

Growing Up Tethered and Beyonces Social Media Identity

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Introduction

Sherry Turkle's "Growing Up Tethered" and Melissa Avdeeff's study of Beyoncé's social-media identity examine different levels of digital life. Turkle focuses on young people whose phones become continuous links to parents, peers, and networks. Avdeeff examines a global celebrity whose public self is carefully constructed through images, performance, feminism, sexuality, and controlled access. The original comparison correctly identifies authenticity and attachment as shared concerns, but it reduces both works to the claim that people look at phones instead of "real life." Digital communication is part of real life, and Beyoncé's social-media presence is not simply a false version of a private person. The more useful question is how different kinds of power shape connection: teenagers may feel unable to disconnect from peers, while a celebrity can use silence, selective disclosure, and professional production as forms of control (Turkle; Avdeeff).

Both articles complicate the idea of authenticity. Turkle shows that constant contact can prevent solitude and independent decision-making even when communication feels sincere. Avdeeff shows that a highly mediated persona can appear authentic because audiences recognize consistency, emotional cues, and control by the artist. Authenticity online is therefore not the absence of performance. Every self-presentation selects what to show. It is a relationship between representation, audience expectation, platform conventions, and perceived honesty.

Turkle and the Tethered Adolescent

Turkle describes young people who carry parents and peers with them through mobile communication. Earlier generations also sought approval and maintained friendships, but the phone changes timing and availability. A teenager can ask a parent what to do before making an ordinary choice, update friends during an experience rather than reflect afterward, and feel social absence as soon as messages stop. Tethering promises safety and belonging while making separation more difficult.

The issue is not merely quantity of screen time. Turkle is concerned with the developmental value of solitude—the capacity to experience uncertainty, form an internal response, and return to others without constant confirmation. If every uncomfortable moment can be filled by messaging, boredom and anxiety are never allowed to become reflection. Yet connection is not inherently harmful. For isolated, disabled, queer, migrant, or geographically separated young people, digital communication

can provide essential community. The question is whether connection is chosen and varied or experienced as an obligation that eliminates other modes of attention.

Parents participate in tethering. Monitoring applications, repeated check-ins, and rapid rescue can reduce danger but also communicate that the child cannot manage risk. Independence is learned through graduated responsibility, not sudden abandonment. Turkle's argument is strongest when it asks adults to examine the systems they create rather than blame teenagers for using tools supplied to them.

Beyoncé and the Controlled Presentation of Self

Avdeeff uses Beyoncé to explore celebrity authenticity in a media environment where audiences expect direct access. Celebrity accounts appear personal, but photographs, captions, timing, design, and publicity may involve teams and strategic planning. This does not automatically make the persona deceptive. A musical performance is constructed and can still express meaningful identity. Beyoncé's digital presence combines intimacy with distance: audiences receive family images, political symbols, fashion, and behind-the-scenes material, but the terms of access remain controlled.

That control is significant because celebrity culture historically depended on magazines, labels, interviewers, and paparazzi to frame public identity. Social platforms allow artists to bypass some gatekeepers and release images or announcements directly. Beyoncé's use of visual albums, surprise releases, and selective communication can shift power toward the artist. Silence itself becomes a strategy because scarcity increases attention.

Race and gender shape the meaning of this presentation. A Black woman's control over beauty, sexuality, motherhood, labor, and political symbolism occurs within industries that have stereotyped Black women and profited from their images. Feminist messages can be commercially powerful and politically meaningful at the same time. The presence of branding does not cancel every emancipatory claim, but it invites questions about who can purchase the lifestyle being represented and how activism operates inside a global entertainment business.

Authenticity, Performance, and Audience Labor

The original essay treats perception as opposed to "actual reality," but social identity always involves performance. People speak differently with family, employers, friends, and strangers without every difference being false. Digital platforms collapse these audiences, forcing users to choose between one broad persona and carefully managed accounts. Celebrities face this at enormous scale, while teenagers face it in schools and peer groups where a post can travel beyond its intended context (Goffman).

