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The Digitally Born Identity: The Influence of Social Networking Sites on Teen Identity

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THE DIGITALLY-BORN IDENTITY:

THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES ON TEEN IDENTITY

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Abstract

Based on in-depth interviews, this thesis examines how teens use Social

Networking Sites (SNSs) to negotiate their identities. The thesis concludes that SNSs,

such as MySpace and Facebook, facilitate a social connectivity that influences how teens

portray themselves online. The process of constructing a self-presentation, receiving

input from peers, and then modifying one's self-presentation in response is not new, but

the speed at which it occurs and the very public way it is displayed on an SNS constitutes

a change in how teens understand the ways in which they make and constantly remake

their identities. The findings suggest that, as previous literature has noted, SNSs are

pervasive and ubiquitous in the lives of teens. However, it also concludes that SNSs are

not uniform and that teens use SNSs differently, an aspect of SNSs previous literature has

not consistently addressed. The thesis posits that whereas MySpace serves as a means for

representation, Facebook is primarily a tool for group communication, and a recent

migration from Facebook to MySpace reveals the importance of group membership and

group connectivity to teen identity. In addition, the thesis finds the teens' SNSs' pages

are reflections of identity that are in large part reactions to others' perceptions of the

identities displayed on profile pages, as well as attempts to reflect an "authentic" identity.

These concepts are particularly well represented by the idea of identity as "bricolage," the

ongoing process of constructing and deconstructing, submitting and omitting, and

organizing of mediated communication to present an online identity.

Table of Contents

Introduction

"The purpose of [my social networking site page] is to advertise me… The

content reflects my interests, and therefore shows the user what kind of person I am… All

the content of the site reflects my personality," stated one 17-year-old male regarding his

personal profile page (Chandler & Roberts-Young, 1998, p.4). Another teen said, "I'm

not very good at describing myself. It's not possible for me to create a complete portrayal

through the medium of the Web, I'm sure—but it is possible to include a great deal of

information not only through writing, but photographs, music, videos, tables, etc." (p. 4).

These teens, who participated in a study at the University of Wales, illustrated the ways

in which personal pages served as outlets for personal expression in the late 90s.

Today, with the emergence and overwhelming popularity of social networking

sites (SNSs) such as MySpace and Facebook, the temptation to spend more and more

time online seems irresistible to teens. SNSs are becoming increasingly popular

worldwide, and offer a new medium in which teens can portray their identities (Boyd &

Ellison, 2007). This thesis examines how teens use SNSs on the Internet and how they

incorporate these sites into their daily lives. I was particularly interested in how

participating in SNSs helps teens negotiate dynamic identities in their relationships with

their peers. To explore this, I interviewed young people multiple times over a three-

month-period to better understand what motivates them to change their online

representations of themselves as they are relating to their friends and others in their social circle online. I examined how they feel the material they put online reflects their identities at differing points in time in order to understand how their identities transformed along with changes in their lives and in concert with interactions they had with their peers both online and offline. Based on the in-depth interviews I conducted, I argue that because teens conceptualize a sense of themselves in relation to their peers, and because SNSs allow (or even demand) responses to interactions, SNSs significantly speed up the process of responding and re-presenting the self for others. This process of constructing a self-presentation, receiving input from peers, and then modifying one's self-presentation in response is not new, but the speed at which it is expected to occur today and the very public way it is displayed on an SNSs constitutes a change in how teens understand the ways in which they must make and constantly remake their identity in relation to others.

Literature Review

My research examines how previous research on identity and media applies to SNSs. While a great deal of research has focused on the concept of identity and the role media play in identity, little research has examined how the relatively new phenomena of SNSs influence identities. Thus, while my research is situated in relation to the vast amount of previous research on identity and media, because the topic of how the new phenomena of SNSs influence identities is a relatively new one, research is only beginning to emerge in this particular area. Therefore, the purpose of this literature review is to explore previous research on identity and media, as well as review information about SNSs. First, it reviews literature related to the concepts of identity, including the role of groups and friendships. Next, it examines scholarship that has explored how media and media use can influence identity. Finally, it presents data on the history, growth and prevalence of SNSs and explores the limited scholarship on how this dynamic media influences the identities of teenagers.

Identity

Scholars have conceptualized and defined identity in numerous ways. For the purposes of this research, identity is considered one part of the self that is relevant and displayed in individual situations and that is influenced by the context of the situation (Finkenauer et al., 2002). Different offline contexts include school, family, and work

interactions. Online contexts could encompass interactions on SNSs, email, or Instant Messaging, for example. Although some suggest that identity is a static concept, conceptualizing identity as the "major developmental outcome of adolescence" (Nowinski, 2007, p. 184), my definition recognizes that identities differ depending on context and environment. That is, a teen may express one identity while in school another with friends and a third with family. While scholars such as Nowinski correctly suggest that for a teen the process of shaping his or her identity determines their attitudes, expectations, and how they act, his view of identity does not accurately reflect the dynamic nature of teen identity. Nowinski describes identity as a "lens through which we view the world" (2007, p. x) and writes that "[i]dentity includes your values (what you stand for), your goals, and your sense of where you fit into the scheme of things" (p. 184). Other researchers present a more dynamic view of identity that better encompasses how teens represent and view themselves online.

Finkenauer, Engels, Meeus, and Oosterwegel, in the book *Understanding Early Adolescent Self and Identity*, write, "In contrast to the self that refers to the person as a whole and encompasses knowledge and feelings that are relatively stable, identity refers to specific aspects of the self that are salient and activated by the social and environmental context in which a person functions" (p. 28). Finkenauer et al. further suggest that a person has one self but can have several different identities that vary depending on the context of the situations with which he or she is confronted (p. 28). As Erikson wrote, identity is never "'established' as an 'achievement' in the form of a personality armor, or of anything static and unchangeable" (Erikson, 1968, p. 14).

4

Furthermore, as discussed below, authors who have focused on the role media and identity also contend that identity is dynamic. For example, Grodin and Lindlof (1996) claim that identity is shaped by social context, and write that a stable, unified identity is not possible due to the ever-changing social landscapes in which we live. The idea of dynamic identity relies on the assumption that self-reflection and self-realization are continual processes that are influenced by ever-changing social contexts. Static identity, on the other hand, assumes that while social situations, groups, and our environment influence our identities, this influence results in one stable, unified identity. Buckingham wrote, "On one level, I am the product of my unique personal biography. Yet who I am (or who I think I am) varies according to who I am with, the social situations in which I find myself, and the motivations I may have at the time, although I am by no means entirely free to choose how I am defined" (2008, p. 1). Thus, because teens are constantly adapting to different social contexts, such as whom they are with and the environment they find themselves in (school, home, or work, for example) the idea of dynamic identity fits more appropriately than the concept of static identity.

Therefore, based on this research, I am not conceptualizing identity as a product, the result of an identity-construction process. Rather, my research considers identity as a process itself. Susannah Stern (2008) writes:

> From a developmental perspective, identity generally refers to how one subjectively views oneself over time and across situations, and is typically believed to evolve throughout the lifecycle as one's inner self changes. Identity is thus commonly viewed as a "process of qualitative stage reorganization rather than a mere unfolding of static personality characteristics." (p. 97).

Stern notes that identity is an ever-evolving process, not an outcome, and further, that personal profile pages have contributed to identity in teens. New media researcher Thiel Stern (2007) writes that identity is influenced through acts such as lying, using technology to manipulate conversation, changing tone to manipulate conversation, or disclosing personal information that makes one particular impression.

Additionally, because SNSs are focused on relationships, it is also important to note the role group membership plays in identity. Conceptualizations of identity that focus on the importance of group membership are important to my research as teenagers engage in social activity and form relationships in both online and offline situations, and thus these relationships influence identities. Gilligan was one of the first to write that identities are formed through relationships. Gilligan states, "In [the] context of relationships, identity is formed through the gaining of voice or perspective, and self is known through the experience of engagement with different voices or points of view" (1988, p. 151). Gilligan's ideas as related to adolescent identity served as the guiding theory for my research, as her research focused on identity related to social relationships.

Although Gilligan builds upon Erikson, another early scholar who held that identities are constructed in relation to others, it is important to note that Gilligan's research is mainly concerned with the female experience, while my research explores identity in both female and male teens. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that both Erikson, whose research focused on male adolescent identity, and Gilligan both note that group membership and relationships are important to identity. Similar to Gilligan, Erikson writes, "It dawns on us then, that one person's or group's identity may be relative

to another's, and that the pride of gaining a strong identity may signify an inner emancipation from a more dominant group identity" (1968, p. 21). While Erikson suggests men and women construct identity differently, Gilligan (1982) criticizes Erikson's focus on emancipation and claims that any differences between female and male identity results from differing levels of intimacy experienced by men and women. Gilligan suggests that although men and women approach relationships differently, they are important to the process of both sexes. Thus, the writings of Erikson and Gilligan reveal the importance of group norms to both sexes.

In addition, although Erikson posits that differences exist in identity, these differences cannot be universally applied to all members of each sex nor does it suggest that there are no similarities between the sexes. Erikson writes that whereas men experience "separateness" or a lack of intimacy with friends and family growing up, and therefore their identities rest on separation and individuality, women create relationships and experience higher levels of intimacy than their male counterparts (1968, p. 13). However, Erikson's focus on the differences between men and women and similarities among them assumes that all men and women construct identity in the same way. Erikson's writings do not take into account more current ideas about gender and gender differences.

While this is a key point for teenage girls, young men are also faced with this task, particularly as gender roles are less dichotomous and universal than we once might have thought. Furthermore, more recent researchers, such as social identity theorists, have explored the role of group membership in identity without regard to gender

differences. Social identity theory posits that all individuals, regardless of gender, "derive their identity from membership or affiliation in certain groups" (Fortman, 2003, p. 105).

"Social identity," as Brewer (1991) explains, is the notion of how we view our identity as it relates to the groups of which we are members. Social identity encompasses "a shift toward the perception of self as an interchangeable exemplar of some social category and away from the perception of self as a unique person" (Turner et. al, 1987, p. 50 in Brewer, 1991, p. 476). Therefore, according to Brewer, our identities are influenced by our memberships in groups. Tajfel (1982) adds to the idea of the importance of groups and identity by stating that group behavior relies on group identification, which is made up of three components. First, group members identify with the group if they are cognitively aware that they are members of the group. Second, group identification is comprised of an awareness of perceived shared values. Finally, when the former conditions are met, group identification takes place when there is some sort of emotional investment in the group.

Goffman (1959) also suggests that how we present ourselves to others is a negotiation of how we see ourselves *and* how we want to be seen by others. Goffman writes, "When we allow that the individual projects a definition of the situation when he appears before others, we must also see that the others, however passive their role may seem to be, will themselves effectively project a definition of the situation by virtue of their response to the individual and by virtue of the lines of action they initiate to him" (p.9). Thus, Goffman suggests that our identity is influenced by our perception and

projection of self as well as influenced by how we wish others to perceive us and how others actually perceive us.

In sum, a number of researchers have contended that a dynamic identity is heavily influenced by group membership. This research suggests that teens are influenced by their group membership, how they want to be perceived by others and by how they think others in the group perceive them. In addition to this research on the role group memberships play in identity, more recent scholarship has examined how media influences both identity and group membership.

Identity and Media

A number of media scholars have explored the relationship between media and identity. Hebdige (1979), for example, focuses on mediated communication and writes that media usage represents subcultures, which are then expressed through styles. Tying media use into the role of groups in identity, Hebdige writes that individuals use things like music and fashion to sort themselves into groups or subcultures, which in turn affect identity. Hebdige uses the example of the emergence of "punk" culture in the 1970s, which was expressed through punk style, in terms of clothing style, but also "social and sexual deviance" (1979, p. 121). Specifically in relation to identity, Hebdige states, "The exact origins of individual punks were disguised or symbolically disfigured by the make-up, masks and aliases which seem to have been used…as ploys to escape the principle of identity" (p. 121). Even while attempting to subvert traditional identities, the punk subculture joined together in groups based on material culture centered on punk music in an effort to build new identities.

Like Hebdige, Grodin and Lindlof also write about identity in terms of mediated communication. Grodin and Lindlof (1996) argue that mediated communication affects the experiences of the self in terms the content of the technology but also the ubiquitous presence of and our use of technology. Grodin and Lindlof state, "It is important to understand that mediated communication shapes experience of self not only in its capacity as a purveyor of content that might influence self-definition but also because media are technologically circumscribed forms" (1996, p. 4). By this, the authors mean that media, in various technological forms, surround us in our everyday lives, and are ever-present in our daily routines. Further, as noted above, the authors argue that identity is "socially specific" and thus a dynamic concept influenced by mediated communication.

Like Grodin and Lindlof, social anthropologist Fisherkeller studied the impact of media on teens. Fisherkeller (2002) followed teens through middle school, high school, and into college to understand their experiences of growing up watching television. Fisherkeller explores what attracts teenagers to certain television programs and what this might say about them. Fisherkeller looks at how talking about television programs helps teens say something about who they are and what they like, and further what role television plays in their everyday lives. Watching TV and talking about these programs with friends and family at home and at school helped teens overcome personal and social dilemmas, as the stories on TV reflected their real life struggles and showed ways to overcome these obstacles. Further, Fisherkeller writes that TV impacts the role of "identity projects," which she defines as "the work in which a self engages to make sense

of her or his particular social positions and life circumstances" (p. 14). Thus, according to Fisherkeller, this form of media helps teenagers make sense of their own identities.

