"I share therefore I am"

A Narrative Inquiry concerning Young Adults' Experiences of Personal Self-Disclosure on Facebook

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Declaration

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of Doctorate in Psychotherapy is entirely my own work, and that I have exercised reasonable care to ensure that the work is original, and does not to the best of my knowledge breach any law of copyright, and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

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Glossary of terms

Avatars: computer-generated versions of the self that are often created for online gaming in online communities in virtual worlds (Turkle 2012).

Cognitive Dissonance: a state in which individuals strive for internal consistency of thoughts beliefs and attitudes and experience psychological distress if and when inconsistencies occur (Singleton, Abeles, and Smith 2016).

Context collapse: occurs when self-disclosure is intended for one cohort of a users' online network but this clashes with another cohort of the online audience, which holds a different notion of the users' 'self' (Marwick 2011).

Digital Natives: a person born or brought up during the age of digital technology, and thus familiar with computers and the Internet from an early age.

Facebook: a popular, free, social-networking website that allows registered users to create profiles, upload photos and video, send messages and keep in touch with friends, family and colleagues.

Facebook Friends: an online community composed of a Facebook member's online connections on the social network, which can range from close offline friends and family, classmates from one's school and college years to work associates (Ellison 2007).

Facebook Timeline: a collection of the photos, stories and experiences selected by the Facebook user that tells their story.

Generation Z: the cohort of people born after the Millennials.

Interpersonal Communication: verbal, written and non-verbal exchanges as part of a direct relationship between the sender and receiver, who are in an interdependent relationship for the purposes of exchanging messages.

Intrapersonal communication: an internal monologue within a single person, often used to clarify ideas or analyse a situation, or to plan or reflect upon something.

LinkedIn: a social-networking website designed for business professionals that allow members to share work-related information with other users and keep an online list of professional contacts.

Master Narrative: An overarching account or interpretation of events and circumstances that provides a pattern or structure for people's beliefs and gives meaning to their experiences.

Newsfeed: a constantly updating list of updates to other people's Facebook profiles viewed from your own Facebook account. The news feed includes status updates, photos, videos, links, app activity and likes from people, pages and groups that you follow on Facebook, including as a default your Facebook Friends.

Nonymous online social networking environments: These environments are not completely anonymous, as some members of the network will have offline knowledge of the user, but they allow for a degree of creativity and manipulation of the portrayal of the self.

Panti: Panti Bliss is a popular Irish gay rights campaigner.

Psychoanalysis: a system of psychological theory and therapy that aims to treat mental disorders by investigating the interaction of conscious and unconscious elements in the mind, and bringing repressed fears and conflicts into the conscious mind using techniques such as dream interpretation and free association.

Psychodynamics: the aggregate of motivational forces, both conscious and unconscious, that determine human behaviour and attitudes

Second Life: online computer game in which users create virtual representations of themselves called avatars and interact with other avatars, virtual places or objects.

Self-concept clarity: the extent to which self-belief is clearly defined, consistent and stable (Yang and Brown 2016).

Self-disclosure: the voluntary communication of personal information to a targeted recipient (Nguyen et al. 2012).

Self-presentation: a form of self-disclosure that involves more strategic intentionality (Yang and Brown 2016).

Sims: an online video game involving the control of an avatar that simulates an activity such as flying an aircraft or playing a sport.

Social capital: a network of contacts composed of a collection of strong and weak ties, the measure of which depends on the strength of the varying relationships.

Social media: websites and applications that enable users to create and share content with other users or the public at large, or to participate in social networking.

Social Networking: the use of dedicated websites and applications to interact with other users or the public at large, or to find people with similar interests to one's own.

Status updates: micro-blogs or shared postings on their Facebook Timeline and are viewed as 'individual active content' viewed on the Newsfeeds of other Facebook users.

The Kardashians: An American reality television series that airs on the E! cable network. The show focuses on the personal and professional lives of the Kardashian–Jenner family.

Tumblr: a popular micro-blogging platform designed for creative self-expression, considered to be a mindful alternative to Facebook.

Twitter: a free social networking micro-blogging service that allows registered members to broadcast short posts called tweets; typically tweets are public postings.

Abstract:

Title: "I share therefore I am" A Narrative Inquiry concerning Young Adults' Experiences of Personal Self-Disclosure on Facebook

The growing popularity of Facebook has prompted much interest in the concept of online self-disclosure. Prior studies have primarily examined this concept from a quantitative perspective, often focusing on how the frequency and pattern of online disclosures relate to personality typologies. This study is the first qualitative exploration of users' perspectives on their experience of personal self-disclosure on Facebook. The aim of the study was to identify the factors that motivate participants to self-disclose online, the functions that this serves and the impact it has on participants. It involved using a psychotherapeutic analytical framework to conduct a content analysis of the Facebook accounts of 57 Irish third-level students (aged between 18 and 25 years) over a six-month period. Five of these participants, who were subsequently identified as engaging in personal online self-disclosure, were invited to participate in a one-to-one interview. Riessman's (2010) Narrative Analysis Framework was used to analyse both the online Facebook status updates and the interview transcripts of these five participants, which formed the data for the study. The study findings add new insights to our understanding of the interpersonal and intrapersonal dynamics of online personal self-disclosure. They suggest that the motivating factors can be divided into internal and external motivators. Internal motivators include a desire to entertain, educate or inspire one's Facebook audience. External motivating factors involve Facebook's role in encouraging and shaping users' self-disclosures, which in turn can influence new cultural norms. The findings suggest that online personal self-disclosure may function as an opportunity for users to express their preferred identities and may also be used for processing, managing and expressing difficult emotions and in turn address a users' psychological need for recognition and validation. The findings also suggest that engagement in online personal self-disclosure often involves intense psychological rumination and feelings of online vulnerability, which may impact users' psychological wellbeing by triggering experiences of anxiety and preoccupation. As these findings suggest that online personal self-disclosure can be experienced as a catalyst for psychological distress and also act as a

mechanism for managing distressing feelings has implications for psychotherapy theory and practice.

Chapter 1 Introduction

> The term "Face" may be defined as the positive social value a person claims for himself, an image that others may share, as when a person makes a good showing for his profession or religion by making a good showing for himself. (Goffman 1965, p.5)

Introduction

This introductory chapter provides a brief background to current knowledge regarding online self-disclosure on social networking sites (SNS) and the relationship between online self-disclosure and psychological wellbeing. It provides a rationale as to why this research study was conducted and outlines the methodology and study design. This qualitative study explored participants' accounts of what motivates or provides the impetus to engage in online personal self-disclosure, what functions are being served or what needs are being met by this activity, and the impact of this on users' psychological wellbeing. The chapter concludes with an outline of the thesis.

1.2. The rise in popularity of SNS

It has been observed in recent years that young people's interactions with their peers and their families have changed from predominantly face-to-face (FTF) communication to more computer-mediated communication (CMC) (Turkle 2012). CMC includes all manner of communication technologies, such as smartphone apps, instant messaging, email and social networking sites (SNS). Many of these changes in our modes of communication have occurred in response to the evolution of technology and the rise in popularity of online SNS (Magherabi et al. 2014).

The most popular SNS in the world is Facebook (Zephoria.com 2016). The success of Facebook is evidenced by the fact that it began with 1 million users in its first year, 2004, increasing to 1.65 billion users in 2015, of whom 1.09 billion are Daily Active Users (DAU). It was estimated in May 2013 that there were on average 4.75 billion pieces of content shared on Facebook every day, which is a 98 percent increase since 2012 (Zephoria.com 2016). This increase in online engagement has been expedited by the emergence of smartphone technology in 2009, which has resulted in Facebook now having 1.51 billion Mobile Active Users (MAUs). This has provided easier access and methods for users to stay permanently connected to each other (Singleton et al. 2016). Recent statistics suggest that 85 per cent of Irish 12-17-year-olds use SNS (Gillan 2015), and UK figures suggest that young adults spend an average of 19 hours per week on SNS, a figure which has doubled since 2005 (Boniel-Nissim et al. 2015). The use of SNS is not limited to young people; Christofides et al. (2012) suggest that people of all ages are migrating to online environments and that there are more similarities than differences in the ways that all age groups engage with SNS. This pervasive cultural shift towards SNS has meant that these platforms are now the most predominant ways in which people communicate (Gillan 2015).

It is widely accepted that CMC has an impact on how people communicate (Locatelli 2012 and Turkle 2012). According to Turkle (2015), social norms of privacy, intimacy, friendship and emotional support have been influenced by SNS. Davis (2012) suggests that SNS has resulted in changing patterns of personal self-disclosure which may have an impact on users' sense of identity and psychological wellbeing. The debates in the literature regarding the psychological benefits and risks associated with online self-

disclosure have led many researchers to claim that the evolution of SNS has had a maladaptive impact on users' psychological wellbeing as it has the potential to negatively impact users' self-esteem, mood and offline social interactions (Balick 2014; Monberg 2006; Singleton et al. 2016; Turkle 2012). However others argue that SNS has facilitated social involvement and provided opportunities for support that young people had not been able to access previously (Ellison et al. 2007; Kim and Lee 2011; Muller et al. 2016; O'Keefe and Clarke-Pearson 2011;). Therefore, research into the association between SNS and psychological wellbeing has had mixed findings. According to Singleton et al. (2016) the SNS experiences of young people, especially those with mental health problems, also remains under-researched.

Given the suggestion that the evolution of SNS is having an impact on personal self-disclosure and users' psychological wellbeing, it is important that psychotherapists understand the psychodynamics of this online space in order to assist their clients to safely navigate their online world (Turkle 2015). Weiss (1950) describes psychodynamics as the manifestations and consequences of the interaction of mental forces within the human being. According to Balick (2014), psychotherapy is currently out of touch with the world of SNS, and he advocates that psychotherapists need to gain a better understanding of how SNS is affecting people's way of communicating and being. Balick (2014) advocates that the concept of online SNS be explored from a psychotherapeutic perspective, which involves integrating the theory and practice of psychotherapy to better understand the human psyche (Balick 2014). Turkle (2012) believes that given its impact on one's capacity to reflect, mentalise and be alone, SNS communication and personal self-disclosure need to be investigated from such a perspective.

1.3. SNS and psychological health

Balick (2014) is concerned about the human-to-machine interface that is developing between users and SNS. He claims that recent changes in communication methods have been accepted without fully understanding how these technologies operate, and this may have grave consequences on our relationships, many of which we have yet to fully comprehend.

Many young people who currently attend Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) (aged 12 to 18 years) or the Youth Mental Health Services (aged 18 to 25 years) were born between 1992 and 2004. These groups are commonly referred to as "Generation Z" or "Digital Natives" because they are either too young to remember a pre-Internet world or they have negotiated their adolescent identity in a world of pervasive Internet use (Prensky 2001). Over the last decade the Irish Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (12–17 years) and Young Adult Mental Services (18–25 years) have observed notable increases in the numbers of referrals (Health Service Executive Annual Report 2014). According to Hamm et al. (2015) the evolution of technology has resulted in noticeable changes to how traditional psychological problems currently present in these clinical populations. International studies have observed that technology is adding psychological challenges for young people and their families which they are struggling to understand and manage (Cash et al. 2013). Core transitional challenges, traditionally associated with adolescence and emerging adulthood, such as identity formation, experimental risk-taking and anti-social behaviour are now being articulated, enacted and observed in the online activities of young people, in addition to their offline lives (Singleton et al. et al. 2016). There are a number of studies that suggest that online self-

disclosure can lead to higher risks of cyberbullying and sexual exploitation (Bryce and Klang 2009; Strom and Strom 2005; Cassidy et al. 2009). This evolution has meant that terms such as cyberbullying, social media addiction, problematic internet use, excessive online gaming and inappropriate exposure to explicitly sexual or violent online material have become commonplace in the clinical context (Broll 2014; Tandoc Jr et al. 2015; Satici and Uysal 2015). The Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (ISPCC) Annual Report (2015) revealed that online pornography and cyberbullying were the two most common reasons for young people to contact their Irish helpline in 2015. Other studies have shown that problematic Facebook use was found to relate to low self-esteem and lower users' sense of subjective wellbeing (Denti, Barbopuolos, Nilsson and Davidsson 2012).

Naughton (2012) states that SNS have become woven into young people's experience of the world and their sense of being and therefore they have differing views on concepts such as privacy, personal self-disclosure and sharing. Taken together, these findings suggest there is merit in exploring young adults' experiences of sharing information on SNS and to adopt a psychotherapeutic lens to this analysis in order to gain some meaningful insights into the nature of online personal self-disclosure and the relationship between SNS and psychological wellbeing and to better understand the role of online SNS engagement in relation to identity formation.

1.4. Self-disclosure, Identity and Psychological Wellbeing

The term 'self-disclosure' was first discussed by Jourard (1958), who simply believed it was a process of sharing information, about one's self, which was previously unknown, to

another person. Davis (2012) further develops this point when she suggests that the exchange of self-disclosures between two people is motivated by a desire to develop intimacy, and thus contributes to a better understanding of the formation and evolution of relationships and identity. Park et al. (2011) also suggest that increased self-disclosure is motivated by the development of intimacy and relationship satisfaction. Psychodynamic theory suggests that establishing attachments with others is an essential human desire that requires a degree of personal self-disclosure in order to form meaningful bonds (Baumiester and Leary 1995; Ryan and Deci 2000). Therefore, it is acknowledged that most individuals have a psychical need for affiliation, or a need to belong, which acts as an antecedent or motivator for personal self-disclosure. It is also suggested that a reciprocal process of personal self-disclosure is required for intimacy to develop in relationships (Rosen 2010). According to Owen (2009), attachment is the conscious experience of love; intimacy and the desire to be close and connected with other people, which are often communicated through personal self-disclosures. Pasupathi et al. (2009) suggest that self-disclosure also plays an important role in our knowledge of self. As individuals construct their narrative identity via storytelling about their personal past, this storytelling involves a process of self-disclosure that can have implications not only for how individuals think about themselves but also how they attribute meaning to the self.

Many commentators suggest that the evolution of SNS is changing the way in which users relate and share information (Christofides 2009; Rosen 2010; Hu et al. 2015; Michikyan 2015a; Satici and Uysal 2015). This literature suggests that the advent of SNS is affecting users' patterns of personal self-disclosure and imply that this is having an impact on their

concepts of what is considered public and private (Rosen 2010). Given the importance of personal self-disclosure as a self-defining action (Pasupathi et al. 2009) and as an integral component of intimacy development and relationships (Davis 2012), it seems pertinent to explore what motivates this activity, what purpose it serves and what effect, if any, it is having on users' psychological wellbeing. It was therefore decided that this concept would form the basis for the investigation of this study in order to better understand the interpersonal and intrapersonal processes of users who engage in online personal self-disclosure. Given the importance of relationships, intimacy development and identity in psychotherapy (Balick 2014), implications are drawn for psychotherapists regarding the experience of online personal self-disclosure and the role of motivation, function and the impact of this activity.

1.5. Methodology: Narrative Inquiry

This research aimed to explore the concept of online personal self-disclosure within the context of a young adult population, aged 18–25 years. To date, many studies have focused on the depth and breadth of the content being shared (Hollenbaugh and Ferris 2015) but they have not explored the nature and extent of users' experience of online personal self-disclosure. Many of these studies claim that online personal self-disclosure deserves further qualitative enquiry (Christofides et al. 2012; Deters and Mehl 2012; Gardiner et al. 2005; Litt 2012; Locatelli 2012; Manago et al. 2012; Singleton et al. 2016) yet despite the plethora of research on general SNS usage, no research has qualitatively examined the relationship between psychological wellbeing and personal self-disclosure on Facebook (Satici and Uysal 2015). Nadkarni and Hofmann (2012) also recommend that

future research examines individual users' experiences in order to explore their motivations for use, rather than continuing to focus on the collective experience. Similarly, Christofides et al. (2009) suggest that research needs to look at individual motivators for online self-disclosure, especially amongst the cohort of young adults. Litt (2012) opined that:

> Future research needs to involve qualitative methods, including observations of social media communication, content analysis, and interviews with users to identify general behaviours, perceptions and strategies (p.341).

Litt (2012) claims that this approach will lead to a better understanding of the relationship that users have with SNS and guide relevant future policies and educational strategies. This approach has been highlighted as necessary to address the current gaps in the existing knowledge base (Deters and Mehl 2012, Litt 2012, Locatelli 2012, Manago et al. 2012).

Considering these gaps identified in the literature, and the fact that online personal self-disclosure can be considered a form of storytelling or a process of identity announcement, this study explored the concept of online self-disclosure from a narrative perspective (Riessman 2010). The study involved analysis of *both* the participants' online shared information (status updates on their Facebook pages) *and* their verbal accounts of their experiences of self-disclosing in this way (semi-structured interviews). The transcripts from the participant interviews, coupled with the analysis of their digital stories, were analysed using Riessman's (2010) Narrative Analysis Framework. The analysis aimed to create a better understanding of the interpersonal and intrapersonal dynamics of personal self-disclosure on Facebook by exploring the experience of online

personal self-disclosure, in particular the motivations behind, functions of and impact of this activity. It was thought that a psychotherapeutic lens would be useful of illuminate this understanding.

1.6. Outline of the thesis

Chapter Two: This chapter provides an in-depth exploration of existing research in the areas of online self-disclosure. The reviewed literature is on topic areas related to the objectives of this study, such as user motivation for online personal self-disclosure, the function of online self-disclosure with regards to expressing identity and the significance of online communication theory in explaining the impact of online self-disclosure on psychological wellbeing. This chapter identifies gaps in existing research and provides the rationale for the current study.

Chapter Three: This chapter provides a detailed outline of and rationale for the chosen methodology, Riessman's Narrative Analysis Framework (2010), and the methods used for data gathering and analysis. A detailed description of the design of the study and its ethical implications are also discussed.

Chapter Four: This chapter provides an outline of the findings gleaned from analysis of the digital profiles and semi-structured one-to-one interviews with the five study participants. It outlines the three key themes identified in the analysis, firstly namely that participants' motivation included a desire to entertain, inform or inspire their Facebook audience which was influenced by Facebook's role in encouraging users' personal self-disclosures; secondly online personal self-disclosure may address a users' psychological needs for

recognition and validation as well as providing opportunities for processing, managing and expressing difficult emotions; and finally online personal self-disclosure can involve intense psychological rumination and feelings of online vulnerability, which may impact user psychological wellbeing by triggering experiences of anxiety and preoccupation.

Chapter Five: This chapter explores how the study findings resonate with and depart from existing literature concerning the motivation, function and impact of online personal self-disclosure. It also highlights the contribution that the study makes to current knowledge in the fields of psychotherapy and mental health.

Chapter Six: This concluding chapter outlines the implications of this study for psychotherapy practice, discusses the strengths and limitations of the study and identifies areas for further inquiry.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

This chapter explores the extant literature on a number of key areas relating to the aims and objectives of this study. The chapter begins by examining the construct definition of personal self-disclosure and explores the varying descriptions of this concept in the literature. The chapter then explores studies that have investigated users' motivations for online self-disclosure, paying particular attention to the impetus for personal self-disclosure in an online SNS context. It then explores the literature that discusses the function of online self-disclosure in relation to what users' needs are being met by engaging in this activity. This is followed by a review of the current literature pertaining to users' overall experience of online self-disclosure with particular emphasis on the positive and negative impact of this activity on their psychological wellbeing. As this study is interested in how aspects of the self are disclosed on Facebook, Goffman's (1959) theories of social interaction are discussed in relation to their relevance to online personal self-disclosure. The chapter concludes with an exploration of the literature pertaining to online self-disclosure and psychotherapy.

2.2. Construct definition of self-disclosure/ personal self-disclosure

The first step in exploring any concept is to establish construct validity or construct definition around the terms being used in the research question. This involves setting boundaries to distinguish what a concept is, and indeed what it is not (Tilton-Weaver et al. 2013). However, this becomes problematic when it comes to concepts like self-

disclosure which involve much inference and interpretation. A challenge in this study is to distinguish between “routine self-disclosure” and “personal or intimate self-disclosure” (Marshall et al. 2005). According to Tilton-Weaver et al. (2013), both of these types of self-disclosure can overlap and co-occur. Furthermore, Tilton-Weaver et al. (2013) suggest that these differences are not always recognised by scholars and as a result, many of the existing studies use the same terms to describe different constructs.

The term ‘self-disclosure’ was first discussed by Jourard (1958), who simply believed it was a process of sharing information, about one’s self, which was previously unknown, to another person. Jourard (1958) saw self-disclosure as an important aspect of self-discovery. Later, the concept of self-disclosure shifted away from being associated with the individual, and moved toward understanding self-disclosure as an interpersonal process (Tilton-Weaver et al. 2013). Here self-disclosure began to be described as a transactional process of sharing private information that is not discernible from other sources.

The concepts of routine disclosure and personal self-disclosure are discussed in the theory of information management (Marshall et al. 2005). This theory suggests that it is necessary to examine the conditions of the self-disclosure to determine its best description. These conditions include the type of information being disclosed and the target audience to whom a person discloses (Marshall et al. 2005). This definition also considers whether a self-disclosure is voluntary or involuntary or a partial or full disclosure. A conclusive definition is also complicated by the fact that self-disclosure may serve the purpose of providing misleading information or keeping secrets, and thus can

also be described as a vehicle for manipulation or a mechanism used to gain control (Marshall et al. 2005).

Other scholars describe personal self-disclosure as evident when someone divulges more information than is required in that situation, which again suggests the circumstances and context of the disclosure can influence how it can be conceptualised (Almas 2009). The available literature also suggests that the definition of personal self-disclosure is primarily concerned with the established notion of privacy that exists within a certain set of circumstances (Rosen 2010). This is also pertinent to incidents of personal self-disclosure on users' Facebook Timelines where a varying degree of closeness or privacy may exist between different members of a users' network. Rosen (2010) suggests that differing levels of maturity and social roles can influence whether something is considered private or not, and therefore these variables can also determine what constitutes different types of self-disclosure. For example, a person who is twenty-two years old may not consider revealing their age as personal self-disclosure, whereas a person in their sixties may well consider it to be so. Furthermore, private information between two people does not always constitute personal self-disclosure, especially when there is an understood agreement between the parties concerning privacy maintenance (Marshall et al. 2005).

According to Allen (1974), self-disclosure must be intentional, contain information that was previously unknown to the recipient, reveal more information than is required by the situation or express thoughts or feelings which enhance intimacy. According to Tilton-Weaver et al. (2013), routine disclosure is often considered to be information that is primarily pragmatic and is possible to acquire using other sources, whereas personal self-disclosure is deemed to be more strategic and where the information communicated is

not accessible from other sources. According to Almas (2009) this distinction is further complicated by the fact that soliciting a lot of routine disclosure can evolve into personal self-disclosure due to the cumulative effect of information being disclosed. This is especially relevant in the case of online communication because the internet can contain a considerable volume of routine information about individuals which can be sewn together to infer greater details about them thereby merging into personal disclosure (Almas 2009). Routine and personal self-disclosure may also co-occur, particularly as routine and personal self-disclosure can often complement each other. Personal self-disclosure can be considered when an individual communicates something in a way that gives some meaning to the other information provided through routine disclosure. For example, during revealing one's activities (routine) one may infer what they thought or felt at the time, thereby making it a personal self-disclosure (Tilton-Weaver et al. 2013).

According to Almas (2009), the potential for co-occurrences is greater in more nuanced communication platforms like social media sites. Status updating on one's Facebook Timeline involves a one-to-many communication that provides information to an audience that is often made up of diverse connections with varying degrees of closeness to the person posting the material (Binder 2012). If the audience considers that the quality of the pre-existing relationship can determine whether self-disclosure is considered routine or personal and will vary in one-to-many contexts like Facebook.

Due to the subjectivity of inference and interpretation, in addition to the oscillating variables of social norms and maturity, it becomes difficult to clearly define the concepts of routine and personal self-disclosure. For the purposes of coherence in this study, the

definition formulated by Allen (1974) will be used to define personal self-disclosure, which suggests that

> Personal self-disclosure needs to be intentional, contain information that was previously unknown to the recipients, and reveal more information than is required by the situation or express thoughts or feelings which enhance its intimacy (p196).

2.3. Motivations for personal self-disclosure on Facebook

The following section will review the literature that explores the factors that create the impetus for Facebook users to engage in online personal disclosure. This will include motivators within the individual, and external motivators which involve factors within the wider context or the specific situation that encourage online personal self-disclosure.

2.3.1. Internal motivations for online self-disclosure

According to Hogan (2010), the extent to which a user is motivated to self-disclose is dependent upon dispositional (personality typology) and contextual (closeness of the relationship between the communicator and the recipient) variables. A study by Lee-Won et al. (2014) identified two types of internal motivations for self-disclosure: "protective" and "acquisitive". Protective self-disclosure is motivated by an avoidance of social disapproval; while acquisitive self-disclosure is motivated by the pursuit of social approval. These findings suggest that online self-disclosure involves a degree of risk, which may involve posting something that meets with social disapproval, and the sensitivity to this risk may vary depending on the anxiety levels and the particular motivations of different users.

A comprehensive systematic review of the literature by Nadkarni and Hofmann (2012) found that the overall primary motivations for Facebook use were 1) a need to belong

and 2) a need for self-presentation. They also found that users who exhibited high levels of extroversion were motivated to use Facebook as a social platform, and had more Facebook friends. Conversely, those who exhibited high levels of introversion appeared to transfer their socially inhibited behaviour from the offline world onto Facebook. In a study involving 343 undergraduate students, Christofides et al. (2009) found that although students were well informed about the privacy risks associated with personal self-disclosure on Facebook, they reported being motivated by the psychological benefits of relationship maintenance, popularity and gathering social capital which outweighed any possible consequences of personal self-disclosure.

Much of the existing research suggests that Facebook is commonly utilised as a self-promotion tool (Horton et al. 2014; Lee-Won 2014; Yang and Brown 2016). Status updates are believed to be the most commonly used self-promoting feature of Facebook. Status updates are postings visible to users' own Facebook friends, or some portion thereof, depending on what privacy settings the user has selected. Status updates appear on a users' Facebook Timeline, and are viewed as "individual active content" which best demonstrate a person's specific outward relationship with their Facebook audience (Seidman 2014 p. 369). It is also suggested that users are motivated to engage in personal self-disclosure in order to self-promote certain aspects of themselves (Hu et al. 2015; Michikyan 2015a; Satici and Uysal 2015). A study by Campbell et al. (2010) suggests that Facebook use is motivated by narcissism, which concurs with Ong et al. (2011), who found that users who update their Facebook profiles regularly, using self-generated content, also scored highly with regard to narcissism.

The concept of narcissism is a common theme that occurs in the literature regarding personal self-disclosure on Facebook. According to DeWall et al. (2011), narcissism refers to an inflated and grandiose self-concept that involves elevated levels of agentic traits such as intelligence, power and dominance. A number of studies have claimed that online self-disclosure on SNS has experienced positively by those who are deemed to be narcissistic (Buffardi and Campbell 2008; DeWall et al. 2011a; Ong et al. 2011).

> It appears that greed, self-obsession, superficial relationships, arrogance and vanity are everywhere apparent and are not making us any happier, with common mental health problems on the increase, especially among the young. Seemingly irreversible alterations to family life, technological development and celebrity worship in social media all feature in the rise of our narcissistic society and are interconnected trends.
>
> (MacDonald 2014, p.144)

The association between personal self-disclosure on Facebook and narcissism is hotly debated in the literature. Winter et al. (2014) suggest that SNS use is motivated by narcissism because sites like Facebook offer users dynamic self-promotion tools, like status updates, which allow users to share one-to-many messages about their daily lives with large audiences (Ong et al. 2011). Deters et al. (2014), suggest that researchers have started to explore whether narcissism is a motivator for online personal self-disclosure because status updates receive social feedback in the form of “likes” or “comments”. Kauten et al. (2015) agree that Facebook is especially appealing to narcissistic individuals, as it allows relationships to be easily maintained via likes and comments on each other’s posts. It is thought that narcissists may use their Facebook community as a means of regulating their excessively good opinions of themselves in order to gain public admiration (DeWall et al. 2011). Twenge and Campbell (2009 p.110) suggest that

Facebook “encourages narcissism in even the most humble” and a number of other studies that claim that narcissism is a strong predictor of online self-disclosure on Facebook (Ong et al. 2011; Buffardi and Campbell 2008; DeWall et al. 2011a). In summary, the available research suggests that: 1) narcissistic individuals are attracted to Facebook because of its self-promotional broadcast features, and 2) Facebook promotes narcissism due to its self-promotional design (Buffardi and Campbell 2008).

I would respectfully suggest that these types of definitive descriptions may be unhelpful, as broad labelling runs the risk of shutting down further exploration of other possible explanations for this behaviour. According to Kets de Vries (1985 p.8) narcissism is not always pathological, and these characteristics are applicable in smaller measures in individuals who adopt a more “normal” mode of functioning. Kets De Vries (1985 p.8) suggests that some narcissists pretend to be self-sufficient, but “in the depth of their beings they experience a sense of deprivation and emptiness”. In order to compensate for these feelings of insecurity narcissists can become preoccupied with power, status, prestige and superiority. Kets De Vries (1985) also emphasises that these characteristics occur with different degrees of intensity and suggests that a certain degree of narcissism is necessary to function effectively, especially in managerial roles where the positive implications of narcissism can be crucial.

Kets De Vries (1985) describes constructive narcissism as a healthy form of narcissism that generates positive vitality and personal worth and considers narcissism in the context of Klein’s Object Relations Theory (Klein 1975). Here narcissistic behaviour is understood as a component of the dynamic of ‘splitting’, which involves making global appraisals of good and bad in others and one’s environment. This is thought to defend the subject

from the persecution of bad objects by getting rid of the unwanted aspects of the self and projecting these into others. Kets De Vries (1985) concluded that the frequency, severity and intensity of the utilisation of these defence mechanisms can determine the type of narcissism that develops. Kets de Vries' (1985) view that narcissism exists on a spectrum that includes non-pathological or adaptive narcissism, seems to challenge the notion that individuals should be categorised into such labels, considering that such fine and subtle margins exist.

Hollenbaugh and Ferris (2015) found that online relationship development was the primary motivator for online self-disclosure. Their study also suggested that users who were motivated to seek companionship were deemed to self-disclose more "dishonest" information on Facebook than users who were motivated by relationship maintenance (Hollenbaugh and Ferris 2015 p.463). However, again this study suggests that a complex concept like truthfulness can be categorised into such binary or two-dimensional terms as 'honesty' and 'dishonesty'. According to Gergan (2010) scientists may use the most rigorous methods to test a concept (like honesty) and amass significant amounts of data indicating the different levels (of honesty) amongst certain groups. However, this presumes that there is something (called 'honesty') that can be measured. Furthermore, considering the level of social/self-construction that is inherent in the use of Facebook, then perhaps a certain degree of selective honesty is almost a prerequisite in these circumstances. These findings open a debate as to whether selective online personal self-disclosure promoting one's positive attributes on Facebook can be considered dishonest.

According to Michkygan et al. (2015a), personal self-disclosure features prominently on Facebook profiles because users are motivated to present different aspects of themselves

online. Much of the available literature describes the online disclosure in terms of different versions of the self that are expressed (Chang and Heo 2013; Utz 2015; Lee Won et al. 2014; Michkygan et al. 2014). Michkygan et al. (2015a) refer to these different versions of the self as the real self, the ideal self and the false self. According to Harter et al. (1996), the real or true self encompasses authentic feelings that are motivated by internal processes, whereas the ideal or hoped-for self is understood in terms of ideal attributes such as one's hopes and wishes (Markus and Nurius, 1986). The false self feels and acts in ways that are not true to the self and may occur for reasons such as deception, exploration and/or impressing others (Harter et al. 1996). It is suggested that the fewer discrepancies that exist between the real self and the ideal self, the more likely the person is to experience positive psychological wellbeing (Higgins, 1989). However, these compartmentalised notions of the self can be overly simplistic, and many of these studies recognise this limitation and suggest that there is a need to understand these complex processes from a qualitative perspective (Yang and Brown 2016; Utz 2014; Lee Won et al. 2014).

A study by Michikyan et al. (2014, p.179) gathered self-reports of 261 young adults and found that online personal self-disclosures can be strategically motivated. This study found that young adults who are experiencing emotional instability can be strategic in their online self-disclosure and therefore are motivated to post material that is intended to seek reassurance and validation. Michikyan et al. (2014) also suggest that users who were experiencing self-doubt attempted to experiment with their online self via online self-disclosure on Facebook. This study also found that users who posted more updates reflecting their hoped-for self did so in order to gain approval and acquire further social

capital. Seidman (2013) found that motivations for different types of self-disclosure behaviour could be established by using the "Big 5" personality markers questionnaire (John, Donahue and Kentle 1991). This study found that self-disclosure was best predicted by users with features of low conscientiousness and high neuroticism. She also found that neuroticism was positively associated with the expression of the "ideal" or the "hoped-for" self (Seidman 2013, p.407). She suggested that future studies should focus on qualitatively examining motivations for Facebook use rather than measuring the frequency of specific behaviours, as this would better reflect the relationship between personality and Facebook use.

There is a notable tendency in many of these studies to describe research participants in terms of pathologies or labels, many of which are complex to identify or diagnose. Gergan (2010) states that constructing the world in terms of distinct, self-contained selves leads to the social world being constituted in terms of difference. This is especially true when it comes to using terms that have connotations of clinical pathology such as neuroticism, honesty or narcissism, which can act as socially-binding forces (Gergan 2010). Yang and Brown (2016), propose that quantitative studies are limited in their capacity to measure the intricate processes involved in online personal self-disclosure and that further qualitative research studies are needed to unravel its complexities and explore the impact of online self-disclosure on identity formation and psychological wellbeing.

2.3.2. External motivating factors for online self-disclosure

Facebook has received a great amount of scholarly attention with regard to how its self-presentational features promote strategic self-disclosure of behaviours that showcase the

online self in a positive manner (Hollenbaugh and Ferris 2015). According to Davis (2012), Facebook is characterised by high amounts of personal self-disclosure because it is a crucial element to relationship development. Facebook's mission statement is to "make the world more connected" (Zuckerburg 2016). This objective relies heavily on its users' willingness to share their inner thoughts and emotional states with their social network. The Facebook software design makes no secret of this by openly prompting users to self-disclose personal information and share it with their Facebook network. Previously, Facebook prompted users to update their status with the question, "What are you doing?" which was then changed to the more emotionally focused "How are you feeling?" Facebook also facilitates self-disclosure by making it easy to share pictures and web content through their mobile applications (Hollenbaugh and Ferris 2015). However, Suler (2004) suggests that the opposite could also be the case, proposing that it is the absence of non-verbal cues about who is watching or listening that encourages users to self-disclose more intimate information than they would in a face-to-face context.

A mixed-methods study by Jordan-Conde et al. (2014) revealed that young adults frequently self-disclose their routine as well as their more intimate information on Facebook and suggest that this is reflective of contemporary evolving social norms regarding what is considered private and public. Personal self-disclosure differs depending on one's age, culture and personal value system (Davis 2012). While there has always been a developmental explanation that posits that younger people have different perceptions of privacy than adults, the shift to online self-disclosure seems qualitatively different to these previously held developmental explanations (Rosen 2010). Rosen (2010) explains that SNS are having a notable impact on the concept of privacy, as many

SNS actively encourage online self-disclosure, which is developing new cultural norms with regard to society's engagement with personal self-disclosure. According to Livingstone (2008), information such as age, religion, politics and sexual preference are not viewed as private by younger users of SNS, and university students routinely disclose this kind of information to a wide network of connections without concern. It is suggested by Rosen (2010) that it is becoming increasingly important for us to learn more about privacy and personal self-disclosure behaviours in response to changes in this medium. Jordan-Conde et al. (2014) hypothesise that this cultural norm is changing as a result of younger people's use of Facebook for identity experimentation, meaning that Facebook has become a forum for personal self-disclosure and feedback. This concurs with Gergan (2010) who suggests that there are socially prescribed times and places when and where it is appropriate and expected to perform and self-disclose certain emotions or information. One might consider whether Facebook is socially prescribing a discourse that encourages performances of personal self-disclosure.

In order to comprehensively consider the motivators for online self-disclosure, this review also explored possible deterrents for this activity, such as feelings of over-exposure or privacy infringements (Aiken and McMahon 2014). There is much concern in the wider media in relation to the risks of online personal self-disclosure regarding privacy infringements and leaving an undesirable online digital footprint (Aiken and McMahon 2014). Karl et al. (2010) suggest that these concerns are justified and report that some users' Facebook pages have been accessed by prospective employers and law enforcement agencies to assess their suitability as job candidates and investigate their possible involvement in particular crimes. A systematic review was conducted by

Valkenburg and Peter (2011) that explored the risks and opportunities involved in online personal self-disclosure from three perspectives of psychosocial development: identity, intimacy and sexuality. They found that online personal self-disclosure on SNS offered opportunities for users to enhance their self-esteem and relationship formation, but there were also significant risks involved, which included cyberbullying and unwanted sexual solicitation. According to Kowalski et al. (2012), the consequences of cyberbullying and sexual solicitation, can occur for users of all ages and can result in a range of negative psychological outcomes. A study by Pelfrey Jr. et al. (2013) suggests that increased online personal self-disclosure is related to an increased risk of being cyberbullied. This study also suggests that users who engage in personal self-disclosures, who are deemed by others to "overshare", elicit more negative judgements by others online, which can lead to cyberbullying and decreased social support by bystanders (Schacter et al. 2015, p.116). The findings of Nguyen et al. (2012) suggest that the perceived psychological and social benefits of self-disclosure on Facebook are stronger predictors of online behaviours than the consequences of privacy concerns or negative online attention.

Another external motivator for online personal disclosure is thought to be culture. In a cross-sectional survey by Lee-Won et al. (2014) involving 352 American and South Korean students found that the American Facebook users predominantly posted self-promotional content, whereas the Asian users posted more self-critical content. These findings suggest that cultural backgrounds can motivate and determine the nature of online personal self-disclosure on Facebook.

All of the above literature illustrates the importance of understanding Facebook users' internal and external motivations for online self-disclosure. Most of these studies took a

quantitative approach and highlighted the need to understand the complexity of the interpersonal and intrapersonal dynamics involved in online personal self-disclosure. This literature supports the need to understand the complex dynamics of online personal self-disclosure and acknowledge that this is a gap in the existing research available. However, adopting a qualitative methodology may help to illuminate these complexities.

