

## **Hey Watch This! Sharing the Self Through Media (2020)**

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### **Study Guide**

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#### **Introduction**

*Hey Watch This!* follows a group of social YouTubers who enjoyed making videos to connect with other people, improve their craft, cope with difficult times, and explore their own creativity through video. Lange attended meet-ups across the United States and one in Canada to speak with interviewees and observe interaction among socially-motivated YouTubers. She also analyzed YouTube videos and participated herself on the AnthroVlog channel on the site. The film depicts how interaction among YouTubers was multi-faceted. Sociality occurred across many different media and traversed online and offline spaces, fundamentally challenging the notion of a strict online/offline “binary” of interaction.

Although the film’s content draws on a case study of early YouTubers, the film invites reflection on general media use, self-expression, and sociality in digital environments. Students may initially focus on the fact that the case study emerged from a specific time and place. Yet, instructors should guide them to concentrate much more closely on the nuanced narratives and events that orient around enduring and quite philosophical questions about how we choose media, where the “real me” is located in and through media, what constitutes “participation” in media-driven cultures, when and how people migrate away from social media sites, and how we envision our own digital legacies. Students should be invited to recognize these themes in the film and explore them in terms of their own social media encounters on multiple sites.

The film also provides important information and inspiration about conceptualizing new sites as we move forward. We are now arguably entering a “third wave” of discourse on internet access (Lange 2017). The first wave focused on achieving universal access to devices and networks that would connect people around the world. Although we have not achieved this goal, a second discourse quickly emerged that emphasized the importance of equitable access to the production of content among varied sociological groups, such that people of different ethnicities, classes, ages, abilities, genders, and other groups may have the same access to producing content. The third wave is concerned with how commercial “platforms” are influencing what may be posted online, and how this impacts self-expression and sociality in everyday contexts. Students are encouraged to read the film in terms of the characteristics that they identify as important for expressing the self and engaging in sociality through many types of media.

Most ethnographic films and documentaries are “character driven” and focus on individuals and their personalities. *Hey Watch This!* is instead organized thematically, around specific concepts, debates, and themes that new generations of media participants continue to grapple with when trying to connect with others and express their ideas and sense of self. Major themes from the film inspire classroom exercises and discussion questions meant for small groups (3-5 people) that help students explore these ongoing questions about human use of media. The discussion questions are oriented to the film (rather than to the class exercises). The class exercises are stand alone and may yield a range of questions. Both instruments are meant to help explore themes from the film.

## **Theme 1: Media Initiation and Learning**

### *Readings*

Jenkins, Henry, with Katie Clinton, Ravi Purushotma, Alice J. Robison, and Margaret Weigel. 2006. *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century*. Chicago, IL: MacArthur Foundation.

Lange, Patricia G. 2012. “Rhetoricizing Visual Literacies.” Paper presented at the annual conference of the International Communication Association, May 25, Phoenix, Arizona. [http://www.patriciaglange.org/page4/assets/Lange%20ICA%202012%20Final %20Paper.pdf](http://www.patriciaglange.org/page4/assets/Lange%20ICA%202012%20Final%20Paper.pdf).

Lange, Patricia G. 2014. *Kids on YouTube: Technical Identities and Digital Literacies*. Walnut Creek, CA: Routledge. [See chapter On Being Self Taught]

Müller, Eggo. 2009. “Where Quality Matters: Discourses on the Art of Making a YouTube Video.” In *The YouTube Reader*, ed. Pelle Snickars and Patrick Vonderau, 126–139. Stockholm: National Library of Sweden.

### *Class Exercise*

Choose an online, socially-oriented site that everyone in the group participates on or has participated on. Try to list the social “rules” and “best practices” that participants know to follow. Try to list 10 social rules or best practices. For example, some people argue that one should not post too many photos on Instagram on the same day. Others say many posts are necessary for gaining a following as long as they are not of the same thing (such as too many pictures of one’s cat). Discuss potential violations of those rules and what happens when people ignore them. How do people develop the “participatory literacies” that are necessary to succeed on social media? What does it mean to “succeed” on a particular social media site? Are the rules the same across sites?

### *Film Discussion Questions*

1. Choose a social media site that you participate on. How and why did you join the site? Did you create your own account or did someone create it for you? Did you create an account for someone else? What are some people’s motivations for joining a site?
2. How did you learn how to participate on the site? What are its “rules” of participation? Are they easy to follow?