Focusing on the power of new media, Gergen (2000) writes that emerging media has the power to influence identity. Gergen states:

> Emerging technologies saturate us with the voices of humankind—both harmonious and alien. As we absorb their varied rhymes and reasons, they become part of us and we of them. Social saturation furnishes us with a multiplicity of incoherent and unrelated languages of the self. For everything we "know to be true" about ourselves, other voices within respond with doubt and even derision. (p. 6)

Gergen defines "social saturation" as the result of myriad technologies that have become inherently part of our daily lives and have seemingly taken over our selves. Gergen also explains that as a result of social saturation, the self becomes fragmented, and thus, "the fully saturated self becomes no self at all" (p. 7). Thus, Gergen's ideas of the fragmented self relates to the idea of both dynamic identity *and* multiple identities, with teens portraying many different selves under different situations. Gergen's work suggests, then, that teens will not have a singular, determined, unchangeable identity. This concept is especially appropriate to consider when research digital media, as the medium makes it easy for teens to cultivate "online identities" which might be very different from their "offline identities."

Stern (2008) also suggests that the Internet greatly contributes to the dynamic identities of teenagers. Stern says teens' "online publications can provide important opportunities for managing the complex situations and shifting self-expectations that characterize adolescence" (p. 97). By acknowledging others' perceptions of one's self, teens constantly negotiate their own identities. Stern contends that "[i]n descriptions of

their decisions about what to reveal, exaggerate, and omit in their online communication, youth authors reveal a highly conscious process of self-inquiry" (p. 97). While Stern focuses on personal home pages and blogs in her research, Stern's assumptions can be applied to the information that teens convey and omit on SNSs, as these are online venues of personal expression for teens. Stern's research therefore provides an important base for my research, which complements her study by providing a close examination of the occurrences that motivate people to change their online self-representations so as to better understand the role of peer influence in identity-construction and the speed at which young people respond to that influence.

Stern and other authors have made evident the influence of media, and more specifically the Internet, on teen identity. As SNSs continue to gain popularity among teenagers, the influence of these sites on teenagers' identities needs to be explored.

SNSs and Identity

Whereas television was once the most pervasive and powerful form of mediated communication for teens in the United States, the Internet has arguably become more prevalent in the lives of teens. Although already somewhat dated, a relatively recent study by the Pew Internet and American Life Project (Lenhardt & Madden, 2007) provides information about how teenagers are using social networking sites. The study suggests that 55% of online teens have profiles online. Among those whose profiles can be accessed by anyone online, 46% say they give at least a little and sometimes a good deal of false information on their profiles. The study found that the vast majority of teens with profiles say they use SNS both to stay in touch with people they see a lot (91%) as

12

well as those they rarely see in person (82%). Finally, almost half of the SNS users say they use the networks to make new friends.

The Pew study also examines the posting of fake information by teens. The study found that boys and younger teens are more likely than girls or older teens to post false information on their online profiles; 64% of profile-owning boys post fake information compared with 50% of girls. Younger and older teens exhibit another split, with 69% of younger teens posting fake information versus 48% of older teens. While teens post fake information to protect themselves, they also to be playful or silly, the study notes. It is apparent that teens publish "fake" information on social networking sites such as MySpace and Facebook, which justifies the need to examine more closely the information that teens reveal in online settings.

Building on ideas about mediated communication as it relates to identity, researchers Goodings, Locke, and Brown (2007) see interactions on the website MySpace and similar sites as examples of "mediated communities." The authors suggest, "A dialectic between collectivity and place, resulting in the grounding of a shared sense of the past in a particular place, is at the base of all communities" (p. 463). Goodings et al. argue that identities are created relative to place, pointing out that offline and online (virtual) experiences intertwine to create identities.

I contend that because, as discussed below, SNSs are based around the concepts of creating and maintaining relationships and the distinction between the ways adolescent boys and girls manage identity is lessening SNSs foster the development of identities in both men and women. According to a 2005 survey, 20% of all Internet users have met

new friends online, and about half of these individuals go on to meet one or more of these virtual friends in person (di Gennaro & Dutton, 2007). Sites such as MySpace and Facebook represent worlds where people communicate with one another, where relationships are forged and broken, and where one has the opportunity to distinguish one's self from the "voices" of friends online.

While MySpace and Facebook are relatively new forms of digital media, there is existing research that explores the history of SNSs in general. Boyd and Ellison provide a useful definition of a SNS as:

> A web-based service that allow[s] individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system (2007, p. 2).

Some social networking sites include, but are certainly not limited to: MySpace, Facebook, You Tube, Xanga, Flickr, Bebo, LiveJournal, Imbee, Hi5, Orkut, CyWorld, vMix, WhyVille, Tagged, CherryTap, Firendster, b-linked, eSpin, Piczo, and Sconex (Kelsey, 2007). Boyd and Ellison describe features of SNSs, specifically noting that SNSs may be viewed by users as being more private than they actually are. "Privacy is…implicated in users' ability to control impressions and manage social contexts," state the authors (p. x).

MySpace is a social networking site that was founded in 2003 by Tom Anderson, the current president, and Chris DeWolfe. In 2005, News Corp acquired MySpace for $580 million (Kelsey, 2007, p. xiii). According to the site, MySpace is "a place for friends" (MySpace.com). MySpace also suggests that the website is "for everyone," such as: "Friends who want to talk online, single people who want to meet other singles,

14

matchmakers who want to connect their friends with other friends, families who want to keep in touch, business people and co-workers interested in networking, classmates and study partners," and "anyone looking for long lost friends!" (MySpace.com). MySpace reports having over 230 million registered users, and it is has been estimated that 25% of MySpace users are between the ages of 13 and 17 (Kelsey, 2007, p. xiv).

MySpace, like many SNSs, allows the user to create a profile page where he or she can list interests, favorite movies, and other personal information. There is also a section where the individual can post blogs, read other's blogs, and subscribe to friends' blogs. Following in Facebook's footsteps, MySpace recently added a feature in which a "news feed" allows a user to see updates of friends' pages. While the individual must have a "subscription" to the person's page in order for the update to appear on the news feed, it appears that MySpace is allowing users to become somewhat more voyeuristic in their online pursuits. Kelsey (2007) put forward seven reasons why teens are drawn to MySpace: separation, peer influence, role model influence, sex appeal, independence, experimentation, and a need for control.

With similar characteristics as MySpace, Facebook is a social networking site that is currently comprised of over 200 million active users (Facebook.com). Facebook was originally a space for college students, but has expanded to include general audiences, including high school students (Kelsey, 2007, p. xv). According to Mark Zuckerberg, the creator of the site, Facebook is a tool for maintaining social networks: "One of the things that Facebook does is it makes it really easy to just stay in touch with all these people" (CBS News.com). While some people appear to be using Facebook as a way to keep in

touch with friends, either long-distance or schoolmates, Facebook has also emerged as a novel way to simply spend time online. Yet, the relationship between teenagers and social networking sites appears to be a more complex social phenomenon, as teens seem motivated by pursuing new relationships, climbing the popularity ladder at school, and voyeurism.

Vander Veer (2008) provides a step-by-step guide for getting started with Facebook, explaining how to find and add friends, send messages, customize one's page, and maintain privacy. On Facebook, one can post a "status" which can serve as an update to friends. The status shows up as the user's name with a blank space for typing. One example of a status would be, "Jane is having coffee with her mom." Users can also post their relationship statuses on Facebook. This is an optional feature that allows the user to list themselves as "single," "in a relationship," "in an open relationship," "it's complicated," "engaged," or "married." Another function on Facebook allows the user to click a thumbs-up icon, which indicates that the user likes something. For example, if someone posts a photo and the user likes the photo, the user clicks the icon to indicate that they like the photo.

Vander Veer points out that Facebook differs from MySpace in that a user cannot change the background or general layout of a Facebook page, as is possible with MySpace. However, on Facebook users can add multiple "applications," which are small programs that run inside Facebook. Facebook provides the user with general applications such as "Events," where one can post different events that he or she is attending, and "Photos," where one posts default profile images and can create albums. In addition,

16

third-party developers have created other applications, such as "iLike," which lets you add music clips to your profile, or "Likeness," which lets you take personality quizzes and compares your scores to your friends' scores. MySpace recently added what they call "applications" as well. On one's profile page, there is a link for managing and getting "apps." Yet, while the actual applications that exist within these two sites may be similar, the process of getting the applications is different. With Facebook, one is usually "invited" by a friend to use an application, whereas on MySpace it seems that applications are sought out individually.

Personal social networking site pages contain text as well as audio-visual media, and vary from simple one-page lists of textual information to multiple pages of highly thematized and hyperlinked information (Lenhardt & Madden, 2007). Yet, profile pages are not often just text, even in their most rudimentary form. While text is written, profile pages are "assembled" (Lenhardt & Madden, 2007 p. 6). Chandler and Roberts-Young (1998) suggest that constructing a homepage is a process of "bricolage," which involves, "The inclusion of particular elements; the indirect allusion to others; the omission of what 'goes without saying' or of what 'is noticeable by its absence'; the adaptation of 'borrowings' by addition, deletion, substitution, or transposition; and finally arrangement: overall organization, sequencing and emphasis" (p. 6). The notion of "bricolage" suggests that profile page construction is a conscious and complex process that involves more than the writing of text. MySpace and Facebook "pages" serve as channels of expression for identity and, in addition, invite responses to that self-presentation, which in turn promotes the role of groups and relationships in identity presentation.

17

Livingstone (2002) suggests the changing media environment, including the rise of SNSs, is affecting adolescents. Livingstone notes three major changes in the media landscape: an increase in the amount of media in homes, the technological and social convergence of media, and the personalization of content. These changes in media have contributed to what Livingstone labels "teen bedroom culture," where teenagers spend more and more time alone in their rooms, either on their computers, creating their own electronic music, or using other means to individualize and utilize their bedrooms (2002). In addition, Livingstone suggests, the rise of the bedroom culture has been spurred by parental desires to keep teens at home and safe. Thus, because SNSs present such an effective way to examine identity, both because of the prevalence and their structure, a number of scholars have recently begun to look at the relationship between SNSs and identity.

SNSs are "montages of group and individual identities…that draw on and blend a variety of genres and sources that provide the raw material for [identity]" (Weber & Mitchell, 2007, p.39). It has been suggested that through SNSs identities are created through expressing and exploring one's own identity and by including others in one's own personal "identity work" and connecting one's identity to others (Weber & Mitchell, 2007). Weber and Mitchell (2007) use the term "collectivity" to describe the process of becoming part of a collaborative "participatory culture." By interacting with others, teens are able to form their identities. Echoing Gergen, Weber and Mitchell note that "[i]dentity processes are multifaceted and in flux" and are "constructed and deconstructed through a process of bricolage," that the authors call "identities-in-action" (p. 25).

18

In addition, Weber and Mitchell highlight the importance of new technology and digital media in teen's identity:

Like youth identities, new technologies keep changing, converging, morphing—seemingly always in flux, and like youth identities, young people's own digital productions facilitate a blending of media, genres, experimentations, modifications, and reiterations (p. 27).

Using international case studies, the authors claim that adolescents participating and interacting online exhibit "shared features of digital production that contribute to identities-in-action: the "constructedness" of production, the collective and social aspects of individual productions, the neglected but crucial element of embodiment, the reflexivity and negotiation involved in producing and consuming one's own images, [and] the creativity in media convergence" (p.25).

Stern (2007) also notes that identity is greatly influenced by new media technologies and may be something very different than the process in the physical word. For example, Stern writes that with new media "[s]ocial standing may be linked to [identity] in ways not seen in the concrete hallways of middle schools and high schools in past history" (p.38). Considering the important role instant messaging (IM) can play in identity, Stern says that IM is a space where teens "feel comfort in confrontation, freedom to use profanity, [experiment] with conversational tone, and play with linguistic and grammatical convention in varying ways" (p. 29). Stern argues that this "space" contributes to how teen girls make sense of and create their identities. In doing these things, Stern argues that girls can fake popularity and articulate social standing through IM. For example, a teenage girl can say she has been invited to social events, such as parties, in order to appear more popular, and in an online setting there is no one around to

deny the information. Stern claims that girls not only lie about their social calendars, but also can "elevate" their social standings by faking popularity online.

Pascoe (2007) also notes the increase in structured activities for teens has contributed to the need for teens to have ways to communicate with their friends outside of school, such as on the Internet. Pascoe estimates more than 90% of teens are online, and 55% participate in some sort of online social networking site, therefore underscoring the pervasiveness of digital communication in the lives of teenagers. Pascoe writes:

> The Internet affords an independence to teenagers that I don't think we've seen since the invention of the car. We saw the creation of teenage culture start in the early 1900s, and it coincided with the widespread use and adoption of cars, because for the first time, teens were really able to escape the purview of their parents and the home and go off with one another in these really independent ways (Pascoe, 2007, para. 18).

Just as the car did for an early generation, the Internet has made it possible for today's teens to display and exercise their independence. Pascoe notes that teens can have private space while they're still at home: "They're able to communicate with their friends and have an entire social life outside of the purview of their parents without actually having to leave the house" (Pascoe, 2007, para. 19). Pascoe and Boyd also argue that social networking sites have exploded in popularity among teens because teen culture is a social culture (Boyd, 2008; Pascoe, 2007), while Pascoe claims that being social is essentially a teenager's job (Pascoe, 2007).

Pascoe also suggests that teen culture and identity are closely related. Citing Erikson, Pascoe notes that adolescence is a time of "identity consolidation" (Pascoe, 2007, para. 10). Pascoe suggests that teens try on different identities and that social networking sites allow teens to display an identity "in a very dramatic and very succinct

way" (Pascoe, 2007, para. 10). Before the creation of social networking sites, teens had to actually say things about themselves, such as what types of music they listen to, or what their favorite movies are. Today, they can use social networking sites to say those things, and, Pascoe claims, "That really defines an identity in a really public way for them. In a way, the social networking sites are this digital representation of what we think of as adolescence" (Pascoe, 2007, para. 10).

Other research has tied the important role groups and relationships can play in identity to SNSs. For example, Boyd (2008) claims that SNSs enable teen users to connect with others and, through these connections teens create identities. Boyd states, "By interacting with unfamiliar others, teenagers are socialized into society" (2008, p. 137). Boyd also looks at how youth identities are formed and the implications of these online identities. While Boyd looks at identity as being a member of society, it is also important to look at how identity in others areas is different, such as identity as a member of a friendship circle or school group.