2.4. The Function of personal self-disclosure on Facebook

2.4.1. Identity announcement as a function of online personal self-disclosure

According to Stone (1981, p.188) the construction of identity is a public process whereby the individual, claiming a particular identity, makes a series of self-disclosures or "identity announcements". These are followed by a series of "identity placements", made by others who endorse the claimed identity. An identity is established when there is a "coincidence of placements and announcements". Questions of identity are a central aspect of emotional development for young adults where a positive sense of identity is linked to healthy psychological wellbeing (Davis 2012). Erikson (1968) posited that peer relationships and social contexts are central to identity formation and suggested that interactions that occur in larger groups develop and reinforce shared norms such as language, clothing styles and music preferences. Brechwald and Prinstein (2011), claim that people experience a sense of belonging among those who share their interests and values in social groups. As adolescents grow older, they participate with multiple peer groups whose boundaries are increasingly fluid (Gilford-Smith et al. 2005). These relationships become increasingly defined by mutuality, empathy and reciprocity, which in turn create intimacy amongst those involved (Seidman 2014). It is through the

personal self-disclosure of intimacy that bonds are made, relationships develop and identity is strengthened. This becomes especially prevalent in emerging adulthood, as intimate self-disclosure increases with age from childhood to emerging adulthood (Davis 2012). This emphasis on the impact of the social eco-system on identity development suggests that Facebook can be considered a contemporary setting for these formative dynamics to take place. According to Jenkins (2010) Facebook status updates can be understood as announcements of identity which are performances of the self that impact the way in which one views and understands who they are. This suggests that Facebook may be a vehicle for contemporary identity announcements and where identity placements can take place which inadvertently influence the manner in which these are expressed.

Jordan-Conde et al. (2014) suggest that young adults warrant particular investigation as they are tasked with maintaining popularity during a period of self-definition. They also express the widely-held belief that the formation of identity is endorsed and explored through our relationships and that mutual disclosure of intimacy forms the basis of solidifying relationships. This view is similar to that of Davis (2012) who describes personal self-disclosure, during a period of self-definition, as serving the function of announcing identity, thereby suggesting that online personal self-disclosure and one's identity are inextricably linked.

In Erikson's (1968) seminal book *Identity*, he describes the importance of context in shaping identity during what he views as the crucial gateway of emerging adulthood. Furthermore, Beyers and Cok (2008) describe identity development in emerging adulthood as a series of person–context transactions over a period of time. This concept

of transactions is especially relevant to self-disclosure on Facebook, where status updates can be viewed as a series of online self-disclosive transactions. According to Davis (2012), individuals draw on values, signals and beliefs embedded in their social context to shape their identities, and she claims that a function of SNS is to provide users with new contexts to express and explore their identities. Given the ubiquitous engagement of young adults with SNS, it is opportune to consider what, if any, impact they may have on their users' sense of identity.

Berger (1966) endorses the idea that identity is a cultural creation and suggests that the nature of the individual's environment ultimately dictates the way in which they perform the self. Each situation demands a different performance that one needs to project as a way to adapt (Goffman 1959). This suggests that people perform their identity through the decisions they make about which aspects of themselves they decide to self-disclose. Viewing identity as a cultural creation that is selectively performed certainly applies to Facebook, where selection and performance appear to be core to its appeal (Davis 2012). The concept that we shape our identities and in turn our identities shape us is especially interesting when considering the phenomenon of online personal self-disclosure on SNS, because this implies that the cultivated version of the self which is self-disclosed on Facebook may in turn shape a users' offline identity.

However, the relationship between online personal self-disclosure on Facebook on our identity is unclear. Some theorists suggest that Facebook's capacity for users to occupy different identities in different settings undermines the users' ability to coordinate these multiple facets of the self into a coherent whole (Zhao et al. 2008). However Valkenburg and Peter (2008) argue that Facebook allows users to experiment with their identities and

receive feedback and validation from others, which enhances their self-concept clarity. It would appear from the literature that online personal self-disclosure is strongly associated with identity, and in turn one's experience of online self-disclosure may have an impact on their sense of identity and self-concept clarity.

2.4.2. The function of the performance of the self in online self-disclosure on Facebook

> "It seems that we spend most of our time not engaged in giving information but in giving shows". (Goffman 1974, p.509)

According to Mead (1934), the self emerges through social interaction and therefore needs to be explored within its social context. According to Michikyan et al. (2014), self-disclosure in an online social network context is considerably different to face-to-face self-disclosure, as it involves engaging in more elaborate processes of editing the performance of the self in order to gain the approval of others and foster desired identity constructions. Zhao et al. (2008) suggest that announcing one's identity through personal self-disclosure is different in an online context because one's online identity is not constructed under the same set of constraints, like the presence of a corporal body. In real-life social encounters, people can only self-disclose identities that are relatively consistent with their visible physical characteristics. This is similar to Goffman's theory (1959) of impression management, which involves mostly the manipulation of the physical setting (furniture, decoration) and/or the personal front (appearance, language or manner) in order to generate a desired impression of the self for others. However, online self-disclosure of identity can go beyond the limits set by physical characteristics, which changes the conditions in which one can construct and perform their version of the

self. With the advent of relationship formation online, the conditions of identity production and self-disclosure have changed; now that the body is detached from the social encounter, individuals can interact in a fully disembodied text mode (Zhao et al. 2008). Depending on the degree of anonymity, some online environments make it possible for users to reinvent themselves through the production of new identities (Suler 2004). The disembodied conditions of the online space undoubtedly influence self-disclosure because the performed self is open to greater manipulation (Suler 2004). As a result of these changed conditions, the performance of the self on SNS is amenable to greater degrees of creativity and therefore may be capable of serving different functions. However, as a consequence of the SNS audience being both large and diverse, the user is also vulnerable to experiencing a greater degree of interpretation, scrutiny and response.

However, in most cases, Facebook is not an anonymous environment. Most Facebook networks will have some gating features to identity, which include the fact that some of the members will have offline knowledge of the user. These are referred to as “anchored relationships” (Zhao et al. 2008 p.1820). Zhao et al. (2008 p.1820) suggests that the combination of anonymous and anchoring features on Facebook make it “anonymous online environment”. Nonymous online environments exists where there are still a number of anchoring features that are not present in anonymous online environments, such as online dating sites. However, this is only the case where an actual offline introduction has occurred with members of one’s Facebook community. In some cases, a Facebook identity can be completely anonymous, and impersonated selves can be created in the absence of any anchoring features. However these are more the exception

than the rule, and may be created with more dubious motives in mind such as intentional misrepresentation for the purposes of criminality or deceit.

Certain degrees of anonymity can allow one to self-disclose versions of oneself that are different to their offline self. The context of online self-disclosure affords users a capacity to create a Facebook avatar which depicts a version of one's offline self. The creation of avatars, a practice previously limited to online gaming environments, can now be observed on Facebook (Waggoner 2009). These Facebook avatars tend to embellish certain aspects of the self and minimise other less flattering aspects (Waggoner 2009). The function of the experience of these virtual versions of the self for users is largely unknown, with many suggesting that the creation of virtual selves is at best pointless and at worst dangerous (Cash et al. 2013). However, in a study of 279 users of the online avatar game *Second Life*, Behm-Morawitz (2013) found that virtual avatars had a positive influence on the users' offline health and appearance, and that this was a significant predictor in the development of satisfying offline relationships. It is the general view that the degree of discrepancy between the disclosed/performed self on Facebook and a users' offline reality has adverse effects on identity cohesion (Hu et al. 2015).

According to Yurchisin et al. (2005) users do not express their uninhibited, true or false selves on Facebook rather they perform their hoped-for selves, which is described as a socially desirable identity. Bowen and Nemaniac (2009) describe the hoped-for self as a well-crafted online persona that seeks others to see the user as part of a socially desirable milieu. Bowen and Nemaniac (2009) also suggest that these online personas are often observed in users who experience a lack confidence in face-to-face contexts. As such these personas can be viewed as rehearsals for real-life enactments. Yurchisin et al.

(2005) suggest that it is unwise to dilute the importance of the hoped-for self and posit that it is not to be seen as a false self, but an extension of another aspect of the self. Zhao et al. (2008) suggest that users regard these online presentations as an integral part of their overall identity, and that they utilise the online space in order to self-disclose and publicly display their hoped-for selves. Horney (1991) states that the hoped-for self provides feelings of identity that can compensate for one's experience of inner division, which enables them to experience feelings of power and significance.

Zhao et al. (2008) conducted a content analysis of 63 Facebook accounts and found that users predominantly claim their identities implicitly rather than explicitly, in that they "show rather than tell" (Zhao et al. 2008, p.1830). They found that users tended to express group identities over personally narrated ones, which adds to the body of literature that suggests that Facebook is changing cultural norms of self-disclosure. This further implies that the online self-disclosure of the hoped-for self may serve the function of identifying with socially desirable milieus (Bowen and Nemaniac 2010).

According to Seidman (2014) psychologists have long accepted the fact that the self is multi-faceted. As far back as Jung (1958), there has been a focus on the distinction between the public persona and the private self.

In his book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), Goffman developed a framework for what he called 'impression management' that can be utilised to understand self-disclosure and identity. Goffman (1959) describes how people present an image that is aligned with how they think their audience wants to see them. The implication being that the audience is constantly trying to decode these expressions (Solomon et al. 2013). Goffman (1959) describes these dynamics with a dramaturgical

metaphor; one manages the impressions of others by a careful process of self-disclosure which creates a front-stage persona and conceals a backstage reality. The front stage persona is seen as a convincing performance which is self-disclosed using the available social scenery to one's expressive advantage, whereas the backstage persona refers to the concealment of aspects of the social performer's non-disclosed reality (Solomon et al. 2013). Goffman (1959) infers that impression management is ubiquitous across all social interactions, correcting the errors in each performance where only the end, polished production is self-disclosed to the audience (Solomon et al. 2013).

Although Goffman's work predates the evolution of Facebook by almost five decades, his theories on the social underpinnings of the human subject are relevant to understanding the dynamics of online self-disclosure (Bullingham and Vasconcelos 2013). The contribution of Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical metaphor to this current study becomes clear when one considers the mutual functions of performance, impression management and concealment, which are core features of online self-disclosure. Bullingham and Vasconcelos (2013) infer that Facebook forms the front stage where users choose to project a given identity, thereby suggesting the backstage aspect is reflective of users' offline self. They conclude that Goffman's original framework is central to understanding the function of online self-disclosure and identity announcement on Facebook. In the front stage, the actor is conscious of being observed by the audience, and will therefore perform according to certain rules and social conventions, as failing to do so may mean losing face. The actor's behaviour will differ backstage, where a different performance is necessary (Bullingham and Vasconcelos 2013). Goffman (1959, p.170) argued that individuals have messages that they both "give" and those that they "give off", the former

communicating the intended message and the latter are messages that not intended to be received by the audience (Bullingham and Vasconcelos 2013). Despite attempting to conceal these messages they are often disclosed, if not intentionally so. Goffman (1959) concluded that these front-stage performances are not used by individuals to serve the function of becoming someone else, but rather are experienced as extensions of the same individual.

Although, Arundale (2010) argues that due to the one-to-many context of Facebook, Goffman's (1959) theories are outmoded and need to be remodelled to incorporate the effects of technological advances. Miller (2009) states that SNS are a natural extension to what Goffman posited, suggesting that in the technological era of SNS, we are simply able to self-disclose a wider range of identity indicators than previously. According to Jenkins (2010), the uses of multimedia features on Facebook serve the function of diluting and/or enriching users' communication patterns. However, the difference is that the physical divide between performer and audience presents more capacity for impression management in the process of online self-disclosure (Bullingham and Vasconcelos 2013). This increased opportunity for persona-adoption triggers the debate as to the realness of these online personas. According to Waggoner (2009 p.157) the term "real world" should be replaced by "non-virtual world", stating that virtual identities may be experienced as just as real to the user as their offline identities. Baker (2009, p.14) offers the term "blended identity" to describe the interaction and mutual influence of online and offline selves. In considering the use of term Facebook, one is drawn to Goffman's (1959) notion of "face", which is where an actor dons a mask to interact with their audience, and then leaves it on for the purposes of saving face in future physical interactions; the audience is

thus ignorant of the different aspect of the self that is not disclosed (Bullingham and Vasconcelos 2013).

The process of identity formation has specific important functions during life stages that involve transition, such as emerging adulthood (Erickson 1968). Zhao et al. (2008) suggest that the advent of online SNS has altered the conditions of self-disclosure and identity announcement which provides more leverage to how users can manipulate the impressions of the self to others. Some authors suggest that this evolution has a positive effect on identity expression, and many others who are concerned that this has a negative impact on young adult's sense of self-concept unity. According to Yang and Brown (2016), the function or long-term impact of personal self-disclosure on SNS users' sense of self has not yet been definitively measured or understood, however this is a concept worthy of ongoing exploration (Yang and Brown 2016). It therefore seems imperative to explore both the perceived function of online personal self-disclosure and its impact on a users' psychological wellbeing.

2.5. The impact of personal self-disclosure on Facebook on psychological wellbeing

The advent of SNS has allowed people more control over the stories they tell themselves and others (Baker 2009). Bruner (1990) and Riessman (2008) argue that we construct stories to make sense of diverse and often challenging life experiences. The work of Bakhtin (1981) foregrounds the human imperative to share these stories to know that we are not alone. As Facebook users are now becoming editors and creators who are designing and shaping their own representations of their stories, it is important to consider to whom they are communicating these stories and the impact of this new mode

of relating on their psychological wellbeing. Communicating and telling one's story on Facebook involves choosing what to perform in the front stage and what to conceal backstage. This process of impression management requires an interpersonal objective and an intrapersonal contemplative process. Bakhtin (1981) suggests that to speak is to address someone, either explicitly or implicitly, within a relationship and suggests that performances are fashioned with respect to the recipient.

According to Turkle (2012), SNS have added new dimensions to social relationships. This can be observed in how Facebook has introduced a social currency into relationships in the form of a users' publicised number of Facebook Friends. Before Facebook, social relationships were not amenable to such numerical and broadcast measurement. It is for this reason that Balick (2014) suggests that further exploration of the possible impact of this contemporary change is warranted. A systematic review by Maghrabi et al. (2014) found that engaging in online personal self-disclosure on Facebook was an emotional activity that affected users' emotional wellbeing. This review suggests that the purpose of engaging in online personal self-disclosure is to reap the emotional benefits of social capital, which include support, information and ideas. Ellison (2007) describes social capital as a network of contacts containing strong and weak ties. Typically, a users' Facebook Friend network ranges from close offline friends and family members, to distant relationships like people from a users' earlier school years (Ellison 2007). According to Hu et al. (2015), the emotional dynamics between a Facebook user and their Facebook audience impacts on their online self-disclosure experience and behaviours. They suggest that the composition of a users' Facebook audience informs what aspects of the self they feel they are permitted to disclose. Portes (1998) discriminates between

productive social capital, which can be experienced as a useful resource, and perverse social capital, which can be experienced as having negative consequences for the user, such as constraining one's actions and choices. To ascertain whether social capital is productive or perverse, one needs to examine the types of relationships that exist within one's network of Facebook friends (Ellison et al. 2011). According to Maghrabi et al. (2014), there is a wealth of literature addressing the positive experiences of social capital, such as strengthened communities (Ellison 2011), increased connectedness (Boyd 2014) and improved psychological wellbeing (Livingstone 2008), yet there is relatively little written pertaining to the adverse experiences of negative social capital. A study by Singleton et al. (2016) found that self-disclosing to a large audience on Facebook was experienced with trepidation as it was perceived by users as a gamble. This gamble involves the risk of experiencing judgement and threat versus the opportunity for connection and support. Singleton et al. (2016) describe various types of experiences of judgement on Facebook, which include a judgement of the user by others (others - self) or by the user themselves (self - self) or the users' judgement of others (self - others). These findings suggest that there are a complexity of positive and negative experiences relating to the benefits and risks of online personal self-disclosure on Facebook.

A systematic review by Claridge (2004) found that online self-disclosure created some negative experiences as a result of unintended consequences for users' social capital within their network, namely collisions of audience members who had varying degrees of knowledge about the user. A study by Bryce and Klang (2009) suggested that the wider a users' Facebook audience, the more likely they are to become a victim of cyberbullying, which can include abuse, threats, harassment and posting and forwarding private

information. Lee-Won et al. (2014) found that one of the major emotional complications for online self-disclosure was the composition of the Facebook audience.

A study of 177 Facebook users by Buglass et al. (2016) revealed that the greater the size and diversity of the users' Facebook network, the greater the experience of online vulnerability. This implies that trying to manage the self-disclosure of multiple selves for an online SNS audience, which is composed of both strong and weak contacts, is a complex emotional task. There was a notable lack of studies that explored this concept of online vulnerability. There were no studies available in the literature that explored online vulnerability and its relationship with online personal self-disclosure from a qualitative perspective. This is an area that the current study seeks to address in terms of creating an understanding of the participants' views and experiences of the benefits and challenges of personal self-disclosure on Facebook. According to Buglass et al. (2016), future studies need to develop an understanding of the positive and negative impact of online vulnerability and capture the intrapersonal experience of the gamble of online personal self-disclosure and how this relates to acquiring positive social capital and/or being vulnerable to online threats.

MacDonald (2014) described another aspect of the role of the audience when he suggests that the broadcasting nature of Facebook has created a culture of pseudo-celebrity amongst Facebook users. This is similar to Rui and Stephanones' (2013) suggestion that the act of broadcasting one's life to a large audience, which was once a behaviour restricted to celebrities, is now becoming commonplace for non-celebrity SNS users. These authors believe that these dynamics are cultivating a cultural norm of oversharing that fuels users' narcissism.

There have been very few studies that directly examine the relationship between online personal self-disclosure on Facebook and users' experiences of psychological wellbeing (Mehdizadeh 2010).

In a study of 193 college students, Yang and Brown (2013) found that patterns of usage and personal self-disclosure on Facebook were influenced by one's level of self-esteem. Their findings suggest that SNS may not cause psychological difficulties, but for certain users, they may exacerbate vulnerabilities that were already present. Yang and Brown (2013) found that users who were identified as experiencing low self-esteem and were motivated to self-disclose in a more positive way than those who were identified as experiencing higher self-esteem. Skues et al. (2012) also found that people who experienced loneliness described more intense Facebook usage. A mixed-methods study by Tazghini and Siedlecki (2013) found that those experiencing lower self-esteem more frequently untagged themselves from photos, meaning that they disabled a feature that identifies Facebook users who appear in pictures that are posted of them. It was also noted that users with lower self-esteem were motivated to accept more friend requests from people they did not know. This finding is of interest to those who work with vulnerable populations, where the possible threat of online predators may mean that vulnerable users may be more likely to accept Facebook friend requests without sufficient knowledge of the sender.

With regard to online self-disclosure and psychological wellbeing, Weidman et al. (2012) observed that socially anxious individuals self-disclose more about themselves than less socially anxious individuals. They speculated that this may be an attempt to compensate for their discomfort and their possible fear of experiencing negative evaluation, thereby

revealing many interests on their profile page (Weidman et al. 2012). This seems to contradict the idea that someone who is anxious or has low self-esteem may be motivated to seek invisibility on Facebook, whereas it would seem from the findings of Weidman et al. (2010) suggest that the opposite is true.

There is a dearth of literature examining young people with mental health problems and their experiences of SNS (Singleton et al. 2016). De Wit et al. (2011) found that adults with depressive disorders spend excessive amounts of time online and Gamero et al. (2008) described the emotional contagion effect of online self-disclosure. Emotional contagion refers to the link between self-disclosing and sharing depressing media, which was observed to induce a negative experience for the users' Facebook network. They found that sharing depressing material had a negative impact on the viewer's mood and participants were observed to be using fewer words, expressing more sad terms and exchanging messages more slowly after viewing this material (Rosen et al. 2013). Interestingly this study did not address the possibility of positive emotional contagions, in terms of sharing positive material and as a consequence lifting other users' moods, but this was not the intended focus of their study.

2.6. The interface between online self-disclosure on Facebook for psychotherapy and psychotherapists

There are very few studies that explore the topic of online self-disclosure and psychotherapy. However, one such study by Farber and Nitzburg (2016) compared young adults' levels of self-disclosure on Facebook compared to their self-disclosure in their psychotherapy sessions. This study used a self-report survey completed by 128

participants, and the findings suggest that the depth of Facebook self-disclosure was significantly less than self-disclosures in psychotherapy for all gender and age groups across the study. This study also found that Facebook served the function of the disclosure of positive emotions, whereas psychotherapy was associated with the disclosure of more negative emotions suggesting that disclosure in each of these two platforms serves different purposes and meets different needs.

The importance of psychotherapists having an insight into online personal self-disclosure is not limited to just enhancing their understanding of the challenges that arise for their clients, but they also need to be aware of online developments that affect the psychotherapy profession as a whole (Ballick 2014). It is widely accepted that some potential clients will search for a therapist online, so online self-disclosure by psychotherapists themselves and the content of their digital identity is now an important professional consideration (Balick 2014).

Furthermore, there is a recent move to provide psychotherapy online, which is the source of much debate amongst members of the profession. A systematic review by De Bitencourt-Machado et al. (2016), explored online psychotherapy modalities by reviewing 59 studies that described the effectiveness of online psychotherapy programmes. Most of these modalities used email technology to provide their therapeutic interventions. The results of this review suggest that online psychotherapy is less effective than traditional face-to-face psychotherapy, but it is more effective than a waiting list control group (those who did not receive any interventions). Most of the studies reviewed involved cognitive behavioural therapy approaches and two of the studies involved psychodynamic psychotherapy approaches. DeBitencourt-Machado et al. (2016) suggest that

psychodynamic psychotherapists need to reflect on the changes taking place in the technological world and be aware of the impact that such changes may have on the minds of individuals who attend for treatment and themselves.

The emotional impact of engaging in online personal self-disclosure may be twofold; the audience may encourage personal self-disclosure from users who want to connect, build social capital and perform their hoped-for self, while also the audience could potentially inhibit other users from engaging in self-disclosure due to the complexity of performing for a diverse Facebook audience. It would appear that other problems can arise when users engage in online personal self-disclosure where there is a lack of awareness of the composition of their Facebook audience which results in collisions of unintended audience members and possibly increases their experience of online vulnerability and/or the risk of becoming a victim of cyberbullying. Given the evidence in the literature that users' engagement with SNS has an impact on their psychological wellbeing it is the objective of this study to develop a qualitative understanding of the nature and extent of this impact. It is anticipated that by exploring participants' stories of their experiences of personal self-disclosure on Facebook that this will provide an insight into the potential psychological impact of this activity.

All of the evidence presented in the literature suggests that the relationship between psychological wellbeing and online self-disclosure is an evolving one which merits ongoing investigation. According to Balick (2014), not only do the psychotherapeutic research community have an obligation to become involved in researching aspects of online relationships, the psychotherapeutic perspective may also have a contribution to offer in terms of understanding this phenomenon. Balick (2014) believes that the connection

between psychotherapy and online personal self-disclosure is most relevant in how we understand the impact of these emerging technologies on the self. It is imperative that psychotherapy as a discipline develops an understanding and knowledge concerning the expressions of the self in users' Facebook communications and particularly how their online self-disclosure/self-presentation affects their identity development and offline relationships.

2.7. Conclusion

This literature review began by exploring the literature concerning various motivations for Facebook use, and the key findings suggest that users are internally motivated to self-disclose due to a need to belong, a desire for self-presentation and the pursuit of social capital. The review of the existing research pertaining to the external motivators of online self-disclosure on Facebook revealed that Facebook's core self-presentational features encourage online users to self-disclose. Other studies exploring the risks and privacy concerns of online self-disclosure suggest that most users believe that the motivators of relationship maintenance and gathering social capital outweigh any possible concern about potential negative consequences of online self-disclosure such as cyberbullying or privacy infringements.

This review highlighted that the experience of online personal self-disclosure involves a separation from the corporal body which permits online environments to allow greater scope for users to cultivate and perform online aspects of the self, which can be distinctly different from self-disclosure in an offline context (Zhao et al. 2008). The disembodiment created by the anonymous Facebook environment can serve the function of embellishing

their positive qualities and minimising their less desirable attributes in a very different manner than traditional offline interactions previously permitted.

Both sides of the debate around the positive and negative impact of online self-disclosure on users' psychological wellbeing were discussed. Some studies propose that the freedom provided by Facebook for users to express the different aspects of the self is helpful for identity expression, is experienced positively and serves the function of enhancing identity formation. While others propose that being able to perform multiple selves on Facebook can negatively affect the users' sense of self-concept unity thereby having adverse effects on their experience of identity formation and overall psychological wellbeing (Hu et al. 2015).

This review concluded with an overview of the literature pertaining to online self-disclosure, and its impact on psychological wellbeing and its interface with and relevance for psychotherapy. There was a dearth of evidence in the literature connecting these concepts, which suggests that further enquiry into this area is required. This literature review highlights gaps in the current literature in online self-disclosure, namely the absence of any qualitative studies which explore the general experience, motivation, function and impact of online self-disclosure on Facebook. The complexity of the phenomenon of personal online self- disclosure and the absence of qualitative studies provides a rationale for this topic to be explored from a qualitative perspective to expand our existing knowledge base and to inform psychotherapy practice by offering some insights into the contemporary world of online SNS.

Chapter 3 Methodology and Methods

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the aims and objectives of this research study and elaborates on the rationale for choosing Narrative Inquiry (Riessman 2010) as the methodology most fitting to achieving these. It explicates the key philosophical underpinnings of Narrative Inquiry and describes in detail the procedures used in the design of the study, including the recruitment process/sampling strategy, data collection and data analysis methods. It outlines the ethical considerations pertinent to this study and how these were addressed and considers how to evaluate the reliability, validity and trustworthiness of the study.

3.2. Study Aims and Objectives

3.2.1. Study Aim

The overall aim of the study is to gain a comprehensive understanding of young adults' experiences of personal self-disclosure on Facebook.

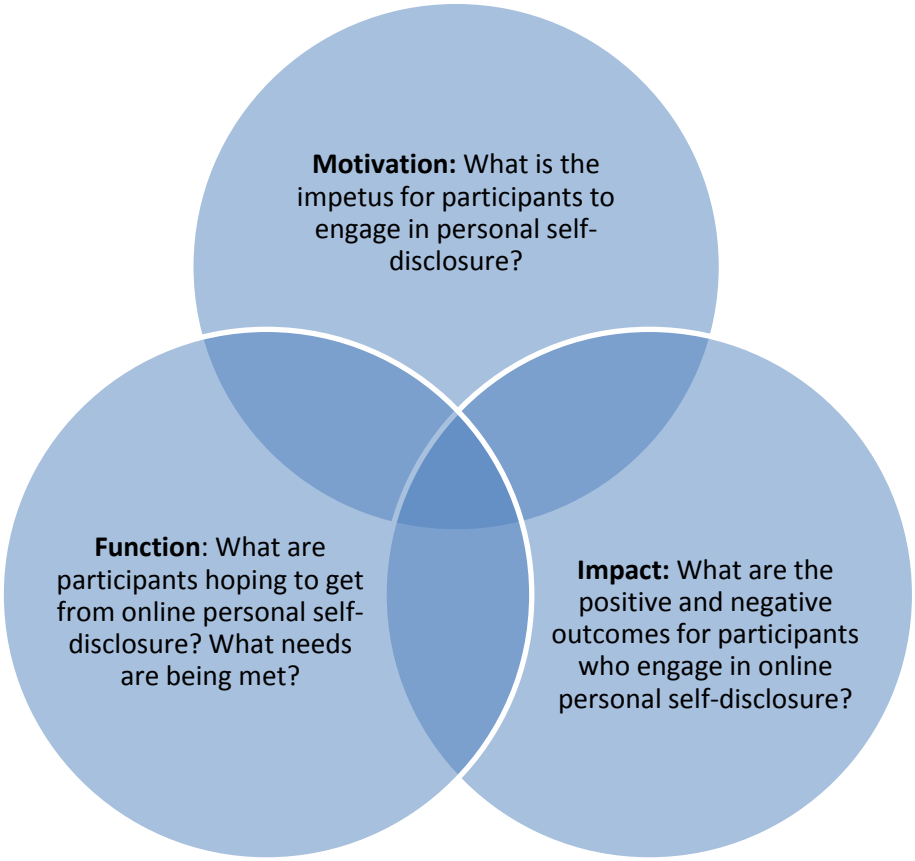
3.2.2. Study Objectives

The objectives of this study are:

- To identify key motivating factors for personal self-disclosure on Facebook by exploring the participants' impetus to engage in personal online self-disclosure.
- To understand the function of personal self-disclosure on Facebook by exploring what needs of the participants are being met through engaging in online personal self-disclosure.

- To examine the impact of personal self-disclosure on Facebook on participants' psychological wellbeing, by exploring any positive and negative outcomes are described as a result of engaging in online personal self-disclosure.

Figure 1.1. Objectives of the study



3.3 Choosing a Methodology

The first question that any potential researcher should ask themselves is what approach and method will meet the aims and objectives of their study. According to Kuhn (1970) the research paradigm contains a spectrum of knowing that extends from positivism to constructivism, represented by a range of quantitative and qualitative approaches. The ontological belief of positivism is that there is one reality, which is objective and independent of human perception (Sale and Brazil 2004). Therefore, quantitative

methods, which are based on the paradigm of positivism, reduce phenomena to empirical indicators that represent truth (Reichardt and Rallis, 1994). According to Kuhn (1970) positivism concerns itself with the tested rather than the lived experience, yet some of its critics suggest that positivism studies human behaviour in much the same way as it studies objects, an approach that discounts the thinking process of the individual and limits our understanding of them (Parahoo, 2014). Up to now a large majority of the studies into online self-disclosure on Facebook have been completed within a quantitative and positivist paradigm.

According to Sale and Brazil (2004) qualitative researchers believe that reality is socially constructed and is therefore constantly changing. This is similar to the view of Creswell (1998) who describes qualitative studies as those designed to explore a social or human problem. Qualitative methods are based on interpretivism and constructivism, in which multiple realities or truths can and do exist. According to Guba and Lincoln (1994) the qualitative researcher and participant construct a truth between them within the context of the study situation. This constructionist view asserts that meaning is not discovered, but is constructed by individuals in the world they are interpreting (Crotty 1998); thus the qualitative approach builds complex, holistic pictures of participants' stories, through interviews conducted in a natural setting. Some critics suggest that qualitative approaches lack the logical constraints of quantitative approaches, but Maxwell (2012) suggests that despite their flexibility, many qualitative approaches have definite and coherent structures. Furthermore, Thorne et al. (1997) claim that qualitative approaches facilitate meaningful examination of phenomena and explore individuals' experiences of their realities in order to develop meaningful knowledge, a philosophy that fits better with the objectives of this study.

It was deemed that exploration of young adults' motivations, functions for and impacts of online personal self-disclosure could be best achieved by an analysis of the participants' online self-disclosures as well as their oral accounts of these activities. The methodology employed needed to be capable of analysing this combination of visual, written and oral data. Thus, a narrative methodology was chosen for its capacity to analyse these stories in terms of their construction and their content.

3.4. Stories and storytelling

At the heart of Narrative Inquiry lies the notion that we "story" our experiences in order to make sense of life. Narrative theory proposes that the individual arranges their experiences in events and sequences, and that this story helps the person to configure the individual's reality (Bruner 1986, Bruner 1990, Phipps and Vorestor 2011). According to Riessman (2005a) we have versions of ourselves that are presented or performed through our stories, therefore storytelling is central to our humanity and as such, sociologists and cognitive psychologists need to become interested in how we constitute ourselves and are in turn constituted by the stories we tell. Riessman (2008) follows Bakhtin (1981) in suggesting that telling stories is a dialogical activity. Therefore, narrative communication needs an "other" – or an imagined other. Because the narrative is a relational practice, there is always an audience to whom one tells one's story. This also aligns with the concept of online self-disclosure in which the real and imagined online audience is crucial to the narrative performance of self and to our understanding of this activity.

Goffman (1959) also confirms the importance of the audience and performance when it comes to understanding stories and is concerned with what is and is not disclosed and in a person's story. It was his view that how a story is performed to an audience is of central importance to understanding the work of the story.

Narrative Inquiry values the participants' "story", and suggests that these lived and told stories, and any talk about the stories, are partly how we fill our world with meaning and enlist one another's assistance in building lives and communities (Murphy et al. 2012). According to Murphy et al. (2012) Narrative Inquiry provides a way of thinking about and studying experience that promotes new theoretical understandings of people's experiences. The concept of self-disclosure is not new, but the engagement in online self-disclosure in the context of a broadcast media like Facebook is a contemporary phenomenon. It is important to build new theoretical understandings of what is known about online self-disclosure on Facebook with regards to its capacity to set new cultural norms and influence users' sense of identity through their own stories. According to Chase (2005) many narrative researchers have already moved into the domain of virtual research, and she believes that many more will follow in their footsteps. She proposes a need for researchers to use narrative methodology to explore how email, blogs, chat rooms and SNS are changing the meaning of naturally occurring conversation. According to Chase (2005)

> Narrative research needs to explore how people are creating new arenas for narrating the self and constructing identities, realities, relationships and communities and narrative researchers must explore these new opportunities to hear people converse and see what new insights or new information will emerge (p. 670).

Another major factor in the choice of Narrative Inquiry for this study was its emphasis on performative storytelling. According to White (2000) the act of telling can serve many purposes including informing, embracing, and retelling, justifying, persuading or misleading an audience. These concepts came to the fore as part of the twofold analysis of storytelling in this study, namely the participants' performance of their digital story on Facebook and their performance of their interview story in the face-to-face context.

Having considered a number of narrative inquiry options, including Labov and Waletsky (1997), Mc Adams (1997), Polkinghorne (1996) and Riessman (2002, 2008, 2010), I decided upon Riessman's (2010) approach as the optimal framework for this study.

3.5. Riessman's (2010) Narrative Analysis Framework

This method was selected in part for its balance, structure and flexibility. These elements make it suitable to conduct a systematic study that also has flexibility to follow each person's story and unique mode of communication, which met the needs of this study. Riessman (2008) draws upon Goffman's (1959) concepts to inform her Narrative Analysis Framework (2010), which explicitly recognises the importance of the role of performance, the audience and identity formation. Balick (2014) and Davis (2013) suggest that self-disclosure transactions, through status updates on Facebook, are forms of identity announcements that are performed as part of the users' digital story and form pieces of their overall online identity. Riessman (2010) states that Narrative Inquiry is particularly well suited to analysing the performance of identity as it offers a unique insight into how identities are announced and designed through self-disclosure. Riessman's affinity for, and recognition of, the performative aspects of a narrative and her acknowledgement of

the importance of language made her approach an optimal fit for the aims and objectives of this study, focusing on participants' motivation, function and impact of online self-disclosure on Facebook.

3.5.1. Use of Riessman's Narrative Analysis Framework (2010) for digital and interview narratives

Given that this study is concerned with the digital and interview narratives, Riessman's analytic approach will now be described in detail. Riessman's Narrative Analysis Framework (2010) involves integrating "five central concepts", which provide a lens to interpret the data. These were considered at all stages during the analysis. Variations of Riessman's (2010) approach have been used in other studies (Busniach et al. 2012; Duggan, 2013; McKelvey, 2014; Smith and Hodge 2014).

3.5.2. Riesman's five analytic concepts:

Case-centred narrative

According to Riessman (2010), case-centred research differs from the vast majority of category-centred qualitative approaches because the investigator preserves and interrogates particular instances and sequences of action, such as how language is negotiated and what narrative genres are used in conversation, and other unique aspects of a given case. Therefore, narrative studies do not require large numbers of participants, as it is the evidence garnered from the singular case that is considered valuable. Although individual cases can be analysed, Riessman (2010) suggests that summative categories can also be generated. This allowed for an additional cross-comparison of the participants' narratives, which was used to generate categories to form theoretical concepts and make observations about general processes.

Staying true to language

According to Riessman (2010), many qualitative researchers view language as a transparent container of meaning, which assumes a direct connection between a speaker's words and their meaning. In everyday life, we assume as much, but in analysing data it is useful to problematize seemingly straightforward relationships between the words and their assigned meaning (Riessman 2010). Given the need to add new perspectives to the existing knowledge base regarding online self-disclosure, it was essential that this study sought to problematise meaning rather than seeking out neat categories from which to diagnose behaviours. Riessman (2010) suggests that analysis examine the form that language takes, and ask "why was it done this way?" Narrative analysis' attention to language is more concerned with the "how" of the story, rather than the "what" which is in keeping with the objectives of this study which were to explore the participants' motivations for engaging in personal self-disclosure, identify any functions of their personal self-disclosure and explicate the impact of their experience of personal self-disclosure on Facebook, which could be achieved using Riessman's (2010) framework.

Riessman's (2010) approach demands a close linguistic reading, rather than accepting the denotation of words used, and advocates questioning the structure and effects of language, the positioning of the people involved and other aspects of the narrative's construction. The analysis of the data in this study involved asking the following questions in relation to the participants' use of language: How was this account generated? Why the story was told this way? What did the story accomplish for the speaker? What do the specific words a participant uses mean, considering their prior uses

by that participant? What other readings are possible beyond what the narrator may have intended?

It was also crucial that the narratives represent both the voice of the researcher and that of the participant, so as to recognise that meaning is created relationally. Therefore, particular attention was paid to the use of language in the two-way discourse of the interview.

The importance of context

Riessman (2010) recognises the value of context and suggests that oral narratives develop in dynamic conversations with listeners, and so the researcher needs to interrogate the flow of the data and locate where the narrative takes place. Many qualitative methods ignore this dynamic and as a result they make the participants' story the focus – independent of the conditions of its production (Riessman 2010). This can occur by not recognising the role of the listener, thus running the risk of encountering unacknowledged power relations in the research relationship. Riessman (2010) suggests five guiding principles to avoid this, which include: staying attuned to context; being precise in choosing narrative vocabulary; interrogating the relationship between form and meaning; and being conscious of the local context of the analysis by including in the analysis both the role of the listener and the research setting; and by being aware of the researcher's position in the context of the participants' story production. In the analysis of the data in this study, the particularities of the online and offline contexts needed to be considered regarding their potential influence on the nature of personal self-disclosure. As described in the literature review, the disembodied online context can facilitate extensive embellishment and minimisation of the self which can influence the

performance of the narrative. It was also important to be mindful of how the Principal Investigator was a known observer in this context influenced the story production. The duality of the analysis of both the online digital narrative and the face-to-face interview had to consider the Primary Investigator's historical context, namely their knowledge of the participants' online identity for the previous six months. Context required particularly complex analysis at this stage of the study given the variety of physical and virtual dimensions in which the study took place. The analysis of the data in this study involved reflexivity on the part of the Primary Investigator in order to moderate their role in the various online and offline communications and interpretations.

Form follows function: The "work" that stories do

Riessman (2010) states that when initiating connections and forming relationships one has to be aware that stories have a purpose and an intention; they are entertaining, but are not aimless. Storytellers (and status-posters) seek to persuade the audience: "this is who I am," and "this is who I want you to know". Stories can also build identities, and persuade the listener to a particular point of view: "this is what I want you to believe too." According to Georgakopoulou (2014) despite the sample sizes being small and the narrative interview being a short, 'one off' occurrence, these interviews are complex communicative encounters which are co-constructed between the researcher and the researched. Georgakopoulou (2014) critiques some narrative interviews as being too representational and attempting to present transparent accounts of people's selves. She advocates that small stories research serves as an approach "for uncovering the messiness, performativity, incompleteness and fragmentation" of people's stories and identities. Riessman (2010) suggests that as an investigator one must resist the narrative seduction and interrogate what the narrative accomplishes and how the form of

storytelling achieves that end. In the case of this study, this required inquiry into why a narrative segment was developed in a certain way and at a certain point in the digital presentation or the face-to-face conversation; and enquire what the participant accomplished by adopting that particular narrative form at that particular time; and whether this self-disclosure served to persuade the audience [i.e. the Primary Investigator and the online audience] of a preferred position. In line with Riessman's Narrative Analysis Framework (2010) one has to ask: in what kind of story does the participant place themselves? How do they position themselves in relation to the audience both online and offline? How do they position characters in relation to themselves? How do they position themselves in relation to identity claims? How do these positions shift throughout a story? It is important to remember that narrators are agents in some scenes and play passive roles in others, and therefore positioning within a narrative event is done for the benefit of the audience and so this was also something that required due attention throughout the analysis.