3. Imagine that you do not know how to do something on the site. What do you do to answer your question? For example, do you read the site's frequently asked questions file, do you reach out to the site's human support, do you ask a friend, or some other method? Why do you use these particular methods? Why do you reject other methods? Does everyone in the group use the same method? What does this imply with regards to designing support and help for people to develop digital literacies?
4. Is it okay to use the #likeforlike, #followforfollow or other similar types of reciprocal tags on social media such as Instagram? If someone follows you on Twitter, are you obligated to follow back? Why or why not? Does your site have these kinds of unwritten rules? Should they?
5. Imagine a scenario in which a friend constantly violates the social "rules" of the social media sites that you both use. What is your strategy with regard to helping your friend? Do you remain silent and allow them to learn at their own pace and in their own time, or do you intervene and try to help them understand the "rules"? Why?

## Theme 2: Digital Community

### Readings

Amit, Vered. 2002. "Reconceptualizing Community." In *Realizing Community: Concepts, Social Relationships and Sentiments*, ed. Vered Amit, 1–20. London: Routledge.

Anderson, Benedict. 2005. "Imagined Communities." In *Nations and Nationalism: A Reader*, edited by Philip Spencer and Howard Wollman, 48–58. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press. [Concept developed in 1983]

Boellstorff, Tom. 2008. *Coming of Age in Second Life: An Anthropologist Explores the Virtually Human*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. [See Chapter 7: Community]

Lange, Patricia G. 2019. *Thanks for Watching: An Anthropological Study of Video Sharing on YouTube*. Louisville, CO: University Press of Colorado. [See Chapter 5: What Defines a Community?]

Strangelove, Michael. 2010. *Watching YouTube: Extraordinary Videos by Ordinary People*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. [See Chapter 5: The YouTube Community]

Turner, Victor. 2002 [1969]. "Liminality and Communitas." In *A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion*, ed. Michael Lambek, 326–339. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

Wellman, Barry, and Milena Gulia. 1999. "Virtual Communities as Communities: Net Surfers Don't Ride Alone." In *Communities in Cyberspace*, ed. Marc A. Smith and Peter Kollock, 167–194. London: Routledge.

### Class Exercise

Each student should take 5 minutes to reflect on their idea of what constitutes a community in general (offline). Next, gather with other students in a small group and compare notes. Did everyone share the same definition? Which characteristics seemed to appear most frequently?

How did your group's definition compare to the definitions that the interviewees presented in the film? What evidence does the film offer that under the right circumstances, it is possible to speak of an "online" community? What data does the film show that challenge the idea that digital communities are possible or desirable to maintain?

### *Film Discussion Questions*

1. Review the section of the film in which participants discuss their views on community and its limits [Time index: 25:38 – 35:34]. Did they seem to reach consensus on what defines community? What were the characteristics that they oriented around? Why do you think that the film shows very different perspectives on community?
2. According to the film, is YouTube a community? Explain. Cite evidence from the film to back up your argument.
3. Imagine you are tasked with creating an online community organized on a specific site or around a particular theme in media. How would you go about it? What steps would you take to foster its creation? How much would offline activity factor into your plans?
4. What are the most difficult challenges that communities springing from media encounter? Are the greatest challenges external to participants (haters, rules on platforms) or are they internal to participants (individuals are shy, people are ephemeral in their loyalty)? Which features are specific to digital milieus and which characteristics can be seen in both digital and offline environments?
5. Consider the technical functioning of social media platforms. Try to brainstorm and list 10 technical features and rules that social media platforms have implemented. How are these features and rules conducive or challenging to the formation of media-based communities? For example, fan communities enjoy posting mash-ups and other works that use copyrighted media in new ways. Yet, sites may have strict copyright rules that challenge a group's ability to express the self and socialize.

### **Theme 3: Exploring the "Real Me"**

#### *Readings*

Ginsburg, Faye. 2012. "Disability in the Digital Age." In *Digital Anthropology*, ed. Heather Horst and Daniel Miller, 101–126. London: Berg.

Goffman, Erving. 1959. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.

Griffith, Maggie, and Zizi Papacharissi. 2010. "Looking for You: An Analysis of Video Blogs." *First Monday* 15 (1). <http://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/2769/2430>.

Lange, Patricia G. 2007. "Publicly Private and Privately Public." *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 13 (1). <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2007.00400.x>.

Lange, Patricia G. 2009. "Videos of Affinity." In *The YouTube Reader*, ed. Pelle Snickars and Patrick Vonderau, 228–247. Stockholm: National Library of Sweden.