Parental relationships can also guide teens' use of SNSs and influence the presentation teen identity. Identity-creation in adolescents is influenced by the "renegotiation of authority relationships" (Gilligan, 1988, p. 145). Gilligan states, "To emerge victorious the adolescent must overcome the constraint of parental authority through a process of 'detachment'" (p. 145). The structure of SNSs suggests that they could represent a space that is free from parental constraints and thus an important place to achieve "detachment." Although research suggests that one perceived notion of successful parenting includes setting parameters regarding media use by children (Alters,

2004), at best this is often a "negotiated relationship" and, in the case of online media, may be influence by parents' ability to access and understand their child's online explorations.

Herring (2008) writes that a "generational digital divide" exists between teens and parents and suggests that parental interactions and opinions regarding the "Internet Generation" have had and will have effects on the ways in which media is regarded. Clark (2007) also suggests that the digital divide between generations influences "how [teens] conceptualize authority and relations within their family and beyond it" (p. 16). Thus, under Gilligan's theory, while the detachment from one's parents via MySpace or Facebook may significantly contribute to the identity building process in adolescents, this interaction must be viewed in light of online media. That is, according to Gilligan, the amount of separation the teens feel from their parents is related to their identity, which becomes especially relevant if teens see SNSs as their own space where parents are either unwelcome or not technologically capable of entering.

While some parents are adept at using and navigating the Internet, including social networking sites, other parents are not equipped with the technological know-how to understand and utilize these sites. Understanding how teens and parents interact regarding use of SNSs and the Internet in general helps underscore that parental guidance and authority may inhibit what information teens present to others on their SNS page. By not putting up certain information on their pages, teens are portraying a different identity than if they had put up certain information. Here, the lack of presentation is just as important as the presentation itself. Thus, it is valuable to acknowledge the importance of

the extent to which parents might influence the amount and type of information teens place on their pages.

In sum, a number of studies have looked at identity and the media. The research suggests that media often play a role in identity and online media can serve as a space for participating and creating unique norms. In addition, the research outlined above demonstrates that SNSs are an ideal format for the study of identity. Previous research on identity suggests that a community, such as an online community like a SNS, helps to shape the identities of its users. This underscores the importance of exploring how teens' identities differ on and offline and further, how online identity has contributed to the idea of fluid identities in teenagers, as Weber and Mitchell have argued.

The purpose of my research was to explore how social connectivity facilitated by participation in SNSs contributes to identity and why teens display certain identities online. Thus, the nature of my research focused on subjects and their behavior more than it focused on the technological medium. Like Lenhardt and Madden, my research also examined if in offline communication teens present similar or different identities to those they do online. But, my research sought to understand not only how teens' identities differ on-and offline, but also how the process helped teens negotiate dynamic identities in relation to the input they received from their peers.

Research Questions

Based on previous research, a number of broad research questions were developed. The main question that emerged from previous literature addressing SNSs and the question that will guide this study is:

RQ 1: How do online presentations of identity in social networking sites contribute to teens' identity?

In order to answer this question, I asked several questions that address the issue of teens' identity. Because a great deal of research has noted the important influence of groups on identity, this topic was also explored.

RQ 2: How do teens' perceptions of how other people see them impact what they put online?

Finally, the differences between online and offline identities was examined.

RQ 3: Do teens portray themselves differently online? If so, why might some people portray themselves differently in one venue than another, and what does that accomplish for them?

Overall, I examined what happens in the process of presenting themselves online and how this does or does not differ from offline representations of identity.

Methods and Limitations

Qualitative research was the optimal methodology for this study because it allowed me to ask in-depth questions with a small number of respondents, relying on anecdotal evidence to relay the intimate personal experiences of teenagers. Qualitative research is conducive to personal contact and face-to-face interviews with participants. In addition, because personality is related to identity, getting a sense of the respondents' personalities was crucial (Markham, 1998). Meeting with the participants face-to-face allowed me to get a better sense of the participants' personalities, whereas a quantitative study may have been more limiting in that regard. Also, as discussed earlier, respondents' perceptions of how they feel other people see them is important to identity. Thus, by asking questions about what images they are trying to portray through photos, videos, and other descriptions of themselves, I was able to explore how teens are aware of the perceptions of themselves by others. Group identity was also be explored in asking questions related to how respondents communicate with one another through SNSs, such as through the instant messaging features, picture comments, status updates, and wall posts. Also, qualitative research is helpful for getting past the one word "yes" and "no" answers that participants often give and allowed me to get a larger, more detailed picture of respondents' experiences.

In addition, as noted above, by meeting in person, I could better understand if the teen was shy, outgoing, funny, serious, or other aspects that may contribute to their personality. Markham, in her book "Life Online" conducted face-to-face interviews regarding teenagers' online lives, emphasizes the importance of in-person interviews. She says,

> Online, I can't see the other person's face, hear their tone of voice, or get any sense of who they are beyond the words I see scrolling up my own screen…Through their words and through my interaction with them, I could sense joy, anger, passion, bitterness, happiness (1998, p. 71).

While the main goal of the research addresses how teens see their own identities, meeting in person helped me, the interviewer, better understand their identities. Markham continues, "I'm convinced that the absence of body language, tone of voice, and other quintessential elements of conversation make a difference" (p. 72). Interviewing young people in person provided me with extra information about who they are, particularly since some of the interviews I conducted were with those they interact with regularly both online and off. Thus, I was able to study not only individuals, but people within their social groups, so as to better understand the role that the interactions between these people play in their online self-representations. In sum, because it was my goal to evaluate the stories of a few teenagers to create an interesting, in-depth look at the functions of SNSs in adolescent identity rather than to construct sweeping generalities that apply to all audiences, qualitative in-depth interviewing was the optimal research choice.

The goal of the research was to understand the process of identity in teens as related to Facebook and MySpace. The questions I developed helped guide the research

and explore the various aspects of how teens create and maintain identities in social networking sites. I divided the questions into five categories in order to address each of the topics that were laid out in the literature review. It should be noted that some of the questions overlapped in the second and third rounds of interviewing, and that new questions emerged as a result of both the information that was gathered during first round interviews as well information that was uncovered during the interviews. These questions served as a guide for the moderator, but new questions were added as a result of the answers given by participants. For the complete interview guide, see Appendix A.

The first section of questions sought to understand aspects of the teen's personality from his or her point of view as well as how he or she saw others' perceptions of his or her personality. In the next category of questions, I explored the influence of relationships on identity. Third, I looked at the role of friends and feedback with regards to how the teen's profile page changes over time. In the fourth category, I explored the role SNSs play in the lives of the teen, and how pervasive MySpace and Facebook were in his or her daily routines. Finally, I looked at parental interactions around SNSs and how this influenced the information that teens display on their profile pages.

To analyze the data, I used a constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In this method, I identified a series of categories that were of interest in the first transcript. Then, I looked at the next transcript to see if a topic fit into those categories, adding new categories as they emerged. When I added new categories, I went back through the transcripts again to determine if topics fit in the new categories that emerged from later transcripts. As I went through the transcripts in this way, I also kept in mind

that the categories I identified might be collapsed into fewer categories (e.g., perhaps by finding more expansive ways to describe what relates them or by finding a different way to describe the categories to more clearly differentiate them from one another) (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

In terms of writing, I used an observational mode of writing, in that I was present in the text just to the extent that I conducted the interviews and performed the analysis, but I was absent from the body of the text itself. This thesis is the story of the teens with whom I spoke, not my own story of how I encountered them, how they felt about me and how that may have influenced what they discussed. Drawing on Bird (2003), who writes, "The absence of the researcher (from the text) may actually allow us to capture a closer approximation of the natural context" (pp. 17-18).

Interviews and Participants

In order to explore the process of how teens are creating and maintaining identities in social networking sites, I conducted one-on-one interviews with teens in the Denver-Boulder area, ranging in age from 16 to 18-years-old. In total, I interviewed six teens, three females and three males. Five of the teens are in high school and one is a freshman in college. I used the snowball method to identify participants. I first identified one female and she recruited her boyfriend to be interviewed. I also interviewed one male high school student who referred me to his friend to be interviewed as well. The other two female interviewees I had previous contact with.

I conducted three interviews with each participant, except for one of the teens, who was interviewed twice, for a total of 17 interviews. I spread the interviews over the

course of several months in order to observe how the teens' online profiles changed over time, as well as to elicit stories about the creation and maintenance of their profiles. The first round of interviews took place over the last two weeks in December 2008, the second round of interviews occurred in February, 2009, and the final round of interviews were conducted toward the end of March, 2009. Participants were interviewed in-person at either their homes or at local coffee shops, depending on their preferences. As noted above, it was important to meet face-to-face with the interviewees in order to develop a relationship with them and gain their trust. In addition, because the topics that we discussed related to the teens' personalities, it was necessary to meet the teen in person to gain a sense of their personality.

The interviews lasted between 45-minutes to one hour and twenty minutes, and were audio taped. It was necessary to gain parental permission if the participant was under 18-years of age. Each teen signed an assent form, and the teens that are under 18-years-old have signed consent forms from their parents. These consent forms were approved by the IRB. I transcribed all of the interviews, and in the final analysis, all of the teens were given pseudonyms in order to keep the findings as confidential as possible.

While my sample is not representative, I wanted to have equal representations of both genders in order to understand the online experiences of both young women and young men.

Observations

In order to gather information about how often teens update their MySpace and Facebook profiles, as well as what kinds of information these teens are changing, I added

the participants as friends to my own SNSs and was able to see via the MySpace and Facebook news feed exactly what updates had occurred and what information had changed on a daily basis. As Markham stated in her study, she "needed to participate online to truly get at their understandings of their experiences" (1998, p. 62). In addition, this process of observing the teens online allowed me to delve deeper in the interview process to ask specific questions about why the teen chose to change certain information. Other benefits included the non-invasive nature of this process, as well as not needing to compensate the teens for this part of the research, as it requires no work for them. Overall, I believe that by keeping track of how the teens' pages change over the course of the interview period, I received a more inclusive understanding of what aspects of their profiles are dynamic.

The participants were informed of my intentions beforehand and I obtained IRB approval for this portion of the study as well. At the end of each of the first-round interviews, each teen was asked if it would be alright if I added him or her to my "friend list." All of the teens agreed without hesitation, and there was no indication that this was in any way uncomfortable for them. I explained to each of the teens that in the subsequent interviews I would like to ask questions related to what had changed about their profiles, such as pictures, profile songs, or status updates. None of the teens voiced any objection to this either.

I also took screen shots of the teens' pages once a month to observe how their pages had changed. Have their pictures, "top friends," interests, page layouts, privacy settings, or other information changed? While I did not include images in my thesis,

observing how the pages changed allowed for more probing interview questions. By examining the pages, my interview questions were more specific regarding what information had changed and enabled me to ask more questions regarding why these specific changes had taken place.

The goal of looking at the users' pages was not to gather quantifiable data for content or statistical analysis. While information about changes that occur is interesting, the overall goal of the screen shots and news feed updates were instead, to serve as a tool that increased the credibility and depth of the interviews.

Compensation

Teens were compensated using gift cards to Target. For the first interview, participants received a $30 gift card to Target. For the second interview they received another $30 gift card to Target, and after completion of the final interview they received a $60 gift card to Target, for a total of $120 for their participation in the three interviews. Because it is crucial that participants follow through from the first interview through the final interview, and in order to keep the respondents engaged and interested in the project, I increased the amount of compensation for the final interview. This was a total of $720 for the project. The financing for this project was provided by Dr. Lynn Clark's project, "Media, Meaning, and Work."

Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations. First, it is often seen as a limitation of qualitative interviews that participants may not be entirely truthful during the interview process. It is my belief that in order to elicit relevant information that was useful to my

study it was helpful to ask questions about the participants' friends. While participants might have been concerned with divulging too much information about their own online practices, respondents were often willing to talk about their friends' actions. I believe that asking questions about their friends was a valuable tool for understanding how teens communicated and "performed" online.

One way that I attempted to overcome obstacles was through the news feed, which gave me factual, daily information about the changes made to the user's profile. Another way I attempted to elicit accurate and thoughtful information was by allowing the user to set his/her own privacy settings, granting me access only to the information they were comfortable sharing with me.

Another limitation of this study was that the sample of teens was relatively small. While I have chosen a small sample so as to have a reasonable amount of data with which to work, it is also my belief that the depth of the interviews overcomes the limitation of quantity. Further, these interviews took place over the course of several months and this aided in the understanding of how teens' identities changed over the course of time, instead of simply providing a snapshot of their online lives.

Finally, the ideas of public and private space are convoluted, particularly in online settings, and these notions were beyond the scope of my study. As Vander Veer (2008) writes, public and private space gets blurred on Facebook, because the personal data that is included on one's profile "includes intimate details (like your views on politics, religion, and relationships)…is tied to a picture of you (your profile picture)" (p. 218). The Pew study discussed above "examines how teens understand their privacy through

several lenses: by looking at the choices that teens make to share or not to share information online, by examining what they share, by probing for the context in which they share it and by asking teens for their own assessment of their vulnerability" (Lenhardt & Madden, 2007, p. 1). Such research suggests that the line that divides public and private information is becoming less distinct with the growing popularity of SNSs. Users post pictures, personal information, and blogs that can be accessible to the public. While privacy settings are adjustable and vary among users, online privacy appears to be waning. Thus, while future research may need to advance these studies and address how teens understand SNSs as either public or private, and what the consequences of their understandings are, because it is unclear how teens view the public or private nature of SNS it was beyond the scope of this research to explore theoretical concepts related to public and private spaces.

Results

The interviews suggest that social networking sites are an important way for teens to create identity, express their identity and communicate with their peers. "You can express yourself as far as you want to and have fun. It's fun to see what other people are up to, and they get to see what you're up to," said Callie when asked what she liked about having a Facebook profile (2/11/09).