Narrative in a social world

We cannot separate narratives from the constraints and structures of their wider social context. Identity is also often bound up in the social world, and so narrators will tell stories with a consideration of the broader social context (Riessman 2010). Participants might stage performances of a more desirable self to save face or manage spoiled identities. According to Riessman (2010) a preferred self is selected from a multiplicity of selves or personae which alternate as one goes through life; as such, Narrative Inquiry must open up the analytic possibilities that are missed by more static theories of identity which assume a singular unified self. The social context was also crucially important in the case of this study. As the Primary Investigator, I had to be aware of the constraints

and structures of Facebook and its role in the narrative in the contemporary social world. This was woven into the fabric of the analysis in this study as it is an exploration of a contemporary dimension of a new social world of SNS. The analysis had to take the social influence of Facebook itself into account in terms of sculpting the narratives of participants and its potential to establish new socio-cultural norms.

In summary, it was decided that an analysis of the digital and interview data utilising all of the five elements of Riessman's Narrative Analysis Framework (2010) would be capable of meeting the aims and objectives of this study. This method of analysis was thought to enrich our understanding of the experience of personal self-disclosure on Facebook and add a qualitative dimension to the existing knowledge base of this topic area.

3.6. Project Design

- This study involved observing the Facebook status updates and profile activity of a group of Irish third-level students aged between 18 and 25 years (n=57). The participants were unknown to the researcher and were recruited via an online recruitment campaign. In order to identify those participants who were engaging in online personal self-disclosure, a content analysis of the 57 Facebook profiles was carried out using Allen's (1974) definition of personal self-disclosure and the online observational framework, Moon's Criteria for Intimate Online Exchanges (2000).

- The initial sample of 57 was reduced by 13 for the following reasons; two of the participants' Facebook pages were not in English. A further two participants

closed their Facebook pages during the initial observation period and nine participants did not engage in any updating activity over the course of the initial observation period. This left 44 participants whose Facebook pages were subject to the initial content analysis.

- In the initial 3 month observation period, 25 of the remaining 44 participants did not update their profile or share any status updates that were considered as personal self-disclosure. Therefore there were 19 participants who met Moon's Criteria (2000).
- Out of the remaining 19 participants, 10 were selected for an extended observation period. These 10 participants were selected based on how prominently they featured in the content analysis, as per Moon's Criteria (2000). The participants' updates were recorded and scored based on the perceived intimacy value of the participants' shared material. Those who were deemed to be self-disclosing in a personal and intimate manner were invited to remain in the study for a further three-month observation period.
- The Facebook pages of the remaining ten participants were then subject to further analysis over the next three months. This involved using Riessman's (2010) Narrative Analysis Framework to analyse the posts of the participants which contained features of personal self-disclosure. This analysis involved using a case-centred approach which closely considered the importance of context, language, performance and the social influence of each of the posts that were deemed to contain aspects of personal self-disclosure.
- Upon reviewing the analysis of the 10 participants' digital postings, five participants were identified and invited for an interview. The selection of these

five participants was based on the identification of posts which raised questions regarding motivation, function and the impact of the participants' online personal self-disclosures. These 5 participants were chosen where it was deemed that an oral account of their experiences of online personal self-disclosure would be most useful in terms of creating a better understanding of their experiences of online personal self-disclosure.

- The interviews were semi structured and each participant was asked to tell their story regarding their specific and general self-disclosing behaviour. Examples of the participants' posts were utilised in the interview to aid their recollection of their experience of sharing certain material. Riessman's (2010) Narrative Analysis Framework was also used to analyse the interview transcripts in parallel to the relevant participant postings. This served to enrich the findings concerning their online and offline narratives regarding self-disclosing behaviour.

3.7. Selection of Participants

3.7.1. Construct Validity:

The definition of personal self-disclosure that was utilised in this study was described by Allen (1974), who suggests that in order for self-disclosure to be considered 'personal self-disclosure', the communication must - be intentional, provide information that was previously unknown to the recipients, reveal more information than what is required for the situation and/or infer thoughts and/or feelings which serve to enhance its intimacy. The context in which this construct was conceptualised in this study positioned the researcher as not having any other knowledge of the participant other than their

Facebook posts. For the purposes of initially screening the participants it was deemed necessary to source an objective framework or tool which could assist in identifying types of self-disclosures that could be deemed personal, in addition to the definition described by Allen (1974). The only such tool that could be sourced was Moon's (2000) *Criteria for Intimate Exchanges Online*.

3.7.2. Moon's Criteria for Intimate Exchanges Online (2000)

Moon (2000) is one of the leading writers on the topic of online personal self-disclosure. His criteria was borne out of his studies which examined why people were not willing to divulge certain personal information online in terms of a business transaction, yet the same people were observed to be disclosing other personal information on their personal blogs and SNS. In the process of investigating online self-disclosure, Moon (2000) was tasked with distinguishing what could be constituted as an intimate online exchange from a non-intimate or routine online exchange. In order to formulate this distinction, he developed a set of criteria for intimate online exchanges, which has been used in other studies.

Moon's Criteria for Intimate Exchanges Online (2000) were used in a study by Jordan-Conde et al. (2014). This study explored the relationship between personal self-disclosure on Facebook and identity definition in young adulthood. They conducted a content analysis on the participants' Facebook pages and utilised Moon's Criteria (2000) "as the basis for the items included in the intimacy rankings" (Jordan-Conde et al. 2014 p.360). This study involved inviting potential participants to accept a Facebook friend request from the researcher as a means of consenting to join the study. This informed the recruitment and selection strategies that were incorporated in the current study. In light

of Jordan-Conde et al. (2014) successful implementation of Moon's Criteria for Intimate Exchanges Online (2000), it was decided that this same criteria could be used for similar purposes in this study. While a certain amount of interpretation is undoubtedly involved, utilising Moon's criteria (2000) in conjunction with the definition provided by Allen (1974) provided a more objective framework for deciding what shared material could be considered personal self-disclosure in order to assist the process of participant selection.

Moon's (2000) Criteria for Intimate Exchanges Online identifies 11 different themes which are used to identify intimate/ personal self-disclosure in an online context. These include - favourite pastimes and hobbies, self-pride, anger, feelings and attitudes about death, self-discontent (personality), self-discontent (physical), frustrations, sexual behaviours, guilt, emotional aspects of self and dislikes about others. This criterion was used to maintain consistency and guide the content analysis.

Moon's Criteria were implemented in a similar way to the approach adopted by Jordan-Conde et al. (2014) which involved assigning signifiers to the participants' various online personal self-disclosures, which would serve to indicate the intimacy value of the participants' shared material. The shared material observed in this study was marked with three colours which indicated the interpreted depth of intimacy inherent in each online self-disclosure. Each online self-disclosure on the participants' Facebook pages was marked with an identifying colour. These colours were given different weighting values, where a black circle indicated a mild degree of intimacy (one point), the blue circle indicated a moderate degree of intimacy (three points) and a red circle indicated a significant degree of intimacy (ten points). As the objectives of this study were to explore the motivation, function and impact of online personal self-disclosure, the screening

phase of the study did not focus solely on the frequency of the participants' personal self-disclosures, but also on the depth of each disclosure. The purpose of this phase of the study was to identify suitable participants for the more indepth study.

It was acknowledged by the researcher that there were some limitations with regard to the specificity to which 'intimate self-disclosures' could be identified, therefore Moon's (2000) criteria were used as a guiding framework rather than a validated quantitative measure, as it was not designed to quantify or assess the material but rather to attempt to provide consistency. It thus provided guidance for identifying core aspects of self-disclosure and this was combined with the definition of personal self-disclosure, described by Allen (1974) to further identify pertinent self-disclosures in this study.

3.7.3 Participant profile

This study explored the online personal self-disclosures and face to face narratives of young adults.

3.7.4 Inclusion Criteria

For Initial Recruitment / Selection Process:

English-speaking third-level students who are Facebook users, and aged between 18 and 25 years.

For Extended Observation Period:

Participants deemed to have posted status updates consistent with the framework used to identify online personal self-disclosure.

For the Interview Process:

Participants who were deemed to have continued to post status updates which were examples of online personal self-disclosure.

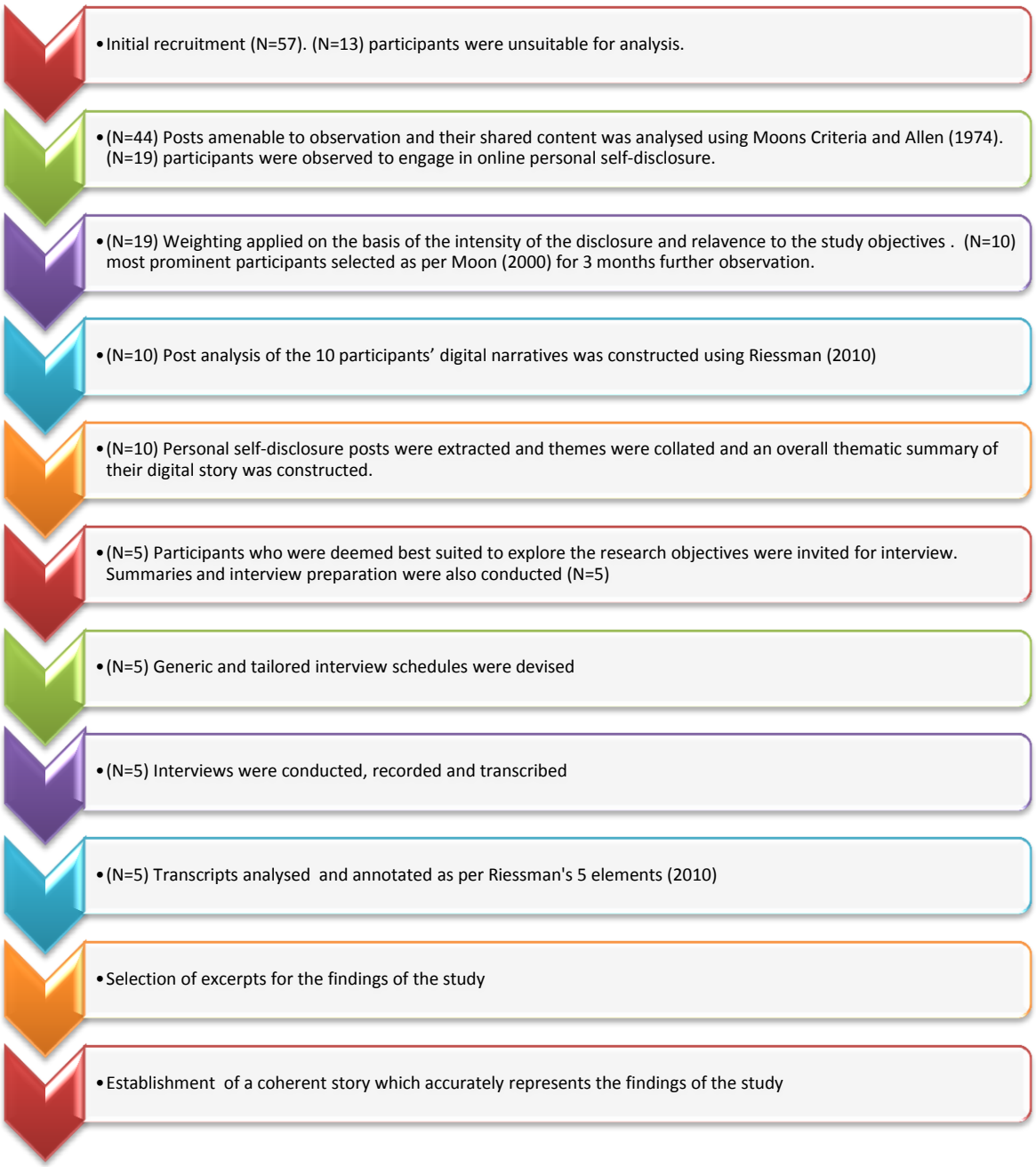
3.8. Data Analysis

Following on from the initial content analysis, the next stage of data analysis in this study was conducted using the principles of Narrative Inquiry. Therefore the data was treated in its entirety in order to construct comprehensive interrelated themes and interpretations (Riessman 2015). Content analysis and narrative analysis were used in this study as they are considered to be complementary approaches that are used in qualitative research (Smith 2000).

3.8.1. Analysis of the Digital Posts

After the extended observation period of the selected 10 participants, the individual posts that were identified as containing aspects of personal self-disclosure were analysed using Riessman's (2010) Framework. These posts were then grouped into themes and compiled to provide a thematic profile of each of the participants' personal self-disclosures. 5 participants who were deemed to best inform the core objectives of the study were identified and invited to attend for interview. An overall narrative summary of the entirety of their posts over the 6 month observation period was also carried out in preparation for the interview phase of the study. An example of each of these chronological stages of data analysis can be found in Appendix B

Figure 2.1. Map of the analytic process



3.8.2. Narrative analysis framework

An important consideration from the outset of this study was whether the online personal self-disclosures via status updates on Facebook could be considered as suitable

units of the participants' narrative. The term narrative implies a story with a plot line with a beginning, middle and end. Facebook is only 12 years old and as such it is still considered a new platform for narrating stories (Georgakopoulou 2014). Therefore it was important to explore whether each of these micro-blog stories could constitute a unit of narrative that could withstand in-depth and thorough analysis. It is important to state that the units of narrative in this study referred to the complete number of status updates observed over the six-month observation period with the five participants, which formed their overall digital narrative, in addition to the narrative analysis that was carried out at the interview process. Riessman (2008, p.14), suggests that instead of the term "life story", the term "personal narrative" should be used to better describe a compelling topical narration. Personal narratives are not just autobiographical stories, but can also refer in a more generic sense to diary entries, journals and letters. Page (2010) states that as small snippets of "talk", status updates can indeed be considered as units of narrative which are suitable for analysis. Page (2010) surmised that this was not only entirely possible but also very important, as these updates form a central part of the contemporary narrative discourse. These updates are considered to be a series of small stories about a person's life over varying periods of time. It was therefore concluded that these pockets of information could be interpreted in the spirit of "narrative-building" whereby smaller stories are pieced together to become larger ones (Braun and Clarke 2006, p.81). According to Georgakopoulou (2014):

> Small stories research has been intended as an organised move to put such non-canonical or atypical stories on the map and make them a focal part of narrative analysis (p. 4)

3.8.3. Maintaining Quality in the Study

According to Loh (2013), many who embark on qualitative research in the form of a narrative study, which is situated within the interpretive-constructivist paradigm, are regularly queried about its rigour and quality. Long and Johnson (2000) agree and suggest that all research studies must be open to critique and evaluation. Lincoln and Denzin (1994) suggest that there are a plethora of works that attempt to articulate and list criteria that describe the characteristics of what constitutes good qualitative research. However, Elliott, Fisher and Rennie (1999) suggest that creating a list of criteria may be fundamentally at odds with the spirit of qualitative research. Hodgkinson and Maree (1998) suggest that any pre-specification of universal criteria is in danger of foisting onto research, artificial categories of judgement and frameworks of conditions that may be impossible or inappropriate to meet. In order to overcome these challenges a move towards proving the dependability of qualitative research was proposed. Dependability attempts to ensure that data collection is undertaken in a consistent manner and can be established and demonstrated through an audit trail (Loh 2013). Dependability is preferred over the term reliability, which Long and Johnson (2000) suggest is not possible to achieve in qualitative research.

> Although efforts may be made to enhance a study's reliability, in most cases the nature of the data and the type of sample make this practically hopeless. (p. 31).

Of note, one of the most highly influential and cited works around reliability and dependability of qualitative research is the work of Lincoln and Guba (1985). In their (1985) work *'Naturalistic Inquiry"*, they moved to make trustworthiness an alternative term to replace the positivistic terms validity, reliability and generalisability. Seale (1999)

recommends that the procedures outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985) can be useful for qualitative researchers to incorporate and demonstrate quality into their work. However even Lincoln and Guba (1985) provide practical caveats that suggest that it is dubious as to whether a perfect criterion will ever emerge. This aligns with the constructivist paradigm that sees all knowledge as constructed and therefore never perfect or complete. Thus, trustworthiness guidelines are to be used as a guide to aid the constructivist researcher to navigate the terrain of understanding and ensuring their study's quality. According to Loh (2013) narrative studies should select a consensus list of criteria that are appropriate for establishing trustworthiness in any study.

The first aspect of Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria of ensuring trustworthiness is 'member checking'. Member checking is a process whereby the final report or the specific prescriptions of themes are taken back to the participants for their perusal. However, Sandelowski (1993) suggests that there are problems inherent in many of these checking techniques as they assume that the notion of reality is external, consensual, corroboratory and repeatable. What is forgotten is that in the interpretive paradigm, reality is assumed to be multiple and constructed rather than singular and tangible. As a narrative researcher one does not seek to learn the facts but an interpretation of the facts (Polkinghorne 2007). Riessman (2008) suggests that

> A narrative is not simply a factual report of events but instead is one articulation, told from the point of view that seeks to persuade others to see the events in a single way (p. 187).

In narrative research, historical reconstruction may not be the primary concern in life stories, it may instead be how the individual sees themselves at given points in their lives and how they want to be seen (Riessman 2008). Therefore the task of narrative

interpretation is to learn of the participants' realities or to learn of their emotional and mental responses to those realities, or the meanings and interpretations that they ascribe to those realities. Polkinghorne (2007) also suggests, evidence is gathered not to determine if events actually happened, but about the meaning experienced by people, whether or not the events are accurately described or not. According to Polkinghorne (2007) "storied texts serve as evidence for personal meaning, not the factual occurrences of the events reported in the stories" (p. 479). Having considered this option and Riesmann's (2008) views on this process, it was decided that member checking was not a suitable strategy to incorporate into this study.

The second aspect of Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria is 'peer validation'. This recommends that it is useful to seek validation from scholars who are familiar with the subject area, interview themes and with the theory that is applied to the interpretation of the interview texts. It is thought that through a process of peer validation one should be able to provide some sort of corroboration with regard to the interpretation of the data. This aspect was incorporated into ensuring the quality of this study by conducting regular in-depth discussions throughout the project with my two academic supervisors.

The third aspect to Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria is 'audience validation'. This involves validation from the primary intended users and readers of the study. Here scholars and clinicians, who have relevant experience, assess whether the interpretation makes sense, are reasonable and connect to how the participants understand the world (Loh 2013). Over the course of this project, the study design and findings were discussed at a number of scholarly meetings and conferences. This involved a series of discussions

with colleagues on the doctoral programme who were familiar with both the world of SNS and psychotherapy and noted experts in the relevant fields.

Loh (2013) states that verisimilitude is defined as the quality of seeming to be true or real and suggests that this is a fair criterion for good literary study in which the writing seems real or alive and transports the reader directly into the world of the study. For a study to have trustworthiness it must also achieve verisimilitude. That is, it must ring true and have believability, where the audience must experience congruence with their own experience of a similar parallel analogous situation (Loh 2013).

> When the narratives are well crafted they should permit insights, deepen empathy/ sympathy and aid in the understanding of the subjective world of the participant (Loh 2013 p. 12).

The researcher was cognisant of concept of verisimilitude throughout the study, and paid particular attention to deepening the understanding of the subjective worlds of the participants regarding their experiences of online personal self-disclosure.

3.8.4. Reflexivity and rigour

According to Sharts-Hopko (2002), the qualitative research investigator is the research instrument.

> Because the pool of participants of studies tends to be smaller, and recruited by convenience or purposefully rather than randomly, the potential for the investigator's personal values and attitudes to influence the report of findings is great (Sharts-Hopko 2002 p. 84).

Although this has been a major source of criticism for qualitative designs, these methods are based on the premise that the investigator will identify relevant personal history, values, and attitudes that may have a bearing on the situation. Sharts-Hopko (2002 p. 84)

states that “the investigator’s own contribution to the dialogue, that constitutes the data set, is understood to be highly relevant”. According to Riessman (2015)

> The subjectivity of the investigator does not stand in the way, nor does it belong at the centre; rather it is an object among many. Stronger objectivity, not objectivism, is what disciplined activity encourages (Riessman 2015 p.235).

According to Houghton et al. (2013) reflexivity as a partner is an invaluable strategy for improving the quality of qualitative research. Houghton et al. (2013) posits reflexivity as a strategy that promotes rigour akin to peer debriefing, audits trails and member checking. Reflexivity can be employed to establish criteria for rigour, which increases the coherence, congruence and credibility of findings (Bishop and Holmes 2013). Reflexivity is a continuous accompaniment in narrative research and it is used at different points in the research process not only when reporting findings but also in designing the project, collecting and analysing the data, and disseminating the findings (Gilgun 2006). It is accepted that both researchers and participants have a subjective influence on the research process and its findings and therefore it is difficult to determine whether the researcher’s interpretations truly reflect participants’ accounts (Houghton et al. 2013). This means that qualitative research findings are a result of the synthesis of the perspectives of the researcher and the participants. According to Darawsheh (2014), subjectivity should be acknowledged and even celebrated in qualitative research rather than being viewed as a contamination that must be eliminated. Through reflexivity researchers reflect on their thoughts, actions, assumptions and expectations. They bring these thoughts and actions to a conscious level and become aware of their influence in the research process. Reflexivity thus enables the researcher to provide a rationale for

the research decisions, which in turn alter the research process and generate relevant findings. Reflexivity is considered a criterion of rigour as it is a strategy that enables the researcher to meet the criteria of, credibility of the data, dependability of the study, and confirmability of findings (Houghton et al. 2013).

> Reflexivity refers to a continuous process of self-reflection that researchers engage in to generate awareness about their actions, feelings and perceptions. Reflexivity in research improves transparency of the researcher's subjective role, both in conducting research and analysing data, and allows the research to apply the necessary changes to ensure the credibility of the findings (Darawsheh 2014 p. 561).

Employing reflexivity in this study meant that the rationale for the methodological stance and the means of data analysis and interpretations were transparent. The use of reflexivity in this research process resulted in some alterations to the study design which facilitated the process of generating credible data. Reflexivity also allowed the researcher to take full advantage of their personal subjectivity whilst carrying out an in-depth exploration and interpretation of the data. Reflexivity not only influenced the formulation of the research idea and the question at the start of the project, but it also affected the decisions that were made with regards to the method used for data collection and analysis. By employing reflexivity the researcher was able to determine their own stance in relation to the work of other researchers and factor in aspects that would need to be addressed in their research.

Reflexivity was also necessary because it features prominently in Riessman's (2015) approach to narrative research. Riessman (2015) describes reflexivity as taking account of our role in the production of the story. She described reflexivity as the capacity of any system to turn back upon itself and to make itself its own object by referring to itself.

Riessman (2015 p.223) believes that the producer, process and product are all deeply interconnected and she suggests that “thinking about the thinking makes this process explicit”, which is essential to reflexivity. Riessman (2015) also believes that there is no detached standpoint that exists for investigators in the human sciences. She refers to this notion as ‘the view from nowhere’ (p.221). She believes thinking about, rather than simply revealing biographical facts about ourselves as producers of knowledge is certainly necessary to ensure the quality of narrative research.

Riessman (2015) states that the central problem for narrative scholars is the editing of participants’ utterances and the power they assume over their words. This infiltrates the conversations in ways that readers can never evaluate, i.e. subjects’ and investigators’ views. Riessman (2015) describes the need to create a third voice in the interpretation of stories. These three voices consist of, the voice of the informant, the voice of the interviewer and the voice of their collaboration. Riessman (2015) believes that research is inseparable from the particular investigator, their observations, their engagement with the data and their interpretation of it. Therefore, the narrative research process intentionally reveals the transformation in thinking via reflexivity, thereby providing the reader with a glimpse into the person who was involved in the process that produced this gallery product. In her (2015 p. 223) paper, Riessman quotes the work of Presser (2005) when she suggests that:

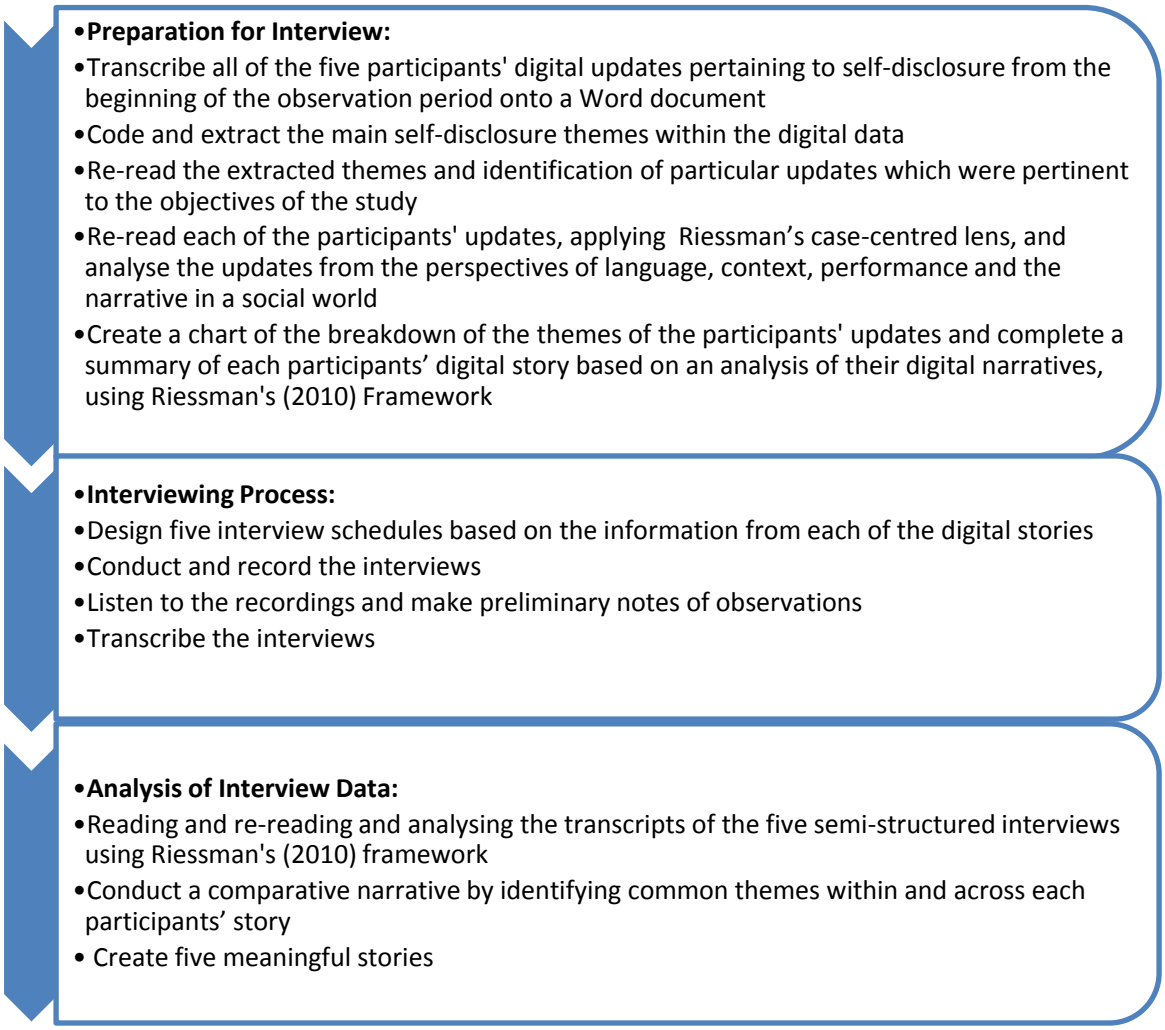
> A researcher’s goal is not to emancipate the attentive story of the narrator- none exists- but rather to expose as much as she can of the relations that influence the construction of the story that is told.

Riessman (2015) reviewed a case study that she had published years earlier, which she interpreted very differently than the way she would interpret it now. She indicates that this occurs because this particular re-interpretation took place in the personal narrative of the social world at the time of the conversation which changes over time. Turning the mirror on one's previous work to reveal the historical situation and our interpretations must include the academic, theoretical, political, disciplinary, and autobiographical imperative that draw us to certain interpretations and not others at certain times which are different to each other. Riessman (2015, p.234) describes reflexivity as an entry into the hall of mirrors that illuminates social phenomena from many angles.

> The task is to account for situated selves in the scullery product, thereby lending the research credibility and validity. The product is never innocent; the challenge is to account responsibility for our presence as well as the influence of our ghostly and other contextual influences. The goal of such reflexive questioning is to greater improve rigour and to generate research that is more trustworthy. This is the kind of objectivity that is suited to the narrative enterprise (Riessman 2015 p.234).

3.8.5. The data analysis summary

Figure 3.1. The process of analysis for the interview phase of the study



3.9. Ethical Considerations

Given the unique online context of this research study, traditional ethical constructs such as consent, privacy and harm needed to be re-examined for their applicability. The issue of consent was complicated by the fact that this was an online study to begin with and therefore face-to-face or signed consent was not going to be possible to achieve. Therefore, significant effort and thoughtfulness was required to provide clarity to participants as to what constituted consent to partake in the study. The issue of privacy

was discussed at length prior to the study design and it was decided that anonymity was not possible in a study like this as the privacy settings of any Facebook account is only as stringent as the privacy settings of others on the network. In other words, the chain is only as strong as its weakest link. Given the nature of online networks it was declared that all endeavours to maintain privacy would be completed but this could not be guaranteed. Finally, given that the relationship between the researcher and the participants took place in a virtual environment it was difficult to establish whether any aspects of the study were causing any harm or distress to the participants. This was identified and support services which were available to participants were named and signposted. Interestingly, many of the traditional steps advised for conducting ethical research remained relevant and were adhered to carefully.

Where an unexpected ethical dilemma arose as a result of the online context of the study, this was discussed with the academic supervisors and resolutions were devised. The only such challenge that arose was when a participant contacted the researcher via the Facebook private messaging facility and informed him that they had a history of serious mental health problems and they were enquiring about what services were available on the university campus where they could seek support. Discussion with the supervisors resulted in directing the participant to the relevant services on campus. This event highlighted some of the ethical dilemmas inherent in online ethnographic research approaches. This participant did not feature in the content analysis as no decision was required regarding their ongoing involvement in the study. The following is an account of the other ethical considerations throughout the study.

Firstly, formal written approval to conduct the study was granted by the Research Ethics Committee at Dublin City University (see Appendix C). It was decided in conjunction with my academic supervisors that ethical approval was to be sought and gained from the organisation from which the study was carried out. Given that the location of the study was virtual (Facebook) and there were no other stakeholders involved, there was no requirement to apply for any other institutional ethical approval.

Ramcahran and Cutcliffe (2001) argue that qualitative research has an emergent design and therefore not all ethical issues can be known in advance of conducting a study. This was particularly relevant for this study. As a large component of the study was to take place online and so the normal constraints of traditional research, such as the signing of physical consent forms and the option of face-to-face explanation of the project, did not apply. Ramcahran and Cutcliffe (2001) suggest that although the broad approach can be outlined prior to the study, the detail of how the study is conducted only occurs in the doing of the research. They propose an "ethics as process" model which highlights the dynamic and fluid nature of qualitative research and ethicality as an ever-evolving dynamic rather than a static process. Every action or decision can be seen as having an ethical dimension that the researcher needs to consider. This model has been particularly useful as new issues came to my attention at different stages in the study and new perspectives and information had to be incorporated into the ethical realm.

It is widely accepted that there are three basic ethical principles that must underlie the carrying out of research involving human participants. These include respect, non-maleficence/beneficence and justice (Orb, Eisenhauer and Wynaden 2000). Respect for persons indicates an understanding of the rights of humans to self-determine, and thus

an acceptance of their right to either participate in the research, or not. The principle of non-maleficence/beneficence directs researchers to do no harm, and indeed to make the most of any potential benefit to participants. Justice refers to the fair treatment that researchers are obliged to provide throughout their studies in accordance with principles of human rights. As the researcher, I endeavoured to maintain the standards demanded by these principles at all points throughout this study. Considering how they might be compromised at each stage of the study allowed me to attend to practice and prepare response strategies for the participants and myself as they occurred.

Key ethical considerations and how these were addressed are outlined below.

3.9.1. Anonymity, Confidentiality

The anonymity and confidentiality of participants cannot be totally guaranteed by the researcher, particularly in small-scale research, and they were especially precarious in this study because the recruitment of participants took place online, where all of the participants were asked to join a collective Facebook page on which each of their identities would potentially be visible to all of the other participants.

However, certain measures were to safeguard anonymity as far as possible. This occurred predominantly at the analysis and interview stages of the study, and the limitations to confidentiality, as indicated above, were explicitly outlined for participants from the outset. Anonymity and confidentiality were nonetheless safeguarded where possible by separating transcripts from participant demographic information; attending to how participant demographics were presented; removing all identifying details from transcripts; using quotes carefully; safely and securely storing and limiting access to data; and undertaking to destroy all data following successful completion of the doctoral thesis.

3.9.2. Informed Consent

Informed consent in this study was complicated initially as the participants were consenting to the study based on their understanding of the information on the webpage. Being cognisant of this from the outset, I needed to be sure to have sufficient and accessible information available to participants about the purpose of study, potential benefits and risks, what participation would involve and how the outcomes would be used. I was reliant on the vehicle of the posters and website information to convey this information adequately. As a result, this dimension of the study required meticulous effort to make sure the participant information sheets were as accessible and comprehensive as possible. Therefore, the webpage designed for the study made it clear to all participants what the key characteristics of the design were and what their involvement would entail. Participants were asked to read an online plain-language statement (see Appendix A) on which my contact information was also available, as well as a brief overview of the background, operational particulars and intentions of the study. The absence of an opportunity to meet the participants and explain the process face-to-face meant that there was an assumed reliance on the participants paying due diligence to read the information provided and to consent only after considering all the details of the study. This lack of personal contact in the recruitment of participants was also purposely extended to those who wanted to opt out of the study at any stage. This was done by simply un-friending the Study Page by clicking the unfriend option on their Facebook page. This facility was clearly outlined on the information webpage and it was explicitly explained that this could be executed at any time by any participant without the need to explain their reasons to me, the researcher.

In terms of autonomy and self-determination, it was important that participants not be coerced into participating in the research. Therefore, self-selection rather than any other selection method was preferable. It was also considered that if participants attempted to invite others (virtually) to join the study, then this would be out of my control. This in turn meant that although the initial advertisements for the study were circulated to students in Dublin City University, there was no possibility of detecting if students from other universities joined the page. This was discussed prior to the commencement of the study and decided that it was an uncontrollable variable. This did not transpire to be an issue when it came to selecting the five participants who formed the final participants for the study.

3.9.3. Respect

In any research project there is always a risk that participants will provide the kind of information that they think the researcher is looking for and/or edit information that they consider irrelevant or are uncomfortable discussing. This was considered in terms of participants' status updating patterns, and a clear request to 'update as normal' was included in the participant information page (See Appendix A). I adopted a curious and questioning attitude with participants' profiles and I also attempted to be consistent with this approach during the interviews. I considered that this approach was going to be useful in accessing these potential sources of rich data. All research is subject to the Hawthorne Effect and it is impossible to achieve complete objectivity in data collection and analysis (Riessman 2015). Narrative research frameworks engage with this reality by recommending that researchers make data collection processes and challenges transparent (Riessman 2015). The researcher engages in ongoing reflexivity concerning the effectiveness of the methodology and the relationships between the researcher and

participants, therefore readers can observe measures taken to ensure the quality of the research.

At the interview stage I was fully aware that the topic of online self-disclosure could be an upsetting one and so it was made clear to participants that they could pause, postpone or terminate their involvement at any time or decide not to answer any individual questions at their absolute discretion. In line with the model of "process consent" advocated by Usher and Arthur (1998), I re-negotiated consent at several points throughout the interview when required. I was also watchful throughout for indications of emotional distress, and would have discontinued the investigation into any subject that was found to be excessively emotive.

I was aware that I was motivated to conduct this research as I had an agenda, and this inevitably informed my interview schedule, shaped what I asked and did not ask in interviews and influenced data analysis. Thus, I realised that critical supervision of completed interviews and data analysis was important, and I had rigorous structures in place for this. To ensure that the data was handled carefully and objectively, my supervisors performed a second read of interview transcripts to ensure that the analysis was an honest and transparent reflection of what had been observed**.** The consent information (See Appendix D) made clear to participants that only my two supervisors and I would have access to their transcripts, and they only for the purpose of supervision, and permission for this level of access was sought. I also kept a journal of my personal experiences throughout the project and engaged in intensive reflexive journaling.

3.10. Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the aims and objectives of this study and provided a detailed account of the theoretical considerations in choosing Narrative Inquiry as the optimal methodology for the study. An account of the design, including recruitment of the sample, gathering and analysing the data in accordance with a systematic guide and a narrative analysis framework were then described. This chapter outlined a clear and coherent rationale for the blended analytic methods used in this study and detailed some of the theoretical and philosophical underpinnings of Narrative Inquiry. The challenges of incorporating two different forms of analysis, Moon's Criteria for Intimate Online Exchanges (2000) and Riessman's Narrative Analysis Framework (2010) were articulated alongside the strengths and limitations of both of these approaches. This chapter has provided comprehensive clarity to the description of the various stages of this study and detailed the decision-making process of each stage, and how these were supported by the narrative methodological framework. Examples of each of these stages of analysis are available in Appendix B.

The possible ethical considerations and challenges facing this study were also identified and discussed, giving specific attention to the contemporary challenges of conducting research in an online environment, and outlining how issues of consent and confidentiality were negotiated and highlighted for participants throughout the research process.

The key issues that have emerged in this chapter include the challenges of identifying a coherent construct for personal self-disclosure as this is a heavily-nuanced concept and

whether the use of small stories, like status updates, would constitute units of narrative. This chapter has explored, clarified and justified these concerns and validated their use in this study. Another key issue was the maintenance of quality throughout the study which was discussed with reference to how rigour and trustworthiness was maintained via reflexivity throughout the study. This was also illustrated using a map of the analytic process and a detailed description of the phases of analysis involved using Riessman's (2010) Framework. The following chapter will describe the findings gleaned from the analysis.

Chapter 4 Findings

4.1. Introduction:

This chapter presents the research findings revealed from the analysis of the five individual participants' online and interview narratives. The account of each case consists of a thematic overview of the analysis of their digital stories using Moon's Criteria for Intimate Exchanges Online (2000) and utilising the definition of personal self-disclosure as described by Allen (1974). This is followed by an analysis of their interview transcript using Riessman's (2010) Narrative Analysis Framework. Anonymised examples of online posts taken from the digital stories and direct quotes taken from the participant interviews are used to explicate the lived experiences of the participants. All names used in these accounts are pseudonyms, and all potentially identifying signifiers have been changed in order to protect the anonymity of the participants.

