Digital Identity Video 1: Catherine Cronin

What is digital identity?

I suppose the most basic definition of digital identity is everything by us and about us online but when we talk as educators about digital identity, it's more about intentionality and agency around digital identity. So what kinds of conversation do you want to be part of and where are those spaces happening, and in those networks, how do you create an identity in order to take part in those conversations, so again, using something like Twitter for an example, there's an immediate decision that a person will need to make about whether or not they want to try and use that tool and then there's a further decision about how they want to be – do they want to integrate their personal and professional identities or have a separate professional identity. And those are all individual decisions, you know, that we all make on our own but I think it's important to try and be part of the conversations that are happening in networked publics. Because if we don't have a voice in those spaces, then we're not heard and you're not part of creating the future basically. So it's also what I try and support students in developing their digital identities also.

How do you engage with 'networked publics'?

I have been a very active social media user for about the past 6 or 7 years. Certainly, I have been on Twitter since 2009 and then blogging since about that time as well. I started using social media myself I'd say just as a learning and networking tool because a few colleagues told me that there were educators using tools like Twitter and so on, and so very quickly, I found that I was able to build a network which continues to be my personal learning network and I know it has grown and evolved over time you know and I've developed and grown over that time.

Do students struggle with the idea of using social media for academic purposes?

Generally yes because like you say, learning is an identity project. Students come in and their identities are very much changing and forming during the time that they're in higher education. But what I have found working with undergraduate students for many years around these kinds of areas is students tend to come in with very well developed social identities online but not very confident online identities as learners, as scholars, as soon to

be professionals or sometimes even as citizens, so that's the work that we do together and I think that it's important that educators in higher education support and help students develop those identities while they are within education because we are teaching them in our respective faculties about being nurses or software engineers or philosophers or whatever it might be but from the moment students leave us they will be doing those things and also being citizens in public spaces which include networked publics. They will be making decisions about who to be online and how to be online. So that needs to be part of the process of higher education.

Is there a certain amount of pressure for students and academics to engage online?

The research that I'm doing at the moment, you know one of things I was speaking about in my session this morning, was yes there is pressure about having an online identity and content production and so on, but it is an individual decision about how and where we choose to do that. I think that's really important for staff and students. We may be encouraging staff and students to have identities but every individual comes up with their own balance between privacy and openness and we can tell lots of stories about the value of openness – it's very important; it enables us to be part of conversations and so on, but privacy – to what extent someone wants to be private – is a very personal decision and it has to do with who we are as individuals, our family situation, whether we have a partner or not or even in the class when we're inviting students to be open, there are dynamics within that class. If we invite students to be open, we're going to be entering into that. So we have to be cognisant of all of that and allow and encourage people yes to create and develop their digital identities, but only to the extent that they feel comfortable. And usually what happens is that is an emergent phenomenon. It's not like I'll use Twitter – OK now I am on Twitter. How you use it evolves with time.

What type of things do people need to be aware of when engaging online?

That's part of the very important conversations that we need to have with our students and with each other. When we use tools like Twitter or Facebook, who owns that data that we share there, what's happening to it? How are those data traces connected? To what extent do we own our data? Can we make other choices about platforms that we use where we have more control over our data and our online presence? These are all really important. Understanding online surveillance, online shaming. We ignore those difficult conversations at our peril. We should precisely be talking about what's happening and if things are happening in the news this week now, let's bring that into the classroom – online, physical – whatever the class is and discuss what they mean for us as citizens, as students and academics but more important as people and as citizens because we all have to make important decisions

about that. You know at the end of the day, we have responsibilities as scholars to be present in networked publics and model that for our students and not as experts but as people who are just learning and developing our own understanding all the time about these things.