As noted, I interviewed six teens, three females and three males, ranging in age from 16 to 18-years-old. Five of the teens attend high school in Colorado, while one teen, Thomas, attends an out-of-state college. Two of the teens, Callie and Thomas, had been dating for over a year when I first interviewed them. Callie, a 17-year-old senior in high school is captain of her cheerleading team, involved in the forensics team, serves on the Youth Council at her school, takes part in advanced drama, and also volunteers on the Link Crew, which is a service her school provides to help incoming freshmen transition from middle school to high school. Heavily involved in her school, Callie describes herself as "funny, hardworking, and outgoing" (12/29/08). Callie says she is always the "instigator" among her friends, constantly encouraging them to go out and do "wild" or "silly" things (Callie, 12/19/08).

Callie's now ex-boyfriend, Thomas, is an 18-year-old freshman in college. He attends college out of state, and Callie and Thomas's relationship was long distance for a

significant amount of time while they dated. Recently Callie ended their relationship, but the two have remained friends and Callie plans to attend the same college Thomas is at in the fall. At the college, Thomas is part of the track team and participates in choir. A snowboarder and skateboarder, Thomas describes himself as "athletic and outgoing" (12/19/08). Thomas also sees himself as the "loving, caring" and "invested" boyfriend, and "prides [himself] as being one of the good guys out there" (12/19/08).

Like Thomas and Callie, Brit, a 16-years-old and junior in high school, was also in a relationship that ended during my study. Brit's boyfriend was not a part of the group of respondents. Brit is a member of her school's dance team, the Poms. She also works at a local health club part-time. Brit describes herself as "kind of on the quiet side" but "talkative when [she's] not shy" (12/20/08). As a result of her shyness, Brit says people sometimes get the impression that she's mean. Brit says most of the time she is happy to keep to herself rather than go out, and feels that people see this as her being anti-social or mean (12/20/08).

Mary is a 16-years-old sophomore in high school. She describes herself as "nice, funny, and a little bossy" (12/21/08). Mary, who has an after-school job at a restaurant that takes up much of her free time, says she doesn't concentrate on school as much as she probably should. "I'm a little wild sometimes," said Mary (12/21/08). One example of Mary's "wild" behavior, she said, was when she and her friends "dressed up as different animals and doorbell ditched with sugar cookies and…videotaped that" (Mary, 12/21/08). She says her friends would also describe her as outgoing and wild, but she also says that she has a more serious side that her friends don't always see. Mary says she's

35

usually a happy person, and wants her friends to only see the happy side of her personality. However, Mary uses writing, sometimes on MySpace, as a way to express her more "melancholy" feelings (Mary, 12/21/08).

I also interviewed two male teens who attend the same high school, and have been friends since childhood. Josh is an 18-year-old senior while Reede is 17-years-old and is a junior at the school. Josh, who is the only teen of those interviewed who does not have a Facebook page, is an avid snowboarder and golfer. He describes himself as a "sports enthusiast" (Josh, 12/27/08). Josh says he is "outgoing and determined" and is "hard working when [he's] into something" (12/27/08). Throughout the interviews, Josh noted that having fun in life is the most important thing to him.

Reede, one of Josh's best friends, is also involved in sports. He is on his school's lacrosse, cross country, and swim teams. While he says he can come across as a little shy at first, Reede revealed that he "just loves to talk to people" (12/28/08). Reede also said that his friends often describe him as being a combination of his two older brothers: "nerdy and outgoing" (12/28/08). Reede describes himself as smart and outgoing, and has nearly a thousand Facebook friends.

My interviews with these teens revealed that SNSs, especially Facebook, are playing an increasingly important role in teen identity. There were a number of areas my subjects discussed at great length. In particular, it appears that SNSs influence they way teens communicate with each other, define their relationships to significant others, attempt to control the way others perceive them. In addition, during the interviews the teens stated that they are consciously attempting to use SNSs as a way to express honest

reflections of their "real" identities. I will first discuss the importance of SNSs in teens'

experiences, focusing on romantic relationships and the idea of being "Facebook

official." Next, I explore how peers' perceptions impact what teens post online,

including pictures, status updates, profile songs, "top friends," and their parents'

influence on the decisions to post material online. Third, I discuss the ways teens use

MySpace and Facebook differently in terms of reflecting their identities. Finally, I

address about the teens transitioning from MySpace to Facebook.

In general, throughout the interviews, teens expressed the importance of SNSs,

particularly Facebook, in their everyday experiences. Teens said Facebook plays a

significant role in how romantic relationships are viewed, both in terms of their formation

and breakup. Also, it was shown that others' perceptions of the teens influence their self-

presentations, which further impacts the "real" identities teens attempt to portray online.

Teens also highlighted the uniqueness of Facebook as a SNS and how this site differs

from their experiences on MySpace.

Importance of SNSs

In order to understand how online presentations of identity in social networking

sites contribute to teens' identities, it was necessary to explore how often teens use SNSs,

how they use SNSs, and how important SNSs are in the lives of teens. I specifically

looked at their activities on two SNSs: Facebook and MySpace. In the first round of

interviews, all participants had a MySpace page, and all but one of the teens had a

Facebook page. However, while all of the teens had MySpace profiles, they revealed that

MySpace was "beginning to lose its flair" (Callie, 12/19/08). Both Reede and Callie said they hadn't checked their MySpace pages in weeks, or possibly months.

The final round of interviews with the teens showed the increasing importance of Facebook in their day-to-day experiences, as well as the decreasing relevance of MySpace. Reede closed his MySpace account entirely, while Callie and Thomas said they would keep their accounts but do not plan on using MySpace anymore. Brit and Mary said they were using MySpace less and less, and had not been to the website in weeks. However, all of the teens except for Josh said they were using Facebook more than when I had first interviewed them. While Josh said he checks his MySpace page about once a day on his phone, he has not added or changed any information on his page in years.

My interviews found that the teens check SNSs frequently. While MySpace use is declining amongst my subjects, most of the teens said they were on Facebook regularly, checking their pages many times a day. For example, Reede uses his iPhone to check his Facebook page and update his status throughout the day. The teens also indicated that in addition to "checking" their Facebook pages during the day, they often leave the Web site up while doing other activities, Thomas, for example, said he checked his Facebook page a few times throughout the day, and then kept his page open most of the evening. Callie echoed Thomas saying, "I usually have it up when I'm doing homework" (12/19/08). When asked about his use of MySpace and Facebook, Thomas said he only logs on to MySpace to check for comments from friends and to take part in a mobster game his friends play. Thomas said:

MySpace used to be a lot more, to be honest. The only time I ever get on is, this is going to sound nerdy, but I do the Mobsters application so I just go on there to check all my statuses to do submissions, and if I see a comment I'll check my profile, but otherwise, it's probably like 10-15 minutes a day. But Facebook I'll probably stay on while I'm doing homework and everything like that. If someone wants to get a hold of me I'll hear this "doodilydoo." I'm on FB a lot more than I'm on MySpace. I used to be on MySpace a lot more. (12/19/08)

The teens interviewed engage in a wide range of activities on SNSs. For example, they update their status, relationship status, post pictures, instant messaging, and use other site-specific activities. However, it is extremely important to note that the vast majority of these activities center on communicating with friends. For example, all of the teens interviewed said they utilize the instant messaging function to immediately communicate with friends. Most of the teens said this allows them to talk to friends whom they see everyday, as well as communicate with friends who they do not see regularly. As discussed below, many of the subjects rely heavily on SNSs during the summer to stay in touch with friends they don't see as well as keep up on what is happening. In addition to communicating via instant messaging, teens also use Facebook to communicate through email messages.

As Thomas suggested, one reason teens are using Facebook is that it allows them to stay in contact with friends at school, as well as friends who live in other states or outside of the country. When asked if he feels connected with his friends through Facebook, Reede said, "Oh definitely. I love Facebook and the fact that I can talk with anybody literally anytime I want" (12/28/08). Reede said he felt like he was part of the "social loop" as a result of being on Facebook more than more interpersonal forms of communication, such as texting. According to this is because of the group aspects of

SNSs. "[W]hen you're texting you can tell what a specific person is doing, but when you're on Facebook everyone is connected in one way or another," said Reede (12/28/08).

Thomas said he especially likes the way Facebook enables him to keep in contact with his friends through the Instant Messenger (IM) function. "I like the fact you can talk to someone instead of [email] them. I mean, you can talk to them quicker, all that good stuff. I mean that's basically the main thing for me" (Thomas, 3/27/09).

Reede said that his life would be a lot different if he didn't have a Facebook page, because he wouldn't communicate with as many people. "I guess [I wouldn't have] stuff to talk about at school. Then over the summer I wouldn't talk to nearly as many people 'cuz I use Facebook to get in touch with people if I don't have their numbers and I want to hang out with them. I'll always use Facebook," he said (3/27/09).

Similar to Reede and Thomas, Brit said she uses Facebook as a way to get in touch with her friends. "I use Facebook a little more, now that you have the chat option, so it's like IMing people on Facebook. So it's like 2 or 3 hours [a day]" (Brit, 12/20/08). Also, Brit says Facebook is a way to communicate with friends to find out events that are happening, such as school events or parties. When asked how she would feel if she was forced to delete her Facebook page, Brit said she would feel "alone." "People don't talk on the phone as much, they talk over the computer, like there's texting but it's not the same 'cuz you can multitask on the computer and talk to more than one person," she said (Brit, 12/20/08). Brit indicated that the ability to network and communicate with friends is one of the most important aspects of SNSs. When I asked Brit if she would be upset

about losing all of the personal information on her page, like photos, wall posts, and applications, she replied "No. I would just feel like I'd lost all contact with civilization cause I'd be like…[only spending time with] family…woo hoo. That's how like stuff gets spread through the Internet now…like parties. Like there's invitations to events now and stuff like that" (Brit, 12/20/08). Thus, for Brit Facebook's most important function is its ability to facilitate communication.

Callie also thought Facebook was a good way to communicate with friends. Like Reede, Callie said she feels like her Facebook page allows her to be a larger part of the social loop at her school. Callie keeps in touch with her friends through Facebook.

> For the most, I use [Facebook] to keep up with what everybody's doing and what's going in the world, the social world. Like especially during midterms everybody falls out of place with everybody and like during break 'cuz everybody goes every which way 'cuz somebody's always studying for something. It's kinda helpful to talk to people. (12/19/08)

In addition, like the other teens in this research, Callie uses the IM function to communicate with her friends.

The frequent use of Facebook as well as the importance of Facebook as a way to get information and stay in the social loop during both during the school year and summer vacation exemplifies the pervasiveness of SNS in the teens' lives. Another way this is displayed is in the information the teens share and receive through Facebook, most evident with regards to relationships.

Romantic Relationships

In order to show others that they are either single or dating someone, Facebook allows users to post their relationship status. On the site, there is a box you can check that

says "single" or "in a relationship." You can also post a link to a person's page if you list yourself as in a relationship with that person. Furthermore, when you change statuses, for example going from "in a relationship" to "single," this information appears on your friends' pages, as part of their "news feed." The news feed is a list of updates about friends' activities online, such as relationship status changes, status updates, and new pictures.

One of the ways teens described the importance of Facebook in their lives was through their relationship experiences. They talked about the idea of listing their own status as in a relationship or single, as well as seeing their friends change their relationship statuses. Although Reede is currently not dating anyone and is listed as single on his Facebook page, he previously had a girlfriend and listed himself as in a relationship at that time. When asked how long he and his girlfriend had been dating before he changed his status to "in a relationship," Reede replied, "It was pretty sudden after we started dating. At our school, they call it Facebook official. Like you aren't actually dating until you're Facebook official, people kind of take it seriously" (Reede, 2/17/09). Josh, who attends the same school as Reede, also emphasized how important it was to list yourself as "in a relationship" when dating, but suggested it was more important to girls. In addition, according to Josh it was even more significant when a girl changed her status from in a relationship to single.

> Oh yeah it's like a big deal. I've heard some of my friends say it's not official until it's on Facebook or some dumb stuff like that. It's more of a definite girl thing. It's like when a girl posts "Oh, we just broke up," it spreads like fire. It is nuts. (3/30/09)

Mary, who does not attend school with Josh and Reede had also heard the term Facebook official. Because Mary is single, I asked if her friends who were in relationships listed themselves as such. "Yeah, immediately," she said. "And that's how you know if you someone's broken up. That tells you before they do" (Mary, 1/30/09). Thus, like Josh, she suggested that it was an important way to notify others of being in a relationship and when a relationship had ended.

It is not only important to the two people who are in the relationship to show their commitment to each other by listing themselves as "in a relationship." It is also important with regards to how others view the relationship. To my subjects, the status is a reflection of that person's perception of the state of the relationship and a way to demonstrate and communicate to others' the seriousness of the relationship. Brit elaborated on this idea in her discussion of being "Facebook official." When asked if she had heard the term, Brit said:

> Yeah, 'cuz if it's not on Facebook you can check and be like, it doesn't say he's single or dating anyone, it just doesn't say anything, so probably available. Maybe not, you don't know. But if it says in a relationship, it's like, ok [he's] off limits. And plus it's kind of fun if they have Facebook too you can say in a relationship with so and so. It's pretty cool. (3/27/09)

Asked if she would feel weird if she was dating a guy and he didn't have his status as "in a relationship." Brit stated, "Yes! I would log on and change that. Well *I* wouldn't, but I'd make him change it" (3/27/09).

Callie, who had just broken up with her boyfriend Thomas at the time of the third interview, talked about one instance where her friend's Facebook relationship status was

43

brought up in an offline conversation. When asked if she was familiar with the term

Facebook official, Callie stated:

> People do say that. I just had… one of my friends broke up with his girlfriend and he hasn't changed his status yet, and so I was talking to another person who was like, "Yeah, he just broke up with his girlfriend," and this other person was like, "Really, his Facebook doesn't say that." I was like, "Really, you're going to check that. You're going to trust Facebook as his word?" (3/27/09)

While Callie may not have seen Facebook as the be-all-end-all of relationship

status declarations, her story reveals that her peers do take a SNS relationship status into

account when discussing friends. In addition, on follow up questions, she revealed that

Facebook relationship status was at least somewhat important to her. When asked if it

would it matter if she was in a relationship with someone and they listed themselves as

single, Callie replied that it depended on how long the she had been in the relationship.