4.2. Riessman's Narrative Analysis Framework (2010)

As described in the methodology chapter, Riessman's (2010) Narrative Analysis Framework is designed around five central elements. The digital profiles, timelines and interview transcripts of the five participants in this study were analysed under the guidance of these five elements. Riessman's (2010) five elements consist of a 'case-centred' approach, close attention to language, analysis of the performative function of the narrative and continuous consideration of the context of the narrative and how it is situated within the wider narrative of the social world. In order to comply with Riessman's (2010) framework this study approached each participant's analysis from a case-centred perspective as opposed to a content-centred perspective. This involved

analysing each case in its entirety and valuing the particularity of each narrative as opposed to just identifying content that was comparative with other participants. In this study, the role of Facebook in contemporary society was considered as generic a Narrative in the Social World and was therefore considered throughout the analysis but not repeatedly referred to in each case. The analysis of the digital and interview data involved detailed attention to the participants' use of language, constant consideration of the context in which the narrative occurred and an analysis of the performative function inherent in the participants' stories. There will be reference to these five elements throughout the analysis in this chapter.

4.3. Mary-Ellen

Mary-Ellen is a 24-year-old, female third-level student. The analysis of her Facebook profile revealed that she was an active online sharer, posting 183 status updates over the six-month observation period. In addition to the volume of her updates, the manner of online personal self-disclosure brought Mary-Ellen to the attention of the researcher. Over the observation period, Mary Ellen featured significantly in relation to Moon's Criteria (2000), as her online personal self-disclosures often revealed her personal perceptions regarding socio-political issues as well as more intimate concerns about her wellbeing. Therefore Mary-Ellen was identified as a suitable participant to invite for interview to discuss the motivation, function and impact of online personal self-disclosure.

Figure 4.1 represents the range and specific themes of self-disclosure collected from the analysis of Mary-Ellen's status updates.

4.3.1 Mary-Ellen's Disclosure Pattern in Status Updates

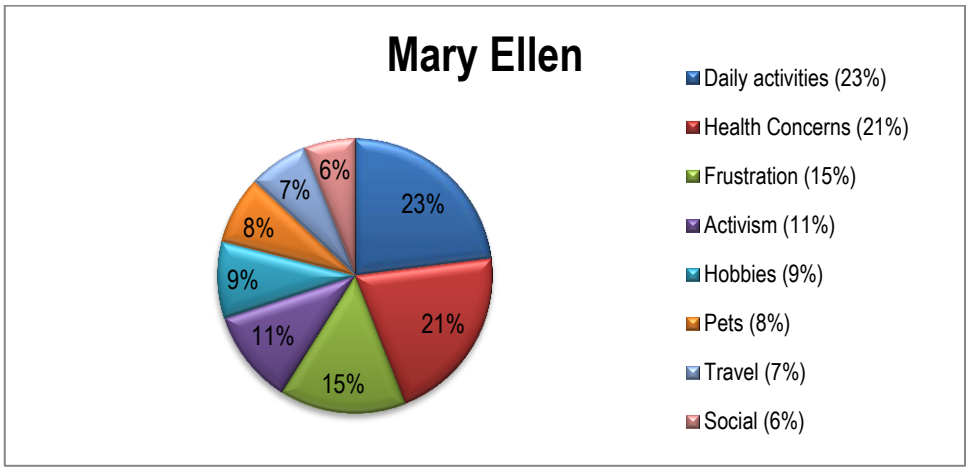
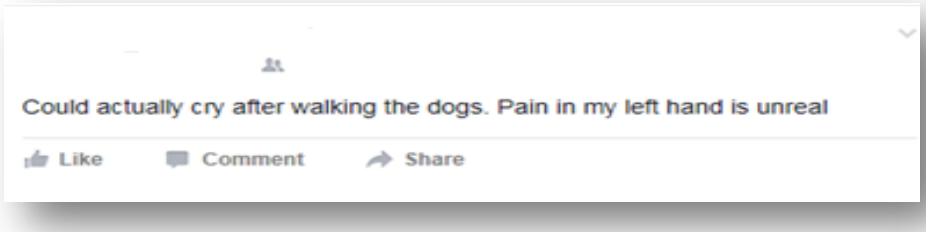


Figure 4.1

This breakdown reveals that Mary-Ellen's most common status updates contained themes of daily activity blogs, health concerns, frustration and activism. In accordance with Riessman's (2010) view of the importance of context, it is worth noting that Mary-Ellen's online self-disclosures pertaining to activism were all related to promoting marriage equality. There was a national referendum campaign occurring during the observation period of this study and therefore Mary Ellen's posts need to be understood within the wider context of current social events at the time, as these may have influenced the content and regularity of these disclosures. The following post is an example of Mary-Ellen's political activism disclosures.

An analysis of the language in this post reveals not only Mary-Ellen's support of marriage equality but also her disapproval of those groups who represent an opposing view. Her personal self-disclosure of her political views in this example could be viewed as potentially contentious. Although strictly speaking Mary-Ellen used the word 'retarded' correctly here in its denotation to slow down, her later use of the word 'fucktard' in another example may indicate that the use of the word 'retarded' could also suggest lesser intelligence of those who hold that mind-set. Considering the performative function of this post, Mary-Ellen appears to want to disclose her political beliefs and align herself with a certain political/socio-cultural discourse. Interestingly this post garnered four likes, which is a moderate response in comparison to other more generic posts that Mary-Ellen shared in support of marriage equality. This may have influenced Mary-Ellen's further disclosures, as all of her subsequent posts appeared to support the notion of equality, and none were denigrating toward the opposing view.

Another aspect of Mary-Ellen's personal self-disclosures was how she used Facebook to express her emotional reactions to events in her life. Analysis of her Facebook updates revealed that she appeared to share openly both her positive and negative feelings. One of the most noticeable themes of Mary-Ellen's digital analysis was the regularity with which she shared her health concerns. The following post is an example of health-focused online self-disclosure.



Here Mary-Ellen first informs the audience that she is walking the dogs, which could be interpreted as a virtuous activity that presents the impression she is conscientious and caring. Her language also suggests that she is doing this in spite of being in "unreal" pain and suggests that she "could actually cry". A further observation of her use of language suggests that her choice of words serves the function of emphasising the intensity of her experience. The performative aspect to this narrative appears to serve the function of garnering sympathy or validation for her efforts from her Facebook audience. It was of interest to the objectives of this study to explore why Mary-Ellen was motivated to share this material and how she experienced the response, or lack of response, that these personal self-disclosures achieved. For example, Mary-Ellen received no likes for the above post. Perhaps her audience might not be inclined to "like" these types of posts, as it may be confusing to express that one likes the fact that she is in pain. More recently, Facebook have instigated a more sophisticated range of emoticons to represent a wider range of possible audience responses, however these were not available during the observation period in this study.

4.3.2. The Interview

Mary Ellen began by discussing her relationship with Facebook and online self-disclosure.

> I am a baby of the MSN generation, so communicating online would be normal to me, but I would try to keep some of my life offline compared to the likes of the kids who would coming a few years after me.

It appeared that that Mary-Ellen was keen to assert from the beginning of the interview that although she was part of the "MSN generation", she is careful about the material she self-discloses. Her language suggests that she considers herself to be more in control of

her personal self-disclosure than the “kids who would be coming a few years after”. From the start, her position is nuanced to suggest that she has a maturity, which is more developed than others, when it comes to online self-disclosure. Later in the interview Mary-Ellen describes how an adverse past experience on Facebook has informed her current engagement in online self-disclosure, which may explain why she presents herself as cautious in this regard.

> I was in a relationship for four years and it was very much a public relationship. We were kind of the star couple of the [Chess] circle. And so we kind of fed into this. When we broke up I kind of reflected how much of that relationship was actually for us and how much was for people who thought we were the love story. You end up in a glass bubble. After that happens you wonder how many celebrities stay together for the sake of their public image, because everyone thought we were just the golden couple, and Facebook didn't help. I am not going to lie, Facebook really didn't help.

Mary-Ellen’s language refers to her role in the “star couple” and the “glass bubble” which communicates her experience of being in the public gaze and being afforded celebrity status. She suggests that Facebook had influenced this belief of celebrity status, both in herself and others. This online positioning appeared attractive to Mary-Ellen as she “fed into this”, presumably through her online self-disclosure. However, upon reflection she sees this experience as ultimately damaging and confusing, “how much of that relationship was actually for us and how much was for people who thought we were the love story.” Considering the context of this narrative, it would appear that Mary Ellen is claiming that the characteristics of Facebook influenced her online performance in a negative way; “Facebook didn't help. I am not going to lie, Facebook really didn't help.” Although Mary-Ellen is aware of her online positioning and performance, elements of this

performance are also evident in her offline interview disclosure where she uses celebrity language like “You end up in a glass bubble” and “public image”.

Mary-Ellen goes on to discuss whether the experience of Facebook “likes” are important motivators for her online personal self-disclosure:

> I am not too fussed on likes, because people are fickle. People are stupidly, stupidly fickle, and stressing yourself about likes will just drive you to madness…When you are first starting on Facebook you want all the likes, because it shows you are important, but people are too fickle. People will scroll through things and like them without actually liking them.

Here Mary-Ellen’s language portrays uncertainty about how she feels about the importance of the likes on Facebook. Her language first suggests that they are not important, because “people are stupidly, stupidly fickle” yet she goes on to suggest that they are indeed important because they “[show] you are important”. Mary-Ellen then shares her view that sometimes the validation achieved by these “likes” is experienced as important. However she then suggests that the likes cannot be trusted which may infer that she lacks faith in the intellect and honesty of her Facebook network. She indicates that investing in the validation of the “likes” on Facebook might leave one vulnerable, or “drive you to madness”, yet despite this, she engages in online self-disclosure quite regularly. Mary-Ellen’s performance at interview attempts to distance herself from this vulnerability by stating that she no longer values the likes on Facebook compared to when she was younger. This demonstrates the significance of the passage of time on her self-disclosing motivation and its potential impact on her. In Mary-Ellen’s current re-telling of the story, she positions herself favourably compared to her younger self, who may have been vulnerable to online feedback. She goes on to stress that she no longer

trusts the likes; as she believes that people "like [...] without actually liking [...]". Here Mary-Ellen attempts to create a context for her resilience to the online feedback that her self-disclosures might receive. This discussion regarding Mary-Ellen's reaction to her Facebook network's feedback led to Mary Ellen describing her motivations for self-disclosure on Facebook.

> Because I am just proud. I am so damn proud of the things I share; I share stuff because I think people find it interesting. It is completely all positive stuff. I share stuff like news articles and stuff, but I am kind of wary of doing that because a lot of my friends would be research-shy – they wouldn't understand heavy, research-based documentation, so I share the dummies' version.

Mary Ellen's explanation for her motivations for sharing and self-disclosing on Facebook seems to enable her to position herself as a thoughtful, intelligent Facebook user. In describing her motivation, intentionality and selectiveness around the material she shares online, her language reveals that she may not be as immune to the audience feedback as she had previously asserted. Her statement "I share stuff because I think people find it interesting", suggests that she shares materials that she believes other people will like or be interested in. Mary Ellen goes on to suggest that she is motivated to adapt her sharing behaviour to suit those whom she perceives as less intelligent, such that she shares 'the dummies version' for those she considers 'research shy'. Again, it is evident that Mary Ellen's self-disclosure appears influenced by her perceptions of her audience both on and offline. The analysis of this narrative must consider the context and performance that can occur in the researcher/ participant dynamic. In this instance, the context of the researcher and participant dynamic may have encouraged Mary-Ellen to perform a rationalisation of the posts that she shares in order to explain to me that they are

dumbed-down for others. Considering the widely held belief in the narrative of the wider social world, that Facebook is sometimes described as 'trashy' or 'tabloid', perhaps Mary-Ellen is trying to distance herself from that identity. Maintaining this position as being in control of intelligent self-disclosure can be challenging for Mary Ellen and sometimes her need for validation seems to become the motivation and function of her online self-disclosure:

> That one, I was kind of looking for validation. There was one person I wanted, who actually ended up actually commenting on it, he is kind of like my unofficial PT [Personal Trainer] so I was kind of looking for him to challenge me to see, "Have you worked out? Have you earned the Chinese?" – Because I genuinely didn't know what to do. I was kind of looking for people to present arguments because I can be quite indecisive, so people going, "Ah well, if you are not feeling up to it, get the Chinese"...Other people would say, "Do you have the money?" So it was just to straighten out my own head. Those tiny little things don't matter. I don't mind people knowing that, but I wouldn't be the type to take a picture of my dinner and put it on Instagram.

Mary Ellen acknowledges that the function of her self-disclosure was intended to gain a sympathetic response from her audience. She recalls that this self-disclosure was motivated by the fact that she could not choose what to have for her dinner, and so she self-disclosed this dilemma on Facebook, to help her decide. However, she goes on to say that she "wouldn't be the type to take a picture of [her] dinner and put it on Instagram". Again considering the context and language in this example, Mary-Ellen is critical of

people whom she describes as, “the type”. It appears that Mary-Ellen considers these ‘type’ of users to be over-sharers. Riessman (2010) explains that the re-telling of a story may involve alterations to the narrative that produce a safer or more removed context. By comparing herself favourably to other online sharers in the offline narrative seems to serve the function of distancing Mary-Ellen from the people she considers vulnerable.

Later in the interview Mary-Ellen explains her intrapersonal motivation and the interpersonal function of certain online self-disclosures that express frustration or upset.

M.E. “My dog and I were crossing the road and a cyclist ran the traffic lights doing 30km an hour. He could have killed my dog and broken pretty much every bone in my body.”

C.N. “And can you tell me about the process of having that experience and sharing it?”

M.E. “I was terrified... I was so scared and so frightened and so angry. I was on my own, my parents were away, I was just freaking the hell out so I posted that... It was like screaming into the void – and to make cyclist friends of mine realise that it could be me you nearly run down when you go through those lights. That could have been me”.

C.N. “Tell me about ‘screaming into the void’.”

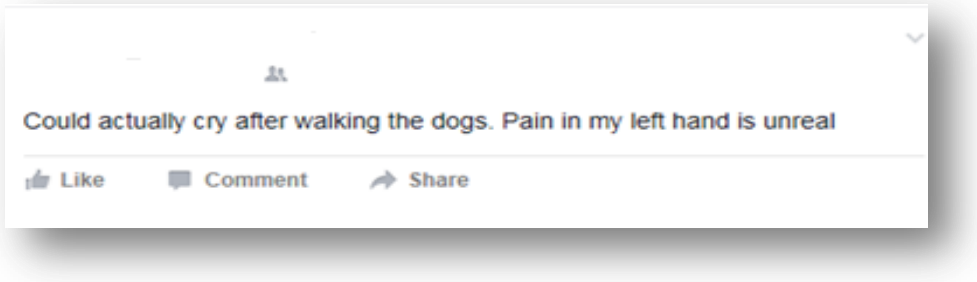
M.E: “So, verbalising my frustration meant that I could let it go. Imagine my parents coming home and me going, “Yeah, we have a €2,000 vet bill because Rover got run down by a bike, and by the way I am in A&E.”

> C.N. "So is it about getting it off your chest and warning other people to be careful?"
>
> M.E: "And it could be me. It could be my dog. A lot of my friends have met my dog and love my dog, so it was to put my face on the person they are blasting past."

Mary-Ellen's use of the term "screaming into the void" provides an insight into her intrapersonal experience of feeling alone and frightened. Perhaps her parent's absence was contributing to her sense of a void and therefore the function of her online self-disclosure could be interpreted as an attempt to manage this feeling of existential loneliness. Mary-Ellen appears to be motivated to utilise Facebook in order to fill this void. The use of the word "void" denotes that something is missing or empty. Mary-Ellen has already described experiencing Facebook relationships as sometimes fickle, empty and untrustworthy, yet she describes turning to them when she is upset. This suggests that managing upset or venting frustration is part of the function of self-disclosure for Mary-Ellen. Her use of emotive language is also notable in this account and may be indicative of some degree of performativity. Using phrases such as "fucktard who blasted through a red light" and "I hope you fall off and break both your legs and arms" serves the function of heightening the intensity of the event to convince the listener/audience of its importance. This level of intensity is also carried into the offline disclosure with "terrified" and "broken every bone in my body", yet in the offline context it is differently nuanced. In Mary-Ellen's online self-disclosure, her experience of intense emotion is conveyed as moral outrage directed at the cyclist, while in the offline narrative, her language is more focused on disclosing the personal impact of the event on herself, thereby emphasising self-concern: "it could be me, it could be my dog, a lot of my friends have met my dog and love my dog, so to kind of put my face on the person they are

blasting past" (emphasis on the "me" and "my"). At a surface level this description appears to serve the function of a plea to cyclists to slow down by Mary-Ellen on behalf of her dog. However, perhaps an analysis of Mary-Ellen's language in this instance suggests that another function for Mary-Ellen might be that she wants these cyclists to think of her too.

Mary-Ellen also describes her experience of online personal self-disclosure with regard to the post described previously concerning her health concerns and "screaming into the void":



> They are screaming into the void as well. Sometimes I put them up if I am not feeling well, particularly with my IBS [Irritable Bowel Syndrome], so people understand why I am not going to things and don't invite me all the time so I don't feel that I have to say no to them.

Considering the importance of performance and context, it appears Mary-Ellen is trying to convey that these posts do not serve the function of garnering sympathy. Rather they are examples of how she informs people not to demand things of her socially when she is unwell. Mary-Ellen's use of language suggests that she views herself as socially popular; "invite me all the time". Thus, this self-disclosure has a dual function for Mary-Ellen, as it keeps her Facebook network informed of her wellbeing, whilst also managing the social

demands on her time. Mary-Ellen appears to use personal self-disclosure to engage and yet simultaneously detach from her connections, this is also evident in her comments regarding her experience of more explicit online self-disclosure behaviour on another social media site.

> M.E. "I say, "It is my page, piss off!" That is my attitude. I have an X-rated Tumblr and the thing I have learned from them is, if you don't want to be here, there is the door."
>
> C.N. Can I ask you about your X-rated Tumblr?
>
> M.E. "BDSM [Bondage Dominance Sado Masochism]... that is what I am into, I share pictures of myself without my face in them so you wouldn't know it is me unless you know me very, very well. Other people I know on Tumblr get very abusive messages going, "I can't believe you do this, you are against the feminist cause." The whole attitude is, there is the fucking door, GTFO [get the fuck out], we are not interested. If you don't want to be here, you don't have to be. That's the attitude I have carried into my Facebook life. I am going to share what I find amusing, or what I want to, or what I think my friends will find amusing. If you are not interested, scroll on."

Here Mary-Ellen claims that her attitude to negative feedback on Facebook is borrowed from her BDSM [Bondage Dominance Sado Masochism] community, where they suggest it is her right to share what she wants and that the views of others are not important. Mary-Ellen suggests that she is motivated to share intimate images of herself, yet unlike other people she does not share her identity and therefore is less vulnerable to abusive feedback than others who self-identify, perhaps reinforcing the idea that she has a desire to control the extent and impact of her personal self-disclosure.

4.3.3 Summary of Mary-Ellen's digital and interview narrative analysis

The key aspect of the analysis of Mary-Ellen's narrative revealed that her personal self-disclosure was motivated by a desire to present information that informed, educated and

entertained her Facebook audience. She revealed that she shares material that other's will like or will educate and influence the attitudes and behaviours of her Facebook audience. Mary-Ellen also conveyed that she feels that she is someone who is savvy when it comes to online self-disclosure.

Mary-Ellen also indicated that her personal self-disclosure served some important functions for her: namely enabling her to vent frustration and elicit validation. Analysis of her language suggests that her feelings and perceptions of "screaming into the void" provided an insight into her use of personal self-disclosure as a response to feelings of loneliness and vulnerability. By naming her personal online self-disclosure as "screaming into the void" Mary-Ellen articulated how she viewed Facebook as serving the function of helping her to vent and manage these uncomfortable feelings in the absence of non-virtual supports.

Mary-Ellen described how her experience of personal self-disclosure had an impact on her psychological wellbeing by suggesting that she experienced this activity as a continual process of trying to exert control over her personal self-disclosures and warding off vulnerability. Mary-Ellen's language at times suggested that the validation that her posts achieved was not important to her and she implied that she viewed herself as somewhat immune to the Facebook feedback that her personal self-disclosures evoked. However, at other times her language appeared to suggest that her experiences of online personal self-disclosure did affect her wellbeing and indicated that at times it can leave people feeling vulnerable and even drive someone to madness. The analysis of the inconsistencies and contradictions in her narrative accounts raised the question of

whether Mary-Ellen was as impervious to the impact of Facebook feedback as she had originally suggested.

Mary-Ellen was also observed to use pseudo-celebrity language in her story when she described her previous experience of over-disclosure on Facebook and how this negatively impacted on a previous intimate relationship.

4.4. Sophie

Sophie is 22-year-old, female third-level student. The analysis of her Facebook profile revealed that she was an active online sharer, posting 87 updates over the six-month observation period. A total of 51 of her 87 posts during this time contained personal self-disclosures about political activism, which revealed a range of her perceptions regarding political and socio-cultural issues. Analysis of Sophie's digital story using Moon's Criteria (2000) suggested that her personal self-disclosures differed from themes of posts that others shared about her. Sophie posted quite serious material concerning her views on socio-political issues, whereas the posts in which she was tagged by others portrayed her in a lighter hearted and fun manner. Analysis of posts over the six-month observation period, using Moon's Criteria (2000), also highlighted a significant amount of personal self-disclosure around the theme of activism. In accordance with Allen (1974) these posts constituted personal self-disclosure as they contained emotionality and expression of personal feelings. These examples of online personal self-disclosure raised questions as to what extent Sophie's online posts were motivated by performance of a particular political stance and what function they serve for her. With these questions in mind,

Sophie was identified as a suitable participant to invite for interview to explore her motivations, function, impact and overall experiences of online self-disclosure.

Figure 5.1 represents the profile of specific themes of Sophie's self-disclosure extracted from her online postings.

4.4.1. Sophie's Disclosure Pattern in Status Updates

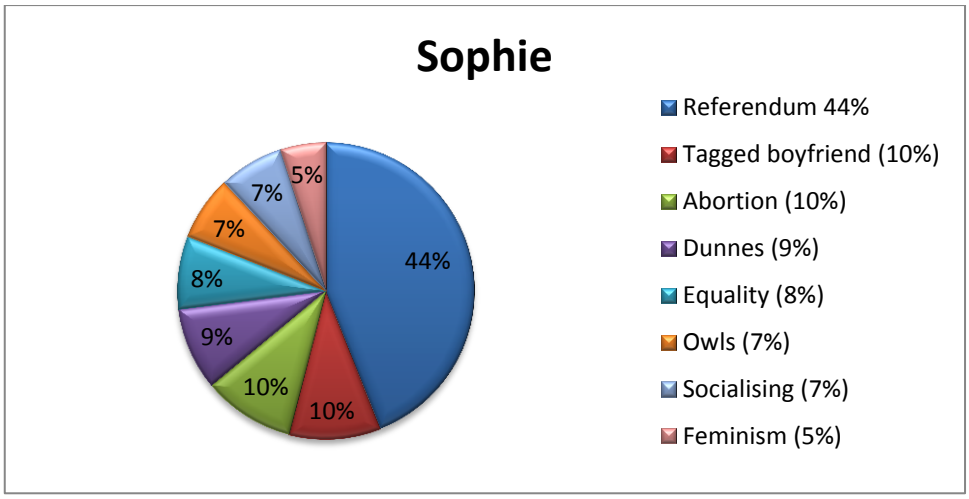
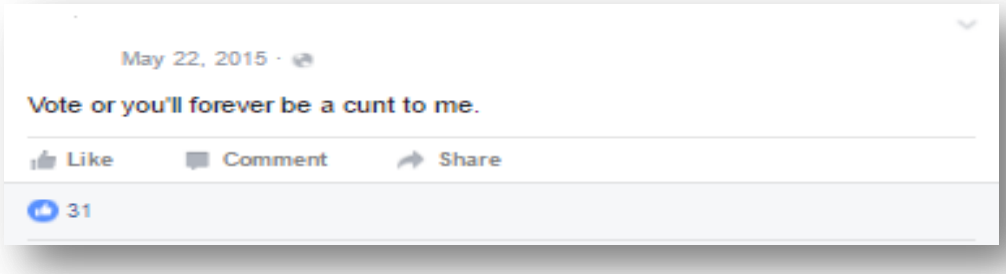


Figure 5.1.

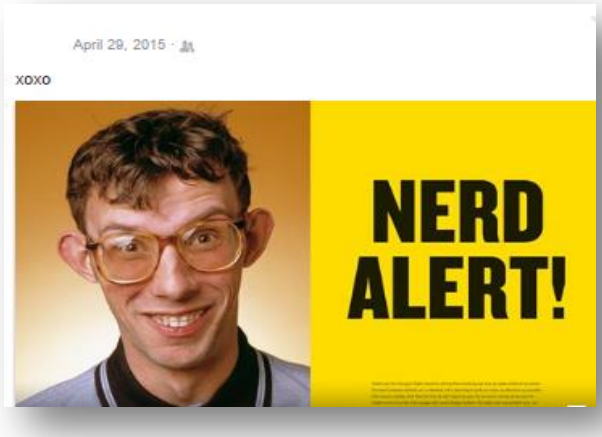
This analysis of Sophie's Facebook profile revealed a total of 41 of her 51 posts examined over the observation period contained personal self-disclosures of socio-political activist views in relation to the marriage equality referendum. Although Facebook activism is considered a part of the narrative of the contemporary social world, many of Sophie's other posts also self-disclosed her position in relation to other socio-political causes such as the pro-choice movement, workers' rights, inequality and animal cruelty, which may suggest that Sophie's interest in activism goes beyond the contemporary issues in a social media context at the time of the observation. The following posts are examples of Sophie's political activism disclosures.

Many of Sophie's online self-disclosures revealed her opinions on a range of political/socio-cultural issues. Her pattern of online personal self-disclosure involved sharing original and non-original posts, often with an accompanying caption which identified her position in relation to these issues. The language used in these captions ranged from encouraging, as above, to direct instruction, as below.



Much of the material that Sophie shared suggested that she was well-informed, knowledgeable and impassioned about political topics. At times her posts were observed to contain language which could be interpreted as Sophie taking a position of authority with regard to her knowledge of these issues.

It is not unusual for university students to embrace activism, and therefore considering the narrative in the social world, it is fair to assume that Sophie's expression of these views on Facebook may be considered a contemporary social norm. Social media activism was also observed in many of the other participants' updates in the study. Sophie's online self-disclosures suggested that any of the humorous or lighter material Sophie posted seemed to contain the theme of intelligence. Sophie referred to herself as a 'nerd' on a number of occasions



On one occasion, a member of Sophie's Facebook network shared a post (see below), which suggested that Sophie's online political/socio-cultural activist identity did not

reflect this Facebook friend's impression of Sophie's offline identity. This raised a question about what Sophie's experience of managing the impressions of others was like for her, especially when she performed an identity via her online self-disclosure that was unfamiliar to others on her network. This post highlighted the challenge of identity performance and impression management via online self-disclosures in the context of a diverse Facebook audience.

Sophie, in her response to this post indicates that it is her "fingers that have political inclinations not me" which suggests a division of agency between Sophie's fingers and her mind. Perhaps this comment illustrated Sophie's struggle to manage two competing identities online; the political activist (inner Hilary Clinton) narrative which she was motivated to self-construct the more "light hearted" (outer Kim Kardashian) identity which her friend is attempting to persuade her to embrace. It is interesting to observe how this challenge influenced Sophie's self-disclosure; she fleetingly allows a more frivolous performance to emerge. "I just want to read stories about how Kim Kardashian wore the same coloured eyeshadow…" However, this comment could be an attempt, (through her self-disclosure of her interest in Kim Kardashian) to identify with friends and perform a "lighter" self. As a result of Sophie's profile featuring highly on Moon's Criteria

(2000) and the interesting dynamic concerning Sophie's identity announcements via her online self-disclosure Sophie was deemed a suitable participant to invite for interview. It was anticipated from Sophie's digital posts that her interview would expand understanding of the motivation, impact, function and Sophie's overall experience of managing and performing online and offline identities via her Facebook self-disclosure.

4.4.2. The Interview

Sophie began by discussing her views on the function of online self-disclosure on Facebook:

> It's like a security blanket: if I am kind of feeling a bit shit, you are more inclined in looking at Facebook than you would be in trying to communicate with somebody, because it is easier. Emotionally – if you are kind of feeling down – it is just easier to engulf yourself in something that is not real rather than actually talk to other people.

An analysis of Sophie's use of language in this example shows how she uses the first person, "I", in describing her own feelings and the more distancing second person, "you", to describe self-disclosure behaviour. This might suggest that Sophie is able to acknowledge uncomfortable feelings; "if I am feeling a bit shit" but is less comfortable about disclosing these to others: "you are more inclined in looking at Facebook than you would be in trying to communicate with somebody, because it is easier." The use of the term 'security blanket' might suggest that Facebook serves as a metaphorical transitional object to allow Sophie to negotiate and manage these feelings of vulnerability.

> What I'd post up would usually be an emotional thing, either really sad or really happy… but something that I would be passionate about. I wouldn't just write something like, 'I am here sitting in a chair or in a cafe.' Maybe when I was younger I probably did, but I am too self-conscious now. I think that's about

> this need for attention, there is some unfulfilment there that you don't have in their personal life and you need it online. I don't know… It's like you are being an expert in something, you are trying to sell yourself as a product.

Sophie describes her experience of online self-disclosure as "an emotional thing". Her language suggests that she only motivated to self-disclose on Facebook when she is "really sad" or "really happy". In this instance, it seems as though Sophie is referring to her emotions in relation to the social injustice material that is produced by others. Perhaps Sophie was using online self-disclosure on Facebook as a proxy for her own personal self-disclosure all the while serving the function of providing the protective shield that someone else said it first. The self-conscious nature of Sophie's self-disclosure is evident in her comments about her posting decisions: "I wouldn't just write something like, 'I am here sitting in a chair or in a café.' Maybe when I was younger I probably did, but I am too self-conscious now." Again, there is the retrospective comment about a younger self who was less self-conscious and therefore self-disclosed less discriminately. Sophie now judges this 'younger' disclosure as being motivated by an attention seeking need or an unfulfilled aspect of the self. It is not clear whether as an older person, Sophie now feels that she does not need to engage in this pattern of self-disclosure or whether her censoring of her self-disclosure is motivated by her own or perceived peer expectations that a more mature, self-contained presentation is now required at this stage of her life. Sophie describes the concept of fabricated self-construction on Facebook when she suggests "it's like you are being an expert in something. You are trying to sell yourself as a product". It is not clear whether Sophie is referring to her past or present self-disclosure pattern, but this remark reveals her awareness of the function of Facebook in relation to self-positioning and performance inherent in her online self-

disclosure. This pre-occupation continues to feature throughout Sophie's offline narrative.

> S: "I think, 'OK, if I share this, what will people think?' There is definitely this self-conscious aspect of, 'Is this stupid?' I definitely am a bit self-conscious in that way, because you don't want to appear stupid. Like there are friends of mine who are incredibly clever and they write really interesting things, but I'd be kind of self-conscious".
>
> C.N.: "Are the aspects of yourself that you try to omit from Facebook, that you wouldn't want them to know or to see?"
>
> S: "I guess looking at Kardashian articles or looking at stupid celebrity stuff, stuff that I give out about myself, just stupid articles... you know, all those sort of... that I try to avoid, even if it is a [whispering] *Daily Mail* article. So yes, that would be basically it, reading stupid things, pointless celebrity stuff that I do actually spend time reading, but I have never shared because I'm too embarrassed".

Attending to Sophie's language it is notable that the word "stupid" features five times in this example. Sophie describes how she would be "embarrassed" if the lighter side of her personality were made known to others. Sophie fears that people will associate some of her interests as not being intellectual and therefore see her as "stupid". In describing her motivation to engage in online self-disclosure Sophie describes significant intrapersonal deliberation before sharing anything on Facebook. She seems very aware that she is motivated to intentionally try to cultivate an online identity of herself as 'not stupid'. She achieves this by only self-disclosing what she believes her Facebook audience want to see or how she wants to be seen by them.

Sophie moves on to describe her motivation to deliberately attempt to manage others' impressions of her. She does so by only self-disclosing aspects of herself that portrays her as clever and a serious activist. We then discussed the post where Sophie's Facebook

Friend publicly challenged her performed online self by suggesting that this political/socio-cultural activism identity is incongruent with her offline self. This post, below, was discussed to better understand Sophie's struggle to manage her online performance when this is challenged by others.

> That's one of my best friends, and she always takes the piss out of me – I have that rapport with her. She knows me well. But a lot of the time posting the clever stuff doesn't feel natural to me. The fear of not getting the likes or the comments or… I just find it hard to participate. Maybe I am more self-conscious about having my softer side being displayed. Maybe it is a bit too intimate. Just posting up articles about certain things is less intimate and you are less vulnerable that way.

This online exchange between Sophie and her Facebook friend illustrates the clash of the unintended audience that can occur on Facebook. A challenge of online self-disclosure arises due to the breadth and diversity of the typical Facebook audience. An online self-disclosure directed at one cohort of the Facebook audience can clash with another cohort who may hold a different view of the users' identity. This problematises the expression of

differing identities, which can have an impact on the users' self-disclosure. Sophie may be motivated to use Facebook to perform her impassioned activist identity online, but this may be unfamiliar to those who know her as a fun-loving fan of celebrity trivia offline. It can be a challenge to integrate both of these contrasting identities to form a coherent Facebook performance. This is made especially difficult when Sophie's Facebook audience is made up of a large constellation of people who may only know parts of who she is offline. This complexity is best understood in terms of performance. The complex management of performing different selves to diverse audiences is illustrated in this exchange. It raises the question as to whether the capacity of one-to-many communication actually encourages self-disclosure and the exploration of identity, or whether the complexities of the composition of the audience make this experimentation problematic. Sophie identifies that posting second hand material such as news articles, is easier than disclosing original material about herself and this way of sharing serves the function of making her feel less "vulnerable", which raises questions about the significance of the material that users self-disclose. It can also be noted by the language used in Sophie's response to this comment that she acknowledges experiencing a tension when it comes to her Facebook and offline identities. This suggests that the conflict between Sophie's heart/mind and her "fingers" (which are used to type), may represent the experience of an inner/outer conflict of competing performances of identity for her.

Later in the interview Sophie goes on to provide a back story to explain her sensitivity to feeling stupid and her motivation to self-disclose an intelligent identity:

> There is this deep insecurity that I am not clever, I have always felt that, and I think I am trying to overcompensate sometimes. I know that it is my own issue to deal with, but I have felt stupid and had this inferiority thing, even though it is ridiculous. I am not

> saying that I am, but I have always had that insecurity there, ever since I was a kid, so that would be important, it is definitely a flaw, I think... I guess it is this kind of need to be accepted, I want to be seen as this particular thing. Yes, I think it is something that is a little bit pathetic, but it is just a human condition: you want people to like you and to think certain things... I don't know, to me that is the ultimate vulnerability. I find it really difficult.

This unit of narrative offers an insight into the reasons for the content inherent in Sophie's online self-disclosures. An analysis of the context of her online personal self-disclosures explain how Sophie's vulnerability originated in her negative experiences of feeling stupid during childhood, and how this is now shaping on her online self-disclosure. Sophie hypothesises that her over-cultivated, careful performance of her online identity is motivated by an attempt to over-compensate for a part of her former identity that she does not want people to associate with her. Although suggesting that this is an attempt to over compensate for other aspects of her identity, Sophie declares that in her online self-disclosures she is more likely to disclose certain aspects of herself and minimise others in order to serve the function of cultivating her identity announcements. It would appear that when Sophie is performing her impassioned activist identity as it is experienced as a safer mode of self-disclosure on Facebook than expressing more intimate and vulnerable aspects of Sophie's identity.

4.4.3. Summary of Sophie's digital and interview analysis

While the analysis of her digital story suggested that Sophie was motivated to intentionally self-disclose aspects of herself, which would demonstrate that, she was knowledgeable about socio-political issues. Sophie stated that she was motivated to share this information in order to inform, educate and inspire her Facebook audience. In her interview, Sophie revealed how she was also motivated to not come across to her

Facebook audience as stupid. Sophie's story reveals that although she feels that educating her Facebook audience is important, her online personal self-disclosures are primarily motivated by fear and vulnerability.

The analysis of Sophie's story at interview suggests that her online personal self-disclosures performance served the function of portraying a preferred identity. Sophie describes her intention to convey an image of intellectualism which she hypothesised was a compensation for her childhood experiences of feeling stupid.

A key aspect to emerge from the analysis of Sophie's story was the impact that this process had on her psychological wellbeing. Sophie's story revealed the nature and extent of the intrapersonal process that she experiences before, during and after each personal self-disclosure on Facebook. Interpretation of her story suggested that her experience of personal self-disclosure on Facebook is characterised by features of contemplation, rumination and careful consideration of her performance to her Facebook audience. These accounts provide unique insights into the impact of her personal self-disclosure which suggested that this process is carefully thought out and pre-meditated as opposed to something random or frivolous.

A further key insight that emerged from Sophie's story was the impact of experimentation of multiple identities in the one-to-many context of Facebook. Sophie's story illustrates the clash of intended and unintended audiences. This insight provokes the question of whether Facebook, of which much of the current literature suggests encourages the exploration of identity through online self-disclosure, is in fact a forum that discourages self-expression of identity given the complexities and diversity of the audience to whom these disclosures are addressed. One must question, in a space where

Facebook encourages identity creativity if it also offers greater scrutiny and how this impacts upon online self-disclosure.

4.5. Hayley

Hayley is a 23-year-old, female, third-level student. Initial analysis of her Facebook profile revealed that she was the most active online sharer of all of the participants in the wider project, posting 206 times over the six-month observation period. Despite Hayley's large volume of shared material, analysis of her posts did not reveal many consistent themes running through her self-disclosures. Despite this lack of consistency Hayley still featured significantly on Moon's (2000) criteria. Analysis revealed that Hayley's digital profile was heavily associated with her views in relation to the promotion of physical and psychological wellbeing. Although she mostly shared non-original material, the accompanying captions revealed her overall position of support of these various issues. Most of the shared material conveyed positivity and pre-occupation with health and wellbeing. Hayley also featured significantly on Moon's Criteria (2000) because many of her posts contained emotional themes of hope, support, inspiration and positive philosophies.

Hayley's posts differed from other participants' sharing patterns as they did were inconsistent, and at times they appeared contradictory. It seemed pertinent to explore Hayley's motivation for sharing this material and to explore the function of her particular style of online self-disclosure.

Figure 6.1 represents the range and frequency of specific areas of Hayley's self-disclosure.

