the researcher made of the younger girls skipping over fact-based, reading intensive activities, such as in *Truth or Rumor*, that detailed information about the media.

In particular, the researcher asked the girls if they recalled one of the terms, “payola,” addressed *Truth or Rumor* activity. In response, none of the younger girls responded but one of the older girls, (Isabella, thirteen years-old), remembered what “payola” was and how it was described in the activity: “I think it has something to do with how radio stations can get money and other stuff if they play a singer’s music a lot” (Isabella, thirteen years-old). The *Truth or Rumor* activity described how recording artist, Jessica Simpson’s, producers used “payola,” or the use of monetary payment to radio stations, to promote one of her recent albums. Moreover, this isolated observation

evidences how some of the older girls' attended better to reading textual information for the various activities.

The two activities that the girls favored the most were *Pop Star Producer* and *Are you a Multi-Tasker?* The girls expressed interest in the *Pop Star Producer* activity primarily because they enjoyed being able to create music and a unique avatar: "I really liked my *Pop Star* songs I can't wait to I get home so that I can ask my mom if I can download it onto a CD... that'll be so cool... I'll be like a real singer with my own CD and I can share it with my friends, too," said Ava, (10). For '*Are you a Multi-Tasker?*' the girls said that they favored this activity because it allow them to see how proficient a multi-tasker they were and it allow them to realize that sometimes it might be best to stick to one activity at a time instead of always juggling several activities: "Yeah, I really liked this activity. The matching part was fun, and I found out that I actually wasn't as good of a multi-tasker as I thought. I think I'll try to limit my multi-tasking when I do my homework... maybe that's why sometimes I might miss things" (Madison, 12). Although the girls favored the *Pop Star Producer* and '*Are you a Multi-Tasker?*' activities, they also had a separate list of activities that they both enjoyed and felt contributed to their media literacy learning, they were: *Pop Star Producer*, *Photo Fakery*, *Selling with a Song*, and *Truth or Rumor* (for the older participants).

For *Pop Star Producer* the girls said that they were able to learn about the Center for Media Literacy concepts regarding constructedness (CML concept one), format (CML concept two), purpose (CML concept five). In terms of the first concept, *constructedness*, Isabella (13) said that, *Pop Star Producer* helped her understand the creative process of the music industry: "Yeah, I could definitely see how the first concept

goes with the *Pop Star* game because you like get to create a song that reflects your own message.” For the *format*, the second CML concept, Madison (12) said, “Well, I think the second one (concept) could go with the *Pop Star* thing because we like got to choose our own sounds and like the way our pop star’s voice sounded and that has to do with like feeling of the song- like if it’s happy or sad.” Moreover, for the fifth CML concept, *purpose*, Isabella, (thirteen years-old), felt that the activity related to the *purpose* concept because it made her think about how why songs are created beyond entertaining audiences: “[...] other than to keep people entertained, I think that music producers, and even singers, make music to earn money. I mean, like every time some downloads an iPod song, it’s gonna cost you, at least, ninety-nine cents.” While the girls understood the *constructedness*, *format*, and *purpose* concept, they did not articulate their understanding of the *audience* and *content* concepts (CML concepts three and four).

In addition to the CML concepts the girls also felt that they were able to attribute all of the media literacy outcomes for the music section to the *Pop Star Producer* activity. In particular, Hannah (14) said that she recognized the second and fourth concepts about how messages help elicit moods and feelings and how media producers are responsible for making important decisions about music production:

I think I was most able to connect the second and fourth ones to the *Pop Star* game because it shows you how a change in the beat can make the song sound happy or sad and we also go a chance to be like producers and make a bunch of discussions like picking out the type of my and the lyrics for our song, just a real producer does.