She said, "If it's like the start of the relationship. I don't expect them to change it the first

day, but if it gets around like 6 months, then it's like okay, you have commitment issues,

let's talk about that" (Callie, 3/27/09).

In addition to these general questions, because three of the six teens interviewed

were dating someone when the project began, but were not by the third round of

interviews, an excellent opportunity to further explore the importance of relationship

status function of Facebook was presented. As noted above, two of my subjects, Thomas

and Callie, were dating when the project began. However, during the course of the

interviews, the two decided to end their yearlong, long-distance relationship. Both had

listed themselves as in a relationship with the other on their Facebook pages and both

changed their status to single when the relationship ended. Highlighting the importance

of Facebook in the lives of teens, Callie talked about the transition from being in a relationship to single on Facebook. She stated,

> I didn't tell anyone verbally that we broke up, so everyone I knew learned from Facebook. And so it was just kind of funny, 'cuz I didn't feel the need to tell anybody. They didn't know who he was in the first place. So, I went the next day at school and everyone was like oh my god you guys broke up, and I'm like, really, I didn't tell you. (3/27/09)

In addition to Callie's own experience, Josh had found out about one of his friend's breakups over Facebook.

> One of my friends and his girlfriend broke up, and his sister texted him like 20 minutes after it was official, and was like, "She put it on her Facebook that you two weren't dating anymore," and it's kind of like, "What?" I think news travels a lot faster on Facebook than it does any way else. Definitely. 'Cuz people probably everyday check Facebook. At least twice a day. (3/30/09)

While Josh described the situation in terms of how quickly the information about the breakup had spread, one of the common threads through Callie and Josh's experience is the way they described how people reacted to the breakup, which are disclosed via Facebook.

In addition to offline feedback from peers about breakups, relationship statuses can also spur online conversations. Mary discussed this when she described her feelings about the relationship status function in general. She stated, "The only thing I don't like is that you can comment on it. My friend broke up with her boyfriend and it was like her friends and his friends were saying rude things to each other on the comments on the relationship status. And both of them were obviously hurt that they'd just broke up" (Mary, 3/15/09).

45

While Mary's experience was second-hand, in that she was viewing a conversation about a relationship status, Callie, Thomas, and Brit all had the experience of having conversations appear on their own pages after their relationship statuses were changed. Brit immediately listed herself as "single" after her boyfriend ended their relationship. After only a few hours of being listed as single, Brit received several comments from friends about her relationship status.

> Pretty much what happened was one of his best friends doesn't like me 'cuz I don't like him because he screwed over my friend…He clicked that he liked it, and my best friend who he screwed over got all protective and now started arguing. And I commented once and I was like you guys chill. It's not that big of a deal. (3/27/09)

The reaction from friends and people she hardly knew was overwhelming for Brit. She said she had not expected the online feedback to be so large. In addition, she was surprised when friends she had at work mentioned her breakup to her in offline conversations. One person, who Brit was not close with, told her that "she could do better" than the boy she had been dating (3/27/09). Interestingly, Brit was surprised when this person mentioned her breakup, because while she was friends on Facebook with the individual, Brit said she was not particularly close with this person.

Like Brit, Thomas and Callie endured online comments from peers after their breakup. While the comments appeared on Callie's page, Thomas had a stronger reaction to the incident. Thomas and Callie explained that after she had listed herself as single, a friend of hers "liked" her status. Callie's page then indicated the action, along with a picture of a thumbs-up. Offended by Callie's friend's reaction to their breakup, Thomas became upset. Thomas described the situation:

On the whole relationship status with Callie. My good Lord, some people that go to [her school]…well, two people commented that they liked it. Just clicked on like the thumbs up. One guy did it on accident. But this other guy was like, "I hope she breaks up with you for good." And I'm just like, "You are a complete and total asshole." And then my friend …got in on it and he was like, "You know what? You mess with Thomas you mess with me." And I'm like, "Calm it down, calm it down. I can take care of this myself if it turns violent." (3/27/09)

What started as an online conversation could have turned into and offline confrontation, although Callie was eventually able to diffuse the confrontation through her own status updates.

When further probed about his feeling regarding the incident, Thomas indicated that while he didn't like the relationship status feature on Facebook, he didn't feel he had the choice to not use it.

To be honest, I really don't like the status thing. I think it's stupid. People that know you already know you're in a relationship, a meaningful one. If that breaks up, it breaks up. But it's so expected of you these days to have a relationship thing on it, to have single or married, or in a relationship, in an open relationship, all that stuff. And it's just so expected. (3/27/09)

"How do you know it's expected?" I inquired.

Because I kind of did the thing where I said I don't want to discuss that and I clicked on the box that says don't show this, and people are like Thomas are you single? And people that I barely know are like, what are you hiding? I'm like, "Are you kidding me? This is so stupid." (3/27/09)

The idea of it being expected to post your status illustrates how others' perceptions influence what information teens post online with regards to relationships. After the analyzing the interviews, it became clear that this was a major factor in determining what teens post online and this theme is developed in the next section, which focuses on the importance of others' perceptions in terms of what information teens post,

including pictures, status updates, profile songs, "top friends," and total number of friends. In addition, the research indicates that parents influence what teens post online.

Influences of Others' Perceptions

On Facebook and MySpace, teens have a number of means for expressing their personal styles, moods, and which ultimately reflect their identities. When asked what kinds of things on her profiles truly reflect her personality, Brit said, "Pictures, music, and then like favorite movies and favorite books. Stuff like that" (12/20/08). The topic of pictures was an especially rich area that made it clear that teens are very concerned with others' perceptions of their identities.

When asked specifically about pictures, many of the subjects clearly indicated they see them as representations and reflections of their identity. Brit, who is part of her school's dance team, the Poms, describes herself as a goofball. She explained that her pictures capture that aspect of her identity:

> I have a tendency of being a little bit of a goofball sometimes and there's a picture of me from freshman year where I just look like a complete fool. I'm wearing one of those ski masks and star glasses. And I have like Poms pictures, and just pictures of friends and stuff. (Brit, 12/20/08)

Further describing how pictures capture and communicate her identity, Brit said, "I think they like, show the ability to have fun but at the same time, like, holding back a little bit. All the pictures, like the cutesy pictures, not like, full on like scandalous cause that's just gross, but the like classy ones [reflect that]" (12/20/08). She said that together the individual pictures of her create a true reflection of her identity.

While Brit statements reveal her belief that pictures can truly reflect a teen's identity and hint at her concern over how others see them, it became clear throughout the

48

interviews that the images and messages teens portray on their profile pages are highly influenced by how they think others will perceive them. Teens often said that they were reacting to feedback from others about the media they post, which influenced what images were retained on their profile pages. According to Callie, she tries to post photos to her SNS that will make her seem approachable to others. For example, Callie said her profile picture "shows that I'm approachable. I try to make it seem like I'm approachable. I just put up fun pictures and let people know that I'm pretty easy going" (3/27/09). Thus, she is taking into consideration others' perceptions of what it means to look approachable and is purposefully posting images she believes will reflect this to others. Callie interviews also demonstrate her feeling that SNSs have the ability to portray aspects of her identity that might not be present in offline settings.

In another example of how she uses photos to shape her identity and others' perceptions of her, Callie, who is captain of her high school's cheerleading squad, said the pictures of her in cheerleading uniforms were a reflection of both her and the school. However, while Callie posted several pictures of herself in her cheerleading uniform, at cheerleading meets, and with her cheerleader comrades, Callie also wanted to make sure that the image of "Callie-as-cheerleader" was not the only identity being portrayed to others. Because of the negative stereotypes sometimes associated with high school cheerleaders, Callie was very aware of how others would view the images she chose to display on her profile page. Callie explained that she believed the image of the cheerleader is "botched" and she wanted to avoid being seen solely in that context. Callie said she thinks boys may see her as "easy" or "loose" based on her cheer pictures.

I took down a lot of my cheerleading stuff. It's not like the best thing to be like, "I'm a cheerleader look at me, I'm so fabulous and cheerleading's just amazing." I'm like, you all know who I am, so, that sounds shallow again. A lot of people befriend you because they think you're a cheerleader and they think …a lot of guys think, "Oh you're easy"…'cuz the image of the cheerleader is always botched. I try to not have it get any worse. (12/19/08)

With regard to her pictures, Callie was very clear that she was attempting to cultivate a very carefully crafted image. While she wanted to be viewed as fun loving, she was very clear that she did not want to be viewed as "skanky." Callie said:

I have like fun pictures where I'm like fun loving but not to the point where it's like skank pictures, you don't want to put any of those on. So I like (that) I have pictures of me doing funny, unpredictable things. (12/19/08)

In another instance, Callie describes a specific photo that she was hesitant to display on her Facebook page for fear of the "skank" image. Demonstrating how many different individuals' perceptions of her she was taking into consideration Callie suggested she was concerned about the picture for several reasons.

There was a photo where we were stretching and I had my foot on her shoulder, like that's how we stretch, and I thought it was a really funny picture cause we were like making a face and we just looked so grumpy and it's morning practice, and then I looked at it and was like that looks kinda slutty, I don't want to put that on there. We really represent the school, like I said. And if my coach finds something really inappropriate, cuz she also has a profile to keep track of us, she can take us off the squad or bench us. And especially since I'm captain, I don't want the younger impressionable freshman to look at that and be like, "Oh, let's be like that, too." (12/19/08)

In this story, Callie explains that it is not only the perceptions of boys she is concerned with, but also her coach's and younger students' and incoming cheerleaders' perceptions of her. Worried about being perceived as slutty, Callie avoided putting up a photo that she thinks others will see as inappropriate. While Callie eventually decided to post this

particular image on her profile, the process was highly influenced by how she felt others

would perceive her.

In addition to her own experience, Callie described a situation in which one of her

friends was misjudged based on pictures she posted on Facebook. Callie suggested that

taken together, photos posted by her friend and her friend's reputation for having

numerous boyfriends combined to create a false image of her friend. When asked about

the downsides of having a Facebook, Callie said:

> [The biggest downside is] probably that people can see you and misinterpret who
> you are. 'Cuz one person can think, "Oh, [she] look[s] so fun loving," and another
> person could think, "Wow, she looks so slutty." One of my friends did a modeling
> shoot, but it was just her friend with a camera, and she posted a couple of pictures
> that were like…hmmm…They thought since she had gone through a few
> boyfriends, they started putting the pictures with all the boyfriends she had
> together and…you know (2/11/09).

Thus, as a result of her belief about her peers' perceptions and her experiences with a

friend's picture being misinterpreted, Callie is very deliberate and careful about what she

posts on her profile. She chooses what images to post and what images not to post based

on her conceptions of how others will view her.

Thomas told a similar story about how others' perceptions impact what pictures

he puts on his profile. He said, "I think there's a pressure to put those manly photos of

you without a shirt on there. And I don't want to do that. I used to do that" (1/20/09).

While Callie hadn't received direct feedback about her cheerleading images, Thomas

received comments directly from his friends that influenced his decision to stop posting

and also remove pictures from his profile. When asked why he stopped posting pictures

of himself without his shirt on, Thomas replied:

I started hearing from a lot of people that they thought I was cocky and everything like that, and I didn't want to portray that image. Like they were saying, "Thomas you have one to many mirror shots, you're so vain." And I don't want that. (1/30/09)

Thomas was concerned about the arrogant, self-concerned image he was portraying, or at least with others' perceptions that these photos were arrogant, and changed his profile pictures.

On Josh's MySpace page, he only has three pictures posted, one of which is of a professional snowboarder. The other two pictures are at least four years old. Josh thinks these pictures continue to reflect his identity, because he hasn't changed since he put them up. He said, "I've had that picture since I started MySpace, like the beginning of high school. I think it just says I'm a big goofball, and I don't care what other people think. I just love to have fun in life" (Josh, 2/13/09). However, while Josh says that he doesn't care what other people think—or at the very least he wants to present that image to others—when probed about what his pictures say about him, Josh revealed that his peers' views of him influence what he posts. Josh said that his MySpace truly reflects his identity because "that's who I am. I'm not trying to be like I have a 4.0 GPA or something I'm not, or like I'm a crazy athlete that's going to play in college. I just want to portray who I am in a nutshell" (2/13/09). Thus, even though Josh stated he wasn't concerned with what others thought of him, he clearly is trying to present an image of himself to others that he felt was true to his identity—someone who doesn't care what others think. Here, Josh reveals that by not posting something that he feels will give others an incorrect impression, he is taking into account how he thinks others will view him based on his SNS page.

52

In addition to posting pictures, another aspect of SNSs that demonstrate teens' concerns over others perceptions, are status updates. For the teens I talked with, status updates ranged from simple statements about what activity the teen was engaged in at the moment, to song lyrics or silly or ironic comments. In addition, status updates were often used as a way to get a reaction from friends. Both Brit and Thomas shared stories about posting status updates that they hoped would garner reactions from others.

Brit explained that after she was dumped by her boyfriend, she was very upset and wanted to reflect this in her status update. While Brit removed her first status update that was designed to express her anger and instead used her status as a passive-aggressive attempt to get a reaction from her ex-boyfriend. After changing her relationship status to single, she also posted a status update that read, "Brit hopes you choke on your own bile" (3/27/09). Brit posted the status hoping that her ex-boyfriend would read it and revealed that he would know that it was directed at him. Then, upon reconsideration, Brit deleted the status update. When asked about her decision, Brit said, "I decided I wasn't going to be all dramatic and ask for sympathy over Facebook. So I decided to make him regret it and put like happy statuses" (3/27/09). When I asked if she thought he saw her happy status messages, Brit said, "I hope so. Just to make him mad" (3/27/09). Obviously, Brit was emotionally reacting to an upsetting situation and used Facebook as a cathartic tool. However, her story also reveals that her status updates clearly took into consideration how her ex-boyfriend would perceive her emotional status post-breakup and were attempts to manage those perceptions.