4.5.1. Hayley's self-disclosure pattern from status updates

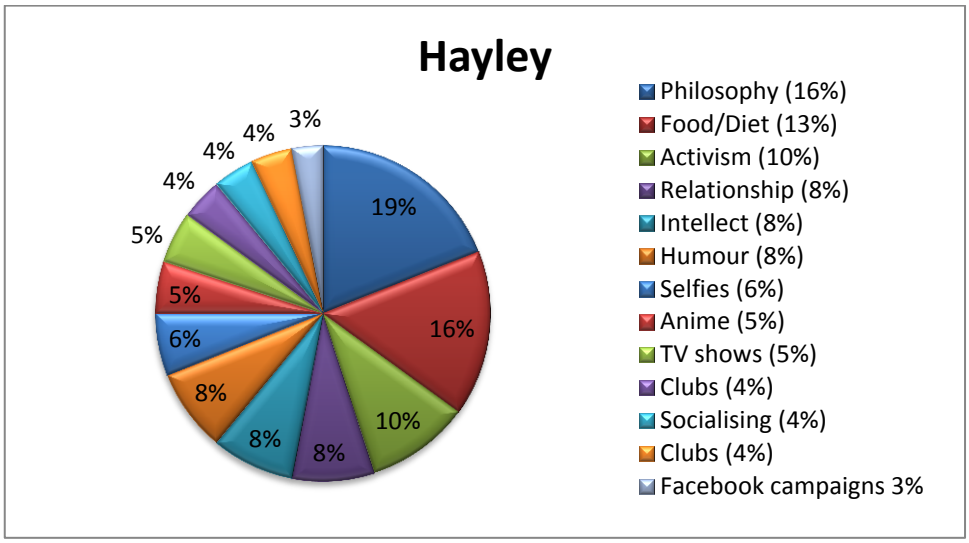
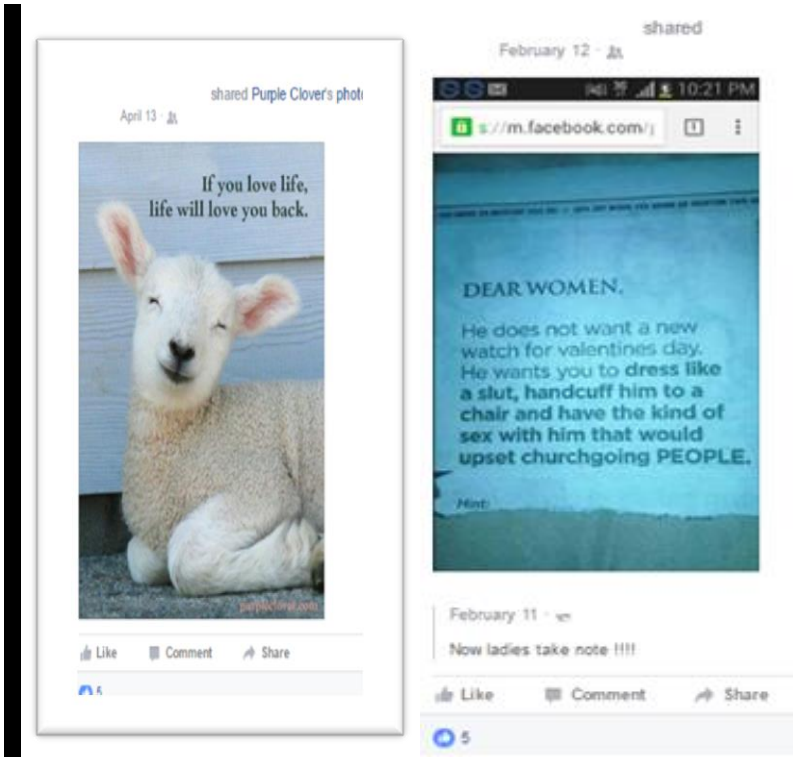
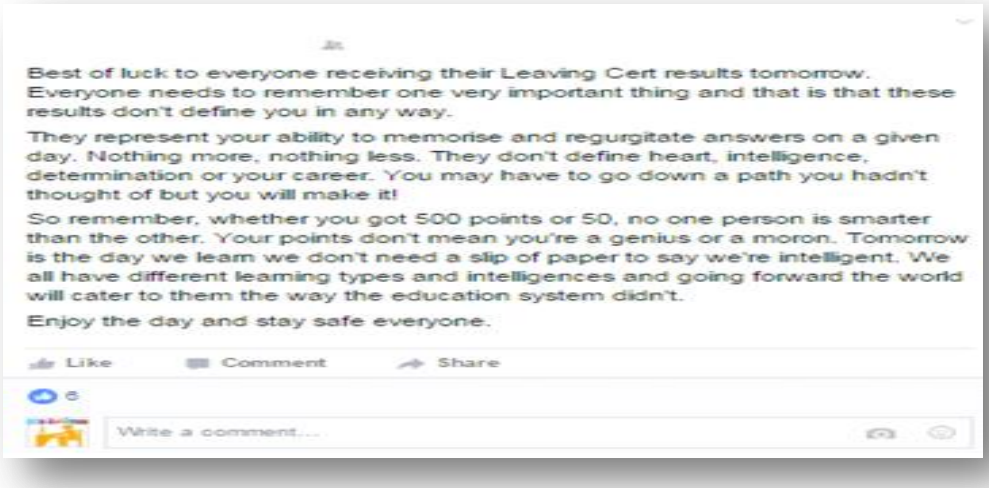


Figure 6.1.

One of the themes of Hayley's online self-disclosures concerned health and wellbeing, by sharing advice regarding healthy living or overcoming life's challenges. However, there were other posts that contained many very different themes that appeared to communicate contradictory messages, which involved less healthy life choices. To demonstrate the contrasting messages being self-disclosed, three examples of Hayley's shared updates are illustrated below.



Here these examples convey very different and contrasting messages. On one hand Hayley is announcing an affinity with the more positive philosophical stance of 'if you love life, life will love you back', yet also conveying the desire to 'upset churchgoing people'. These seem to conflict each other, and her caption 'now ladies take note' suggests her endorsement of this perspective. In addition to these examples of non-original shared material, there was also some original material that Hayley also self-disclosed, as below.



This example was similar to other original posts that Hayley shared with her Facebook network. In the analysis of the language in this example Hayley suggests that exams and intelligence do not "define'" people. This is only noteworthy because Hayley often shared other material that suggested that intelligence is something she values (see post below). The statement that "no one is smarter than the other" and Hayley's use of the term "we" seems to serve the function of positioning herself as an inclusive and benevolent sharer.

These apparent contradictions in Hayley's self-disclosures of her views were evident throughout her digital story on many topics, including diet and exercise.

4.5.2. The interview

At the beginning of the interview Hayley discussed some of her dilemmas associated with online personal self-disclosure

> Although I do share stuff, it is always – God, my whole life story is on here, they know everything about me… When I started, I was like "Don't share anything," but Facebook actually niggles at you, they want you to give them your stuff. Like you get prompts like, "You haven't finished where you went to school." Why the hell do you care? They are always prompting you: "Give me more information." So you end up putting it up... you just put everything up then, don't you?

Hayley's describes how she feels "niggled" by Facebook into self-disclosing more information about herself than she wants to. This is suggestive that Facebook itself may act as an external influence for online self-disclosure. She describes how she was initially cautious about her self-disclosure. However, this has changed over time, largely due to Facebook's apparent persistent requests, which have led Hayley to 'put everything up'.

The requests for more information such as “you haven’t finished where you went to school” seems to conceal the demands of Facebook for users’ information, and in this case seems to shape and motivate Hayley’s online disclosure. It is also worth considering whether this pressure to “put everything up” may also account for the contradictory messages or indiscriminate posting.

Later Hayley discusses the motivations for her online self-disclosure

> I only do it when I am really excited. I am not really into sharing, I know my mum likes to see my updates, she never went to college and she always likes to see “Oh look there is my scientist (signifier replaced here) daughter”, type of thing, so I share from that aspect and from the point that I have a lot of family on there that they can see how I am doing.

Hayley’s description seems to feature an aspect of performance. When Hayley mentions her mum liking to see her “[scientist] daughter” on Facebook, it appeared that Hayley wanted to communicate what she was studying from the outset of the interview, as this seemed to be an important aspect of Hayley’s identity both online and offline.

Hayley explains what she feels the function of self-disclosure is for her:

> H: “I suppose it is just to show people you are not dead type of thing – to show them that you are doing something.”
>
> C.N.: “To show them you’re alive?”
>
> H: “Exactly. ‘Look: I am doing something with my life.’ To show I am active in my life, I do things. You have to put up pictures to show them: ‘I do stuff.’”
>
> C.N.: “So it is about sharing the things that you want people to know?”
>
> H: “Definitely, I don't share a picture of me at home gaming for three hours with messy hair, unbrushed and no make-up, click, click: ‘I am a mess’... I don't share, ‘Down in the dumps right now, depressed as shit, eating two tubs of Ben and Jerry's, going to gain

> 2 lbs.'… Like you don't say how your life is going to hell on Facebook. When I started jogging I went, "Oh, going jogging." And when I did well – you would do that. I definitely try to portray a healthy person because I try so hard to be that healthy person; I feel that if I can make that person exist on some plane, on–– somewhere, then I can attain that. That can be attainable."

Here Hayley's language suggests that she is motivated to only share the good parts of herself on Facebook and she describes making conscious efforts to not self-disclose any aspect of her life that she does not deem to be positive. This suggests that Hayley is performing a preferred identity of a healthy online self on Facebook, as it serves the function of allowing her to feel that she is being healthy "on some plane". Hayley's language suggests that she is hopeful that her offline identity and behaviour can be influenced or "attained" by her online identity that she self-discloses on Facebook. This may be indicative of the capacity to perform a cultivated online identity on Facebook, which serves the function of experimenting with various roles in a virtual space in the hope that this will be eventually attained in one's offline attitudes and behaviours.

Here Hayley describes the motivation and function on her posts that support wellbeing.

> I hope it has an impact, because a lot of the stuff I share is beautiful. Most of the ones I share, like the one, 'You are enough.' My mum and sister don't get along. I wanted them to give up cigarettes and exercise more, but that day they were both very upset about their weight. I had weighed myself, and I said, 'Guys, I am keeping a record, do you want me to keep a record for you guys?' 'Yeah, go on.' When they weighed themselves, they realised how heavy they were and they were down. And I said, 'Look guys, it is a number, it means nothing, unless you let it.' And so I shared that just to try and boost them or anyone else who felt down about something. I like to boost people, just to let them know you are perfect the way you are, and that is fine.

Hayley's interview offered an opportunity to explore the motivation for sharing inspirational posts which are a regular feature of Facebook status updates and appear to be a contemporary narrative in the social world of SNS. Analysis of Hayley's language suggests that she is motivated to share these posts as she believes that her online self-disclosures will have a positive impact on her Facebook audience's feelings and behaviour. In this instance Hayley implied that she wanted to inspire her mother and her sister to "give up smoking and exercise more", but then she suggests that "you are perfect the way you are". These examples of Hayley's presentation as a benevolent sharer seemed to lack consistency in how they are performed and explained. This inconsistency is visible in both her Facebook digital profile and in her offline interview.

In the final aspect of Hayley's interview she describes how she is motivated to convey a positive identity which she intentionally tries to cultivate for herself on Facebook. When describing the function of her online self-disclosures she explains:

> It is not important for me to be liked. I would prefer not even to be noticed in my every day, but it's more important for people to be happy rather than to like me for something. I would prefer for them to be happy in themselves, even if they don't notice me. This week, I came into contact with two people who I considered good friends who didn't even know my name – didn't remember

> me…. OK, you know, if they don't, they don't…. But previously maybe I made them happy, or now I will make them happy as this 'new' friend, fine. I like people being happy.

It appears in the excerpt above that despite Hayley's description of these two people as "good friends", they did not know her name; this is an offline example of how Hayley might over-estimate her potential influence on others both online and offline. Analysis of her digital story suggests that most of her self-disclosures achieve a modest number of likes or commentary. An example of this moderate feedback can be seen in the post below.

This post, which appears to serve the function of being a plea to be recognised, received a modest four likes and no comments. It is also important to consider that this might not be a reflection on Hayley's popularity as the narrative of the social world might suggest that many of these types of postings are non-original shared posts which other users can often be reluctant to respond to this chain posts. Regardless of this consideration one must consider that Hayley shared this post and therefore it is reasonable to assume that she may have expected some response from her Facebook audience.

4.5.3. Summary of Hayley's digital and interview narrative analysis

Analysis of Hayley's digital story reveals that she is a very active sharer who was motivated to express an identity that conveyed that she was an advocate for physical and psychological wellbeing. Hayley suggested that she was motivated to self-disclose in this way because she anticipated that these posts could positively influence her Facebook audience's attitudes and behaviours. This was also reflected in her online personal self-disclosures, which encouraged healthy living strategies, positive mental health and contained inspirational and philosophical messages. Hayley described how the online performances of these attributes are motivated by her desire to create a virtual identity in which her self-disclosed material has the capacity to make people happy. She also indicates that she is motivated to avoid the self-disclosure of negative material as this has the potential to negatively affect her Facebook audience and in turn herself. Hayley also described how she is motivated to engage in personal self-disclosure in response to the pressures that are applied by Facebook to self-disclose. Hayley describes the constant questions and prompts that Facebook send out as perpetuating more personal self-disclosure. Hayley describes how this has resulted in her 'just putting it all up there', which she believed was the same for most users

Hayley also described how her online personal self-disclosure served the function of allowing her to perform a positively edited version of her hoped-for self. She described how this was made possible by the capacity to conceal aspects of herself that she felt did not reflect this preferred identity. She articulated a clear intentionality around her selection of information to disclose and conceal, which was central to her experience of personal self-disclosure. A further insight that emerged from the analysis of Hayley's story was how her online personal self-disclosure served the function of seeking a sense

of recognition. There were examples of pleas for recognition in some of the posts that she shared, which appeared to be a consistent feature of her online story. Hayley also described only posting material that she felt that other users would like, as opposed to her personal self-disclosures being primarily driven by her own desires, which reflected the importance of recognition and acceptance as features of her personal self-disclosures on Facebook.

This analysis of Hayley's story also suggested that her engagement in online self-disclosure had a significant impact on her psychological wellbeing. Hayley described a considerable amount of thought and effort that was invested in her personal self-disclosures in order to convince her Facebook audience that she is physically and mentally knowledgeable and robust. The analysis of Hayley's digital and oral stories revealed how her experience of online self-disclosure involved a significant intentional cultivation of her online identity, which she hoped that in time would positively impact on her offline behaviours.

4.6. Paul

Paul is a 21-year-old male student. Analysis of Paul's digital profile revealed that he was not a very active online sharer, posting a total of 21 posts over the six-month digital observation period. Despite the infrequency of his online status updates, Paul scored significantly according to Moon's Criteria (2000) as some of his updates contained themes of significant emotionality. The analysis of Paul's digital story suggested that his overall digital identity varied from his own self-disclosure (posts he shared himself), to the disclosure of Paul's digital identity by others, (posts in which Paul was tagged in). It was

evident that all of Paul's own self-disclosures appeared to serve the function of performing an identity of a dark, death-metal enthusiast, which stood in stark contrast to the material posted about him by others (mainly by his father and his girlfriend) which portrayed Paul as a thoughtful and caring young man. That is not to suggest that these two presentations cannot co-exist in one person, but the contrast in emphasis was remarkable. During the observation period Paul self-disclosed two status updates which articulated strong negative feelings towards his mother. This self-disclosure stood out in terms of its intensity and scored significantly on Moon's Criteria (2000). Given the objectives of the study were to explore the motivation, function and the impact of users' experiences of online self-disclosure it was felt that further exploration of Paul's posts would offer an opportunity to explore this very intimate self-disclosure on Facebook. It was with this in mind that Paul was identified as a suitable participant to invite for interview.

Figure 7.1 represents the range and frequency of specific areas of Paul's self-disclosure.

4.6.1. Paul's self-disclosure pattern in status updates

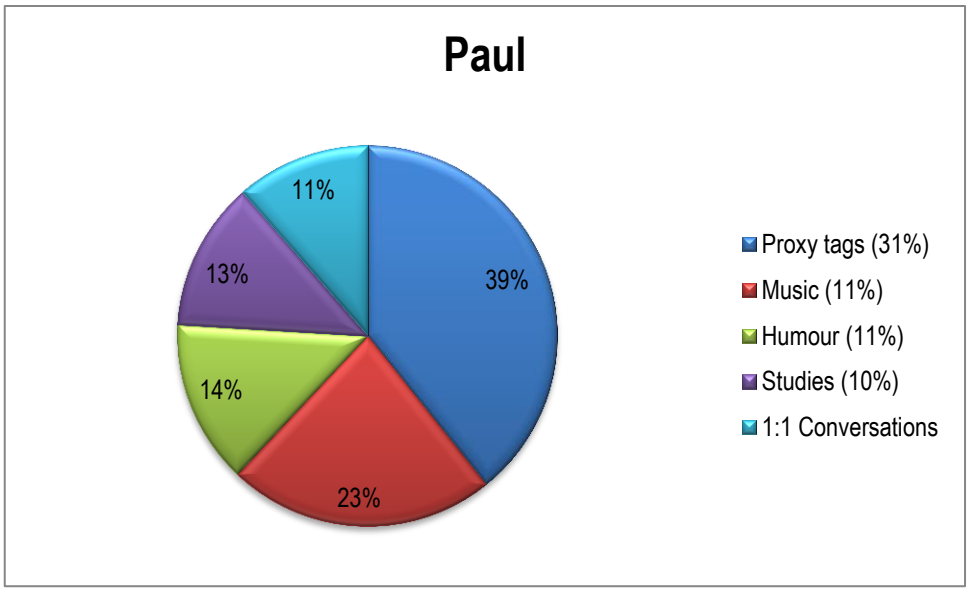


Figure 7.1

The following posts were identified as intimate personal self-disclosures as they contained themes identified by Moon's Criteria (2000) which included anger, frustration, discontent, and an expression of dislike about others. One post (below) contained Pauls' negative feelings about his mother.

An analysis of the language in the initial post suggests that Paul is revealing verbatim what his mother has communicated to him, which is that she believes that he is "narcissistic", needs to grow up and "learn how to be civil". Paul appears to be motivated to conduct a public 'outing' of what his mother said, by relaying the details of this conversation in the one-to-many context of his Facebook Timeline. The function of this self-disclosure seems to be for Paul to use his Facebook Timeline to communicate this information and present his side of the story. Paul provides a context for his Facebook network by stating that his mother "hasn't had a proper conversation with me since I was 14". He goes on to suggest that these incidences "reinforce" his decision to keep his mother out of his life. The use of the language "well played" suggests that he feels that his mother is involved in some degree of manipulation or strategic game playing. Another reason why this post stood out in the analysis of Paul's profile was because it was atypical compared to all of the other posts on his digital story.

4.6.2. The Interview

Paul discussed the posts that contained intimate self-disclosures pertaining to his negative feelings toward his mother.

This example includes the initial update at the top of the image with a follow-on comment by Paul, which was posted 8 minutes after the initial post.

> "Ok… emmm... so my relationship with my mother is quite bad… Emmm, basically... emmm, my mother and father separated seven or eight years ago. Initially I tried keeping good contact with her but she… her personality wasn't nice, and when I forgave her for some of the things she did – because she cheated on my dad and that's why they separated – so, "OK, I've forgiven you twice." And then she was disrespectful to my dad and I'm like, "First I forgive you for your own wrongdoings, and now you're coming up here and making trouble..." I'm like, "Get out." There had been a lot of the trouble with her over the years I suppose… Emmm... She's definitely not a figure in my life and I'd like to keep it that way".

Paul attempts to give some historical context to this post and appears to want to rationalise his actions. He does this by listing the chances that he had given his mother and explaining how she has repeatedly let him down "initially I tried keeping good contact with her" "when I forgave her" "I forgive you for your own wrongdoings" but she

continued “making trouble”. The language Paul uses could be interpreted as quite blaming of his mother “her personality wasn’t nice”, “she cheated on my dad” and “she was disrespectful” which were possibly further attempts to explain his frustration. Riessman (2010) refers to how the dynamics can change in the re-telling of a narrative in order to position the teller in a positive light.

In explaining the background to this post, Paul revealed another function of his use of Facebook which also involved communication with his mother. Paul explained that he has two Facebook accounts so that he can contact his brother when he is staying with their mother. Paul’s second Facebook account has been set up under a pseudonym to avoid his mother detecting his secret contact with his brother.

> Ok... emm, so basically… my little brother has a diagnosis of learning disability (signifier change here). I get on quite well with my brother, which I guess not a lot of people would say about their siblings. So it was annoying that I couldn’t talk to him without this threat of my mother getting my information, so I set up a fake Facebook page and got a few in jokes in that as well so he’d have a laugh, but mother found out and had taken offence at some of the in jokes [laughs] So – and I think that may have fuelled the argument we had – I can’t necessarily remember.

Paul’s language again seems to portray his caring nature as he mentions that unlike “most people” he gets on quite well with his brother. Here Paul describes how Facebook functions as a means of conducting covert communication between him and his brother. He then states “but mother found out” which omits the use of ‘my’ or ‘our’ to preface how he addresses his mother. This may be suggestive of an attempt by Paul to disconnect from his relationship with his mother by omitting a term that suggests a connection.

Paul discusses further the background to the exchange with his mother, which motivated him to put this post on Facebook.

> So a lot of different factors played into why I did it... emmm I was talking to my girlfriend at the same time – I was having an argument with my mother via the fake Facebook page – and I was on the other Facebook page chatting to my girlfriend. I was telling her as it happened the things my mother was saying, so I suppose it reinforced... emmm... the notion that my mother was being, ya know, irrational, it went just to me thinking, "No, this is not right," and I had another person to confirm – "This is definitely not right".

Paul again provides the context for his personal self-disclosure and attempts to justify his actions by stating that there was another person (his girlfriend) involved in his decision-making process. He describes how his girlfriend "reinforced" his decision to self-disclose these feelings on his Facebook Timeline. An analysis of Paul's language and the second use of the term "reinforce" may suggest some experience of uncertainty on Paul's part that intimates that he requires reinforcement around certain decisions. Paul says that his girlfriend confirmed for him that he had good reason to be annoyed, and this "confirmed" his decision to post. This unit of narrative provides some insight into the back-stage dynamics and the intrapersonal processes and interpersonal experiences that occurred for Paul before he posted this personal self-disclosure. As this discussion developed Paul became aware that most members of his Facebook network would not be privy to the back-stage processes and therefore would merely witness the end product of the performance, the posted personal self-disclosure.

Paul further discusses his motivations for this self-disclosure:

> I really don't like it, how long she's been able to get away with it. She's giving the impression that she's a wonderful mother and has

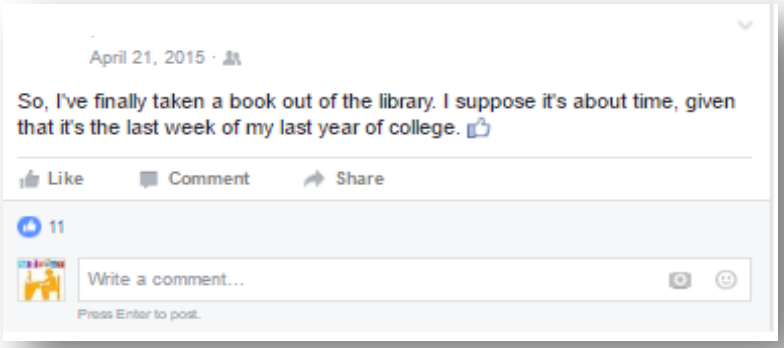
> all [sic] relatives told she's still playing an active part in my life. I'm friends with one cousin on my mother's side on Facebook as well… I think it's, in a way, I suppose I was hoping to show, 'Look, obviously she has nothing to do with me'.

Paul describes how he feels his mother has "been able to get away with it" and how he is unhappy with her performances on Facebook, which he feels are disingenuous and misrepresent his reality that she is not involved in his life.

> I don't like to admit it, but I wanted the cousin on my mother's side to see it. Emmm, it did come into play a little bit… I was like, "Ya know what? Beat her at her own game." I'm gonna tell people, actually, that she's not involved. I just, I wanted to shatter the illusion, you know?

In describing his intrapersonal process, Paul articulates that the function of this online personal self-disclosure was to "beat her at her own game". Unhappy with how his mother has suggested that she is involved in his life, Paul claims that he was in turn motivated to use Facebook to rectify this inaccuracy and perhaps achieve some revenge. It is also worth noting just how sophisticated and intricate this experience is for Paul. The posting of this update has involved a few audiences including his brother, mother's cousin and his girlfriend. Therefore quite a number of others were involved in the orchestration, and then later the justification, of this personal self-disclosure.

Further analysis of Paul's Facebook use suggests that on other occasions he had utilised personal self-disclosures as a means to express difficult emotions. This emerged when Paul described how he did not have a good relationship with his classmates in university as he felt they were "fickle". In the final months of his degree he posted the following self-disclosure on Facebook.



> Emmm I know a lot of them had awful hard times in 4th year trying to cram for exams and trying – like spending hours in the library – taking out books and making out notes and I was like eh yeah I'm not doing all of that so (laughs) yeah I don't know why but it's I wanted to put it up basically.

Here Paul suggests that the function of this post was to use online self-disclosure to express his anger and frustration to people with whom he felt aggrieved. Paul knew that his classmates were struggling in their preparation for their exams, so he was motivated to post this update to provoke them, as it implies that he had not worried about his exams whereas they were all struggling.

In further discussion exploring the context of Paul's self-disclosures, he explains that he prefers digital communication to face-to-face communication.

> It gives me time to think, to digest what someone has said in a message and it gives me the time to think about what exactly I want to say because I like having the freedom to chop and change what you've said after you already have it typed is quite nice. I let it go around and around in my head until I decide on the best reply.

Here Paul suggests that he likes to have the experience of control that Facebook affords him, which allows him to be able to edit what he wants to say before he decides what he

self-discloses. Paul suggests that the benefit of email and Facebook is that they allow him to do that. Paul also discussed how he would go to exhaustive lengths to try to find an email address if he had to contact a company about something, rather than having to tolerate the anxiety of making a phone call and having to then speak directly to someone. He reported on one occasion that he asked his father to make a call for him, as he was too anxious to do it himself.

4.6.3. Summary of Paul's digital and interview narrative analysis

In the context of Paul's experience of anxiety and his anger with his mother, he describes being motivated to engage in personal self-disclosure on Facebook to communicate his anger at his mother. Paul also described his motivation for this personal self-disclosure was to inform his Facebook audience of the truth of the circumstances around his relationship with his mother. Paul described how he was motivated to "shatter the illusion" that he felt his mother was creating by her performance on Facebook and he wanted to 'beat her at her own game'.

Analysis of Paul's digital and interview stories also highlighted how his personal self-disclosure on Facebook served the function of communicating uncomfortable feelings to wider audiences. Paul's account of his experience of social anxiety formed the context for why he used Facebook to express difficult feelings like anger or frustration to wider audiences. It appears that personal self-disclosure on Facebook served the function of allowing this to be expressed without doing so in a face to face context.

Paul's case also illustrated how self-disclosure on Facebook impacted positively on his psychological wellbeing. He described how Facebook allows users to edit and contemplate their social interactions which he experienced as less anxiety provoking than

live face to face communication. This insight illustrates how the concept of control is a feature of online self-disclosure on Facebook. Analysis of Paul's story suggests that online personal self-disclosure can function as an apparent support to anxiety as it may be felt to be less threatening as it allows him to edit his communications before expressing them. However, one must question whether the availability of this technology does anything to allow users to address their fears of live face to face interpersonal communication, in order to improve them. Paul describes a process of deliberation and rumination where he allows thoughts to go around and around in his head before deciding on the perfect response. Perhaps this capacity to deliberate over responses, afforded by Facebook users, could exacerbate the feelings of anxiety over a longer period.

4.7. Cian

Cian is a 25-year-old, male, third-level student. Analysis of Cian's Facebook profile indicated that he was an active online sharer posting 147 times over the six-month period. Cian's profile featured significantly on Moon's Criteria (2000) as there were many examples of intimate online self-disclosure. Both Cian and his girlfriend regularly shared their thoughts, feelings and emotions about each other on their Facebook Timelines. This aspect of Cian's online self-disclosure on Facebook was unique in terms of the degree of depth regarding his intimate relationship he was willing to disclose. This aspect of Cian's digital profile stood out during the analysis as these updates featured regularly. It was for this reason that Cian was deemed a suitable participant to invite for interview to discuss his motivations, functions and experiences, of his online self-disclosure.

Figure 8.1 represents the range and frequency of specific areas of Cian's online self-disclosure.

4.7.1. Cian's self-disclosure pattern in status updates

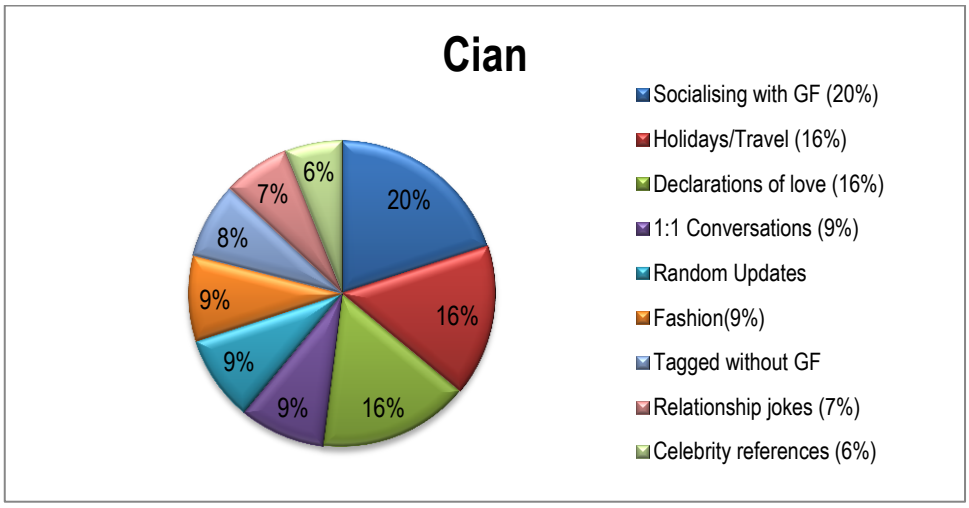


Figure 8.1

The analysis of Cian's Facebook profile revealed that posts pertaining to his relationship with his girlfriend were the most prominent aspect of his online identity. 87 out of Cian's 117 online self-disclosures referred to this relationship. Many of his posts detailed the couple's patterns of socialising and provided insights into their private life together.

It was not possible to give an example of many of the posts that Cian shared with reference to his feelings for his girlfriend, as almost all of them accompanied pictures of the couple, which would compromise Cian's anonymity. However, here is an example of a selection of the captions that accompanied the photographs.

"Feeling Festive with my one and only"

"Selfie with my beaut"

"Watching TV with the love of my life"

"I am so lucky to have someone so perfect who loves me".

The following are examples of how Cian and his girlfriend self-disclosed aspects of their feelings for each other and their relationship on Facebook.

The following image contained the caption, “For my beautiful lucky girl”;

Cian and his girlfriend were also very regularly self-disclosed their activities and there were a total of 81 Facebook ‘check-ins’ observed in the six month observation period.

The following image is an example of how this couple self-disclosed their activities.

The following image had the caption “Excitedly planning our romantic holidays for this year”

Cian and his girlfriend communicated with each other on Facebook in a way that was visible to their Facebook audience. This included sharing images to entertain each other, tagging each other on their broadcast Timeline and sharing declarations of their thoughts and feelings about each other. The manner in which these intimate conversations took place on the public Timeline on Facebook was of interest to the study as it enables better understanding of the motivation, function, impact and experience of this type of personal self-disclosure.

4.7.2. The interview

From the outset of the interview, Cian seemed determined to convey that he did not have much control over his Facebook status updates.

> I don't think I update my Facebook that much, but I find myself being tagged by other people, particularly my girlfriend, so if I go anywhere, before I even get my phone in my hand I am tagged there. So I am not doing it myself, obviously you don't have much

> control over it. I am not actively sharing that stuff but I am taking part in it.

Cian appeared to set out a context for his online presence by suggesting that it is not always self-motivated or of his own doing but is often the responsibility of his girlfriend and their friends. He goes on to say that his pattern of self-disclosure on Facebook has changed over time; in the past he was a lot more vocal on Facebook, but this has changed in recent years due to maturity.

> Initially I used it quite a lot … It's kind of a bit embarrassing that that stuff is out there, and it shows your immaturity in some of the stuff. But then as I got older, I stopped putting my thoughts out there as much.

Cian discusses his current motivation for online self-disclosure:

> It would be based on something that has already happened, or it would be like looking forward to something. It would be more sharing my location, or going to an event. I know some of the reasons I do it would be pressure from my girlfriend. She has said before, "I am always doing that, you don't share anything about me." I end up feeling, "OK, I will do it this time". I don't know why I feel the need to check in, if you are doing nice things, it is nice for other people to know. It does sound very self-indulgent, but I think it portrays that you are off doing great things, because the rest of your life isn't that interesting.

Here Cian seems to be trying to provide a context to justify why he tags himself and checks in at events. An analysis of Cian's language suggests that he is aware that publicly broadcasting what he is doing may appear "self-indulgent". Cian rationalises his motivation for this by saying that if he does not tag himself and check in, someone else will. Cian also describes being under pressure from his girlfriend to take his turn at checking in. It appears from Cian's narrative that when couples tag each other in posts or check-in at events on Facebook that this carries some meaning regarding the strength of

their relationship. Cian's narrative seems to suggest that if one person checks in more than another does, that this may signify that they love the other person more, or that the person who checks them both in together is more proud that they are there together and wants everyone else to see it. These functional dynamics are interesting as perhaps these examples suggest how Facebook has introduced new dynamics or cultural norms into intimate relationships, in which the expectation is to display a more public commitment to each other.

Cian discusses the difference between his online and offline identity:

> I would like to think that I am pretty much the same person on my Facebook page as I am in reality. The only slight difference is with my Facebook page, I would say people perceive me as being far more social than I actually am. So it would look like we are going here and there and everywhere, but in reality we are just -every two weeks or something like that – we might go for something to eat, and we'd be tagged.

In terms of context, Cian explains that his girlfriend's sister is married to a professional athlete and therefore he and his girlfriend get invited to a variety of sporting events. Cian feels that this adds context to why his life may sound more impressive than it is in reality. He used the phrase "we might go for something to eat, and we'd be tagged". The use of language "we'd be tagged" suggests that someone else tags them both at these locations. However when they are both just out for dinner the likelihood is that if they are tagged it is initiated by one or both of them and not anyone else.

Cian explains why checking in and having a presence on Facebook has become a central part of his life:

> I think initially, you wouldn't have needed to share events. I think, for example, now, if it is a birthday or a meal or dinner that you

> almost need a picture to show it actually happened. And sometimes it bothers me. I am like, "Just put the phone down, please. We are here to eat or here to go to a film…" I just find that is different. It is only really in the last two years that it is expected that you share what you do on Facebook. When we had Facebook before there was no need to share everything we did.

When Cian suggests that "you need to a picture to show it actually happened", he implies that in the narrative of the contemporary social world experiences do not feel like they have happened, or that they are real, unless they have been captured and publicly shared on SNS. It seems from Cian's narrative that in his opinion the sharing of an experience has interfered with his capacity to savour the experience. Cian also acknowledges how the public nature of Facebook affects his intimate relationship and suggests that Facebook plays an important function in their pattern of communication. In the following excerpt Cian describes how the public Facebook Timeline has a function in how he and his girlfriend communicate.

> We could be sitting beside each other like after an argument, where it is a bit tense… and she would post something funny… I will get a buzz on my phone, get a notification, and I'd see it and she would look at me smiling…. I think she would find it easier to do it through Facebook.

Here Cian is describing how Facebook functions as a means to communicate uncomfortable feelings between him and his girlfriend even though the intended audience is in close proximity. The self-disclosure of intimate feelings is shared and made visible to their Facebook network. Considering this from the perspective of performance and the narrative in the social world, it seems that the Facebook audience have a role in this type of online personal self-disclosure. The fact that this communication is not conducted through the Facebook private messaging facility suggests that the public

nature of the apology is an important function of this communication. The function of this self-disclosure seems to be to make the apologetic gesture more public, which may appear to make it more authentic and therefore better received.

4.7.3. Summary of Cian's digital and interview narrative analysis

Analysis of Cian's story illustrates how he claims that much of his digital identity is motivated and influenced by others, namely his girlfriend. Cian seems to want to rationalise and justify his self-disclosures on Facebook by explaining that much of his online presence is out of his control. Cian's narrative also suggests that he seems to lack influence over what is disclosed because he states that if he does not personally self-disclose online, someone else will do it regardless.

Analysis of Cian's language in his digital profile shows that his declarations of love for his girlfriend are expressed in a very clear, obvious and public ways; as is her love for him. In explaining his motivation for these personal self-disclosures Cian suggests that it portrays a more interesting version of his life than his offline reality. Cian suggests that he is motivated to share this information as he believes his Facebook audience may be entertained by these personal self-disclosures.

Cian also explains how his public Facebook Timeline seems to function as a means to communicate messages between him and his girlfriend. These self-disclosures appear to be only intended for each other but nonetheless are communicated publically. This may be suggestive of new ways in which Facebook is playing a role in communicating or performing intimacy. One wonders if this has become a cultural norm for how couples relate to each other on Facebook. Not only is the audience able to observe their partner

to partner communication, it would seem that the audience plays an important role in the performative function of these communications too.

Another key insight provided by the analysis of Cian's digital and interview narrative concerns the impact of online personal self-disclosure on his psychological wellbeing. Here Cian described how online personal self-disclosure can function as a means of making an offline experience feel more real. Here Cian explains how an offline experience does not feel like it has happened unless it is shared on Facebook. Here Cian's narrative suggests that the Facebook audience has an impact on the construction of a users' reality. This is achieved through the validation received from other users' responses and reactions which serve to enhance the validity of the offline experience. This also raises further questions about the impact of Facebook on establishing significant cultural norms.

4.8. The Comparative Narratives

Having analysed all of the participants' digital and interview stories individually in a case-centred manner (Riessman's 2010) there were a number of common themes that were identified in the analysis across the five participants' narratives that concerned the areas of motivation, function and impact of online personal self-disclosure. The following is an account of the comparative narratives that emerged across the participants' stories.

4.8.1. Motivation for personal self-disclosure on Facebook

4.8.2. The internal motivation to entertain, educate and inspire the Facebook audience

The analysis across all of the participants' stories revealed that a common theme of their intrapersonal motivation for personal self-disclosure was a desire to entertain, educate and/or inspire their Facebook audience. Sophie and Mary-Ellen articulated that her reasons for engaging in personal self-disclosure on Facebook originated from their belief that their audience could be educated by their views on various social-political issues. Hayley suggested that she was motivated to self-disclose her views and philosophical positions by sharing a series of posts that conveyed these messages, so that her Facebook audience could be inspired to be happier. Cian explained that his motivation to share personal information about his intimate relationship on Facebook was as a result of his belief that his audience would be entertained by this information. Paul described how he was motivated to engage in online self-disclosure so as to inform his Facebook audience of his side of the story.

These findings suggest that the participants were motivated to engage in personal self-disclosure on Facebook because they believed that what they had to share was of benefit to their Facebook audience. They were motivated to engage in personal self-disclosure because they believed that their shared material would educate, entertain or inspire their Facebook audience. This motivation to share did not seem contingent on the feedback that these shared posts achieved.

