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Brady Robards and Sîan Lincoln
Growing up on Facebook
New York: Peter Lang, 2020, £28 pbk, (ISBN: 9781433142741), 210 pp.

Reviewed by Lukasz Szulc, University of Sheffield, UK

Since its launch in 2004, Facebook has enjoyed widespread and continuing popularity. Recognising this persisting importance of the social media platform for billions of people around the world, Brady Robards and Sîan Lincoln begin *Growing up on Facebook* by asking: 'What is it like to have "grown up" in the era of social media?" (p. 2). The book offers a highly original qualitative study of Facebook use over time (minimum of five years) by the first generation of young people who have grown up with social media.

Robards and Lincoln interviewed 41 young people based in Australia and the UK, asking them to reflect on their Facebook use in their teenage years and early twenties. To help them with this memory exercise, the authors developed a new method of scrolling back through Facebook Timelines, which includes looking through Facebook profiles together with the interviewees, encouraging them to discuss selected posts, provide additional context and explain the periods of more or less intensive engagement. This method yielded in-depth insights into to the importance of Facebook for growing up; insights which could not be obtained by simply scraping social media posts and analysing them 'in the abstract' (p. 59). The method and its ethical implications are described in the book at length (Chapter 4), which makes the study replicable for other researchers.

The key theoretical questions addressed in *Growing up on Facebook* concern issues of identity work. Drawing mainly on the theories of Erving Goffman (the presentation of self) as well as Anthony Giddens (the reflexive project of self) and Pierre Bourdieu (different forms of capital), the authors show how social media use by young people cannot be characterised as simply spontaneous, care-free or irresponsible. Quite the contrary, social media use 'is labour intensive—as well as emotionally intensive' (p. 144), as it requires young people to skilfully navigate their identities, mediated by social media in new and complicated ways. To illustrate this, Robards and Lincoln zoom in on four domains of social life: education and employment (Chapter 5), romantic relationships (Chapter 6), family life (Chapter 7) and leisure time (Chapter 8). They show, for example, how much negotiation is involved in deciding if partners should disclose their relationship status on Facebook, how they should do it and when.

The major contribution of the book lies in its longitudinal focus on Facebook use at the time of growing up. By discussing how Facebook use changes over time for young people—for example, around critical moments of their lives, such as graduation, first romantic relationship or first job— Robards and Lincoln reveal not only what young people do but also what they do not do on Facebook, as well as what they delete, hide or edit, and who they unfriend. In the last chapter, they further conceptualise social media disconnections by discussing such practices as 'Facebook abstinence' and 'Facebook vacation'. I also applaud the authors for challenging normative assumptions about some key aspects of social life discussed in the book. This is most clearly visible in the chapters about romantic relationships (with special attention to queer relationships) and family life (with special consideration of young people in the foster care system). At the same time, the chapter on education and employment focuses only on the 26 participants who had an experience of university (or other

tertiary) education, leaving me curious about the experiences of the remaining, less-privileged participants.

What I miss the most in the book is a careful examination of the importance of the cultural context. The authors set out to engage ‘with the contextual circumstances of Facebook use’ (p. 5) but their understanding of context is limited to either the immediate social context or the larger historical context. The omission of the cultural context is all the more striking in a research project designed to be conducted in two countries, Australia and the UK. The authors do not explain why they chose the two countries and they do not compare them. Often, we do not learn in which country particular participants were based at the time of the interviews. Consequently, culture remains largely absent from the book, unless it is the culture of the marginalised, as it is the case with a migrant student of Muslim background based in the UK. Similarly, the authors recognise that young people’s use of Facebook is ‘modulated by gender, class, and race’ (p. 154), and yet, while gender is regularly discussed and class is often mentioned, race is virtually unaddressed in the book.

Altogether, *Growing up on Facebook* is an invaluable contribution to the sociology of youth, media and communication studies, and identity theories, and is likely to become a model for in-depth longitudinal investigations into social media use. Future research should build on Robards and Lincoln’s work to advance our understanding of how people in different cultural contexts and of different sociodemographic characteristics grow up, and live their social lives, with social media.