53

Like Brit, Thomas said he had once posted a status update in order to get a reaction from friends. However, whereas Brit was left to hope her ex-boyfriend saw her updates, Thomas's story demonstrates that through Facebook teens can receive almost instantaneous feedback from friends and know that their message is getting through. While Brit used her status to communicate with her ex-boyfriend, Thomas used his to let his friends know he was returning to training. During our second interview Thomas said, "Yesterday, my last post was '[Thomas] is really sore,' and I was kind of wanting my friends from cross-country to see that I had starting running again" (1/30/09). When asked if anyone had commented on his status, Thomas said, "Yeah, a lot of my track friends were like, 'Been running again, huh?' And I was like, 'yeah, coming back from that injury'" (1/30/09). While both situations exemplify how status updates are a communication tool unlike Brit, Thomas was able to learn that his message was received and invoked a reaction. Thus, Facebook is a communication device that can provide near instant feedback from peers.

In addition to pictures and status updates, another way teens express their identities is through their profile song. Available on MySpace, but not Facebook, a profile song appears on the person's profile page and plays when the profile is opened. The teens with whom I spoke thought the profile song helps reflect one's identity. For example, when asked about how she felt about the profile song, Brit said:

> I think it definitely reflects [your mood and your identity], like it's dependent on your mood. Like if you're not happy at the time, you're not going to put like happy music. But at the same time I think it reflects who you are as a person. If you're the kind of person who's into like acoustic music or techno you can show that through whatever your music plays and that says more about your personality than if you were into hard rock or something. (3/27/09)

54

Josh, who has a profile song by a popular black hip-hop artist on his page, says that his choice of songs tells people something about his identity and exemplifies the degree to which he considers how others will view him based on his song choice. In addition, Josh reveals that his profile song expresses his personality. Josh said:

> They probably think you can just come up and talk to me, that I'm not as uptight as some people. Overall I just like to have fun and live life to the fullest. I think they think I'm contemporary with my music and stay up with the pop culture. (2/13/09)

In several interviews, Josh described himself as someone who wants to have fun and live life to the fullest. By posting this profile song, he believes others will see him as fun loving, as well.

Like Josh, Reede says that a profile song "says a lot about a person" (Reede, 2/17/09). Further, like Brit, Reede believes the genre of music reveals aspects of your identity to others and even stated that he might not think he could be friends with someone based on their choice of song. When asked what exactly a profile song says about someone, Reede said:

> I guess it depends on the genre. If it's angry, [then it's a] dark kind of person. Then that's not my kind of person, that's not someone I'd talk to. But if it's more like popular music, like stuff you'd hear on the radio, [they are] more likely to be my friend. (2/17/09)

For Reede, the profile song said so much about someone's personality that he would be able to tell if he would want to be friends with that person.

> I mean if you're listening to the popular stuff, whether you like it or you want other people to listen to it, it says you're with the times…I'd say they relate to me more. A lot of times if people listen to a genre of music I can't stand, odds are I don't like them. I don't why that works. (Reede, 2/17/09)

All of the teens said a profile song was a powerful reflection of identity in some way, particularly related to mood. Yet, as with so many aspects of SNS, this also appears to be a response to how teens think others' will perceive them. Another example of the influence others exert on teen identity is MySpace's "Top Friends" function.

On MySpace, teens have a profile page where they can display their top friends. One can display anywhere between one and 40 friends. The profile pictures of each of the people selected to be a top friend appears on one's profile page in an area labeled "Top Friends." Interviews with the teens revealed that the top friends feature was a way of communicating to others that the friend was one of the most important persons in their lives. In addition, teens can use the feature to communicate their displeasure with a friend. Reede said, "I used to [change my top friends] when I actually cared more about MySpace. Honestly if someone was making me mad they'd go to the bottom of my top friends. And I guess if someone I didn't talk to a lot I'd replace them with a newer friend" (12/28/08).

Yet, another way teens use the top friends function is to try to portray themselves as having more friends, or having more popular friends. Callie describes her experience using the top friends feature to convince others she was popular:

> Way back before I had Facebook. You know, a year ago. I used to use it kind of a lot. I did it because I was still kind of trying to figure out who I was like in high school and so I would put the friends that more people knew so that they thought that I knew a lot of people that knew a lot of people… I was changing friend groups and the friends that I had before I kind of fell out of tabs with so I was like lost. I didn't really have any close friends anymore, so I was transitioning through that. So I began to get more friends so I was like maybe I'll show that these are my friends now. (2/11/09)

56

Thus, for Callie, the top friends feature was away for her to portray a popular identity to others. This identity was influenced by how she thought others at her school would perceive her based on who she listed as her friends. Callie believed that she could become part of different friend circles by portraying herself online as having more friends from that circle.

While having close friends listed as top friends was one way to portray their identities, teens also said the total number of friends a person has is a reflection of identity. While all of the teens said having at least a few hundred friends was not unusual, almost all of the teens I talked to said that people who have a tremendous amount of Facebook or MySpace friends are usually just trying to appear popular. The teens said they often added people from their high school to their friends list, even if they would not consider that person a friend offline. When asked if having a large number of friends actually makes someone appear more popular, Thomas responded, "No. We actually used to call them MySpace or Facebook whores. I'm just like, 'Why do you have that many friends?' You do not talk to all of them, I know you don't. I mean, I barely talk to my 200 friends" (3/27/09). All of the teens agreed that having an unrealistic number of friends did not make them think that person was more popular.

In addition to peers' perceptions of teens influencing their online profile, parents play a role in what information teens choose to post on their SNS pages. Most teens said their parents either had access to their MySpace or Facebook accounts or, if their parents did not have access to their pages, the teens said they would willingly show their parents their online profiles.

Three of the teens with whom I spoke, Reede, Mary, and Brit, had parents who were also on Facebook. Reede and Mary were both friends with their parents on Facebook, while Brit was not. For Brit, Facebook was a place for her to communicate with her friends, not with her parents. "I just, don't want them lurking on me 'cuz I know they would. Maybe when I'm in college but right now there's stuff I don't really want them to see," she said (12/20/08).

However, all the other teens interviewed for the project said they were fine with showing their parents their Facebook and MySpace pages. Thomas, whose dad has a MySpace page, said he was open with his parents and shares the information that is on his pages. Thomas was comfortable with his parents both seeing his profile and having access to more private aspects of his profile, such as messages, which could only be opened using his password. When asked if his parents had access to his MySpace page, Thomas said:

> My parents say, "Thomas, show me what's on your MySpace." And I go, "Ok there you go." They actually have access to my MySpace, I gave them my account and email sign in and my password and said, "Whatever you want to do I don't care." I'm very open with my parents. (12/19/08)

For Thomas, his parents did not influence the images he was putting on Facebook, because he felt like images that were offensive to his parents wouldn't likely exist. When probed further about his parents' influence on his page, Thomas said he didn't feel they had a significant influence because he would not post material that would be offensive, regardless of if his parents could see it.

> I never really think about it that way, because if I'm putting something up that my dad doesn't approve of, it's probably something I wouldn't do in the first place…. I was raised with a certain set of values, and those values represent what my dad

and mom think is right, so that influences what I do. So if I'm not taking shots out of a beer bong there's not going to be pictures of it to put on Facebook. (Thomas, 1/30/09).

Reede is also friends with one of his parents on Facebook and MySpace. "My mom made [Facebook and MySpace pages]. I don't know why. It wasn't to check up on [me], I mean, she trusts [me]. It's not a big deal to her. She just made one for fun" (Reede, 12/27/08). Reede is friends with his mother on both MySpace and Facebook, and told me that he actually posted a video of her snoring on his Facebook. "Did your mom know about that?" I asked. "Yeah, she posted one of me snoring the other day. It was pretty good," he said (3/27/09).

When asked about how comfortable he was with his mother having access to his Facebook and MySpace profiles, Reede responded differently than Thomas. Whereas Thomas felt he was not engaging in anything inappropriate in the first place, therefore there would be no evidence of that, Reede said he chose not to put anything incriminating on his pages. "I'm not gonna say I'm a good kid. Like I'll do bad stuff, but I'm not going put it on my Facebook or MySpace. If I don't have anything bad on there, then what can she get mad at me for?" he said (Reede, 12/28/08). Overall, both Reede and Thomas were comfortable having their parents view their pages. However, whereas Thomas indicated he didn't do things his parents might find offense, Reede's chose not to post certain things that his parents would consider "bad." Thus, both profiles were influenced directly or indirectly by the teens' perceptions of what a parent might find inappropriate.

In contrast, neither Josh's nor Callie's parents are on Facebook or MySpace. Both indicated that their parents weren't technologically savvy enough to create or understand

SNSs. Callie said her mother would not have the technological know-how to create a

SNS profile page. "My mom doesn't even know how to work a phone…She still gets

stuck with the Internet," she said (12/19/08). When asked if he thought his parents knew

how to get onto Facebook and MySpace, Josh said, "No. They wouldn't even know

where to begin. They don't even know how to turn on their cell phones" (12/27/08).

Yet, even though Josh's parents don't see his MySpace profile, they still have an

influence over what information he posts. When asked about his parents' influence on his

postings, Josh said:

> It probably makes me not think about things so much, but at the same time, it's
> like my MySpace page is kind of who I am, so I wouldn't be that nervous if they
> were to see it… Because what I put on it resembles like interests that I like, the
> hobbies that I like, the movies that I like. I don't know, it's just me telling all my
> friends what I like. (12/27/08)

However, while Josh acknowledges that his parents would not be offended by his profile,

he does say that he thinks less about the information he puts online as a result of their

inability to monitor his page. Therefore information teens post, or choose not to post, is

influenced by their perceptions of the opinions of their parents as well as their peers, even

in situations where parents are not able to monitor their children's SNSs.

In sum, concerns over how they will be perceived by others—both friends and

parents—greatly influence what they post on their online profiles. Images, status updates,

profile songs, and friend displays are all influenced by how teens feel others view them.

As discussed below, while teens acknowledge the influence of others, they still believe

their online profiles are a true reflection of their identities. Interestingly, however, many

of the teens interviewed suggested that they once saw online profiles as a way to present

someone they're not, even though they currently view them as accurate representation of themselves.

<div align="center">*The Real Me*</div>

When asked if their online profiles reflect who they really are, all of the teens said yes. However, a few teens said when they first acquired their pages they tried to portray an identity that was different than who they knew themselves to be. This was particularly prevalent when some teens first got their MySpace pages, when they posted profiles that they knew did not accurately reflect their identities.

Mary, who created her MySpace page in seventh grade, said when she first began posting she was very concerned about the image she was portraying and she consciously tried to portray an identity that was not accurate to her vision of herself.

> I really cared a lot more about what pictures went up and what I said and I was so decisive about what song I put on and so worried about what it would make me look like, I don't think it looked like me…I think [it made me look] just really cool, like [a] hot girl, but I was really just the funny, weird one in the group who's like fun to be around. (12/21/08)

This attempt to portray someone she wasn't was reflected in the pictures she put up on her page and the music she used as her profile song. When asked about how she tried to portray herself as popular, Mary said, "I would [post]… what everyone else was listening to, like rap. I was like I don't even like this song but everyone else has it, and they would be like, that's such a sick song, and I'd be like, yeah, of course it is" (12/21/08).

Now, a sophomore in high school, Mary feels her MySpace page is a more honest reflection of herself than when she first created her page. Mary said she now feels like her profile page on MySpace reflects her real identity.

I hope it's just the regular me…Like...I hope I don't come across as someone different. Like if you were to meet me in person, and then if you were to see my MySpace [page] I hope you would see the same stuff you think of when you think of me, instead of like you see me in person and you're like, oh and then on MySpace you're like, "Who is this?" (12/21/08)

Although one of the reasons Mary feels like she's changed the image she portrays on MySpace is to be more honest about who she is, she is less interested and less invested in MySpace now than she was when she first set up her page.

I think I just don't care anymore. I'm not as interested in it anymore. Like, I used to … get on every day. But now, I'm just like, "Eh." I'll put a picture up that's like awful of myself that my friends think is funny, and I'll be like whatever, that's what I look like (Mary, 3/15/09).

However, even though Mary is less active on MySpace now than she was when she first set up her page, when asked she said that her profile is now "what [she] look[s] like."

Just like Mary, Thomas also displayed a very different image on MySpace when he first created his page. When I asked what kind of image he used to portray, Thomas said, "Well I used to be like a punk skater and everything like that, against like everything mainstream…So I tried to portray that badass skater image" (12/19/08). When asked further about what kinds of things about his profile helped further a skater-punk image, Thomas said, "I had a lot of skate company layouts and I would always put on the punk metal songs. I would always post pictures of skating and snowboarding" (12/19/08).

When Thomas started high school, however, his MySpace page changed dramatically. According to Thomas, he was less concerned about portraying a skater image and thought less overall about what others thought of him. "When I got to high school …I decided I really don't care what anyone thinks about me," he said (Thomas, 12/19/08). Thomas explained how he changed his profile:

I took all the shirtless pictures of me off. Now I have more pictures of me in choir, more pictures of me showing that I'm the loving boyfriend, that I'm the loving brother, all that. I used to not have anything to show that I was caring or loving…It was probably my sophomore year after my first long time committed relationship ended, I changed it after that. (12/19/08)

Overall, by taking down certain images and adding others, Thomas could better reflect different aspects of his life that reflected his identity. He no longer wanted to put up images and information that made him appear to be something he wasn't.

Brit described a similar experience, noting that her MySpace profile is currently very different than when she first created it. When asked if she thought her profile reflected a personality or persona that was different than who she was in real life, Brit said,

I think so, especially when I first put them up. Because when I first got them I was a lot more quiet and I really didn't talk to anybody and so it was like a way for me to get to know people and talk to them without being like so intimidated and so shy. (12/20/08)

Brit said she "definitely thought [she] was a different person online" than offline when she first created her MySpace (12/20/08), but believed her current MySpace profile is a better reflection of who she is than when she first started using the website. Although by the third interview she rarely logged on to MySpace.