4.8.3. The external motivator of Facebook for encouraging personal self-disclosure and its impact on cultural norms

This theme ran through a number of the participants' accounts of their experiences of online personal self-disclosure. In this context, Facebook could be regarded as a master narrative that positioned the participants in ways that encouraged them to self-disclose more information than perhaps they initially intended. The analysis of the language used in the participants' stories suggested that Facebook itself encourages personal self-disclosure. Mary-Ellen referred to this when she spoke of her tendency to over disclose aspects of her previous relationship, which resulted in her feeling as if she was in a "glass bubble", and "Facebook didn't help, it really didn't help". Hayley spoke about how she began as a cautious self-discloser on Facebook but that, Facebook continued to "niggle" and "prompt" her for more self-disclosures which resulted in her "putting it all up there". Cian also spoke about the way in which it has become customary to check-in one's location on Facebook when one is doing something deemed interesting. He discussed how he was not aware of how this became part of social interaction, but he commented that it has become a significant aspect of 'what everyone does now' and he felt if he did not do it somebody else would.

The participants' stories also suggest that their response to the pressure applied by Facebook to engage in personal self-disclosure has evolved over time. Mary-Ellen, Sophie and Cian all explained that as younger Facebook users they disclosed more indiscriminately than they do now. They suggested that now that they are older, they are more considered in their personal self-disclosures. It is therefore worthwhile to ask the question if this is a feature of their 'maturity' or another shaping influence of Facebook?

4.8.4. The function of personal self-disclosure on Facebook

4.8.5. The construction of preferred identities as a function of personal self-disclosure on Facebook

The use of personal self-disclosure on Facebook to communicate preferred identities was another theme that emerged in many of the participants' stories. This seemed to be a function of personal self-disclosure on Facebook. The most notable stories where this occurred were in the cases of Hayley, Sophie and Cian. In the case of Hayley she described how

> You don't say how your life is going to hell on Facebook. I definitely try to portray a healthy person because I try so hard to be that healthy person; I feel that if I can make that person exist on some plane.

Here Hayley provides an insight into the interpersonal function of her online personal self-disclosures, which is to perform a preferred identity. This was similar to Sophie who suggested that

> I guess it is this kind of need to be accepted, I want to be seen as this particular thing… you want people to like you and to think certain things.

Here Sophie describes the intentionality and deliberate function of her personal self-disclosures which is to portray a preferred identity. Cian also describes the function of personal self-disclosure of a preferred identity on Facebook because

> It portrays that you are off doing great things, because the rest of your life isn't that interesting.

This finding supports the evidence that Facebook largely facilitates one's performance of predominantly positive attributes of a hoped-for-self (Davis 2012). In most of these incidences the participants disclosed a hoped-for version of the self on Facebook which was a carefully edited version of the self that emphasised certain desirable aspects and minimises other less desirable ones. It is not clear whether the participants cultivated these hoped for personas and then posted them on Facebook or whether it was that Facebook was used in the construction of the hoped-for self. The participants' descriptions of personal self-disclosure on Facebook did appear to have differing functions to that which they would disclose in an offline context, thereby suggesting that users perform different aspects of the self in an online and offline context. This is not unlike how most people interact in everyday life, however what appears unique is that due to the lack of anchoring features on Facebook, different performances are possible. This portrayal of the self appears more amenable to editing and manipulation given the online context of Facebook and therefore allows for more creativity. These findings support the view that personal self-disclosure is influenced by with the representational affordances of Facebook which allow the presentation one's hoped-for self.

This finding speaks to the importance of the context of one-to-many self-disclosures on Facebook. The central themes that emerged across most of the participants' stories concerned how they felt Facebook functioned in managing their identity. Some of the participants suggested by the performance of multiple versions of the self, Facebook shapes their identity in ways that allow them to correct it and emphasise certain aspects of the self that they think others would find desirable, which the offline environment does not permit.

4.8.6. The function of personal self-disclosure on Facebook: the expression and processing of uncomfortable emotions.

This theme emerged in two of the participants' stories and it concerned the strategic use of Facebook to express, process and manage difficult emotions. Mary-Ellen described engaging in online self-disclosure on Facebook as a means of "screaming into the void". This occurred when she was trying to process difficult emotions like sadness, fear or loneliness. She described turning to Facebook when she was frightened and there were no non-virtual supports available. Paul described how on a number of occasions he had strategically used Facebook to communicate his anger and fury. This was most noticeable in the post which he self-disclosed his negative perceptions of his mother, but Paul also provided some interesting insights into the role of Facebook in his intrapersonal process of managing uncomfortable feelings in other circumstances. Paul suggested that he experiences anxiety in social situations in the offline world, which prohibits him from engaging in conflict. However, he described how Facebook allowed him to express his feelings of anger, indirectly towards his classmates, which both gave him some sense of satisfaction and helped him to avoid face-to-face conflict. He described incidences where he would use Facebook to communicate his anger and frustration by posting updates online to provoke anxiety in his classmates, whom he knew were anxious about their pending exams. Paul had previously felt aggrieved by his classmates, and so he used online personal self-disclosure on Facebook as a way of communicating that and perhaps seeking revenge. This story suggested that Paul's self-disclosure on Facebook might serve to communicate anger, frustration and envy if he feels unable to do this in an offline or face-to-face context. In Mary Ellen's case, it seemed that she turned to Facebook to help her manage her feelings of sadness and loneliness. This is an interesting finding as it

postulates that Facebook is experienced as perhaps something that is nurturing and caring, yet simultaneously empty and void.

Considering the function of personal self-disclosure on Facebook for Paul, this allowed him to achieve indirect retribution for past grievances. On the other hand, Mary-Ellen's screaming into the void served to seek recognition, empathy and validation, which was another function of personal self-disclosure on Facebook.

4.8.7. The impact of personal self-disclosure on Facebook

4.8.8. The impact of online personal self-disclosure on psychological wellbeing; rumination and anxiety.

A number of the participants described how the experience of personal self-disclosure on Facebook involved a carefully thought out process of selecting the aspects of their lives, which contributed to the identity they are trying to cultivate on Facebook. This suggests that an intrapersonal process occurs before, during and after the online self-disclosure experience. Sophie and Paul described their contemplative experience of online personal self-disclosure which involved a series of edits before posting any information. The accounts of this editing process involved a significant amount of consideration and a process of weighing up the potential risks and gains of self-disclosing certain personal information. Sophie captured this when she suggested:

> If I share this, what will people think?' There is definitely this self-conscious aspect of, 'Is this stupid?' I definitely am a bit self-conscious in that way, because you don't want to appear stupid.

This speaks to the potential impact of judgement and threat that these participants anticipate when they engage in personal self-disclosure on Facebook. It would appear

that this experience of judgement encourages a sense of deliberation in order to get it right. Paul described how he used Facebook as a means of communication because it allowed for him to deliberate over what he was going to share, which he felt helped him to feel less anxious than a live face to face communication.

> It gives me the time to think about what exactly I want to say because I like having the freedom to chop and change what you've said after you already have it typed is quite nice.

This finding suggests that the editing control that Facebook communication affords the user appears to initially reduce anxiety, however these findings suggest that the time and energy invested in editing a personal self-disclosure on Facebook may add to the experience of anticipatory anxiety which negates its original function. It appeared from the stories of the participants that many were unaware of this paradox of control.

Another theme of the participants' stories which concerned the impact of personal self-disclosure was the notable number of the participants compared themselves favourably to others whom they believed to self-disclose more or at least more innocuous aspects of their lives than the participants did. This familiar narrative was a feature of a number of the participants' accounts. The participants who self-disclosed the most explained that they did not consider themselves to be 'over-sharers', because they knew other users who shared more than they did. This favourable self-other comparison to others could involve a sense of 'cognitive dissonance'. This is when individuals strive for internal consistency and experience psychological distress if and when inconsistencies occur (Singleton et al. 2016). This can occur on Facebook where individuals seek to lessen the conflict between their own actions and beliefs by conceptualising their online self-

disclosures as genuine and much needed, unlike the attention-seeking posts by others on their network (Singleton et. al 2016).

The stories of the participants revealed that their relationship with Facebook seemed to wax and wane over time. In the case of Sophie, she described an ambivalent relationship with Facebook as she articulated that she experiences Facebook at times like a "security blanket" whereas on other occasions she suggested it was experienced as the "ultimate vulnerability". These accounts were consistent in their descriptions of s degree of emotionality that is involved in their experiences on personal self-disclosure on Facebook.

4.8.9. The impact of personal self-disclosure on Facebook on intimate relationships

All of the participants claimed that personal self-disclosure on Facebook had some impact on their intimate relationships. This was a common and significant theme running through a number of the participants' stories. Mary-Ellen referenced this in terms of her past relationships where engaging in personal self-disclosure both held the relationship together and played a role in its eventual demise. Cian also referred to the impact of personal self-disclosure on Facebook on his intimate relationship and how he has witnessed changes in his long-term intimate relationship since the advent of Facebook. Cian also describes how his girlfriend will engage in personal self-disclosure on Facebook as a means of initiating and apology after an argument, which often has the effect of resolving the couple's disagreement. Cian also described how self-disclosing a couple's activity via checking-in on Facebook has become an aspect with which one's love or commitment can be measured.

4.9. Summary

The analysis of the individual and collective digital stories and the face-to-face interviews revealed a number of key findings.

Motivation: The first finding suggests that users are internally motivated to engage in online self-disclosure because of their desire to entertain, educate and inspire their Facebook audience and they are externally motivated to engage in personal self-disclosure through the persistent prompting of the Facebook.

Function: The second key finding was that participants' engaged in personal self-disclosure on Facebook as a means to portray a preferred identity online. This allowed them to cultivate and experiment with preferred identities and communicate these desired aspects to their Facebook audience. A second function of personal self-disclosure is the role it can play in expressing, processing and managing uncomfortable emotions which allows for subtlety, recognition and validation.

Impact: The third key finding revealed the degree of contemplation and emotional investment that participants described experiencing prior to and during their online self-disclosures and the impact this has on their psychological wellbeing. It appears that these experiences can be a source of anxiety and rumination for conscientious Facebook users who are concerned by the judgement and threat inherent in personal self-disclosure on Facebook.

These key findings will now be discussed in relation to existing literature in the Discussion chapter.

Chapter 5 Discussion

5.1. Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to make theoretical sense of the findings of this study, which sought to illuminate the motivation, function and impact of five young adults regarding their online personal self-disclosure on Facebook. This chapter examines how the findings of this study compare to the existing literature and identifies what new knowledge has emerged. The chapter discusses how these findings address the original aims and objectives of the study. New insights are discussed in relation to other theoretical frameworks and the author examines how they are informed by, and contribute to the field of psychotherapy.

5.2 Key contributions of the study to existing knowledge

Having analysed the narratives of the five participants both individually and collectively, and compared the findings to the wider literature, three clear key contributions have emerged. The first contribution is that the motivation for personal self-disclosure on Facebook, among this participant group, appears to be both internally and externally motivated. The internal motivation includes the desire to entertain, educate and inspire one's Facebook audience. The external motivation appears to come from Facebook's self-presentation features and prompts which can influence the user to share more personal information then they would normally do.

The second contribution suggests that online personal self-disclosure can serve the function of expressing preferred or hoped-for identities. This allows users to experiment

with and cultivate online identities that are edited to portray the positive aspects of the self. A further contribution of this study, in relation to the function of personal self-disclosure on Facebook, suggests the strategic use of status updates to express, manage and process difficult emotions and/or elicit recognition and validation.

The final contribution of this study concerns how personal self-disclosure on Facebook can impact a users' sense of psychological wellbeing by inducing rumination and feelings of vulnerability. Rumination is complicated by the notion that Facebook offers an illusion of control to how users self-disclose, which at first appears to lessen anxiety. However, this capability also fuels a process of deliberation regarding the possible responses from ones diverse Facebook audience, which potentially increases anxiety.

This study contributes to existing knowledge by highlighting that the relationship that is formed between Facebook and its users is a more emotional relationship than previous studies have suggested. This relationship is thought to influence users' motivation for personal self-disclosure, meet users' need to express and manage emotion and impact on their psychological wellbeing.

5.3. Key Finding 1:

Internal and External Motivators for personal self-disclosure on Facebook

The first key finding relating to the original objectives of this study involved developing an understanding of the participants' motivation for their online personal self-disclosure. As previously mentioned, there is a limited understanding of this area as no studies have qualitatively explored the nature and extent of Facebook users' intrapersonal motivation

for online personal self-disclosure. This study addressed this gap in the literature and revealed the following insights.

The analysis of the participants' stories revealed that their intrapersonal motivations for self-disclosure consisted of a desire to entertain, educate and/or inspire their Facebook audience. Sophie and Mary-Ellen articulated that her impetus for their personal self-disclosure on Facebook originated as a result of their belief that their audience could be educated by their views on various social-political issues. Hayley suggested that she was motivated to self-disclose her philosophical stance via sharing a series of philosophical messages, so that her Facebook audience could be inspired to be happier. Paul described being motivated to self-disclose his feelings toward his mother as he wanted to inform his audience of what he saw as the truth of his circumstances. Cian explained that his motivation to share personal information about his intimate relationship on Facebook was as a result of his belief that his audience would be entertained by this information.

These findings concur with Vitak (2012) who states that Facebook friends can indeed become potential audiences who can influence users to engage in strategic self-presentation and self-disclosure. The existing literature describes the primary motivators for online self-disclosure as being 1) self-presentation and 2) the need to belong (Nadkarni and Hoffman 2012).

The findings of this study add to the existing literature by revealing that engaging personal self-disclosure on Facebook can be perceived as a desire to perform. Just as actors on stage know that they are being watched by the audience and tailor their behaviour accordingly, effective use of Facebook implies selecting and framing one's personal self-disclosures with a view to pleasing and/or impressing a certain crowd

(Rayner 2012). The desire to entertain one's Facebook audience, as described by the participants in this study, is recognised in the literature as an aspect of social media engagement (Vitack et al. 2012). However, the findings of this study add to the existing knowledge base by suggesting that the impetus to self-disclose information with the intended purpose of entertaining one's Facebook audience may be understood as part of a pseudo-celebrity phenomenon. This theme of pseudo-celebrity was evident in the case of Mary-Ellen, who explicitly referred to her previous relationship being akin to a "celebrity couple" and described being motivated to engage in online self-disclosure so that her "PT" (personal trainer) could advise her on her dietary intake. Cian also described how he and his girlfriend used their Facebook updates to declare their intimate feelings toward each other in front of their Facebook friends, as he believed these posts would entertain people. Sophie and Hayley also described how they believed it was their role and responsibility to use online personal self-disclosure to inform and educate their network's knowledge around socio-cultural issues. These findings concur with MacDonald (2014 p 149) who suggests that there is a cultural belief emerging on Facebook that "anyone can be a celebrity and everyone is a celebrity". Furthermore, results of a study by Stefanone et al. (2008) suggest that social behaviours commonly associated with celebrities are now being enacted by non-celebrities as a result of the increasingly mediated social environment of SNS. They suggest that the defining characteristic of this development is reality TV. Stefanone et al. (2008) suggest that because reality TV uses ordinary people to serve as the main characters as opposed to professional actors, this is eroding the boundaries between celebrity and non-celebrities. This cultural change suggests that our media role has changed in the last ten years from one of consumption to one of production (Stefanone et al. 2008). Owing to the fact that

entertaining, inspiring or educating one's Facebook audience was described as a motivator for online personal self-disclosure by the participants in this study, suggests that they saw their role as producers as well as consumers on social media. The findings of this study also suggest that the participants were motivated to engage in personal self-disclosure, as a means of announcing aspects of their identities. Rayner (2012), states that personal self-disclosure is part of a subjectification of the self by announcing, "I sent this – it is part of my work. You shall know me by my work", which catalyses the audience to then honour this identity announcement by acknowledging the content via likes, comments or shares.

According to Rayner (2012) the motivation for online sharing stems from a sincere desire to empower and inform tribes and communities, alongside making a personal statement in doing so. Rayner (2012) suggests that by engaging in online sharing the user is claiming

> I affirm this; I share it; I like it". We speak to a crowd of our personal preferences, and we like nothing more than for the crowd to affirm those preferences in return. No doubt this satisfies a deep psychological need for recognition. Whatever it is that drives it, it draws us back to share and share again. (Rayner 2012 p.4)

Therefore, the motivation to engage in personal self-disclosure seems dependant on the audience, whether real or imagined. It seems that the motivation for self-disclosure involves the user and the audience which suggests both internal and external or intrapersonal and interpersonal motivators. Litt (2012) claimed that because of the popularisation of broadcast tools like Facebook life has come to be seen as a constant performance in which we are both audience and performer at the same time. The findings of this study suggest that users are motivated to entertain their audience and by the hope of a response from the audience, real or imagined. The term imaginary

audience is chosen in the context of this study because the observation of the majority of the participants' posts revealed that despite receiving decidedly moderate feedback from most of their personal self-disclosures, the participants persisted in self-disclosing in this way. This suggested that they continued to hold onto a belief with regards to the potential reach of their personal self-disclosures to their Facebook audience.

Litt (2012) describes the imagined audience as a person's mental conceptualisation of the people with whom they are communicating and suggests that the less visible an audience is or the less that is known about them, the more dependant one becomes on imagining them. This is due in part to the ease of sharing, the vast amount of information available and the ability to archive the content, which make it difficult to know who is out there and when (Boyd and Ellison 2007). According to Litt (2012), Facebook can influence a users' sense of the potential reach of their shared material by manipulating how users see the audience with whom they imagine they are communicating. In face-to-face communication, the audience with whom we are communicating is unambiguous. However, on Facebook, the audience is less apparent, and the size, diversity and permanence of the network can make them less relevant to the user. This causes a potential to misjudge the prospective audience. This may also explain how Facebook itself may play a role in encouraging and blurring the context of the audience by influencing the users' perception of whether it is real or imagined.

There is some evidence that proposes that there is a mutual relationship between the audience and the user where one influences the other. The work of the French philosopher Michel Foucault (1926–1984), which involved his theories on social conditioning and identity formation in relation to power, is relevant here. From a

Foucaultian perspective, Facebook is not just a vehicle for exchanging information; it is a vehicle for identity-formation (Rayner 2012). Foucault (1979) understood how controlling one's visibility can impact upon one psychologically. Foucault was fascinated by Bentham's model of the ideal prison, the Panopticon. The Panopticon comprises of a ring of cells surrounding a central guard tower. The prisoners in the cells are perpetually exposed to the gaze of the guards in the tower, yet since they cannot themselves see into the tower, they are never certain whether or not they are being watched. Foucault (1979) argued that this would make the prisoners take responsibility for regulating their own behaviour and act in the prescribed manner at all times on the chance that they were being watched. In time, prisoners would come to regulate their own behaviour as if they were in a Panopticon all the time, even once they were released from the institution.

Foucault (1979) claimed that main function of the Panopticon was to induce a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic function of power. According to Rayner (2012), this is not unlike Facebook's mission statement of being 'always connected' and by making all shared material visible to a crowd. Facebook exposes users to a kind of virtual Panopticon because the surveillance that directly affects users and impacts upon their behaviour comes from the people to whom they self-disclose. There are no guards in Facebook's virtual Panopticon. Facebook users are therefore both guards and prisoners, watching and implicitly judging one another as they share content (Rayner 2012).

The findings from this study shed light on the important role that Facebook plays in encouraging and externally motivating personal self-disclosure. Many of the participants' stories in this study suggested that they experienced Facebook as effectively seducing and

pressuring them to engage in more personal self-disclosure. This was illustrated by Hayley's explanation that after Facebook "niggles at you" you just end up "putting it all up there". This sentiment was also reflected in other participants' stories, where Cian and Hayley described how they felt seduced and pressured by Facebook to self-disclose more information about themselves. Facebook has a facility that which reminds users of status updates they had posted in the past which had achieved a significant amount of 'likes' when they were originally posted. This feature, called "Facebook memories", encourages users to re-share these old but popular posts. Litt (2012) suggests that Facebook is responsible for providing these cues or cognitive shortcuts to help users, consciously or unconsciously, imagine their audience. These cues and shortcuts derive from algorithms created by Facebook, which mediate why, how and when content is presented. This plays to a users' need for recognition and therefore influences them to self-disclose more information (Binder 2012).

Analysis of the participants' stories suggests that some of them saw Facebook as an external motivator for personal self-disclosure and some saw it as another audience member or even a manager of their self-disclosure. The participants described how this was becoming a cultural norm amongst Facebook users, which in turn creates other pressures to self-disclose because "everyone else was doing it." This finding links with the studies of Vitak and Ellison (2012) who suggest that Facebook is establishing new cultural norms as:

> Facebook is becoming a super peer, which serves as a construction of all beliefs within an online community that may cause users to alter their beliefs in line with that of the Facebook community (p.244).

Other available literature suggests that the design of Facebook is conducive to encouraging personal self-disclosure because of its many self-presentation features that are central aspects of the software (Davis 2012). However, the stories of the participants in this study suggest that Facebook's influence on personal self-disclosure seemed more active than this description. They implied that the momentum created by the cultural norm to share seems to be an equally powerful influence in motivating self-disclosure. The concept of self-disclosing one's emotional material on Facebook changes the relationship formed with the platform. This appears akin to the relationship that one forms with a copybook when they change it to a diary. It seems that similar principles are being applied with users and Facebook as they engage in online personal self-disclosure a more personal and emotional relationship is formed.

5.4. Key Finding 2:

The expression of preferred identities and the processing of uncomfortable emotions as functions of online self-disclosure

The second key objective of this study related to developing a deeper understanding of the function of personal self-disclosure on Facebook serves for users. One function that the participants in this study described was that personal self-disclosure facilitated the expression of a preferred identity or hoped-for self. This concept of the hoped-for self was evident when the participants described how their online expression of self was different to how they presented offline. This was consistent in both their accounts of their own performances and my impressions of observing them in both the online and offline contexts. The concept of the hoped-for self was central to many of the

participants' stories in this study. Hayley and Cian both described their personal self-disclosures as compensatory performances that are performed when they believed that their offline lives were not interesting enough. They both recalled how performing their hoped-for self, made them feel better, if even it was only in a virtual capacity. This concurs with a study by Skues et al. (2012), who suggested that the hoped-for self is performed in order to compensate for an offline life that is felt to be unsatisfactory.

The concept of the hoped-for self is not new. However, the findings of this study expand on the existing literature by suggesting that the hoped-for self and its gazing audience online may serve the deeper, more psychical function of receiving recognition.

Hayley's story illustrates how online self-disclosure may be serving the function of meeting the formative need of recognition. Hayley suggested that her attempt to create a hoped-for self originates from her desire to fit in and be liked. She explained how she makes detailed attempts to conceal aspects of herself that conflict with her online identity as an advocate for physical health and psychological wellbeing. She illustrated this by describing how she would not share the fact that she plays video games for hours at a time whilst eating ice cream. The analysis and interpretation of Hayley's story suggests that a function of her self-disclosures on Facebook may well be to engage in positive self-presentation and a need to belong. However, a deeper analysis of her narrative revealed that there may have been other more primitive needs, like recognition, being met by her hoped-for self-performance.

Hayley's story suggests that her hoped-for self was concerned with visibility. The volume of Hayley's shared material online seems to speak to her desire to be or seen or recognised. Hayley suggested that her investment in cultivating and communicating her

hoped-for self was in the hope that it would have an impact on other's lives or be memorable. According to Balick (2014), recognition-seeking is a core psychodynamic of online social networking. This is best understood by exploring the concept of recognition from a psychodynamic perspective. Despite early psychoanalytic theory emphasising intra-psychic dynamics within the subject (conscious and unconscious), further evolutions moved away from this emphasis and began to consider relational psychoanalysis or the importance of the subject–other relationship. This is evident in the work of Stern (1974), Bowlby (1969) and Winnicott (1964) who were relational psychoanalysts who prioritised the concept of recognition. The original psychoanalytical concept of recognition related to the infantile desire to attract and hold the gaze of the mother. According to Matousek (2011), one learns their world through the mother's eyes, as they are the refuge from where one claims their existence. However, this dynamic is not isolated to childhood and can occur quite regularly in adulthood. According to Stern (1974), the subject can become dependent on the gaze of the other and as an adult, this can manifest in attempts to seek recognition and visibility in a variety of different relationships and contexts. According to Naughton (2012), the concept of recognition is also central to the world of social networks. According to Fink (1996), desire is created by what is absent, which may explain why despite her numerous posts gaining very little feedback, Hayley continued to self-disclose more frequently than any of the other participants.

Hayley's case was intriguing because it raises significant questions that other researchers (Turkle 2012; Yang and Brown 2016) have asked about what might be the outcome if the online the hoped-for self becomes the most predominant performance of the self that people utilise. These commentators have suggested that the persistent performance of

the hoped-for self will reduce the users' sense of self-concept clarity and result in a fragmented sense of self (Yang and Brown 2016). However, Hayley suggested that by performing her hoped-for self on Facebook, this might in turn positively affect her offline behaviour. This concurs with the findings of Behm-Morawitz (2013) who suggested that online performances could adaptively affect users' offline behaviours. This suggests that the online self-disclosure of the hoped-for self may be in some way serve the function of being an experimental rehearsal for offline behaviours, which may develop in time.

It appeared from Hayley's story that her comprehensive attempts to self-disclose may have served the function of achieving recognition. It is important to state that Hayley's online self-disclosures were not adjudged false or untrue; rather, they just disproportionately represented aspects of Hayley to manipulate the views that others had of her.

The findings of this study add another dimension to other social media research findings which purport that online personal self-disclosure is an expression of a false self, which is characterised by a dishonest online performance (Hollenbaugh and Ferris 2015; Michigyan et al. 2014). However, the personal self-disclosures of the hoped-for self which was self-disclosed by the participants in this study were interpreted to be performances of the self that served the function of personal fulfilment. These performances did not portray false information about the participants, but rather were an embellished performance of their positive attributes with a minimisation or concealment of the aspects of their self that they deemed undesirable. Various performances of the self were evident in both online and offline contexts and given the social constructionist lens inherent this research approach, no performance of the self was deemed to be any

truer or more authentic than the other. According to Balick (2014), our online identities are not manifestations of a false self, but instead they are virtual selves, which are entities that are as real to SNS users as their offline identities. Therefore, we need to remove the separationist discourse of the true and false selves and change to the virtual and non-virtual self instead (Balick 2014).

According to Naughton (2012), one of the core functions of online recognition-seeking behaviour is gaining the validation that ideally should follow (Naughton 2012). These recognition-seeking behaviours indicate a draw of the ego to perform across Facebook in ways that can break previous social conventions, in the name of recognition and validation (Balick 2014). However, there is also a need to become aware of the more subtle ways in which the need or desire to share can have negative consequences on people's lives. This is demonstrated when, say, enjoying a child's delight on Christmas morning, one is seduced into filming it for Facebook; or at a live music venue, one watches the performance through a seven-inch smartphone screen; or when time with loved ones is interrupted by attempts to photograph it. All of these moments can be enjoyed by the internal part of the ego by paying attention to one's own experience of them, or by experiencing these events with a friend or loved one without having to record it for posterity. According to Balick (2016) the richness of any experience is diminished when it is bypassed directly with a need to share it. If the need to share to achieve recognition and validation becomes the primary function of the experience of online self-disclosure, it risks doing so at the expense of inner satisfaction (Balick 2016).

Turkle has (2012) also articulated her concerns about the need to share as a means of achieving recognition and she anticipated that if the need to 'share' usurps the 'meaning

of the experience', this could have many significant consequences on our societal understanding of meaning and value. Turkle (2012) states that this changing cultural norm is very pertinent to the field of psychotherapy; if the evolution of the need to share continues apace, the search for validation and recognition could change from the traditional "I have a feeling which I need to share" to "I need a feeling, and so I must share." This suggests that online self-disclosures may be part of users' attempts to manufacture feelings to achieve validation, recognition and empathy. It is important to add that some people may achieve a greater sense of meaning of the experience through sharing on Facebook, and it is impossible to dictate what constitutes a rich experience for different people. However, the concern seems to be that these experiences of recognition are responding to an outwardly manufactured performance, which serves only to provide a metaphorical sugary hit to sate the hunger of loneliness as opposed to providing substantial psychological nourishment.

Having discussed how Facebook can influence the Facebook–user relationship to manipulate users' need to share, another aspect of sharing also emerged in the stories of the participants in this study. This concerned the participants' strategic use of Facebook to serve the function of expressing, processing and even managing difficult emotions. This emerged most significantly in the cases of Paul and Mary-Ellen. These stories suggested that a function of self-disclosure on Facebook was to communicate anger, frustration and envy that the user feels unable to do in an offline or face-to-face context. In Mary Ellen's case, it seemed that she turned to Facebook to help her manage her feelings of sadness and loneliness. This is an interesting finding as it postulates that Facebook is perhaps something nurturing and caring, yet simultaneously empty and void.

Considering the function of personal self-disclosure on Facebook for Paul, this allowed him to achieve indirect retribution for past grievances. On the other hand, Mary-Ellen's screaming into the void served to seek recognition, empathy and validation. The role of conscious and unconscious strategies in online self-disclosure remains an under-explored area of research. This makes these findings particularly novel, and they offer a rich insight into the function of online self-disclosure for these users. The analysis of the participants' stories suggests that one of the intrapersonal functions, of online self-disclosure, in Mary-Ellen's case, was to strategically seek out reassurance or validation. However, her personal self-disclosures may also meet her need to process and express uncomfortable emotions. As these findings are unique to the field of inquiry, their identification speaks to the value of this study. This is what makes this finding so important and should lead to this aspect being explored in future studies.

If users are turning to Facebook to manage, process or express difficult emotions, this is of significant interest to psychotherapists. It is important to understand why some clients may turn to Facebook to make sense of an existential crisis or psychological distress. Such a move may be motivated by a desire for validation and/or recognition, or serve the function of overcoming the challenge of expressing these feelings in a face-to-face context. A study by Farber and Nitzburg (2016) compared disclosure patterns on Facebook with personal self-disclosure in a therapy setting and found that Facebook was more associated with positive self-disclosures, whereas therapy was more associated with negative disclosures. The findings in this study would suggest, in Mary-Ellen and Paul's case, that Facebook can also be used for negative disclosures, which may be motivated to evoke validation, empathy, communicate distress or seek revenge.

These findings contribute to the field of psychotherapy, as they suggest links and connections between personal self-disclosure on Facebook and other life experiences. Given that it is the role of psychotherapy to identify conscious and unconscious patterns to inform an understanding of behaviour, thinking and emotion; the findings of this study become relevant as they suggest that users may utilise online personal self-disclosure to address issues in each of these dimensions. This is in line with Balick (2014) who suggests that not only is an awareness of the psychodynamics of social networking beneficial to the field of psychotherapy, he feels that applying this school of thought to the investigations in this area may also create a better understanding of the phenomenon. The functions of personal self-disclosure on Facebook are relevant to psychotherapy as they provide insight into the role of important concepts like identity management and expression which are especially important in life stages that involve transition, such as emerging adulthood. Given that these findings suggest that some of the functions of personal self-disclosure include the processing and regulating difficult emotions, this should also be of great interest to the field of psychotherapy. It is important to consider what aspects of client's lives may be causing anxiety or distress or indeed are being used as a means of managing such emotions. It is also pertinent if these dynamics could potentially impact on psychotherapeutic engagement.

5.5. Key Finding 3:

The impact of personal self-disclosure on Facebook on the users' psychological wellbeing

The third key objective of this study related to exploring the impact of personal self-disclosure on Facebook on users' psychological wellbeing. The findings in relation to this

objective reveal that a core feature of users' online personal self-disclosure experience is rumination. The analysis of the participants' stories revealed extensive ruminative processes that occurred for users prior to and during their online personal self-disclosures. This experience consistently contained themes of deliberation and anticipatory anxiety, which challenges other claims that suggest that online self-disclosure is an insignificant or mindless activity (MacDonald 2014; Twenge and Campbell 2009, Georgakopoulou 2014) that is motivated by narcissism and egotism (Ong et al. 2011; Buffardi and Campbell 2011). This study suggests that personal self-disclosure on Facebook is part of a complex process of identity announcement that is largely driven by anxiety and vulnerability. This experience is described as *self-disclosure rumination*.

Despite having pathological associations, the use of the term "rumination" in this study refers to its everyday context. In the Oxford English Dictionary (2016), rumination refers to "a deep or considered thought about something" or "the action or process of thinking deeply about something". The term rumination is chosen as it conveys the tension and anxiety, which is central to the analysis of the participants' experiences.

This finding reveals new knowledge that has not been described in any of the previous quantitative studies. Prior to this study, there was only one reference to the term rumination, regarding the literature on Facebook use, which was identified in a quantitative study by Feinstein et al. (2013). They described rumination as part of a dynamic, which involved negatively comparing one's self to other Facebook users which was thought to contribute to the development of depression. However, Feinstein et al. (2013) do not describe the users' experience of rumination, nor do they refer to online personal self-disclosure specifically. The only other reference to a similar term with

regard to online personal self-disclosure is in a study by Seidman (2013) which found that neuroticism was an aspect of online self-disclosure. Seidman (2013) posits that anxiety/worry are related to Facebook use, but again this was a quantitative study, which did not provide insight into the nature or extent of the experience of anxiety or worry in online personal self-disclosure. Singleton et al. (2016) describe a relationship between anxiety and SNS use. In their study, they found that the fear of "threat and judgement" were the most common sources of worry for SNS users. However, this study does not refer specifically to online self-disclosure and does not provide insight into the nature or extent of worry the users' experienced. Singleton et al. (2016) suggest that users endure this worry because they are motivated by the more positive outcomes of personal self-disclosure, such as "connection and support" (p. 396).

Neither the findings of Seidman's (2013), nor Feinstein et al. (2013) nor Singleton et al. (2016) qualitatively explain the nature or extent of the impact of their participants experienced, nor how they deem these worries to be pathological. Rather, these studies merely highlight the presence of anxiety in certain participants who were sensitive about their online personal self-disclosure. It is important to add that these were not objectives that these studies set out to explore.

The findings of this study add to the existing knowledge base by providing in-depth insights into the impact and experience of anxious rumination whilst engaging in personal self-disclosure on Facebook. The concept of self-disclosure rumination is best illustrated in the cases of Sophie, Paul and Hayley, who all described lengthy periods of rumination when they recalled engaging in personal self-disclosure on Facebook. These findings

meet the core objectives of this study by providing insights into the impact of the participants' experiences of personal self-disclosure on their psychological wellbeing.

Paul's story comprehensively reveals the ruminative nature of his personal self-disclosure experience and provides a rich understanding into how this can manifest. When describing his experiences of personal self-disclosure, Paul articulated how he embraced communication via Facebook, as it allowed him more control over his interactions. Having described himself as socially anxious, Paul suggests that the ability to draft, edit and double-check his communications in a text-mediated context allows him time to carefully construct his personal self-disclosures and deliberate over the drafting of his responses to any comments that are posted. This allows Paul to scrupulously ponder what he wants to say and allows the information to "go around and around in [his] head" until he settles on a complete or near-perfect draft. Subjectively Paul experiences this process as a comfort, as it appears to offer him control over his online personal self-disclosures and communication. However, the analysis of Paul's, and other participants', stories revealed that the capacity that Facebook affords users to control their online communications can encourage users to ruminate. The analysis in Paul's case revealed how Facebook seemed to provide him with a sense of control over his online communications, which appeared to reduce anxiety, while further analysis suggests that this mediated method of communicating can potentially intensify and prolong one's feelings of anxiety and cause rumination.

Some of the participants described that they were willing to endure this experience of rumination because they are more motivated to achieve an increase in social capital. The participants also described portraying a preferred identity on Facebook as they

anticipated that a carefully cultivated preferred identity would be less vulnerable to the scrutiny from the Facebook audience. Sophie describes ruminating about her personal self-disclosure through a series of checks and balances to ensure that she did not disclose any content to her Facebook audience where she could be construed as being stupid. Sophie's story gives a rich account of the impact of the tension, deliberation and anticipation that formed part of her experience of rumination regarding her personal self-disclosures.

The experience of rumination involved in online personal self-disclosure can be understood when one considers how Sophie described that the impact of maintaining the performance of her hoped-for self, in front of her diverse Facebook audience, which was a source of anxiety for her. She anticipated that her online self-disclosures would be open to judgement by her Facebook audience and she described an experience of apprehension about being questioned or threatened. The impact of her online personal self-disclosure led to Sophie experiencing online vulnerability. In Sophie's case this fear was realised when her performance of her hoped-for self was challenged by a member of her Facebook audience.

Other participants also described experiencing feelings of vulnerability in relation to how their Facebook audience would interpret their personal self-disclosures. This concept of online vulnerability relates to the fear of what Boyd and Marwick (2011) call 'context collapse'. This term explains how the human mind struggles to consider the diverse membership of the Facebook audience in the context of one-to-many communications. The findings in this study illustrate the impact of these challenges of performing different versions of the self to a Facebook audience, which consists of such diverse connections,

many of whom are aware of different conflicting or competing versions of the user offline.

According to Dunbar's (2003) 'social brain hypothesis', the cognitive capacity of humans is limited to 150 meaningful connections that the ego is equipped to maintain at any one time. Yet research suggests that the average adult Facebook user has approximately 338 Friends (Smith 2016). Therefore, managing personal self-disclosure in these large diverse networks can become more difficult as the ego connects to "friends" from an increasing number of partially (or wholly) incompatible social spheres (Binder et al. 2012). These networks will have complex structures with multiple contextual social boundaries, which are permitted to mingle digitally. The potential recipients of a communication are central to the concept of personal self-disclosure and so this one-to-many context impacts on the nature and form of the self-disclosure. This one-to-many context can result in the boundaries of the social spheres in which they reside collapsing and forming an increasingly homogenous online existence in the ego's network. Binder's (2012) study suggests that the social diversity of a Facebook network adds to a sense of online vulnerability across collapsed contextual social boundaries. This again can be illustrated in the example of Sophie who posted information pertinent to a particular social sphere in which she resided (socio-cultural activism), which inadvertently caused tension with friends from a different sphere (her school friends). Buglass et al. (2016) adds to this by suggesting that it is not just the risk posed by the friends of the user but also the communications of the ego of the user themselves. This was evident in Sophie's response to her peer when she responded that her fingers have the political leanings but she just wants to post about Kim Kardashian's eye shadow. This response captures Sophie's

attempt to rationalise the split of performances that she experiences in herself and how the judgement from the ever-watching Facebook audience can complicate this process. This self-disclosure of identity announcements on Facebook suggests that the volume of judgement and the potential for conflicting feedback impacts on users on an unprecedented scale. This tension of online vulnerability and the fear of context collapse are contributing factors to the impact and experience of personal self-disclosure rumination.

The findings from the stories of participants in this study address the objectives of the study by revealing that the performance of multiple selves on Facebook can create an experience of tension. The dynamics revealed by the findings of this study suggest a more complex impact than other studies have suggested and point to a potential compromise of users' psychological wellbeing. These findings imply that these experiences are central to online personal self-disclosure and impact ongoing identity announcements. Rayner (2012) suggests that identity formation on Facebook is like sculpting a statue of oneself, but with the interference of constant feedback on how one should proceed. This complicating factor of the often diverse and invisible audience suggests that Facebook has an impact on identity announcement and as a consequence identity formation.