Similar to the *Pop Star Producer* activity, the girls thought they were able to acquire knowledge about media literacy from playing the *Photo Fakery* activity. Moreover, the participants articulated how the activity helped them understand the *constructedness, format, and purpose* concepts. In particular, the girls said that *Photo Fakery* taught them about advertising and how messages are constructed in print media, like magazine:

I already knew that magazines air brushed picture of some celebrities, but now I actually know a lot more about the process; like how simple changes, like even lighting can complete change how a picture looks in a magazine and how magazines are formatted and stuff (Isabella, 13).

According to Isabella (13) as well as the other participants, the *Photo Fakery* activity primarily highlighted one of the magazine concepts, (the ability to recognize that fashion magazines and advertising create unrealistic, unhealthy, and impossible ideals), and emphasize the previously mentioned CML concepts (*constructedness, format, and purpose*).

Again with the activities, *Selling with a Song and Truth or Rumor*, the girls indicated that the activities emphasized *constructedness, format, and purpose* CML concepts. Furthermore, the girls explained that the *constructedness* concept attribute to their media literacy learning in the *Selling with a Song* activity because it helped them better understand how music shapes the mood of a commercial; and the *Truth or Rumor* was helpful introducing the girls the concepts that all media are constructed including magazine articles, TV news telecasts, and radio segments, (that may appear to be true). Moreover, the participants indicated that both activities engage the *constructedness*

concept about how media texts are assembled to present media messages. In this ways, the girls felt that activities encouraged them so see how media are built. In fact, the girls said that they appreciated beginning to learn about how music can play a role in the construction of advertising, and how everything from newspapers to celebrity tabloids are constructed to present a story in certain way:

For *Selling with a Song* was helpful for learning about how not only words but the music in advertisements on TV and the radio make me feel certain ways about the stuff that's advertised. Like when I hear the McDonald's song it makes me feel light-hearted because I associate McDonalds's with good times (Madison, 12).

While the girls enjoyed the activities and thought they were helpful for them beginning to acquire some of the basic principles of media literacy, there presence of imitation is another that deserves discussion.

Participants' Activity Imitation Patterns

During the observation (of the participants interacting on My Pop Studio) one of common navigation patterns was activity selection imitation. In particular, the music section was the content area that the where the majority of the girls spent the bulk of their time interacting. During the Web site session, after one girl, (usually an older girl), started an activity that looked interesting or engaging the other girls would imitated the first person by going to the same section and activity: "What's that one called?" asked Ava (ten years-old). "Hold on! You're gonna make me lose. It's in the digital section...ummm...wait let me go back and look at the name... it's," said Madison (12). "Where is it? I wanna play that one next," said Ava (10). "It's in the music part...no...I mean digital, digital, click that part," replied Madison (12). In effect, there was somewhat

of a ripple effect as the girls played the activities on the site. The observation of the girls imitating each others' Web site navigation extends Bandura's (1977) social learning and social cognitive theory (1986) to the online learning process. Moreover, social learning theory suggests that human behavior is learned through observation and modeling, which the participants in this study demonstrated during the Web site session.

Therefore, by taking note of the time the girls spent on activities and discussing their motivation to attend to activities the researcher was able to identify two consistent patterns among the girls: 1) Regardless of age, the girls were privy to attend to activities that with vivid audio-visual elements; and 2) Girls motivation to win influenced their activity attention level.

Research Question #3: Media Literacy & Activity Comprehension

The activities that the girls attributed to advancing their media literacy knowledge, (as previously mentioned in the Attention section), were the *Pop Star Producer*, *Truth or Rumor*, *Photo Fakery*, and *Selling with a Song*. In terms of the CML core concepts the girls expressed comprehension of the following concepts:

- 1) *Constructedness* -All messages are 'constructed';
- 2) *Format* -Media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules; and
- 5) *Purpose* - Media messages are organized to gain profit and/or power.