Authenticity is often judged through signs such as informal photographs, emotional disclosure, direct

address, and apparent spontaneity. These signs can be planned. Conversely, a polished image may express a genuine artistic identity. Avdeeff's case shows that authenticity is granted by audiences when a presentation feels coherent with what they believe the artist stands for. Fans perform labor by interpreting clues, sharing content, defending the celebrity, and building collective meaning.

Turkle adds that this performance can become exhausting. Users monitor responses, edit themselves, and experience silence as rejection. Metrics turn social recognition into visible numbers. The desire for an authentic self may paradoxically increase management: people repeat images that receive approval and suppress parts that do not. Digital identity is therefore shaped by personal choice and by platform feedback.

Connection, Commerce, and Unequal Power

Teenagers and global celebrities use some of the same platforms but do not occupy the same position. Beyoncé has professional resources, an established brand, legal support, and the ability to make absence desirable. An ordinary young person may be excluded socially by going offline. The comparison should therefore avoid treating all users as equally empowered creators.

Platforms profit from both. Attention, interaction, and audience data become commercial value. A celebrity attracts users and advertisers, while everyday relationships keep people returning. The platform shapes visibility through recommendation, moderation, interface, and metrics. Neither Turkle nor a celebrity-centered analysis is complete without this institutional layer. Tethering is not only a personal habit; it is encouraged by designs that reward constant checking.

Commerce also complicates feminism and authenticity. Celebrity advocacy can introduce ideas to large audiences and materially support causes. It can also turn political language into brand distinction. Evaluation should examine the content, labor practices, partnerships, and effects rather than assuming that popularity proves either liberation or manipulation.

What the Articles Reveal Together

Turkle and Avdeeff both show that digital identity is relational. The teenager's self develops through messages from parents and peers; the celebrity's self develops through interaction among artist, industry, fans, critics, and platforms. Neither identity is produced by an isolated individual. Technology changes the speed, scale, persistence, and visibility of those relationships.

They also reveal different meanings of control. For Turkle, growth may require the power to disconnect and make a decision alone. For Avdeeff's Beyoncé, agency appears through controlling what is disclosed and bypassing traditional gatekeepers. Privacy and publicity are not opposites here. Selective privacy makes a public persona possible, and a healthy adolescent identity similarly needs both connection and protected interior space.

A contemporary response should therefore avoid a demand to abandon phones. Young people can benefit from notification boundaries, device-free conversations, private reflection, media literacy, and adults who model balanced use. Audiences can appreciate celebrity art while recognizing production and commercial strategy. Authenticity should be understood as accountable self-presentation, not unrestricted access to another person.

The two readings also differ in method. Turkle relies on interviews and cultural observation to interpret changing habits, while Avdeeff performs a media and celebrity analysis focused on representation. Neither method alone proves a universal psychological effect. Turkle's examples illuminate experiences but should not be generalized to every young person, and a study of Beyoncé cannot represent all influencers or users. Reading them together is productive because one emphasizes everyday development and the other emphasizes industrially organized visibility.

Privacy is another shared theme. Tethered adolescents may disclose location and emotion to maintain belonging, while Beyoncé's public authority partly depends on withholding access. This contrast shows that privacy is a resource distributed unequally. People with status can make scarcity valuable; people with less power may be pressured to remain constantly reachable by parents, schools, employers, or peers. Digital wellbeing therefore includes not only personal restraint but a social right to be temporarily unavailable.

Conclusion

"Growing Up Tethered" and Avdeeff's analysis of Beyoncé approach social media from different positions but share a concern with how identity is made under continuous visibility. Turkle warns that constant contact can weaken solitude and autonomy. Avdeeff shows that a celebrity can use carefully managed visibility to produce authenticity, authority, and brand power. Together, the works demonstrate that online life is neither simply false nor naturally liberating.

The central issue is agency over connection. People need the ability to participate, withdraw, choose audiences, and understand how platforms shape response. Beyoncé's controlled persona and the tethered teenager illustrate opposite sides of the same problem: identity requires relationships, but relationships become oppressive when access is compulsory or controlled entirely by others. Digital maturity means learning not only how to present the self, but when not to present it.

Works Cited

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