Lange, Patricia G. 2014. *Kids on YouTube: Technical Identities and Digital Literacies*. Walnut Creek, CA: Routledge. [See Chapter 5: Video Mediated Lifestyles]

Maddox, Jessica. 2017. “‘Guns Don’t Kill People . . . Selfies Do’: Rethinking Narcissism as Exhibitionism in Selfie-Related Deaths.” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 34 (3): 193–205.

Marwick, Alice, and danah boyd. 2010. “I Tweet Honestly, I Tweet Passionately: Twitter Users, Context Collapse, and the Imagined Audience.” *New Media & Society* 13 (1): 114–133.

Senft, Theresa M., and Nancy K. Baym. 2015. “What Does the Selfie Say? Investigating a Global Phenomenon.” *International Journal of Communication* 9: 1588–1606.

Sontag, Susan. 1977. *On Photography*. New York: Anchor Books. [See Chapter 1: In Plato’s Cave]

### *Class Exercise*

Each student should spend a few minutes selecting an image that they have posted or might likely post that expresses their “real self.” The student should write a paragraph or make a bullet list describing how the image expresses their true self. Students should choose images they are willing to discuss publicly in class. After each student is finished, students in small groups should take turns showing their image to others and asking what the image appears to convey to the other students. They should not share their intention until the other students in their group have had a chance to offer their interpretations. Do others’ interpretations of one’s media generally match one’s intentions? Did any of the students achieve new insights upon hearing their classmate’s analysis of their media? When we all post on social media, are we posting our “real selves”? How important is it to post our real selves online?

### *Film Discussion Questions*

1. How did the people in the film use media to express themselves? Did they appear as “characters” performing an act in their videos, or did they advocate showing their “true” self? What characteristics were seen as important to use for portraying their “real” self through media?
2. What is the difference between showing your “real self” and being your “best self” on social media? Are they the same thing? Or are they different?
3. What is your approach to social media? Pick one social media site and explore to what extent you try to be “yourself” versus presenting your “best self.” What are your strategies for presenting yourself this way?
4. Reflect on multiple social media platforms in which you participate. Are some of them more prone to express your “real self” versus your “best self”?
5. Reflect on situations you experience offline. What kinds of situations do you feel you can be your “real self”? What kinds of situations show that you are actually trying to project an image of your “best self”? How do your answers complicate the idea that we are always “real selves” offline and we are always just a persona online? Is there such a thing as a “real self”?

## Theme 4: The Future of Internet Commentary

### Readings

Calhoun, Craig. 1992. "Introduction: Habermas and the Public Sphere." In *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, edited by Craig Calhoun, 1-9. Cambridge: The MIT Press.

de Seta, Gabriele. 2018. "Trolling, and Other Problematic Social Media Practices." In *The Sage Handbook of Social Media*, ed. Jean Burgess, Alice Marwick, and Thomas Poell, 390-411. London: Sage.

Lange, Patricia G. 2019. *Thanks for Watching: An Anthropological Study of Video Sharing on YouTube*. Louisville, CO: University Press of Colorado. [See pages 158-177]

Lovink, Geert. 2011. *Networks without a Cause: A Critique of Social Media*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press. [See pages 50-63]

Reagle, Joseph M., Jr. 2015. *Reading the Comments: Likers, Haters, and Manipulators at the Bottom of the Web*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

### Class Exercise

Imagine that you run a website that provides important information for the general public. Decide on your website's topic. Note that your website draws on testimonials from people's every day experiences as well as research reports to communicate its message. Imagine further that a study found that people began questioning the results of the research studies that you posted because readers tended to believe the text comments posted to the site more than the actual findings of the research. Yet, many of the text comments are erroneous. How does your group propose to handle this situation? Do you advocate disabling comments in the future? Do you remove all comments, or moderate them in certain ways? If the latter, how do you propose to moderate them? Do we need internet commentary?

### Film Discussion Questions

1. How did interviewees treat comments in the film? Were they seen as important for being a member of a "participatory culture" on YouTube, or did the interviewees see them as insufficient in comparison to posting videos with their own image for achieving true YouTube participation and sociality? Cite specific examples to back up your points.
2. Some scholars argue that commentary online is now pointless given people's lack of digital literacies (e.g. knowing how to craft commentary) and inability to truly process floods of comments. Others believe we need to pay more attention to comments, even the difficult or unhealthy comments "at the bottom of the web" (Reagle 2015). What is your view of online commentary today? Is it "pointless" or should we try harder to understand new and/or different points of view? How do comments bolster or challenge the Habermasian notion of the "public sphere"?