While Mary, Brit, and Thomas had similar experiences on MySpace, where their profiles changed significantly from their inception, Josh said his MySpace profile has hardly changed since he first created it five years ago. He said, "A lot of it is the same. The only things I've changed are like the Tiger Woods background that I just found from somewhere, but for the most part I haven't changed any pictures or anything" (Josh, 12/27/08). Unlike the other three teens, Josh said he never created a profile that portrayed

63

him as someone he wasn't. Josh uses his MySpace—and believes he has always used SNSs—to show what he believes is his real identity. He said, "For the most part I haven't really changed [since I created my profile]. I'm still the same person so I don't need to change it. I'm the same person… I just try to keep it about me and not try to be something else" (Josh, 12/27/08). Interestingly, although Josh was the only subject to say his MySpace page had always been a true reflection of his identity, none of the teens thought their Facebook pages had ever represented anything other than their "true" identity. As noted earlier, teens see Facebook as a tool for representation and communication. MySpace, on the other hand, was talked about more with regard to representing or portraying a certain image. However, many of the teens deemed this as a reason for using Facebook, stating somewhat paradoxically that because Facebook has less ability to be customized, it is a truer reflection of identity. In the next section, teens' views about the ways MySpace and Facebook differ with regard to the degree to which the sites allow them to reflect their identities is discussed.

MySpace vs. Facebook and the Migration to Facebook

While sites like Facebook and MySpace fall under the broad label of social networking site, the teens I interviewed discussed the differences that exist in how each site enables them to portray an identity. Josh stated, "Facebook pages are more about talking to people and interacting with people, rather than just showing who you are like on MySpace" (3/30/09). Teens agreed that Facebook is a better way to communicate and stay in touch with friends, whereas MySpace allows you to reflect your identity more. One reason is that MySpace can be more personalized. For example, as a few teens

64

illustrated, MySpace allows its users to customize the layout of their profile page, the background of the page, and add a profile song that plays when other users open their pages. Facebook, however, does not have the option of putting up a profile song, and every user's page is virtually identical in terms of layout. As Callie described it, "Everyone is put at the same level [on Facebook]" (3/27/09).

Brit noted that one reason MySpace enables you to express your identity more than Facebook is because "you can pick a background, have music, you have the whole like 'about me' thing you can put pictures in. Facebook is just kind of like words and the generic background for everyone" (3/27/09). For Brit, MySpace was more customizable, and therefore a better way to display her identity than Facebook. When asked if both her Facebook and MySpace profiles represent her identity, Brit stated:

> To some extent, especially since you can edit so much of it now you can really show your true colors, even with just pictures or songs and stuff. I think that's what really has an effect on MySpace at least 'cuz there's quotes where you really like learn about someone or by listening to the music the songs that mean something to them and people put those on their MySpaces for a reason. (12/20/08)

Like Brit, Reede said that MySpace allows you to reflect your personality because "you can change your background and do all sorts of weird stuff to it" (3/27/09). In another discussion, Reede highlighted two of the main distinctions between MySpace and Facebook: the background and profile song.

> On Facebook, everyone's profile is generic. It just says who they talk to, shows their pictures, which says a lot about them. But MySpace you could decorate your whole profile however you wanted to. And your music, music says a lot about who you are. I just don't think Facebook [does that]. It could be a lot more personalized. (Reede, 2/17/09)

65

Like Reede and Brit, Thomas thought having a profile song on his MySpace page allowed him to reflect his identity. When asked whether Facebook or MySpace was a better means for reflecting one's identity, Thomas said, "To be honest I think MySpace [is]. Because it allows you to post songs and everything like that, and Facebook you can't really have a profile song" (3/27/09).

Although all the teens agreed that backgrounds and profiles songs help teens express their identities, several interviewees suggested this makes Facebook a more "honest" representation of one's identity. Mary noted that MySpace is more personalized and customizable. However, for Mary, the lack of personalization means that people are forced to be more honest on Facebook. When asked if she had any friends on Facebook who she thought presented themselves differently online than they did offline, Mary said:

> None on Facebook. On MySpace that was the case because you could design your own profile and put quotes and pictures on your actual profile, but Facebook you can't really do that, so I think it helps people be more honest about who they actually are. I just feel like it's a thousand times more mature. (3/15/09)

While MySpace allows you to reflect your identity says Mary, Facebook forces you to be honest about whom you really are, because you can't add backgrounds and profile songs. As discussed earlier, these aspects of the profile page are often reflections of how teens feel others perceive them. Therefore, Mary sees Facebook as a place where you are responding less to others' perceptions and portraying someone you aren't, and more as an honest reflection of identity. An excellent example of this is the issue of how many friends you have on Facebook. As noted above, while individuals may attempt to appear more popular by having a large number of Facebook friends, these attempts ultimately fail.

66

When asked about how others' would perceive them based on their online profiles, most teens said they do not think about or are unconcerned with what others think of them. However, when asked about the reasons behind their motivation to be on Facebook, the importance of group membership was quickly revealed. Thus, while the teens interviewed for this project were not consciously aware of the importance of group membership, it was one of the most defining elements of online identity.

As noted several times, even though they believe MySpace is more customizable and has greater options for personalization, overall, the subjects interviewed said they are using Facebook more and MySpace less. There are several reasons for this shift. For example, the teens felt Facebook was a better tool for communication and more mature. However, it seems the most important reason they are switching to Facebook is because their friends are switching to Facebook.

When asked if she was on Facebook more than MySpace, Callie said, "Yeah much more. I think Facebook's easier to work. There's a lot more of my friends on Facebook, and that's how you communicate more than MySpace" (3/27/09). Callie noted that more people are migrating from MySpace to Facebook because all of their friends are moving to Facebook. When asked why she thought her friends were moving to Facebook and deleting their MySpace pages, Callie said, "Probably because most people are on it" (3/27/09). Similarly, Reede said he deleted his MySpace account because "nobody really used it anymore" (2/17/09). Both Callie's and Reede's responses illustrate the importance of group membership and group influence on SNSs.

67

Like Callie and Reede, Josh, who only has a MySpace page, says he has friends

who are closing their MySpace accounts and using Facebook more. During our second

discussion, Josh said,

> Yeah my friend got rid of her MySpace. I think it's because a lot more of her and
> my closer friends are on Facebook, so she feels like there's more of a purpose to
> be on Facebook than MySpace 'cuz when she got rid of it a lot of people were
> getting rid of their MySpaces. It was kind of like the old thing they just wanted to
> get rid of. (2/13/09)

In our last interview, Josh said even more of his friends had closed their MySpace

accounts. He stated that in addition to being the "cool new thing," Facebook is becoming

popular because people are using it more and this makes it a more powerful tool for

communicating with friends.

> I think they like Facebook because more people are on it. I guess it's now the cool
> thing. And MySpace when it came out was the cool thing, and now say, it's like a
> new computer, like it's cool for like three years but then everyone's getting a new
> piece of technology… I feel like Facebook [is] easier to get in contact with people
> that you went to high school with or people that you know through jobs just to
> keep in touch, and it seems like a lot more people are on Facebook than MySpace.
> Regularly, I guess. (3/30/09)

Mary echoed Josh's statement, stating that many of her friends were no longer on

MySpace. For this reason, Mary was also considering closing her account.

> A bunch of my friends have started closing their MySpace accounts because they
> don't use them anymore, and I think I'm probably gonna do the same. The only
> reason I get on there, I go on and there's nothing on there. I haven't used it for a
> long time…just because they don't feel the need to have it anymore because they
> don't use it anymore. (Mary, 3/15/09)

The fact that an increasing number of their friends are using Facebook makes Facebook

more appealing to the teens, underscoring the importance of group membership. Like the

other teens, Brit said her friends are using Facebook more than MySpace:

68

> I think [Facebook is] better 'cuz Facebook is more mature. That's probably because I got MySpace when I was in middle school so it has those ties to it. MySpace isn't as like interesting, and as fun. It's kind of gotten lame 'cuz not everyone is into it anymore. Kind of like a chain reaction. (3/27/09)

In addition to more of their friends moving from MySpace to Facebook, Brit said that Facebook is a more mature SNS than MySpace. However, Brit said this is primarily because she was older when she created her Facebook profile.

Mary also used the term "mature" when describing Facebook, but said the maturity was a result of the absence of immature "high school gossip sessions" (3/15/09). When asked what she likes about Facebook, Mary said:

> Always, when I get on, there's something to do. I always have someone that tags me in a picture or messages me, and no one's on MySpace anymore…Facebook is a little more mature. Everyone can see what you're doing, so there's no need for little high school gossip sessions. You can chat at the same time, and message people. Everything's right there. (3/15/09)

Josh used similar terminology when talking about Facebook. Josh, who is considering making a Facebook profile page, said he has "graduated" from MySpace.

> Honestly I'm starting to drift more and more away from [MySpace]. I know I need to get a Facebook, like [Reede] is all up in my grill. Like more people are I guess graduating from MySpace to Facebook…On my phone every once in a while I'll look at stuff [on MySpace]. But, otherwise I don't really use it on the computer. Like I've kind of just graduated from this whole era of MySpace. (3/30/09)

Overall, the teens interviewed for this project are using MySpace less and less or getting rid of their accounts altogether. For some, Facebook is a more mature space to reflect their identities and communicate with peers.

In sum, my interviews with these teens revealed that SNSs are a ubiquitous part of their lives and are playing an increasingly important role in teen identity. As evidenced

by the teens focus on Facebook as a communication tool, it is clear that SNSs have a

profound influence on how today's teens communicate with each other, define their

relationships, and attempt to control the way others perceive them.

Discussion

The purpose of my research was to explore how SNSs, specifically MySpace and Facebook, influence teens' identities, and further understand how social connectivity made possible by participation in SNSs contributes to identity in teens. The results of my research show that SNSs are playing an increasingly important role in how teens reflect identity and highlight the importance of peer perceptions to teen identity. The identity process of creation, self-presentation, feedback, and transformation occurs rapidly in SNSs. In my discussion, I first argue that not all SNSs are the same. As demonstrated from the findings, inherent differences exist between MySpace and Facebook and teens use the two sites in different ways. Whereas MySpace was used as a means for representation by the teens I interviewed, Facebook was used less for individual representation and more for communication. Furthermore, I contend that the differences between the sites and how they are used, as well as the migration of teens in this study from MySpace to Facebook, emphasizes the importance of group membership in teen identity. Next, I explore how the idea of bricolage is a more appropriate construct when talking about teen identity and SNSs than the polar notions of static and dynamic identity. Finally, I discuss some additional findings and explore areas for future research on teens, identity, and SNSs.

71

Differences Among SNSs and the Importance of Group Membership

Although it was not originally anticipated from reviewing previous literature on SNSs, the teens discussed their uses of MySpace and Facebook differently. This includes both how often they use the sites and how they use the sites. The frequency with which they use Facebook greatly outweighs their use of MySpace. Most of the teens I interviewed said they logged onto Facebook at least once a day, if not more. In contrast, by the final interviews, the teens said they rarely logged on to MySpace. This is partially explained by the way in which the teens in my study were using the two sites. Whereas the once-popular MySpace was used mainly as a tool for self-representation, the now-popular Facebook is a means for instant communication and feedback from others.

The teens in this study recognized that MySpace is a highly individualized tool for representation that can be personally tailored to the user's preference. On MySpace, backgrounds, profile songs, and top friends allow the user to customize her or her page. However, Facebook profile pages are much more homogenous, where each user is given the same format and basic white background. The teens I interviewed said that overall, MySpace was a better place to reflect individual identities because the site itself is conducive to personalization, yet the teens said Facebook allowed a more honest representation of themselves because they couldn't tailor the page to show themselves in a false light.

In addition to the aesthetic difference between the sites, the teens said they primarily utilize Facebook as a tool for communication. The site, much more so than MySpace, allows the teens to keep in constant contact with friends through instant

messaging, wall posts, and email messages. This communication, and thus Facebook, provides teens a way to stay in the social loop at school and during breaks from school. In addition, the teens interviewed for the study said they felt more connected to their friends and felt part of the social scene at school as a result of being part of the Facebook network. The teens use IM, wall posts, and email messages via the site to communicate with friends and maintain these relationships in a new way.

These findings are consistent with Boyd (2008) and Pascoe's (2007) research that indicated social connectivity is an important function of being part of an online network such as Facebook or MySpace. Boyd and Pascoe suggested that teens socialize via online outlets such as MySpace and Facebook, because teen culture is a social culture. However, while Boyd and Pascoe explain the pervasiveness of SNSs in teens' lives, their research does not differentiate between types of SNSs. This finding is particularly important in light of previous literature that has often grouped SNSs into a single category, even though the sites have distinct features. I was surprised by the difference in the way the teens had used and were now using these two SNSs and, as discussed below, future research should examine why such differences exist. It is important to understand that SNSs have different features and further, that users see different purposes for these sites. Past research has not always recognized the differences between SNSs and future research needs to explore how individual sites function for various purposes, including representation of identity, group membership, and communication.

Also highlighting the differences between Facebook and MySpace, and the importance of the communication tools of the former, the teens noted how SNSs have

73

changed the way they announce and legitimize romantic relationships. Importantly, the teens only talked about the importance of Facebook in terms of legitimizing romantic relationships, rather than about SNSs in general. One reason for this is that, as noted earlier, Facebook is a communication tool and where teens go to receive information. This public display of private information makes the relationship more real, for the teens. For example, many of the teens believe that a relationship is not real or meaningful until it is "Facebook official." Reede stated that two people aren't considered boyfriend and girlfriend unless they list themselves as such on Facebook and both Reede and Josh used the term Facebook official to signify the importance placed on declaring one's relationship status on the site. In addition, all of the teens with whom I spoke said they expected their current or potential significant others to list themselves as in a relationship on Facebook. Not only do people portray themselves as in a relationship or single on Facebook in order to reflect their status, but teens receive information from Facebook as well. As Callie noted, if two people are not listed as in a relationship on Facebook, their peers often question the validity of their relationship status.