This finding may be especially applicable to the field of psychotherapy, as it provides insights into the emotionality that Facebook users can experience during online personal self-disclosure and its impact on their psychological wellbeing. These findings acknowledge the uniqueness of personal self-disclosure by articulating how each user may have a different relationship with personal self-disclosure on Facebook from other

users. However, in the case of this study; rumination was a consistent feature in all the participants' stories. An analysis of this finding from a psychotherapeutic perspective may suggest that personal self-disclosure on Facebook can aggravate the harsh Super-Ego, which militantly demands that the outwardly facing Ego keep up the performance of the hoped-for self. The analysis of Sophie's story revealed how she experienced her Facebook audience as an external Super-Ego whose purpose was to cast judgement on her shared posts. In terms of the impact of these experiences on users' psychological wellbeing, these factors seemed to create an intra-psychical tension for Sophie and others that could be described as anxiety. This concept of anxiety, coupled with the element of co-presence, suggests a potential significant impact of online personal self-disclosure on psychological wellbeing. Co-presence refers to the fact that Facebook is 'always on' and therefore the user is constantly being represented, judged or threatened whether they are online or not. Therefore, users who experience self-disclosure rumination may have no respite from these tensions and this may well have an accumulative effect which is likely to have a greater impact on their psychological wellbeing. The findings of this study provide insights regarding the impact of online personal self-disclosure on psychological wellbeing and suggest that it is important for the field of psychotherapy to acknowledge these possibilities and to engage in exploring these issues in a therapeutic context. It is also noteworthy to suggest that self-disclosure rumination may be part of a Facebook cultural norm which users have become habituated to, therefore users may not think it is worthy of mentioning when they are attending for psychotherapy. This finding suggests that it is important that psychotherapists explore their client's relationship with Facebook in order to establish if

they experience any ruminative anxiety regarding their online personal self-disclosure and how this affects their sense of self both online and offline.

5.6. Summary

This study sought to explore the participants' motivation, function and the impact of their overall experience of personal self-disclosure on Facebook. It was anticipated that these findings would better inform the field of psychotherapy as to the key issues related to personal self-disclosure on Facebook. The findings revealed that the main stated motivator for online self-disclosure was a desire to educate, entertain and inspire the Facebook audience. This may be linked to a pseudo-celebrity cultural norm that exists on Facebook. The findings also revealed that an external motivator for online self-disclosure was Facebook itself. This is with regard to how the self-presentation features of Facebook prompt users to self-disclose more and more personal information about themselves via their self-presentation features and maintain this process of self-disclosure with the seductive currency of audience feedback.

The findings of this study suggest that there are a variety of different functions of personal self-disclosure on Facebook. These included the cultivation, experimentation and expression of preferred identities or the hoped for self. Another function included the use of personal self-disclosure on Facebook as a means of processing and managing difficult emotions and receiving recognition and validation.

In terms of the impact of personal self-disclosure on Facebook on users' psychological wellbeing, this study revealed that a process of rumination can be experienced by

Facebook users regarding their personal self-disclosures. This is experienced as a carefully thought out anxiety about the manner in which their portrayal of themselves will be perceived by their real or imagined Facebook network. The findings also suggest that some users who experience anxiety in a face-to-face context use the mediated communication of Facebook to edit and carefully cultivate their responses in conversations which face-to-face communication does not permit. However, an implication of this finding may be that this process paradoxically encourages rumination and prolongs the experience of anxiety for the user.

Together, these findings highlight how an emotional relationship can develop between Facebook and its users. This may be an ambivalent relationship, which can be experienced as secure and supportive, as well as anxiety-provoking and artificial. This relationship with Facebook appears to evolve and change with time, suggesting that some users become better informed and therefore more conservative with their Facebook self-disclosures as they get older, while others may share more.

The importance of the relationship that develops with Facebook and its potential impact on psychological wellbeing suggests that personal self-disclosure on Facebook may have many implications for psychotherapy and allied mental health professionals. These implications and recommended future research are discussed in the conclusion chapter.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

This chapter summarises the key contributions of this study to the existing body of psychotherapy knowledge and discusses the implications of these contributions for psychotherapy practice and future research. A synopsis will be drawn on how the original aims and objectives of the study, which were to create a better understanding of the motivation, function, impact and overall experience of online self-disclosure, were achieved. In addition, a discussion of the strengths and limitations of the study is included.

6.2 Contributions of the study to existing knowledge

This study contributes to our existing knowledge of the dynamics of personal self-disclosure on Facebook. It sheds new light on the nature and extent of the intrapersonal and interpersonal processes involved in personal self-disclosure on Facebook. The unique design of this study allowed for rich insights into the participants' psychological processes and emotional experiences surrounding their online self-disclosures. Analysis of the stories of the five participants addressed the aims and objectives of this study by revealing insights into the participants' motivations, functions and the impact of their personal self-disclosure on Facebook on their psychological wellbeing. The study reveals a more advanced series of insights into the interpersonal and intrapersonal dynamics of online self-disclosure than was available in the existing literature.

According to Riessman (2008) the ultimate test for a research study's quality is its utility. She asks, "Does this piece of narrative research become a basis for other work" (p193). Eisner (1998) provides a list of criteria to test a study's usefulness. The first is comprehension which asks, can this study help us to understand a situation that would otherwise be enigmatic or confusing. The second is anticipation; does this study provide descriptions and interpretations that go beyond the information given about them already? Thirdly, enlightenment, does the study explain the concept in a way that deepens and/or broadens the reader's experience and helps them to understand what they are looking at? As described above, this study meets these criteria and affords researchers the opportunity to better understand the intrapersonal dynamics of online self-disclosure by going beyond what was previously known.

The available literature described how Facebook plays a role in encouraging the performance of the hoped-for self in online self-disclosure; how it may be used strategically during periods of emotional instability; and how it can instil feelings of judgement and threat in its users. The findings of this study have taken these theories and added a new richness by providing the accounts of the intrapersonal experiences of these five participants which has created an experiential understanding of the experience of online self-disclosure. The findings of this study enhance our understanding of this enigmatic activity, provide descriptions and interpretations beyond what has been previously available and enlighten the concept of personal self-disclosure that broadens the readers understanding. These findings have also provoked further questions about how these concepts might be further investigated in future research endeavours.

6.3. A review of the quality in this study

According to Loh (2013), narrative researchers need to demonstrate to their readers that they followed procedures to ensure that their methods are reliable and their findings are valid, in other words trustworthy.

As previously described in the methodology chapter, the techniques described in establishing trustworthiness include analysing the narratives considering various contexts and from various perspectives, and ensuring that the findings resonate (verisimilitude) and have a use (utility) for the potential consumers of the study (Loh, 2013).

Throughout each step of the data collection and analysis process in this study, a series of strategies were incorporated to ensure the trustworthiness and quality of the study. These verification strategies include methodological coherence, appropriate sampling and an iterative interaction between data collection and analysis (Morse et al. 2002). All of these recommendations were followed in this study, as there was clear congruence between the research question and the components of the method. The data met the analytic goals and was coherent, with each verifying the previous component and the methodological assumptions. The methods of participant selection and the analytic goals for the data were coherent in this study, and confirmed the suitability of the methodological choices.

The sample was appropriate, and it consisted of participants who best represented and had significant knowledge of the research topic. This ensured efficient, optimal quality and sufficient data to account for all aspects of the phenomena (Morse et al. 2002). This was exemplified in the richness of the data that emerged from both the digital observation and interview data from the participants in this study. Their relationship with

online self-disclosure provided an in-depth insight into the nature and the extent of the motivation, function, impact and overall experiences of online self-disclosure on Facebook, which justified their ability to represent and demonstrate knowledge of the topic.

Thirdly, the collection and analysis of the data formed a mutual interaction between what was known and what was needed to be known. According to Morse et al. (2002), the iterative interaction between data collection and analysis is the essence of attaining reliability and validity. This was achieved in this study by establishing and building on what was known from the existing literature about online self-disclosure and establishing a method to learn more about what was not known, such as the nature and extent of the motivation, function and impact of personal self-disclosure on Facebook.

6.4. Study Strengths and Limitations

The main strength of this study was that it allowed for an analysis of participants' online self-disclosures *and* their verbal stories of these experiences. This dual perspective added a unique richness to the data, as the participants could articulate their intrapersonal processes that occurred alongside their interpersonal motivations for, functions of and impact of online self-disclosure. This allowed for the study to achieve its original study objectives. The methodology employed in this study provided insights into the "why" as well as the "what" of online self-disclosure, which was an important aspect of the process. Trying to analyse and understand the motivations, functions and impact of a personal self-disclosure on Facebook by merely objectively observing participants' online self-disclosures, is limiting and would only reveal one part of the story. It was the

participants' backstories that were obtained in the interview that revealed the nature and extent of their motivations, functions and overall impact of their online self-disclosure. These stories gave the digital postings colour; therefore, analysis of the interviews formed the central aspect of the study outcomes and separated the project from previous studies.

Further strengths of this study were that it met all of its initial aims and objectives. The aim of the study was to gain a deeper understanding of young adults' experiences of online self-disclosure. Specifically what motivates or what provides the impetus to engage in personal self-disclosure; what functions are being served, or what needs are being met by engaging in online self-disclosure; and what is the impact of the overall experience of online self-disclosure on Facebook on users' psychological wellbeing. Riessman's (2010) Framework proved a very useful analysis tool as it was structured enough to be coherent, yet flexible enough to cater for all of the various forms of data. A unique strength of this study was that there is now a tried and tested narrative analysis template capable of analysing the small stories of status updates as units of personal narrative.

One of the most significant limitations of this study was the establishment of a coherent concept of personal self-disclosure. As previously discussed, this construct is often subjectively understood and can have different interpretations for different people. An attempt to objectify and maintain the consistency of the construct of personal self-disclosure involved the use of Moon's (2000) Criteria for Intimate Online Exchanges. Moon's Criteria for Intimate Online Exchanges (2000) was chosen as the most appropriate observation tool. However, it proved to be a limiting instrument as many of the

categories contained a degree of overlap and did not encompass more contemporary patterns of online sharing, such as selfies and profile pictures. These more recent concepts were included by adding additional categories or including them in the existing categories where appropriate. Moon (2000) was the only such criteria in existence for categorising intimate exchanges in an online context and was therefore deemed the best fit to be utilised for the purposes of guiding the content analysis during the observation period in the initial screening/ selection phase of the study. The utilisation of Moon's (2000) criteria in this study involved using the items on the criteria as a framework and not as a quantitative validated measure, as it was not designed to quantify or assess the material but rather to provide consistency across the observations. It was the experience of the Primary Investigator in this study that future use of the Moon's (2000) criteria be limited to this function and perhaps modified to incorporate more contemporary methods of personal self-disclosure. Moon's (2000) criteria, alongside Allen's (1974) definition of personal self-disclosure, provided guidance for identifying core aspects of personal self-disclosure. A replication of the approach used in the study by Jordon-Conde et al. (2013), which involved the use of additional signifiers in order to indicate the intimacy value of the participants' shared material. Undoubtedly a certain amount of interpretation was involved at this stage, but in the absence of another approach, it was deemed to be the most effective approach available. Given the degree of interpretation that was involved, a number of interventions were required to protect the integrity and the trustworthiness of the data. These included peer review, extensive reflexivity and a devising a comprehensive trail of the various steps in the decision-making processes in order to provide transparency. This decision trail explicitly illustrates the way in which the participant and data selection decisions that were made at every stage of the study

and how these decisions were based on the quality inherent in both the digital and oral stories that met the objectives of the study, e.g. motivation, function, and impact of personal self-disclosure on Facebook. These measures are discussed and illustrated in the methodology chapter.

The presence of the researcher in narrative research is not considered as a limitation (Riessman 2015). In the context of the interview situation the interviewer is considered to be both audience and researcher and once this is accompanied with extensive reflexivity it can be understood as a strength of the approach (Riessman 2015). However, in the case of this study, the role of the researcher had to be considered as both an online SNS member and as an offline research interviewer. Therefore it was a challenge to establish the researcher's position as an audience member and as researcher in the observation phase of the study. Information management theory suggests that it is necessary to examine the conditions of the self-disclosure to determine its best description. These conditions include the type of information being disclosed and the target audience to whom a person discloses (Marshall et al. 2005). Therefore it was agreed that the researcher would position themselves as having no other knowledge of the participant other than the Facebook Friend connection and therefore shared material was categorised as personal self-disclosure on that basis. Where this was seen to be an approach to improve clarification, this dynamic could not be controlled for in the analysis of the data and so must be identified as a limitation of this study.

6.5. Theoretical Contributions for Psychotherapy

One of the core desired outcomes of this study was that the findings would contribute to the field of psychotherapy by highlighting the psychodynamic significance of online personal self-disclosure. The findings of this study suggest that personal self-disclosure can be an emotional activity that can have a bearing on users' psychological wellbeing by providing a vehicle for experimenting with and cultivating preferred identities. It can also function as a mechanism for expressing and processing difficult emotions and act as a catalyst for rumination and anxiety in its users.

The findings with regard to the motivation for personal self-disclosure revealed that the desire or willingness to engage in personal self-disclosure on Facebook is internally motivated by a desire to entertain, educate and inform their audience and externally motivated by Facebook's self-presentation features and prompts. This finding is new in this field of study, in that no previous study had articulated an account of the intrapersonal process of users who believe that their personal self-disclosures will inform, educate or entertain their Facebook audience. Some research has hypothesised that Facebook's self-presentation features may play a role in the motivation of users to engage in personal self-disclosure (Nadkarni and Hoffman 2012), but no study has qualitatively described the process of being prompted or harassed to self-disclose by Facebook. Much of the existing literature suggests that narcissism is a primary motivator for self-disclosure.

This finding also revealed that the users in this sample held a genuine belief that their shared material would have an influence on their Facebook audience and they were

susceptible to the responses that their shared material achieved. This suggests that there may be some emotional implications for the user, depending on the response, or lack of response, that these self-disclosures will achieve, which may affect future self-disclosures. The findings suggest, in line with Diener's (1993) theory of emotion, that the more that a user emotionally invests in their shared material, the more potential there is for them to become upset or disappointed by a negative response or indeed a non-response. This finding also raises further questions about how users make decisions about what material they disclose online compared to face to face.

Another finding concerned the function of personal self-disclosure on Facebook, the findings revealed that personal self-disclosure may be utilised by users to meet their need to experiment with, and express preferred identities. The existing literature has indicated the existence of the 'hoped-for-self' and this is well documented, amongst a plethora of literature suggesting concepts such as the 'true self' and 'false self' and discussions surrounding the honesty or dishonesty inherent in online self-disclosure (Hollenbaugh and Ferris 2015; Michigyan et al. 2014). However, there have been no qualitative studies that have described the intrapersonal process of individuals who engage in cultivating a preferred identity and how this can be utilised to compensate for a perceived underwhelming offline reality.

This study also revealed that a further function of personal self-disclosure on Facebook is for the management and processing of uncomfortable emotions. The only other reference in the literature to this concept was in a study by Michikyan et al. (2014) who suggested young adults, who are experiencing emotional instability, can be strategic in their online self-disclosure by posting material that is intended to seek reassurance and

validation. However, there are no studies that explore the potential impact, marked effect or influence of personal self-disclosure on Facebook on users' psychological wellbeing. The findings of this study revealed that, for the participants in this study, rumination and anxiety were identifiable features in the process of personal self-disclosure on Facebook. Most of the existing research has suggested that general SNS usage can impact on self-esteem and loneliness but these quantitative studies have mixed findings across much of the literature. A study by Seidman (2013) identified rumination as a feature of SNS usage in terms of negatively comparing one's self to other users, but this was not in relation to personal self-disclosure and Singleton et al. (2016) discussed the experiences of judgement and threat that users reported whilst communicating on SNS, but this was not in relation to online personal self-disclosure. This is the only study that qualitatively describes the nature and extent of this ruminative process before, during and after an online personal self-disclosure.

The findings of this study also highlight the impact of online self-disclosures on users' perception and evaluation of the authenticity of certain experiences. A participant in this study suggested that sometimes an experience needs to be shared or self-disclosed on SNS to prove that it actually happened. The only available literature on this topic consists of a small number of anecdotal discussion papers which abstractly discuss the concept of the importance of sharing experiences online (Rayner 2012) and therefore this finding is considered as new knowledge pertaining to this concept. This finding suggests the importance of sharing experiences and capturing moments on SNS and how the feedback that these shared moments receive has implications for how the experience is evaluated by the online sharer.

Another finding revealed the impact of personal self-disclosure on Facebook on intimate relationships. Most of the participants in this study described how their personal self-disclosure had impacted on their intimate relationships, both positively and negatively. There are no previous studies that have explored the impact of personal self-disclosure on intimate relationships in the available literature.

6.6. Implications for Psychotherapy Practice, training and education

As Facebook is central to so many people's lives today, it is crucial that psychotherapists understand any psychodynamics that may be involved in this relationship. It is therefore imperative that psychotherapy training curricula embrace these contemporary challenges and look to incorporate modules dedicated to understanding the psychodynamics of this contemporary method of relating and personal self-disclosure.

The findings of this study have implications for psychotherapy practice and education. With regard to the finding that suggests that users emotionally invest in their shared material, this has an implication for self-disclosure in the psychotherapeutic session, as it suggests whether the nature of self-disclosure in a psychotherapeutic encounter differs among people who self-disclose online. This finding also suggests that users may be pressured into over disclosing personal information on Facebook which may leave them vulnerable to negative online feedback and with a sense of regret regarding the nature and extent of their online self-disclosures. This finding has implications for psychotherapy, as it suggests that psychotherapists need to integrate this awareness into their clinical work by exploring the importance that clients invest in their online personal self-disclosures and consequently their vulnerability to the responses that these disclosures achieve or do not achieve. Psychotherapists need to integrate an awareness

of the pressure that some users may feel, in response to the pressure applied by Facebook itself, to engage in online personal self-disclosure in order to obtain a sense of belonging or acceptance. Binder (2014) suggests that the more users engage in personal self-disclosure, the more vulnerable they may be to negative online feedback. Therefore therapists need to be able to assist users to manage this pressure and support them to only disclose personal information that they feel comfortable disclosing.

The finding that illustrates the use of personal self-disclosure Facebook to manage feelings like loneliness, frustration or anger in order to receive validation or recognition also has implications for psychotherapy. Any mechanism for expressing and managing uncomfortable emotions is pertinent to the field of psychotherapy. It is crucial that psychotherapists become aware of these processes of managing uncomfortable emotions and explore the potential advantages and pitfalls of this coping strategy. It is also important to recognise how some users may experience self-disclosure via the mediated format of SNS. The findings of this study suggest that for some users online SNS may be perceived as a more forgiving and potentially controllable environment than face to face communication which may result in face to face disclosures becoming more difficult for some clients. Also psychotherapists need to be cognisant of the nature, role and function of online communication engagement among all clients in assessment and support formulations and explore incidences where online self-disclosure serve positive or negative functions for the client and how psychotherapists may have a role in assessing and/or assisting clients to mediate this experience.

Regarding the finding concerning the function of personal self-disclosure on Facebook, the findings revealed that personal self-disclosure may be utilised by users to meet their

need to experiment with, and express preferred identities. This has important implications for psychotherapy as the concepts of identity development and identity experimentation are core to psychotherapeutic enquiry. The idea that these processes are now occurring in online forums is crucially important for psychotherapists to become aware of, in terms of its potential impact on the users' sense of self. All psychotherapists need to appreciate the importance of online identity experimentation and recognise new ways in which clients are potentially expressing their identity. These ever evolving communication technologies, like Facebook, allow for more elaborate ways to edit and express one's identity, which is also important for psychotherapists to become aware of and integrate into their clinical assessments. Boyd and Marwick (2011) suggest that the expression of preferred identities in the one-to-many context of Facebook can increase the chances of context collapse and problematic online exchanges. It is therefore important for psychotherapists to be aware of this changing landscape and the potential interpersonal difficulties that can emerge for users who engage in personal self-disclosure on SNS.

The finding that describes the nature and extent of this ruminative process before, during and after an online personal self-disclosure has important implications for psychotherapists. The qualitative knowledge of any activity that can be a catalyst for anxiety should be known and understood by the field of psychotherapy. Furthermore, this may not be something that young adult users consider share-worthy in a therapeutic setting as it is suggested that in the case of digital natives, the anxiety inherent in their online presence may be all that they have ever known and therefore consider it the norm. As a consequence, young digital natives may not consider this experience share-worthy in

a psychotherapeutic setting and may need to be assisted in acknowledging its existence. It is important for psychotherapists to be aware of the potential for this ruminative process to occur and assist their clients to negotiate this challenge. Psychotherapists need to acknowledge the potential for clients who experience ruminative emotions around their online self-disclosures that this may correlate to another underlying anxiety, and it is important that psychotherapists be aware of this and in turn provide their clients with an opportunity to discuss these issues in the psychotherapeutic encounter.

The finding that suggests the importance of sharing experiences and capturing moments on SNS and how the feedback that these shared moments receives, has implications for how the experience is evaluated by the online sharer. This has implications for psychotherapy as it is important for psychotherapists to become aware of any phenomena which affect a client's perception of reality and meaning. Therefore, psychotherapists need to integrate any contemporary aspects of users' experiences and acknowledge any changes that might be occurring in contemporary modes of relating (Nguyen et al. 2012) which affect the meaningfulness of experiences (Zhao et al. 2008).

The finding that illustrates the impact of personal self-disclosure on intimate relationships in the available literature has important implications for psychotherapy as it is pertinent that all psychotherapists be aware of any dynamics that impact on intimate relationships, especially any psychotherapists who work with couples or families where the dynamics of these relationships are key aspects of this work. Further exploration of this concept is warranted as psychotherapists need to be aware of any contemporary influences on intimate relationships.

The findings of this study support some of the existing literature which suggest that there is an association between online social networking and psychological wellbeing, in terms of self-esteem (Skues et al. 2012), identity development (Davis 2013) and vulnerability (Singleton et al. 2016). These findings have implications for psychotherapy practice as they encourage all mental health clinicians, to pay attention to the possible emotional processes that can occur for clients who self-disclose personal aspects of themselves online. It is important that psychotherapists be aware that the relationship that users form with online social networks, like Facebook, can involve significant emotional investment. If users rely on the recognition and validation achieved by the feedback from their social network audience, or if they experience rumination about performing their preferred identity online, or if they encounter difficulties from a fallout of over-disclosing information to unintended audience members, it is essential that psychotherapists be aware of the intrapersonal investment and the psychodynamic importance of these experiences. Minimising or failing to acknowledge the experiences of judgement and threat that some Facebook users may experience, runs the risk of misinterpreting or missing a large part of their story.

The participants in this study indicated that discussing their intrapersonal processes and the interpersonal objectives of online self-disclosure was difficult. Many of them felt embarrassed talking about their feelings of vulnerability and revealing how much preparation they invested in their online performance of their hoped-for selves on Facebook. It is therefore reasonable to assume that similar efforts to conceal these vulnerabilities might occur in psychotherapy. A study by Farber and Nitzburg (2016) found that users experienced different freedoms to self-disclose in online and therapeutic

settings. All psychotherapists need to be aware of these dynamics so that they can explore them in meaningful ways with their clients. The awareness of these psychological processes may give clients permission to discuss their online experiences in the therapy setting with a therapist who demonstrates an interest in and knowledge of this aspect of their lives. In addition, psychotherapists may need to make it clear to their clients that this is an area that they are interested in knowing more about, and should try to provide their clients with opportunities to discuss their experience of online self-disclosure. This is especially important given the widely-perceived notion of the "digital disconnect", namely that older adults, or "digital immigrants", are unaware of or disinterested in the dynamics of the online space. This may mean that clients may not discuss their online experiences for fear that the therapist will not "get it". Alternatively, the therapist may be anxious to discuss a client's online experiences for fear that they, as the therapist, will not get it.

It is also important that the field of psychotherapy become more aware of the technological evolution in terms of their own practice. The importance of psychotherapists having an insight into online self-disclosure is not just limited to enhancing their understanding of the challenges that arise for their clients, but also to being aware of developments that affect their profession. Many potential clients will search for a therapist online, so the online self-disclosure activity of psychotherapists will form part of their digital professional identity, which is an important consideration.

The implication of these findings with regard to psychotherapy training would suggest that post-qualification psychotherapy educational programmes need also to include what is known about the psychodynamics of SNS in this rapidly changing cultural context. This

training could involve providing information about the emotional benefits and risks of healthy and unhealthy relationships with SNS, strategies that promote healthy relationships and increase the awareness of the intrapersonal and interpersonal risks and vulnerabilities that exist in this online space. It would appear that psychotherapists are ideally placed to explore clients' online interactions and assist in the development of resilience and developing an emotional and practical understanding in the online space.

It is widely accepted that technology will become more integral into our lives, homes and relationships. It will be important to continue to measure the effectiveness of online psychotherapy programmes. The results thus far suggest that online psychotherapy is less effective than traditional face-to-face psychotherapy, but it is more effective than a waiting list control group (those who did not receive any interventions). There are undoubtedly potential benefits to providing psychotherapy in a technological era, i.e. further reach and improved accessibility, and there are also challenges in terms of the expectations that the speed of technology places on our emotional lives (Balick 2014). Therefore, there is a need for the field of psychotherapy to embrace the challenges and opportunities which this evolution brings.

6.7. Implications for Future Research

This study suggests that there is a continuing need to explore peoples' relationships with social networks in order to further understand the impact of this activity on psychological wellbeing. Given that this phenomenon has only been in mainstream use for less than a decade, it would be important to have some longitudinal studies to explore the impact of this relationship over time.

The study suggests that engaging in online self-disclosure can involve an emotional process that for some may require education and support. The concept of online vulnerability needs to be further explored in future qualitative research projects that focus on the depth and the extent of emotional experience inherent in the relationships that are formed with SNS such as Facebook.

The impact of Facebook on intimate relationships was also an interesting finding, and further research into the impact of technology on a range of intimate relationships should be encouraged. According to Hampton (2011) the largest cohort to move onto Facebook in recent years was middle-aged, white, educated women. It would be worthwhile exploring the impact of this cohort's relationship with technology regarding their intimate relationships.

This study was limited to young adults aged between 18 to 25 years. It is suggested that further work needs to occur across all of the age ranges to explore whether the experience of online self-disclosure changes with age. There have been calls to move past the preconceived notion of "digital natives" being the only cohort with problematic relationships with technology. It is now important to look also at the relationships that older "digital immigrants" are forming with social networks such as Facebook. It is anticipated that although identity formation may not be such a central feature of older age groups, similar challenges of online vulnerability may still be present. The findings of this study suggest that a users' relationship with Facebook evolves over time, so further studies should compare the online concerns across varying age groups to map this evolution.

The notion of needing to share an experience in order to prove that it exists was another interesting concept that emerged in the findings. The fact that in contemporary culture the sharing of an experience might usurp the experience itself was a revealing finding. It would be interesting to explore whether online self-disclosure has had an impact on how we interpret meaning from experiences, as this may indeed have some significant social and relational consequences in the future.

6.8. Summary

This study set out to qualitatively explore, from a narrative perspective, the motivations, functions and the impact of personal self-disclosure among young adults' on Facebook in order to better inform the field of psychotherapy. This was facilitated by an analysis of their online status updates over a six-month observation period and a semi-structured interview. This data was analysed using Riessman's (2010) Narrative Analysis Framework. This was a unique approach that had not been used in any other studies which aimed to explore the nature and extent of these concepts in relation to personal self-disclosure on Facebook.

The findings of this study revealed that personal self-disclosure can be motivated internally by a desire to educate, inform and entertain one's Facebook audience and can be motivated externally by the continuous prompts by Facebook to provide more personal material. The findings of this study illustrate the challenge and benefits of personal self-disclosure for Facebook users which highlight the degree of emotional investment that is involved in the process of engaging in online self-disclosure.

The findings also revealed that the function of personal self-disclosure for some users includes an opportunity to experiment and expressed preferred identities. The stories of the participants in this study highlight the freedom involved in the expression of identity on online platforms and how this provides the opportunity for more creativity than offline of face to face contexts. Although this was seen as a positive aspect to online self-disclosure, accounts of the challenges of maintaining preferred identities online and the sense of vulnerability that this can involve was also indicated. Another function of personal self-disclosure that emerged from the findings was how some users use Facebook to express, manage and process uncomfortable emotions. This finding was new knowledge that had not emerged in any other studies and seems pertinent to the field of psychotherapy.

Finally the findings described the impact of personal self-disclosure on some users' psychological wellbeing. These stories provided insights into the nature and extent of rumination that can accompany online self-disclosure for some users and how this process can again arise from a feeling of vulnerability to the judgement and threat of the Facebook audience.

These findings in relation to online personal self-disclosure on Facebook suggest that some users may form an emotional relationship with Facebook which evolves over time. Features of this relationship can be experienced as nurturing and anxiety provoking where in some cases Facebook can be experienced as a security blanket and at other times can represent the ultimate vulnerability. It seems important that we explore this relationship more in the future so as to better able to understand, negotiate and respond to this new way of relating with other and ourselves.

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Appendices:

The appendices have been organised to illustrate the chronological journey of the participants' data throughout the study. This offers a comprehensive thread to best illustrate the different phases of analysis throughout the study.

Appendix Overview

Appendix A:

A.1: Invitation poster for participants

A.2: Information Leaflet available to participants on recruitment website

Appendix B:

B.1. Content Analysis

B.2. Themes extracted from the content analysis

B.3. Digital Post Analysis

B.4. Reflexive Summary of the Digital Story

B.5. Generic Interview Schedule

B.6: Sample of Tailored Semi-Structured Interview

B.7. Sample Selection of Annotated Interview Transcript (Sophie)

Appendix C: REC Confirmation Letter

Appendix D: Interview Consent Form

Appendix E: Overview of research project

Appendix A.

First Contact with the potential participants via the Invitation Poster and Recruitment Webpages

A.1: Invitation poster for participants

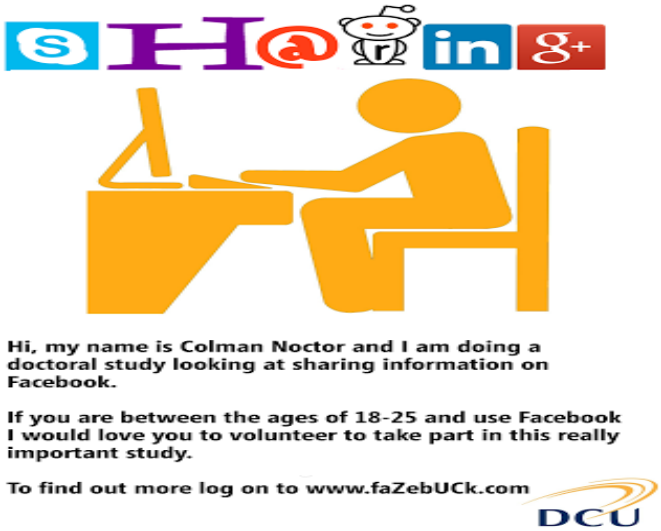
Hi, my name is Colman Noctor and I am doing a doctoral study looking at sharing information on Facebook.

If you are between the ages of 18-25 and use Facebook I would love you to volunteer to take part in this really important study.

To find out more log on to www.faZebUCk.com

DCU

A.2: Information available to participants on recruitment website



Study Title: 'Understanding sharing on Facebook'

I. Research Team

Principal Investigator: Colman Noctor, Doctoral Student, DCU
Co-Investigators: Dr. Evelyn Gordon , DCU & Dr Briege Casey, DCU.

II. Study Overview and required Involvement

My name is Colman Noctor and I am a Doctoral student who is interested in finding out more about status updating on Facebook. I have set up this study to explore the use of Facebook among third level students in Ireland. I am hoping that you will take this opportunity to contribute to important research in the growing field of social media. Social media now plays a huge role in many of our lives and how we communicate. Research suggests that there may be many different patterns to the status' we post. Through this study, and your status updates, we will be able to better understand the use of Facebook for people in Ireland.

If you are interested to know more click on the following link

http://www.Fazebuck/ColmanNoctorStudyPage.com

In order to participate you need to be

Aged between 18-25 years

Attending a Third Level Institute of Education

A Facebook User

To contribute to this study all you need to do is to become Facebook Friends with this online study page 'Colman Noctor Study'. Once you have 'Friended' the Study Page, I will be able to look at your profile page and your status updates for the following 3 months.

I understand that this is a significant request but be reassured that this will be done in a respectful way. I commit to doing my utmost to protect your information with sensitivity and confidentiality at all times and at no time will I ever use anyone's real name in writing up the study. So please update your status as per usual.

I will then invite a small selection of people from the initial participants to talk to about their experience of status updating and online sharing. This is entirely voluntary and you are under no obligation to take part in this aspect of the study.

Please note that you can opt out of the study at any time by De-Friending the 'Colman Noctor Study' Page.

III. Confidentiality and Anonymity

As I mentioned earlier, online anonymity and confidentiality is impossible to guarantee

but I will make every effort to protect your confidentiality throughout the study and only the research team will have access to any of your information which will be securely stored at all times will be destroyed 5 years after the study is completed.

However, I must state that in the highly unlikely event where a person describes something on their Facebook page that indicates that someone is in clear danger I would be obliged to inform the Gardaí.

IV. Spreading the News

The findings will be published as part of my Doctoral Thesis and will be put forward for publication in relevant academic journals and will contribute to the much needed knowledge in the study of social media.

Thank you for reading this and hope you will agree to take part in this study.

If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person,

Please contact:

The Secretary, Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee, c/o Research and Innovation Support, Dublin City University, Dublin 9. Tel 01-7008000

To join the study read the details above then Add ColmanNoctorStudy as Friend on Facebook.

Appendix B.

Having agreed to join the study, the participants' Facebook pages underwent a three month initial period content analysis.

Below is a description of how each participants' online digital posts were monitored during the initial observation period. For the purposes of this study, the construct of personal self-disclosure as described by Allen (1974) and Moon's Criteria for Intimate Exchanges Online (2000) were used to organise and prioritise the participants' shared material. Any examples of online personal self-disclosure were recorded and weighted (using a colour coded signifier).

B.1. Content Analysis

The content analysis was conducted based on the overall data which was collated on an Excel Spread sheet. The participants' ID numbers were entered on the left vertical column and Moon's (2000) individual criteria items were entered along the top horizontal bar. Each profile was analysed and each post that contained a theme pertinent to Moon's (2000) criteria and Allen's (1974) definition, was entered into their corresponding excel cell and identified with an entry of the date of the update. The pertinence of each personal self-disclosure, and the varying degrees of intimate information that the posts contained, was highlighted by a colour code (black, blue and red) to represent weighting. Black posts signified a mild degree of personal self-disclosure (1 point), blue posts suggested a moderate degree of personal self-disclosure (3 points) and red posts signified a significant degree of self-disclosure (10 points). The construct of personal self-disclosure

was cross referenced with Allen (1974) who defines personal self-disclosure as "intentional, containing information that was previously unknown, revealing more information than required by the situation or expressing thoughts or feelings to enhance intimacy".

The first process of the analysis involved eliminating those participants who had no posts that merited entry into the assigned personal self-disclosure Excel cells over the initial 3 month observation period. This identified participants who had not engaged in personal self-disclosure and were not deemed suitable for progression to the extended observation period or the interview process that would follow. The updates of the remaining participants, which were highlighted in the excel sheet, were analysed and the ten participants who featured most prominently, who were deemed to be engaging in significant personal self-disclosure were identified. These identified participants were contacted and requested to remain in the study for an extended 3 month observation period. All of those contacted agreed to remain in the study.