3. How did the YouTubers feel about “haters” or people who post cruel, pointlessly critical, or mean-spirited commentary? Were they united in terms of having experienced them and dealing with them? What strategies did they propose to deal with them? Were the solutions community-based or individual?
4. Does the film seem to argue that comments are important for promoting video sociality? How so? Do comments promote sociality in general? Why or why not?
5. Should comment systems be automatically be moderated before a video creator sees each comment? Should individuals have sole responsibility for removing harmful comments? Should there be a collaborative effort between those who run the system and video creators in terms of comment approval and moderation? Explain.

## **Theme 5: Digital Legacies**

### *Readings*

Bollmer, Grant David. 2013. “Millions Now Living Will Never Die: Cultural Anxieties about the Afterlife of Information.” *The Information Society: An International Journal* 29 (3): 142–151.

Christensen, Dorthe Refslund, and Stine Gotved. 2015. “Online Memorial Culture: An Introduction.” *New Review of Hypermedia and Multimedia* 21 (1–2): 1–9.

Lange, Patricia G. 2019. *Thanks for Watching: An Anthropological Study of Video Sharing on YouTube*. Louisville, CO: University Press of Colorado. [See pages 203-216]

Gotved, Stine. 2014. “Research Review: Death Online—Alive and Kicking!” *Thanatos* 3 (1): 112–126.

Ryan, Jenny. 2012. “The Digital Graveyard: Online Social Networking Sites as Vehicles of Remembrance.” In *Human No More: Digital Subjectivities, Unhuman Subjects, and the End of Anthropology*, ed. Neil L. Whitehead and Michael Wesch, 71–87. Boulder: University Press of Colorado.

Wahlberg, Malin. 2009. “YouTube Commemoration: Private Grief and Communal Consolation.” In *The YouTube Reader*, ed. Pelle Snickars and Patrick Vonderau, 218–235. Stockholm: National Library of Sweden.

### *Class Exercise*

Imagine that you have a distant relative who is ill. Although they are not gravely ill, it occurs to them that they would like to create a website that will function as a memorial to them after they pass away. They have asked you to design their web page for this purpose. How will you go about designing the web page memorial? Will you interview them? What questions might you ask? Do you wish to access their old media? What media will you examine? Who else might you talk to? What sources might you turn to in order to craft the web page? What features will it have? How will you deal with conflict about the design or content of the page? For example, what if your relative wants certain content to appear, but your relative’s children ask you not to post it. What will you do?

### *Film Discussion Questions*

1. Review the section of the film in which Lange asks participants about their envisioned digital legacies [Time index: 45:48 – 51:42]. Did YouTubers say that their channel and videos should remain online? For what reasons? For how long? How do you feel about your own digital legacy? How does your vision compare to those of interviewees in the film?
2. Imagine you were placed in charge of maintaining someone's digital legacy page on YouTube. You received instructions from the person to delete all the videos that they made of a certain type (say political videos). The person's family members requested that you restore them because they are important to their community and help them mourn their loved one. What do you do? Why?
3. In the past social media sites simply deleted accounts from people who had passed away. Today, many sites have policies that allow a social media account holder to designate a legacy account manager who will make decisions about the account. Imagine that your team is part of a social media company that must make decisions about legacy accounts. Try to list 5-7 "rules" of such accounts. For example, should people have the opportunity to keep an account up for a certain period of time after they pass away? What "windows" of time will be allowed [1 week? 1 month? 1 year? Other?]. Provide brief justifications for the policies you are setting. Does the legacy account manager need to provide legal proof that they are designated for this role? What kinds of proof will your company require? Explain.
4. List a number of characteristics that you would expect a legacy account to have on social media. Try to find 3 public legacy accounts, each on a different type of social media. Study them carefully. How are they similar? How do they differ? In what way do they conform to the characteristics that you expected? How do they line up to the kinds of accounts that are described in the film? How do they map to descriptions in the scholarly literature? Do they seem to be helping people "stay connected" to the person who passed away, or do they seem to help people cope with loss (or both)? What are the clues you are using to make this assessment?
5. We are said to be entering a "posthuman" era in which digital elements of our lives and personalities (also called "alters" or alternative versions of ourselves) will live on in perpetuity. How should society deal with digital "alters"? Should they be preserved (in schools, libraries, digital memorial sites) or should we create media that maps to the end of a human life cycle? Should everyone's media be preserved and catalogued or only those of specific people? How will society decide how to handle posthuman "alters"?

