

Playing with Borders: Young People's Mediated Cultures and Digital Worlds

Proposed special issue of *The Canadian Journal of Communication*

Edited by Kisha McPherson, Natalie Coulter, and Marion Tempest Grant

In the current digital mediascape, young people's play is increasingly entangled in consumer culture as the boundaries and borders between culture and commerce collapse, and as digital spaces transform into sites of branded content in unprecedented ways (Hardy 2022). In these entanglements, young people are audiences, markets, consumers, users, creators, and fans. They play on gaming platforms like Roblox, they produce content for YouTube, they follow their fandoms on TikTok, and they aspire to be influencers on Instagram. As they do, they create, engage, and socialize within these entanglements. Meanwhile, media companies make content for them, brands court them, tech companies gather data on them, musicians pursue them, social media platforms cultivate them, streaming companies push content at them, and fashion companies co-opt them. All the while, parents, schools, and governments try to police and regulate them in these spaces.

These tensions necessitate an urgency for families, scholars, industry professionals, and communities, to outline, debate, and address the complexities of young people's play within these entanglements.

The borders and boundaries of young people's cultural worlds are nuanced and constantly in flux, especially those in the entangled capitalist spaces of consumer culture, digital culture, and media culture. This special issue, *Playing with Borders*, is an invitation to consider how young people contest, resist, negotiate, push, and play between and across borders in the messy spaces between 1) the analog and the digital, 2) the authentic and the branded, 3) the global and the local, 4) markets and other forms of life, and 5) play and labour in the consumer, mediated, and digitized spaces of young people's lives.

This special issue will interrogate the concepts and definition of young people's "play" in borders and boundaries that have often reinforced settler colonialism, racism, hetero-patriarchy, homophobia, transphobia, and white supremacy.

We are specifically calling for papers that center young people's voices, perspectives, and experiences. *Playing with Borders* invites work that engages with transdisciplinary methods and perspectives from across the humanities and qualitative and critical social sciences. The Special Issue theme invites research that draws from critical perspectives that center marginalized selves: queer, trans, feminist, crip, antiracist, abolitionist, decolonial, Indigenous, diasporic, transnational, and so on.

The following topics are prompts for contributions that explore young people's consumer cultures, digital cultures, and media cultures. Other areas of critical engagement are also welcome.

1. What type of innovative research methodologies and approaches can be used to effectively capture and describe young people's interactions and creations within emerging digital and consumer spaces?
2. How do children and teens navigate and embody digital and consumer citizenship within contemporary media landscapes?
3. What roles do social, cultural, and economic factors play in shaping children and teens' participation in digital spaces?
4. How do digital technologies facilitate and/or constrain young people's creative expressions in online environments?
5. Describe the impact of young people's play in commercialized spaces, including the influence of branded environments, consumer influences, and digital interactivity on their experiences and agency.
6. What strategies exist to strengthen children's media and digital literacies in these spaces?
7. How do digital media cultures reinforce and challenge traditional geographic, cultural, or generational borders? What strategies do children and teens use to navigate, subvert, or redefine these boundaries in their online engagements?
8. What are the mechanisms used to regulate or restrict young people's play in digital environments? How do young people push back against or creatively navigate these restrictions to carve out autonomous play spaces?
9. How do we critically integrate the shifting definitions of young people's play into scholarship on media and digital culture?
10. In what ways do children and teens utilize media and digital technologies as tools for creative expression, storytelling, and content production? How do these forms of digital creation reflect their agency, aspirations, and engagement with the broader cultural landscape?
11. How do young people actively "lean in" and participate in consumer culture, and what are the broader implications of this form of engagement?
12. Approaches that consider young people as creators, influencers, and entrepreneurs within these global digital marketplaces.
13. Explorations of the erosion of the boundaries between the authentic and the branded.

All articles should be scholarly in nature and engage with relevant literature. We welcome a range of article lengths, from 6000 to 8000 words, following [APA style](#). The journal's [citation and style guide can be found here](#).

As Special Issue Guest Editors, we are committed to welcoming contributions from a range of scholars teaching across a variety of disciplines. Group contributions describing an academic unit's intervention(s) are welcome.

Articles are due **15 May 2025** via email to childrenandteen@yorku.ca.

For all inquiries, please be in touch via email at childrenandteen@yorku.ca.

Kisha McPherson, Toronto Metropolitan University

Natalie Coulter, York University

Marion Tempest Grant, York University