For each of the My Pop Studio sections the girls' advancement in their media literacy knowledge was indicative of their age. Moreover, the older adolescent girls' reported more detailed descriptions of the activities they felt helped advance their media literacy skills and knowledge. For the music section the older girls were able to discern several of the media literacy learning objectives; however, the younger participants did not

reference any of the objectives and mainly agreed with the older participants' comments. For instance, Isabella (13) stated that *Pop Star Producer* helped her understand the *format* CML core concept which had to do with message construction and how media messages help create and express moods, feelings, and emotions for audience members: "It was cool to have a message... like mine was natural...and it was it was interesting like how your style and your music and all was reflected." While Isabella discussed message construction, Madison (12) explained how the same activity taught her lessons about how producers make decisions about music production: "You actually had a choice, you didn't have to make up the actual sounds and stuff but you actually got to create your own music."

The participants devoted less discussion to activities in the television, magazine, and digital sections. In fact, for the television and digital sections the girls did not discuss how any specific activities connected to the learning objectives listed for the content areas. However, for the magazine section the girls were able to associate the *Photo Fakery* activity to their acquisition of one important media literacy objectives presented as primary learning outcomes: 1) the ability to recognize that fashion magazines and advertising create unrealistic, unhealthy, and impossible ideals. Moreover, Hannah and Isabella suggested that *Photo Fakery* reinforced their beliefs about how many photographs and pictures in magazines are airbrushed and embellished to make celebrities and models appear to be beautiful and flawless.

One the most significant findings was that all of the activities and learning objectives that the participants recalled were from the music section with the exception of the *Photo Fakery* activity in the magazine section. This resulting finding may be

attributed to the fact that adolescent girls (especially middle school aged youth) spend significantly more time with audio media than boys (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2005). The central media literacy objectives that the participants did not fully acknowledge or express comprehension of included learning outcomes listed for the digital and television sections as well as the Center for Media Literacy's third and fourth core concepts, *audience* and *content*. In particular, when the researcher posed the question, "Can you think back to the Poll: Song Lyric activity where you had to make a selection about the meaning of the Avril Levine song? Did you all think the song message was the same?" the girls' responses varied by age. While the younger girls responded that they believed that most people have the same points of view regarding the poll because most visitors voted for the same category, the older participants recognized that everyone may not have had the same view points. In doing so, the older participants supported the CML *audience* concept that indicates that different people experience the same media. For instance, Isabella (13) and Madison (12) said that it would have been cool if they could write in or submit their own interpretation of the song lyric answer choice, even though you can express those ideas on the message board. Therefore, the older participants had had a clearer understanding *audience* concept than younger participants.

Although the older participants appeared to have more comprehension of the *audience* concept, the researcher posed a follow-up question about the news to see if the girls' age influenced their understanding of the *audience* concept a second time. The proposed question was: Do you think most people see the same news story and think mostly the same things about it? In general the girls said yes to the news question. Moreover, the girls' replied that if the news covered the story in a way that made people

see the story in the same light then people would most likely experience the news stories in the same way. The girls response to this question indicated that the participants' may have not fully comprehend the *audience* concept because they did not acknowledge that all people's individual experiences shape the way that people interpret the media.

For the next CML concept, *content*, the researcher posed the question: When you made your pop star on *Pop Star Producer*, "who's point of view do you think your pop star reflected?" For this question all of the girls responded that their pointed of view was reflected in their creation of their pop star avatars. Although, it is true that their personalities' were reflected in the pop stars' they created; the girls failed to realize However, the girls did not think about the fact that the group of individuals who constructed the activity also have their values and points of view reflected in the activity's content. For instance, the activity creator made choices about the types of music, the attire, body types, etc. that are shown in the activities. Furthermore, these content decisions reflect the activity producers' attitudes, values, and views.

The learning objectives that the participants did not mention primarily related to being able to understand how to assess the credibility and authenticity of media messages, especially those related to television and digital media, and understanding that girls have the power make effective choices about their media diet and media consumption behavior.

In terms of comprehension of the material on My Pop Studio, the narrative structure of the site activities eased the comprehension process for the girls. Regardless of age comprehension was enhanced through the use of story or narrative-like activities. Each girl in one way or another through direct communications with the researcher or