The following is an example of the Excel Spread sheet detailing the content analysis

	1) Favourite pastimes/ hobbies,	2) Self-pride	3) Anger-management	4) Feelings and attitudes about death	5) Self Discontent (Personality)	6) Self Discontent (Physically)	7) Frustrations	8) Sexual Behaviours	9) Guilt	10) Emotional Aspects of Self	11) Dislikes about others	Miscelaneous	Profile Themes	Number of Friends	Groups	Likes	Pictures of self	Tagged by
Participapant 1	06/1. 26/1, 4/2 9/2,	1/1, 2/3, 5/3, 6/6,	28/1, 3/2, 7/3, 8/3,	6/1. 7/1 charlie hebdo, carlow girls crash,	9/2, 11/2,	4/3,	Equality, Gay Right	Picture with boyfriend 1/1. 17/1, 2/3 , reference	1/1, 5/1, 9/1, 14/1, 2/2, 5/2, 21/2,	Political 6/1. 7/1. 16/1. 4/2.	Food and coffee pics 11/12. 16/12	2/2, 14/3,	316	1	beauty and	>100		
Participapant 2	11/12. 16/12. 14/2.	repeated reference to boyfriend		7/1.	24-Dec			boyfriend reference plus plus		review of the year 26/12.		identity with fictional characters hobbits	Pets	295	4	college related	sci fi	>100		01-Jan
Participapant 3	31/01/2015. 15/01. 6/3.	Body and Soul Shakras										Profile Change 12/1. 4/2. 2/3. 12/3	Profile Change 12/1. 4/	989	Media Dcu		Music / Cau	>100		
Participapant 4	29/12. 31/12.	26/12. 31/12.	12/3 equality. 14/3. political	26/12.		21-Dec	21/12/2015. 23/12.	Gay rights. Boyfriend.	17-Dec	23/12/2015. 23/12. 8/3. 9/3. 14/3	10/3 Political. 10/3 Governemnt. 10/3.		Social	597	Humanitarian stud	Music / Cau	<100		
Participapant 5	27/12.	2/1. Got appendix out and updated it./		1/1. celeb death	1/1.	1/1. 17/1.	16/12. 31/12.	Modelling pics and celebrity coushes. Pout pic 1		18/12. 14/1. 26/1. 27/1	31/12/2015. 23/1.	Missing cat,	Change 18/12. 6/1. 26/1	1120	Horses and model		Music	<100		4/2, 9/2.
Participapant 6	28/1, 3/2, 7/3, 8/3,	Lots						Sexualised pics 27/12.		Family Pictures		Food	Lots of changes	1300	Music		Music	<100		31/12.
Participapant 7	Updates Not in English	none											Cartoon	514	Retail		Retailers	>100		
Participapant 8	1/2.	none	Government 16/12					Selfie Sexualised		6/1 Bland sharing	27/12 broke glasses	Food	Pet	385	None		Retailers	>100		5/2. unhap
Participapant 9	3/01, 4/02. 14/02.	2/3, 7/3, 3/4,	Political 12/03		Weight related		Political					Survey	Team	931	Retail		Retailers	<100		
Participapant 10	holidays 1/1	15/1 exams	16-Mar				equality 25/3			25-Jan			Social	1451	Science		Music TV	<100		
Participapant 11	alcohol & girlfriend 26/12	none			left 3 jobs in 3 months			Selfie Sexualised		13/1.			Social	322	Sport			<100		Lots of tag
Participapant 12	Girlfriend	Girlfriend pic 20/12. Family pic 26/12 girlfriend 31/1. 21/2.		07-Jan		10-Feb	3-Dec			got engaged 26/12. Lots of daims of happiness		Food	Girlfriend Image	490	TV			<100		
Participapant 13	Travel 9/2	Travel	political 9/1. 10/1.		20-Jan		GoT Book	Selfie Sexualised	Alcohol related	GF sharing pics		alcohol	Selfie	1012	Politics and Sport		Politics	>100		
Participapant 14	No Updates												Social	172	Retail			<100		
Participapant 15	Girlfriend	Girlfriend										alcohol	Social	723	Retail		Retailers	<100		Numerous
Participapant 16	Football	Award Ceramony. 19/2	political 19/2	Political interests			Political	Selfie sexualised				Gave up Fb after declaring a new start but rejoined 3 days later	Social	354	Sport		Retailers	<100		
Participapant 17	Only 4 posts in 3 month period.	exams								Exam performance		Food	Team	222	Music		Retailers	>100		
Participapant 18	No Updates	sport											Selfie	654	Music		Retailers	<100		
Participapant 19	Socialising	Music 3/3						Gay Rights	Alcohol related		Political 6/1. 7/1. 16/1. 4/2.	alcohol	Selfie	632	Retail and Music		Sport	>100		
Participapant 20	Alcohol	27/02/2015. 16/3. 21/1 pass	09-Feb	03-Mar	Updating from work		Water campaign					Drink pic 21/2	Selfie	190	Sport and Languag		Retailers	>100		
Participapant 21	Star Trek Anime etc	01-Apr						Referendum					Selfie	764	Tv and music		Retailers	>100		04-Feb
Participapant 22	Lots of everything	Candidate		3/2, 8/3,		03-Feb				Relationship declaration		alcohol	Selfie	534	Retail and Music		Music	<100		
Participapant 23	No emotional disclosivity	Family						Couple Pics					Team	298	Retail and TV		Music	>100		
Participapant 24	Family & dogs	Yes		02-Feb				Some pics	Food related			Food	Pet	321	Cars and Sport		Music	>100		3/3, 2/1
Participapant 25	Updates not in English												Cartoon	222	Music		Music	>100		
Participapant 26	No Updates	none											Selfie	106	Music		Retailers	<100		
Participapant 27	No Updates	none											Selfie	134	TV AND Sport		Retailers	<100		
Participapant 28	No Updates	none											Selfie	207	Retailers		Music	<100		
Participapant 29	Yes	Consistantly							Exam preparation			Food	Selfie	805	Retail		Retailers	>100		3/2, 2/3
Participapant 30	Zombies Anime 26/2	Cartoons	Lots of humanitarian posts	cruelty to animals			Animal welfare					alcohol	Social	296	Music		Retailers	>100		
Participapant 31	Closed FB Page	none											Selfie	456	Food and Music		Sport	<100		
Participapant 32	Socialising	none				22-Jan		alcohol			academic	Advertisments	Social	321	Literature and Mus		Music	>100		
Participapant 33	Horse riding	Awards											Social	472	Film and Media		Retailers	>100		14/2
Participapant 34	Socialising	Academic					academic			Academic stress		Food	Selfie	528	Sport		Retailers	<100		
Participapant 35	Painting	none						Political 17/2, 21/2, 26/2	Food				Pets	543	Retail		Retailers	<100		
Participapant 36	No Updates	none											Social	72	None		Retailers	<100		
Participapant 37	GAA	sport										Food	Selfie	120	Tv and music		None	<100		
Participapant 38	Socialising	none	political		academic			social					Selfie	732	Retail		Retailers	<100		
Participapant 39	No Updates	none											Family	104	Retail		Retailers	<100		
Participapant 40	Diving	Exams								Alcohol related		alcohol	Selfie	976	Retail		Retailers	<100		4/3, 3/2, 1
Participapant 41	Travel 9/2	Travel	social				political					alcohol	Social	143	Music		Retailers	<100		
Participapant 42	Sport	sport										Food	Team	673	Sport		Sport	<100		
Participapant 43	Travel	Academic				03-Dec							Selfie	276	Retail		Music	>100		
Participapant 44	Socialising	none	political		academic			couple				Advertising Gig	Selfie	235	Music		Retailers	<100		14/2
Participapant 45	No Updates	none											Social	145	Music		Music	<100		
Participapant 46	Socialising	none										Political	Icon	342	Music		Retailers	<100		
Participapant 47	Sport	none	political 4/3										Sport	492	Music		Retailers	<100		09-Mar
Participapant 48	Socialising	friends					03-Mar						Selfie	862	retail		Retailers	<100		
Participapant 49	Reading	none											Selfie	521	Tv		Retailers	>100		
Participapant 50	Sport	sport	political 2/1					advertisement				Foood pics	Selfie	130	none		music	>100		
Participapant 51	Science	academic				12-Jan							Selfie	521	Sport		food	<100		4/3, 2/1
Participapant 52	Closed FB Page	none											Family	741	retail		none	>100		
Participapant 53	No Updates	none											Selfie	96	Retailers		science	<100		
Participapant 54	Socialising	none					01-Feb						Selfie	777	None		none	>100		
Participapant 55	Paragliding	none	4/2, 5/2, 9/3								political		Selfie	487	Politics and Sport		Politics	<100		
Participapant 56	Sport	none						music				Food pics	Selfie	541	Politics and Sport		Sport	<100		
Participapant 57	Socialising	sport											Selfie	152	TV		music	>100		14/2

B.2. Themes extracted from the content analysis

Following the extended content analysis period, the core themes of the ten participants' self-disclosures were extracted and broken down and this informed the final participant selection for the interview phase, based on their suitability to speak to the objectives of motivation, function, impact and experience of personal self-disclosure on Facebook.

Below is an example of the breakdown of Sophie's themes of personal self-disclosure.

F4

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O
1	Tagged boyfriend (8%)	8%													
2	Abortion (8%)	8%													
3	Dunnes (7%)	7%													
4	Equality (7%)	7%													
5	Referendum (36%)	36%													
6	Owls (6%)	6%													
7	Updates (4%)	4%													
8	Socialising (6%)	6%													
9	PJ Hrvey (4%)	4%													
10	Xavier (4%)	4%													
11	Other (7%)	7%													
12	Feminism (3%)	3%													
13		100%													
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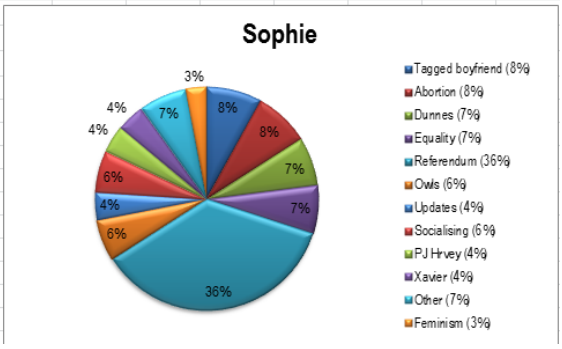

B.3. Digital Post Analysis

During the second extended observation period an additional analysis of each of the ten participants' posts was completed to inform the selection of participants to invite for interview.

Riessman's (2010) Narrative Analysis Framework was used to guide the interpretation of each of the participants' Facebook posts.

Below is in an excerpt from Sophie's analysis which illustrates how each of the posts were analysed.

Sample Sophie's Digital Post Analysis

26/02/2015

Shared supportive post on marriage equality with caption 'come on lads, be sound' (7 likes 0 Comments)

Analysis

Case/ Context: This was one month prior to the marriage referendum in Ireland where people were asked to vote on the topic of marriage equality for gay couples.

Language/ Narrative Vocabulary: The use of the term 'lads' is an inclusive Irish term that encompasses both genders but the universal term may be a communication of a lack of importance of gender. The call to 'be sound' may be an appeal for people to be open or

generous. By omission Sophie may be inferring that those who vote 'no' or indeed don't vote at all are 'not sound'.

Form follows function/ what does the story do? Performative function: The appeal inherent in this post clearly indicates Sophie's political and moral beliefs around marriage equality and she is also publicising this belief to her social network. These declarations of one's political beliefs are deemed to be personal self-disclosures by many people. This declaration serves the function of aligning Sophie to a particular socio-political discourse and announces an aspect of her identity.

Interactional Context: The interactional context is informative, jovial yet clearly directive. Sophie seems to be directing people to share her own personal value system in an insipid way. The sharing of these informative and directive posts seem to direct her social network into a desired action alongside declaring aspects of her own identity.

Narrative in a social world: The sharing of politically charged posts is commonplace on contemporary social media discourse and raises questions as to whether privacy and disclosure have changed in the last number of decades. I wondered what Sophie's views were on sharing her political preferences so freely and what provided her with the impetus to do so and what if any function this type of personal self-disclosure served.

16/04/2015

Tagged in comment 'this is a fierce politically charged Facebook page ya have going missus...you go girl! Would ya not post an aul light hearted selfies- give your inner Hillary Clinton a day off (smiley face x2) congrats on phone number 27...xoxo (8 likes)

Sophie replied 'It's my fingertips that have political inclinations not me. I just want to read about how Kim Kardashian wore the same coloured eye shadow for two days in advance row (2 likes)

Friend: I can't believe see did that though...(smiley face x2) (22 Likes 4 Comments)

Analysis

Case/ Context: This was a comment from a Facebook friend of Sophie's who was remarking on her recently shared posts involving themes of Pro-Choice (x5), Pro-Equality (x6), Pro-Feminism (x3) and Pro-Industrial Action (x5)

Language/ Narrative Vocabulary: Both the initial post and the reply by Sophie are of interest to the objectives of this study. Firstly the plea from Sophie's Friend to relent from her 'politically charged' posts and advice to post an 'aul light hearted selfie' is interesting. She suggests that Sophie give her 'inner Hillary Clinton a day off'. The reply from Sophie is also interesting as she suggests that 'it's my fingertips that have political inclinations not me. I just want to read about how Kim Kardashian wore the same coloured eye shadow two days in advance row'.

Form follows function/ what does the story do? Performative function: This reply by Sophie denotes that there is a 'split' in her of which is partly politically charged and partly frivolous. This is interesting when one considers the differing identities that exist online and offline. This idea that Sophie feels compelled to perform the identity of a political advocate, when all she wants to do is discuss celebrity gossip is really interesting. Which is more representative? Is it the politically charged campaigner and therefore this

response is merely to appease her friend or indeed is it the frivolous celebrity watcher and the politically charged posts are performing an identity that she desires?

Interactional Context: The interaction in this case is interesting because this statement dilutes the intensity of all of the emotionally charged socio-political posts that that she had shared previously. In this instance the audience has gotten a glimpse of the 'backstage' dynamics for Sophie. Or is it merely an effort at appeasement or 'saving face'? This is definitely a topic worthy of exploration at interview.

Narrative in a social world: Here two of Sophie's social worlds seem to collide which is the inherent problem with portraying multiple contrasting online identities. Turkle (2012) suggests the compartmentalising of the self can problematic on social media with such a collection of diverse contacts in one space. This brings about the concept of the intended audience and the unintended audience that can view the material that we share.

Research Aims: This example is central to the notion of self-disclosure and the contradictions of the self that can be disclosed on social media forums. The multiple selves' concept is illustrated in this example and definitely deserves further exploration at interview.

B.4. Reflexive Summary of the Digital Story

Following the extended observation period, five participants, who were deemed to share in ways that spoke to the aims and objectives of the study, were invited to attend for interview. A reflexive narrative account was then compiled which consisted of a summary of the researcher's musings and impressions of the participants digital stories which served as a method of preparing for the design of the individual semi-structured interviews.

Below is an example of the reflexive summary compiled for Sophie.

Reflexive Summary of Sophie's Digital Story

Case/ Context:

Sophie's digital story was analysed using Riessman's (2010) Narrative Analysis Framework and therefore the data was explored from a case focus as opposed to category focused perspective.

The overall themes of Sophie's profile and updates reveal her leanings towards 'advocacy' and 'activism' in response to what she perceives to be social injustices or unfair treatment of marginalised groups. This is woven into a large proportion of her online or digital identity.

The most prominent theme of her updates surrounds the topic of the Marriage Equality. This occurred in the context of a national referendum taking place on this topic. It would appear that Sophie became involved in campaigning for a Yes vote to support the passing of the referendum to allow same sex couples to get married. Initially many of the posts she shared were from another origin but then she seemed to gain more conviction in her

endeavours and began to post more 'anti-no' material with accompanying original captions. Some of these posts contained explicit forceful and aggressive language which was actively encouraging people to vote Yes.

People who engage in activism are generally considered to be altruistic people who hope to make the world a better place, but perhaps their decisions about what issues to advocate are often strongly mediated by perceptual biases. These biases perhaps lead people to prioritize issues that have an element of self–interest and issues that are popular either in general society or in their social group. It is personal and circumstantial factors that have most likely led activists to the social cause that they engage in. It is not clear why she has aligned herself so much with this campaign and it would be worthy of further exploration to see what Sophie's motivations were for engaging in online self-disclosure about her socio-political beliefs. However, the context of Sophie's overall digital story suggests that this is not the only campaign which she identified with as she was also noted to self-disclose her beliefs around topics such as, the 'Pro-Choice' movement, Trade Union movements, racism, animal cruelty, Islamic terrorist attacks and other issues concerning inequality for women.

A large proportion of her updates were seemingly 'politically charged', which was a phrase that was used by one of her network users who was remarking on the themes of her updates.

Another aspect of Sophie's profile was when she was tagged by her boyfriend in a 'couple' scenario. Interestingly she did not post these images herself but rather was tagged in them. This is of interest to the study as it would be interesting to explore her experience of being tagged in such pictures and why she does not post them herself? Is

there a feeling of being represented by proxy as these representations are seemingly in contrast to that of her 'activist' identity?

There were other posts which seemed to inform the audience of what she was doing and feeling, for example Sophie informed her Facebook network that she had left her lunch on the bus. These stood in contrast to the posts about politically charged minorities yet was also of interest to the objectives of the study to explore the motivation, function and impact of this type on online personal self-disclosure.

Some literature suggests that social networks are used as extensions of self where the tools of online sharing enable self-expression? Facebook has been described as an Ego focused software which encourages the personal and relatable aspects of users to be expressed. Facebook enables the outward facing Ego which focuses on the 'way we want to be seen' or 'the way we want other to see us'. However if Facebook enables some expressions of the outward facing Ego, does it also disable the Inward facing aspects of expression or the more shameful elements of the self. This is akin to Goffman's (1959) view of the 'front stage' and 'back stage' aspects of the self. The function of this activity was an aspect of online self-disclosure that this study was keen to explore.

Language/ Narrative Vocabulary:

There were some very explicit uses of language observed throughout the analysis of Sophie's digital story. There were some that were maybe intended in a humorous manner, but others which seemed to be more aggressive. This tended to be when Sophie was discussing socio-political topics such as the Marriage Equality Referendum. It was deemed interesting to explore why Sophie was motivated to use this type of language in

such a public way and what function did she believe it would serve. This is something that may merit further exploration at interview.

The pictures where she and her boyfriend were situated were almost always accompanied by a caption that seemed to attempt to dilute the intensity of the image. Phrases like 'Craic' and 'hungover stroll' were used which seemed to distract away from the fact that the image was one that suggested intimacy and closeness. This was interesting because it occurred repeatedly and regularly. This again may be connected to the couple not wanting to give an impression of being 'soppy' but then again why post the images at all? Again this is interesting from the perspective of the motivation and function of this form of personal self-disclosure and what the impact of by proxy self-disclosure is on Sophie.

The analysis also revealed that there was definitely a theme of a value placed on intelligence throughout Sophie's postings. Although this was not done in an explicit way there were insipid messages that suggested that intelligence was something Sophie felt was important. Much of the online political activism seemed to suggest a level of awareness or intelligence that allowed her to educate her audience as to what she thought and sometimes what she thought they should think.

The case of Sophie highlighted one clash of commentary which occurred when a network user commented about Sophie's 'politically charged' posts and pleaded with Sophie to 'lighten up'. Here her friend seems to be having a go at the serious nature of Sophie's posts and suggesting that this is not representative of the Sophie that they are familiar with. Sophie responded by suggesting that it was her fingers that had political inclinations and that she would just want to discuss Kim Kardashian's make up habits.

Turkle (2012) also discusses the clashes of audience that can occur on social media, where one is observed to be trying to express an aspect of themselves to a certain cohort of our audience, but this expression clashes with another notion of the self which a separate cohort of the audience are familiar with. This problematizes the expression of the outward facing ego if there is multiple ego identities that user wishes to maintain. In this instance, Sophie may want to represent herself as an impassioned activist, but she may also be a fun loving fan of trivial celebrity gossip. The challenge is maintaining both of these identities in front of a combination of audiences on Facebook. It was deemed important to explore Sophie's personal experience of this challenge and explore the impact of such an experience on her psychological wellbeing.

Form follows function/ what does the story do? Performative function:

The observation of Sophie's digital story suggested that there was a performative function to personal self-disclosures on Facebook. When one considers Sophie's online self-disclosures through the lens of Goffman (1959) there appears to be aspects of 'impression management' in Sophie's attempts to cultivate an identity for herself. Sophie's digital story appears to convey an image of someone who is active in her protection of people who she perceives as vulnerable or marginalised. She cultivates an image of altruism and care for those with whom she identifies as being treated unfairly. This perhaps conveys an image of a deep thinker or someone who is bright enough and clever enough to understand the depth of socio-cultural issues that exist in marginalised groups. Sophie also seemed to believe that her activism would be effective in influencing the actions of her Facebook audience. By posting the educative information about world events and global injustices one wonders if Sophie assuming that other people need to be

informed and educated about these issues and does she see herself as the person to do that.

The performative function is something that I would very much like to explore further in interview in order to get a better understanding of the motivation, function and impact of this type of personal self-disclosure.

Interactional Context:

The observation of Sophie's interactions with her Facebook audience reveals a repetition of patterns that emerge. The 'likes' and 'comments' that Sophie achieves throughout the observation period was variable and it would seem that although the amount of Sophie's validation and feedback seemed less for the political campaigning posts and more for the personal posts, this did not seem to sway Sophie's ongoing posting pattern. She did not seem motivated to share more of the material that was getting more of the validation, but instead she persisted with her politically charged posts despite much of them receiving quite few validations. I was interested to explore this with Sophie at interview as it seems counterintuitive to what we appear to know about social networking validation and what the function these responses serve.

Narrative in the Social World:

The observation of Sophie's personal self-disclosure patterns seemed representative of a changing narrative in the larger social world. Facebook has become a platform to express one's socio-political views and assertions and engage in online activism. It would seem that Sophie's sharing patterns are reflective of a wider contemporary narrative in the social world of online social networks.

Reflexivity:

It is my view that much of the socio-political declarations are personal self-disclosures of a fairly significant kind. I myself was living in Ireland during the Marriage Equality Referendum and I did not share with anyone what I voted or intended to vote as to me that was something very private. Therefore from my position the fact that someone would publically express their views, values and beliefs about a topic in such a broadcast and detailed way conflicted with my concept of privacy and personal self-disclosure. I had to be very mindful of this throughout the analysis because I know that the concept of personal self-disclosure has different meanings for different people and is therefore somewhat subjective. I also need to be fully aware that my position in relation to this topic is not representative or universal but it is a view nonetheless. Sophie on the other hand seemed to have no such difficulty airing her socio-political beliefs publically on her Facebook page. I also think that other contentious moral issues such as whether someone is 'pro-choice or not' are conceivably private concepts of which it appeared that Sophie and I differed. In my supervision sessions we discussed whether this was a feature of a generational gap or whether there were other issues at play.

Other areas of reflection contained themes of what constituted personal self-disclosure. Regardless of the use of Moon's Criteria (2000) and Allen's (1974) definition of personal self-disclosure, the subjectivity of the researcher is an unavoidable variable. Therefore much of the supervisory meetings were reflexive sessions which discussed the construct of personal self-disclosure and how these were conceptualised by the research team and included or excluded in the analysis of the digital stories.

B.5. Generic Interview Schedule

This is an example of the interview questions that were asked of all of the 5 participants.

Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Introduction

Welcome and thank the participant for taking part in the study acknowledging the sensitive nature of the subject matter

Re-iterate issues addressed in 'Information for Participants', particularly; purpose of study, confidentiality and the participants right to stop the interview/withdraw at any stage

Provide participant with opportunity to ask questions/clarify information

Broad Warm Up Questions

How are you doing? Did you find your way here okay?

Specific Research Questions

Tell me about your relationship with social networking/social media sites such as Facebook

(Prompts)

How was developed over time?

How does it impact on your daily life?

How many is SNS sites are you a member of?

How has your involvement waxed and waned over time?

Why do you status update?

(Prompts)

Do you do it to connect with people?

You see it as a way of sharing?

Is there an addictive or seductive element to the activity?

What is the function of status updating for you?

Can you tell me about the identity that you express online?

(Prompts)

Do you consciously decide on certain things to share and other things not to share?

Is there an ideal version of yourself that you would like your Facebook network to see you as?

Other aspects of yourself or your identity that you will omit from sharing on Facebook?

Do you think your Facebook identity closely reflects your off-line identity?

Are you familiar with the concept of a digital footprint?

(Prompts)

Have you ever thought in terms of the possibility of it, for example, affecting prospective employment opportunities?

Can you tell me about the positive experiences of status updating for you?

(Prompts)

Does it make you feel better?

What is your personal intrapersonal motivation for doing it?

Can you tell me about any negative experiences of status updating for you?

(Prompts)

Do you ever feel anxiety or any other uncomfortable emotions when you status update?

Can you tell me about your experiences of feedback from status updates that you have made?

(Prompts)

Do you get affected by the reaction of the updates?

Do you seek responses?

Do you feel the urge to check the response after you post an update?

Can you tell me if you have ever had an experience of creeping Facebook users' pages?

(Prompts)

Why do you think you do that?

Does it make you feel good?

Why do you think that some people are anti-Facebook?

Can you conclude by telling me upon reflection whether you feel that social media has been a positive addition to your life overall I do regret ever getting into it

Is there anything that I haven't asked you about social media relationship with social media that you like to tell me about

Is there anything that we have discussed today that you would like to expand on? Can I ask you about your experience of being in the study and whether that ever influenced the material you posted or didn't post?

Closing Questions

Is there anything you have said you would like to change or clarify?

Do you have any questions?

B.6: Sample of Tailored Semi-Structured Interview

An additional set of interview questions were compiled based on the individual digital postings that each of the 5 participants had shared during the observation period. These questions were designed to address the objectives of the study by referring to specific areas pertaining to each participant's individual digital story. Below is an example of the additional tailored interview schedule that was used in the case of Sophie.

Sample of Tailored Semi-Structured Interview of Sophie

Interview Schedule Sophie

1. Tell me about your relationship with social networking/social media sites such as Facebook

- How was developed over time?
- How does it impact on your daily life?
- How many is SNS sites are you a member of?
- How has your involvement waxed and waned over time?

2. Why do you status update?

- Do you do it to connect with people?
- You see it as a way of sharing?
- Is there an addictive or seductive element to the activity?
- What is the function of status updating for you?

3. Can you tell me about the identity that you express online?

- Do you consciously decide on certain things to share and other things not to share?
- Is there an ideal version of yourself that you would like your Facebook network to see you as?
- Other aspects of yourself or your identity that you will omit from sharing on Facebook?
- Do you think your Facebook identity closely reflects your off-line identity?

I now like to ask you some particular questions about your own profile and your own updates over the observation period from December 2014 to August 2015.

There are a number of themes that emerged during the analysis of your profile. I read them out you now not like to know if you agree that these make sense to you.

Themes

Activism: 69%

Pictures with Boyfriend: 8%

Random Shares: 11%

Socialising 6%

Owls 6%

I notice from your profile picture that the image was borrowed from a post that was posted by somebody else. Can you tell me about that?

I noticed that there were a number of pictures similar to your profile picture posted in the last number of months in which you were tagged in. Can I ask you what you think about being tagged by other people in photos that are publically posted?

I also note from your profile that you were involved in activism and this came across quite strongly in your digital time line. Can you tell me about that?

You had quite a number of updates about the Marriage Referendum. Can you tell me about your involvement in that campaign?

I also noted on another occasion you disclosed to your Facebook Friends that you had left your lunch on the bus. Can you tell me as much as you can remember about that time that you posted that?

I noted on some occasions you used some strong language to describe various things. Are you familiar with the concept of a 'digital footprint'? What are your thoughts in terms of the possibility of for example prospective employers accessing one's digital footprint?

I am interested in your repeated use of references to 'Owls' throughout your profile updates. Can you tell me about that?

On one occasion a Facebook friend posted on your wall that she prompted you to 'Give your inner Hillary Clinton a day off and post a light hearted selfie', to which you replied 'it is my fingers that have political inclinations, I just want to discuss how Kim Kardashian used the same eye make-up 2 days in a row'. Can you tell me about this?

There seems to be two distinct impressions of you that I can glean from your digital Facebook story. One is of someone who gets quite exercised by social injustices and like to advocate for the marginalised and the other is someone who is fairly carefree and frivolous. Can you tell me what your response is to me saying that?

Can I talk to you about the responses that your posts achieved over the observation period? I noticed that the posts about you and your boyfriend or the more 'softer posts', in general achieved more 'likes' than those posts that contained an element of 'activism'. Yet this did not seem to influence your posting patterns. Can you tell me about this and more in general what your thoughts are on 'Facebook Feedback'.

24. I noticed on some occasions there was evidence of some strong 'identity announcements' to describe various things in your life. Are you familiar with the concept of a digital footprint? Have you ever thought in terms of the possibility of it, for example, affecting prospective employment opportunities etc.

25. Can you tell me about the positive experiences of status updating for you? Does it make you feel better? What is your personal intrapersonal motivation for doing it?

26. Can you tell me about any negative experiences of status updating for you? Do you ever feel anxiety or any other uncomfortable emotions when you status update?

27. Can you tell me about your experiences of feedback from status updates that you have made?

- Do you get affected by the reaction of the updates?
- Do you seek responses?
- Do you feel the urge to check the response after you post an update?

28. Can you tell me if you have ever had an experience of creeping Facebook users' pages?

Why do you think you do that?

Does it make you feel good?

29. Why do you think that some people are anti-Facebook?

30. Can you conclude by telling me upon reflection whether you feel that social media has been a positive addition to your life overall I do regret ever getting into it

Is there anything that I haven't asked you about social media relationship with social media that you like to tell me about

Is there anything that we have discussed today that you would like to expand on? Can I ask you about your experience of being in the study and whether that ever influenced the material you posted or didn't post?

B.7. Sample Selection of Annotated Interview Transcript

Each of the interviews were recorded and transcribed. This is an example of an annotated transcript which illustrates how Riessman's Narrative Analysis Framework (2010) was utilised to analyse the interview data.

Excerpt of the annotated transcript of Sophie

Thank you very much for coming. The purpose of this study is there is a few generic questions around updating on Facebook and status updating and sharing and that sort of stuff and then I am going to ask you specific questions about your own profile and then some generic ones to finish. Does that sound alright to you?

That is fine yes.

Can you tell me about your relationship with social networking, social media sites such as Facebook, for example what has your relationship been from start to finish, has it waxed and waned over time? And how does it affect your daily life?

I guess I joined Facebook around 2009, because my friends did, and I wasn't very active in the beginning. I just wasn't active in social media, it wasn't a big part of my life, but over the years it has become a bigger part just connecting with, like I have buddies over in Australia, and connecting with people. I even have it on my phone, it is something that I check pretty frequently. I would say I check it at least five to six times a day. And there are times that I am very aware of my compulsion to check if there is anyone who has messaged me or whatever, so yes I check it every day. When I was travelling I wouldn't have been as frequent, but when I was in college I certainly would be, even during lectures, you'd always check just to see, even though there could be nothing at all.

And did that coincide with starting college or was that still in school?

Starting to join Facebook? Yeah it did, I guess all my friends had joined and it seemed like the thing to do, even just to connect with people and gain more friends, it was an easier way. Even in the likes of dating it is so much easier to Facebook someone rather than ask for their number, it is not as intimidating. So yes...

And you mentioned about the compulsion to check, I am really interested in that, can you tell me a little about that?

It is just even hearing the thing of having a Facebook comment. Just this need to see what is it, I want to see it right now, and even it is a security blanket, 'It's like a security blanket, If I am kind of feeling a bit shit you are more inclined in looking at Facebook than you would be in trying to communicate with somebody because it is easier'. Emotionally if you are kind of feeling down it is just easier to engulf yourself in something that is not real rather than actually talk to other people...what I'd post up would usually be an emotional thing, either

Comment [CN1]: Does this speak to her Motivation? Is this a changing Cultural Norm? NARRATIVE IN A SOCIAL WORLD

Comment [CN2]: Does this denote a relationship which evolves with Facebook? Or is this a PERFORMANCE?

Comment [CN3]: Does this suggest that it is now? Temporality CONTEXT

Comment [CN4]: MAU changed usage CONTEXT

Comment [CN5]: Usage indicator. At least - LANGUAGE

Comment [CN6]: The impact of the Experience, 'Compulsion' Anxiety? LANGUAGE/

Comment [CN7]: The rumination anxiety experience?

Comment [CN8]: Motivation, 'Its easier' not as 'intimidating' Language

Comment [CN9]: The relationship with Facebook LANGUAGE ++

really sad or really happy... but something that I would be passionate about. I wouldn't just write something like, I am here sitting in a chair or in a cafe. Maybe when I was younger I probably did, but I am too self-conscious now. I think that's about this need for attention, there is some un-fulfilment there that you don't have in their personal life and you need it online. I don't know...It's like you are being an expert in something, you are trying to sell yourself as a product....

Comment [CN10]: Here the experience is emotional, passionate and secure LANGUAGE CONTEXT

Comment [CN11]: Relationship with Facebook, evolving. Cognitive Dissonance? CONTEXT

Comment [CN12]: Recognition and Validation? PERFORMANCE FUNCTION

Comment [CN13]: Motivation? Need for attention FUNCTION CONTEXT

Comment [CN14]: Hoped for self? LANGUAGE CONTEXT

And when you say not really real, can you explain that to me?

It is not real though, I mean Facebook is just like this, it is what we like to present ourselves as, like rarely you'd put up... Like in the case of Sinead O' Connor, she put up something that was very personal, people don't put up when they feel shit usually. Usually it is, I am out or I am on holidays here, and if people do put something up it is just seen as attention seeking. It doesn't seem very authentic. Like rarely Facebook, like even in the cases of like one of my close friends died a couple of years ago and like people are putting up messages on Facebook. I initially did but now, when it comes up to her anniversary I don't put anything up because I kind of feel I don't need other people to see that I am mourning. I don't know, it seems disingenuous a lot of the time. Sometimes it can be genuine, people are empathetic, but yes you just put up the best side of yourself online, you are rarely going to put up, I am unemployed and all this kind of stuff.

Comment [CN15]: Hoped for self CONTEXT

Comment [CN16]: Experience of loss, expression of intimacy FUNCTION PERFORMANCE

Comment [CN17]: The hoped for self is disingenuous? PERFORMANCE

How many social networking sites are you a member of, obviously Facebook, but do you have Twitter or LinkedIn?

I have Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, I think that is it actually, and Snapchat.

Comment [CN18]: Usage CASE/ CONTEXT/ NARRATIVE IN A SOCIAL WORLD

And would you engage in all of them at the same level?

I don't really use Twitter that much. I go through phases of kind of using it but I have never gotten into it, like it is kind of too much for me, just so much information from so many outlets and it is a bit overwhelming, whereas Facebook seems easier to shift through what you want and what you don't want. With Twitter it is just this story and this story and it is just words. Whereas basically if you see a picture with an article you will click on it or you will see just the headline and it is more, the way it is presented it is more attractive than with Twitter. I like Instagram, I would be active a good bit as well.

Comment [CN19]: Twitter is overwhelming, too much information, emotional use of LANGUAGE

Comment [CN20]: Edit cut and paste the audience PERFORMANCE

Comment [CN21]: Motivated by pictures and easy access and attractive aspects of posts CONTEXT NARRATIVE IN A SOCIAL WORLD

And have you ever gone on a Facebook fast or have you tried to turn it off?

I haven't actively. I lost my phone a couple of months ago and I wasn't on Facebook for a few days but that was just out of I don't have my phone so I can't really use it, I probably did

Comment [CN22]: Enforced Facebook fast, not a choice CONTEXT

use it on my laptop. But it has been something that has been on my mind but I kind of haven't felt the need to do something as drastic as cutting myself off.

Comment [CN23]: Experience: Cutting myself off- query addict discourse LANGUAGE CONTEXT

I suppose what I am interested in is the notion of the status updates, can I ask you why do you use status update?

Why do I status update? I can't even think of many statuses that I write because a lot of it is news articles that I might share. I don't status update as much as I used to, I can't remember doing it recently, but if I was writing something it would be maybe on somebody's page to say something funny. It would usually be something humorous or if something happened that I was pissed off about. It is usually maybe an emotional thing, either really sad or really happy, but I don't think I status update that much.

Comment [CN24]: Cognitive Disonense? NARRATIVE IN A SOCIAL WORLD

Comment [CN25]: Relationship CONTEXT SOCIAL

Comment [CN26]: emotionality of the experience CONTEXT LANGUAGE

Is it the extremes of emotions?

Yes it is, if something horrible happened I would probably say something. Or even stories, the likes of anything to do with abortion in Ireland, I would be quite passionate about that, or one of the gay rights, during the gay marriage referendum I would say a couple of things there. But something that I would be passionate about, I wouldn't just write something for the sake of saying, I am here sitting in a chair or in a cafe. Maybe when I was younger I probably did but I don't do it as much now. I am too self-conscious now I think. I find it very... Like I see other people's status updates and everything is they are checking themselves into everywhere and I would be quite judgemental of that so I think I am too self-conscious myself of doing that and coming across that way.

Comment [CN27]: Experience of passion and emotion LANGUAGE

Comment [CN28]: Awareness of how I will be interpreted by the audience. Judgement and threat??? LANGUAGE EXPERIENCE

Appendix C: REC Confirmation Letter

This is a record of the confirmation letter indicating ethical approval

Ollscoil Chathair Bhaile Átha Cliath
Dublin City University

Mr. Colman Noctor
School of Nursing and Human Sciences

18th July 2014

REC Reference: DCUREC/2014/162

Proposal Title: A narrative exploration of Facebook users' use of 'status updating' for the disclosure of personal/ intimate experiences and/or information

Applicants: Dr. Evelyn Gordon, Dr. Briege Casey, Mr. Colman Noctor

Dear Colman

Further to review, the DCU Research Ethics Committee approves this research proposal. Materials used to recruit participants should note that ethical approval for this project has been obtained from the Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee. Should substantial modifications to the research protocol be required at a later stage, a further submission should be made to the REC.

Yours sincerely,

DCU Research & Innovation

Dónal O'Mathúna

Dr. Donal O'Mathuna
Chairperson
DCU Research Ethics Committee

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Appendix D: Interview Consent Form

This is an example of the consent form signed by the participants at interview

Interview Consent form

Title "A narrative exploration of why we share what we share on Facebook"

I……agree to participate in Colman Noctor's research study.

The purpose and nature of the study has been explained to me.

I am participating voluntarily.

I give permission for my interview with Colman Noctor to be audio-recorded.

I understand that I can withdraw from the study, without repercussions, at any time, whether before it starts or while I am participating.

I understand that I can withdraw permission to use the data within two weeks of the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.

I understand that anonymity will be ensured in the write-up by disguising my identity.

I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in the thesis and any subsequent publications if I give permission below:

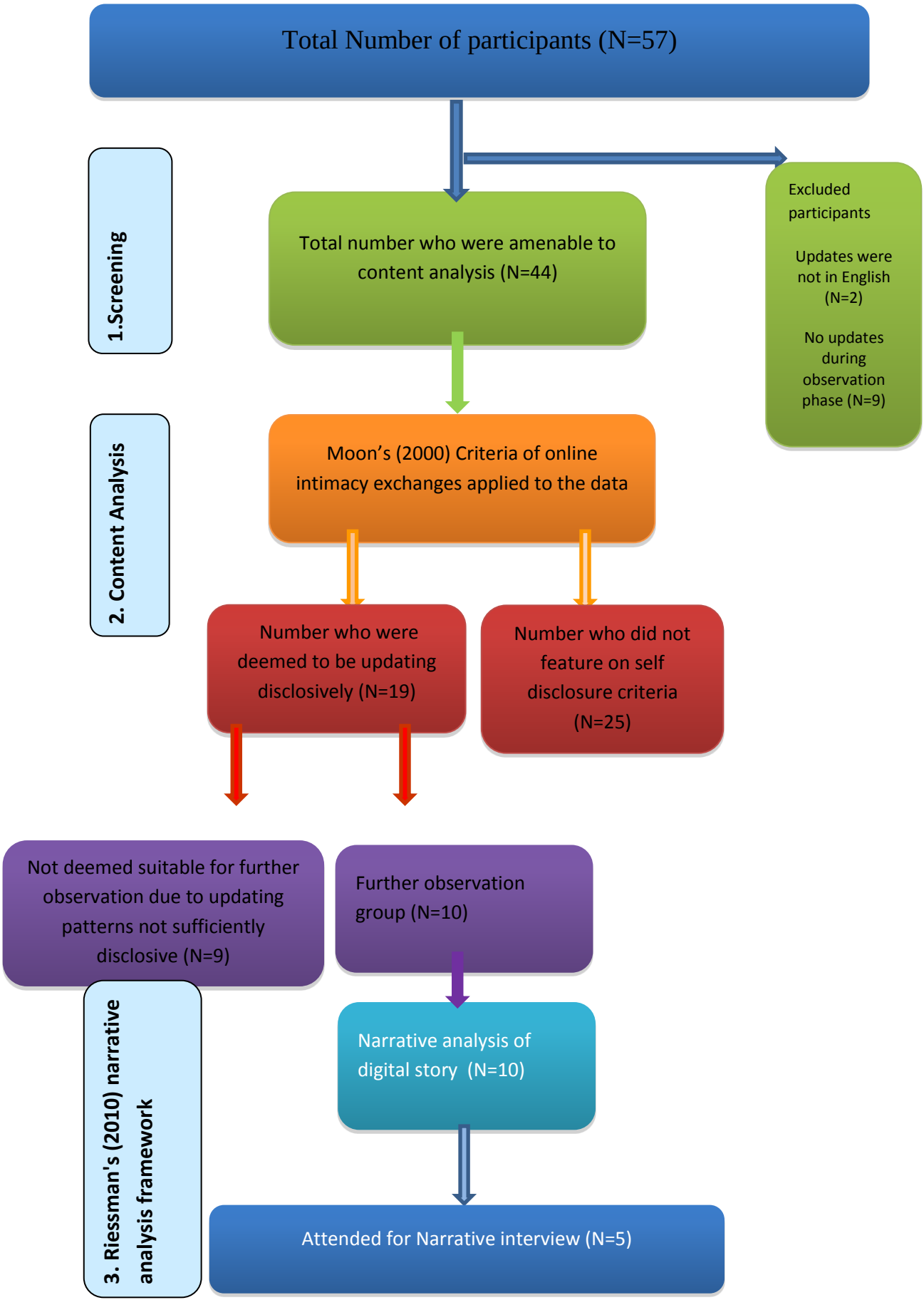
(Please tick one box :)

I agree to quotation/publication of extracts from my interview ☐

I do not agree to quotation/publication of extracts from my interview ☐

Signed: …… Date: ……..

PRINT NAME: ……

Researchers Signature ……..

Appendix E: Overview of research project