

What is Self-Image/Identity in the Digital World?

People are generally concerned about their self-image/identity in the real world, spending time and money to assure they have clothes, a hairstyle, and other items that reflect who they are. More importantly, people behave in a manner they want others to take notice of - hopefully for good!

While self-image/identity is important in the real world, it has now become equally important in the digital world. As we learned with Digital Footprint, everything we do electronically can be traced. Now that we understand the significance of Digital Footprint, we need to consider the self-image/identity we portray for the world to see!

Why is Digital Self-Image/Identity important?

If you were to write a traditional autobiography, you would take great care to portray yourself as you see you. While willing to share your struggles and concerns, you would still want your reader to understand the person you are, and/or trying to be. Consider your digital self-image/identity an online autobiography - as much care should go into the digital story you tell about yourself!

Digital self-image/identity is slowly becoming the primary source for people to get to know you. After interviewing for a school or job, the interviewer will spend as much (or more) time identifying you online. What you say, how you say it, and the image you portray of your self online is the cover to your autobiography - what will people think of your image?

What is the relevance for Students?

Digital Self-Image/Identity is crucial for our students. For years, either through postings of family/friends, or of their own, their life story is being written online. Right now, students need to take ownership of their Digital Self-Image/Identity by posting/sharing the positives of their life. Especially if there is a digital past they are not proud of, now is the time to flood their online presence for the better. Whether sharing their own accomplishments, or applauding those of family/friends, students need to establish the self-image they want the world to see!

What can we do to help students?

Here is a short list of examples educators may use to discuss the relevance of Digital Self-Image and Identity

- Have students pair up in class. Each student writes a mini autobiography (one paragraph or bulleted list). Next, each should review the other's online presence. After, each should summarize the other's line presence (similar format to autobiography). When writing is done, students should compare/contrast their findings
- Class discussion of famous person who made mistakes with their online self-image and has worked (successfully or not) to correct that image (e.g. Mantei T'eo, Anthony Weiner, etc...).
- Discuss what the online presence may look like of a famous political figure who lived before social media
- Discuss the business implications, good and bad, of digital branding (a company's self-image), demonstrating both good and bad
- Compare/Contrast number of "views" of positive/negative viral YouTube videos. Is there a correlation?

Where can I learn more?

- <https://www.commonsensemedia.org/educators/scope-and-sequence#grades-9-12>
- <https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/gradhacker/reassessing-my-digital-identity>
- <http://www.forbes.com/sites/alextaub/2012/06/07/5-key-things-needed-to-improve-your-digital-identity/>