## **Theme 6: Ethnographic Vulnerability**

### *Readings*

Behar, Ruth. 1996. *The Vulnerable Observer*. Boston: Beacon Press. [See Chapter 1: The Vulnerable Observer]

Evans, James, and Phil Jones. 2011. "The Walking Interview: Methodology, Mobility and Place." *Applied Geography* 31: 849–858.

Lange, Patricia G. 2007a. "The Vulnerable Video Blogger: Promoting Social Change

through Intimacy.” *Scholar and Feminist Online* 5 (2). [http://sfonline.barnard.edu/blogs/lange\\_01.htm](http://sfonline.barnard.edu/blogs/lange_01.htm).

Ruby, Jay. 1991. “Speaking For, Speaking About, Speaking With, or Speaking Alongside—An Anthropological and Documentary Dilemma.” *Visual Anthropology Review* 7 (2): 50–67.

Shrum, Wesley, Ricardo Duque, and Timothy Brown. 2005. “Digital Video as Research Practice: Methodology for the Millennium.” *Journal of Research Practice* 1 (1). <http://jrp.icaap.org/index.php/jrp/article/view/6/12>.

Tedlock, Barbara. 1991. “From Participant Observation to the Observation of Participation: The Emergence of Narrative Ethnography.” *Journal of Anthropological Research* 47 (1): 69–94.

### *Class Exercise*

Visual ethnographers are increasingly experimenting with more flexible and integrated ways of interviewing people for research projects. One method is the “walking interview” in which a researcher films an interviewee as they walk together in a place that is important for the study participant’s life. Working in pairs, go on a “walking interview” for 15-20 minutes for each person. Set a theme for the interview that would benefit from being in a specific place when the interview occurs. Who will set the route for the interview? Will interviewers establish questions ahead of time or will questions emerge from the exercise of experiencing a place together? What kinds of “walking probes” or elements in the environment that prompted questions and discussion emerged? How will the interviewer “sign post” what is happening in the interview? [Example: A videographer might sign post themes by making explicit where they are as they are recording and talking, and narrating what the interviewee is doing during the interview.] After the exercise provide a written summary of what was learned. Reflect on the process itself. What would you do differently? What kinds of things would you do in the same way? [Note: This exercise may require your institution’s Human Subjects IRB approval. See the American Anthropological Association’s website for information on exemptions for “student ethnography.”]

### *Film Discussion Questions*

1. Identify moments in the film in which Lange as a visual ethnographer is “vulnerable.” How are you defining the idea of being “vulnerable” as a visual researcher?
2. Shrum et al. (2005) argue that visual ethnographers should involve the people whom they study more directly in their research and in their video work. Ruby (1991) states that there is an important difference between visual work that is “cooperative” in which people elect to participate, for instance by granting an interview. However, projects that are truly “collaborative” involve research participants as decision makers, shaping the content of the film. What steps might you take to turn a “cooperative” research film into a “collaborative” project? What concerns might you have over this process?
3. Studies have found that if a person is more open about themselves, other people tend to reciprocate and open up about their lives. Imagine you are doing a documentary on social media use. How much information would you share about your own social media

practices with your interviewees? What kinds of things would you share and what kinds of things might you be reluctant to share with your research participants? [For this exercise, discuss categories of information (such as “posting about personal relationships”) rather than disclosing specific personal details.]

4. Imagine that you are conducting a visual ethnography project. Decide on the theme for the project. Will you put the images of your interviewees on camera? Why or why not? Will you put yourself on camera? How important is it for the visual ethnographer to put themselves on camera? Explain.
5. In a classic article Tedlock (1991) argued that ethnographers should move away from the idea of participant-observation because it promotes more distant forms of data collection. In contrast, she advocates engaging in observation of participation, in which researchers observe themselves participating in an ethnographic encounter. Identify moments in the film in which the researcher/filmmaker seems to be engaging more in participant-observation and when they visually depict the process of observing their own participation. What kinds of data are shown visually in each of these rubrics? Is what is depicted about study participants and learned about one’s own participation the same or different when using these different approaches? Are these approaches opposed or compatible? In other words, can you do them at the same time or are they mutually exclusive? Explain.