From these discussions, it is clear that these teens see Facebook as a way to express their relationship to one another as well as a means of legitimizing a relationship. As Brewer (1991) and Tajfel's (1982) research related to group membership found, and this research supports, we view our identity as it relates to the groups of which we are members. For the teens in this study, posting relationship statuses validated the relationship by engaging in an activity that was public to and related to the group. Facebook allowed the teens to legitimize the relationship via engagement with and

acceptance by their peers, highlighting the way in which Facebook encourages group membership.

In addition, in many ways, Facebook is often seen as the most honest reflection of information, even more so than face-to-face communication. While much of this reinforces previous research on the important role SNSs play in teen identity and previous research has indicated a high use of SNSs by teens (Kelsey, 2007; Lenhardt, 2007), research has yet to explore the importance of the medium in establishing and legitimizing romantic relationships.

The interviews I conducted also lead to several conclusions about teens, SNSs, and group membership. First, as noted above, it is clear from this research that teens are moving quickly from MySpace to Facebook. When I began my research, I thought teens would be using MySpace and Facebook, an assumption supported by previous research (Kelsey, 2007), but I was surprised by the rapidly decreasing interest in MySpace. Over the course of the interviews, one teen had completely deleted his MySpace account, while all of the other teens said that although they would keep their accounts they rarely, if ever, log on to the site. I contend that in addition to highlighting the importance of communication, this finding illuminates the importance of group membership to teen identity.

In the interviews, teens said that the reason they were more interested in being a part of Facebook was because all of their friends were using Facebook. In addition, the teens interviewed thought Facebook was a more mature space than MySpace to display their identities for a number of reasons. These include the fact that many started using

Facebook later in life and the perception that Facebook was once a place only for college students. While these could be interpreted as a simple phenomenon of popularity besting functionality or teens wanting to appear more mature, the superior communication functions of Facebook make these findings significant. The reasons the teens provided don't fully explain why Facebook is seen as "more mature." I contend that the switch from MySpace to Facebook highlights the importance of group membership for teens. As noted, the teens in my study freely admit that MySpace is better at representing a nuanced identity. However, they felt that a more generic identity provided a truer sense of self and the ability to communicate and stay connected was the most important function of SNSs. This is not surprising, considering previous research that has established the importance of group membership to teen identity.

For example, Hebdige (1979) revealed the importance of group membership in his research on the punk culture. Just as punk clothing expresses identity, says Hebdige, the clothing represents (for the wearer) a means for rebelling against society, while at the same time promoting group membership. Similarly, while SNSs represent tools for expressing identity, they are even more powerful tools for promoting group connectivity. Even thought Hebdige's research dates back to the late 1970s, his ideas are relevant today with regards to SNSs. More recent researchers have also noted the important role media plays in group connectivity. Fisherkeller (2002), for example, notes the importance of media and group connectivity, particularly for teens. Fisherkeller suggests that group interactions around mediated communication helps teens make sense of their own identities. From my research as well as other authors such as Hebdige and Fisherkeller, it

is clear that group membership is extremely important for teens. Indeed, the importance of others' perceptions, group affiliation, and communication between peers suggests that it is the "social" aspects of SNSs that make the greatest contribution to identity. As Erikson (1968) discussed, the teen years are when identity is constructed and shaped. While Erikson posits a more static conceptualization of identity than I do, he emphasizes that developmentally the teenage years are crucial for identity construction.

In addition to the transition from MySpace to Facebook, the way relationships are established and maintained by teens online demonstrates how social connections and group identity influence individual identity. One of the most interesting ways this was demonstrated was Callie's story about who she chose to display in her top friends on MySpace. Although Callie eventually abandoned her attempts to present a "false" identity online, she did reveal that at one time she used the top friends feature to seem more popular in real life, and used MySpace as a tool for making friends in real life. Thus, her peers' views of who was in her friendship circle influenced how Callie portrayed herself online, and impacted her offline experience of making friends as well. This confirms what Boyd has suggested about teen culture and identity.

Boyd (2008) wrote that SNSs allow teens to connect with peers and through theses connections teens create identities. Boyd highlighted the importance of others' perceptions of self when negotiating identity. Additionally, as Pascoe (2007) suggested, teen culture is a social culture, and SNSs further the social connections teens create in novel and powerful ways. However, my research always qualifies some of what Pascoe suggests about SNSs. While Pascoe writes that SNSs are ways for teens to assert their

independence, it is important to note that while teens may be asserting their independence from their parents through their use of SNSs, Facebook in particular is a way to promote peer connectivity. It is possible that Pascoe's ideas are more clearly related to MySpace, as this site was once a tool for asserting an individual identity. However, newer SNSs, like Facebook, that focus on communication are revealing the importance of group membership and connectivity in the lives of teens. Again, this underscores the importance of recognizing the differences among SNSs.

In sum, with the rapidly changing media environment, these conclusions demonstrate that research on SNSs should be updated, especially in light of media such as Twitter, which is designed to function solely as a communication tool. My research indicates that teens use these sites very differently, focusing their actions around communication and group membership on Facebook. While Vander Veer (2008), wrote a guide for using Facebook, the site is changing at such a rapid pace even more updates are needed and research should continue as the site evolves and expands. For example, while accurate only a short time ago, Vander Veer's exploration on Facebook does not include new additions to the site such as status changes and the like function. The research on how the site's tools and applications allow users to function on the site should be updated, and research should focus on the ways in which these tools allow for group identification and communication.

The teens interviewed are migrating from what was once a highly individualized site used for personal expression to a more uniform site that is a tool for communication. It does not appear that teens are less interested in expressing individual identity than they

78

once were; they are just highly concerned with group membership. When asked why they were transitioning from MySpace to Facebook, teens across the interviews noted that they were using Facebook more because more of their friends were on it, and their friends use it consistently. Being part of the Facebook group then, is the highest priority, and individual expression of self in a customizable landscape is less important. Although, as discussed below, Facebook is seen by the teens I interviewed as a tool that allows for an expression of the authentic self it's most important function is serving as a means of communicating and connecting to the group. Even when the site is used to express identity, as discussed next, the communication aspect of the site ensures that others' perceptions play a central role in the process.

The Effects of Others' Perceptions and Identity as Bricolage

Further illustrating the difference between SNSs, the teens in my study indicated that the communication aspect of Facebook is one of the main ways they gather information about events in their friends' lives and receive feedback on their own lives. For example, as noted above, when a relationship falls apart, or when two people declare themselves a couple, Facebook informs their friends through the news feed and can provide a legitimizing effect. Thus, as Grodin and Lindlof suggest, the ubiquitous presence of technology and mediated communication have a great influence on identity, as it shapes the self by being ever-present in our daily lives and experiences (1996). This ubiquitous presence combined with the immediate and public feedback received from peers, shapes the self. My research suggests this communication and feedback loop, as well as other aspects of SNSs, shape identity in several ways.

First, while my research supports Grodin and Lindlof's arguments related to the influence technology and mediated communication, the authors also argue that identity varies in terms of the social context in which people exist. While the teens interviewed did seem to portray somewhat different identities online than offline, the teens in my study clearly stated that it was their goal to present a well-rounded identity online, which encompassed all aspects of their identity. While this suggests that teens do have different identities, my research supports the notion that teens see SNSs as a way to reflect aspects of their identities that they are unable to portray in offline settings and use SNSs as a tool for representing all facets of their identities.

While the teens I spoke with once used MySpace to portray identities that were different from what they considered their true identities, they are not using Facebook the same way. Even though teens said MySpace allowed them to personalize and customize their pages more than MySpace, they all agreed that Facebook is actually a more honest representation of identity. According to the teens, because you can't add backgrounds and profile songs, you are forced to be "honest" about your identity. Thus, while my research supports the idea that identity is specific to social contexts, as Grodin and Lindlof suggest, I believe this is more a result of the belief that there is a lack of opportunity to fully express one's identity in offline settings. My analysis suggests that because teens believe they are more capable of reflecting an "authentic" identity online, this becomes a goal when engaging in the online identity process.

Second, it is clear that others' perceptions were extremely important to how the teens chose to portray their identities online. This is manifested in several ways on SNSs,

including profile pages, pictures, status updates, profile songs, and friends. As Callie discussed, she used pictures of herself participating in activities such as forensics and drama in order to counteract the "Callie-as-cheerleader" identity she felt she cultivated by only having cheerleading images. For Callie, it was important to balance her identity as a cheerleader with other aspects of her identity, which she attempted to accomplish through her selection of pictures to post. However, it is important to note that Callie was specifically doing this with the intention of shaping how others saw her. Callie thought that if others saw only cheer pictures, they would get the impression that that was her entire identity. This was problematic for Callie because she felt that the image of a cheerleader was often seen by others as loose, skanky, or easy, and she did not want this to be her sole online identity. Thus, Callie was attempting to counteract the cheerleading identity she thought others were seeing by posting pictures that represented different aspects of her identity with the specific goal of influencing others' perceptions of her identity.

Like Callie, Thomas wanted to reflect his entire identity through pictures, rather than only the punk-skater identity he thought others were seeing. Unlike Callie who made the decision herself, however, Thomas was directly influenced by others' comments. Based on this feedback from others, Thomas took down somewhat revealing photos of himself and replaced them with images of himself engaging in other activities. Because Thomas's friends said he looked cocky and vain in pictures where he had his shirt off, he removed these pictures and posted photos of him and Callie together, choir concerts, and sporting events. Thus, Thomas said he was showing himself to be a loving boyfriend and

81

choirboy, as well as someone interested in skateboarding and snowboarding. Both Callie's and Thomas's decisions to replace or supplement pictures posted on their SNS pages were directly tied to how they believed others were perceiving the pictures.

Status updates were another way the teens interviewed reflected the importance of others' perceptions. The teens said they would sometimes post status updates in order to get a reaction from friends. Both Thomas and Brit described incidents in which they posted a status update in order to elicit comments from others. For example, when Brit posted a status update that read "Brit hopes you choke on your own bile," her status was stated specifically in hopes her ex-boyfriend would read it and respond of understand her anger. Similarly, Thomas posted a status update to get comments from friends about his track performance. In this way, status updates, said the teens, are useful ways to inform people about what they were doing and a tool for getting feedback from peers.

These findings support Thiel Stern's (2007) notion that identity is influenced through acts such as using the Internet to manipulate conversation or by disclosing personal information that makes a certain impression. The status update feature is one way teens can manipulate information and disclose information in order to make an impression or elicit responses from peers, just as Thiel Stern suggested. However, Thiel Stern's research seems more focused on posting of fake information and manipulation of information, rather than related to the ways in which teens are using status updates, which is to post ambiguous information to elicit responses. In my interviews, teens said they wanted to present an authentic self – a true, honest, and whole reflection of their identities. The teens said they did not use Facebook as a way of manipulating information

82

to present a false identity, but used aspects of Facebook, such as status updates, to elicit feedback from peers. My research supplements Thiel Stern's research related to disclosing information by illuminating the power of not disclosing information in shaping both how peers view the user and how the user wants to be viewed by his or her peers.

Like status updates, profile songs and the top friends feature, two characteristics unique to the MySpace website, allow teens' to express their identities in terms of how others' perceived them. Although, in general, MySpace is not focused as much on communication, as the teens explained, these tools are geared toward personal expression based on others' feedback. The teens interviewed said they used profile songs both to reflect their current mood and as a way to express their overall identity, but posted this information based on how they thought others would perceive it, such as in Callie's case of using the top friends feature to appear more popular than she actually was.

This finding is similar to Fisherkeller's (2005) analysis of television programs. Just as Fisherkeller said television programs helped teens say something about who they are and what they like, profile songs accomplished this for teens. Perhaps the best example of this was Reede's statement that he would likely not be friends with someone who had dissimilar music taste, because he felt the genre of the music gave him an impression about the identity of that person. Reede thought he was gaining a sense about this person's identity, and could therefore make a decision about if he thought he would be friends with this person. However, SNSs allow teens to broadcast what things they like, such as music and television shows, in ways that has not been accomplished previously. In addition, some SNSs allow for instantaneous feedback from peers. Before

SNSs, there were limited ways to broadcast information about one's self such as likes and dislikes related to entertainment and feedback depending on in-person discussions.

Taken together, my subjects' concerns with the perception of others—as evidenced by their use of pictures, status updates and music—aligns with Goffman (1959) and Gilligan's (1988) ideas about the importance of identity as being formed through the "voices" of others. Goffman suggests that how we present ourselves to our peers is a negotiation of how we see ourselves and how we want to be seen by others. Similarly, Gilligan argues that "self is known through the experience of engagement with different voices or points of view," (1988, p. 151). While Goffman and Gilligan were not writing about SNSs, their ideas that identity is formed based on how we feel others' perceive us can be appropriately applied to these teens' experiences on sites like MySpace and Facebook. In addition, the metaphor of identity being formed through voices is particularly well suited to Facebook, where one's page is literally saturated with the "voices" of others through wall posts, likes, wall comments and photo comments.

While Goffman and Gilligan's early work indicates that the feedback of others' was strongly influencing identity long before SNSs, it is important to note that SNSs do this in a way that hasn't been accomplished in previous generations. When the process outlined by Goffman and Gilligan's is executed through the ubiquitous and near instantaneous nature of communication via SNSs, it is transformed into something very powerful. That is, through their use of SNSs, today's teens are using a powerful and almost instantaneous feedback tool that accelerates and amplifies the feedback process. On SNSs, one can post on a friend's page via their wall, through comments on photos or

status updates, IM and email. There are myriad ways to communicate, but the collaboration of the resulting page is what makes SNSs unique. Others' comments and feedback accelerate a constant negotiation of what the user intends to portray on his or her site. The resulting page is then more of the work of a group of people rather than just the single user, although the user is still in control of the information and is often times posting information, such as status updates, to elicit feedback.

My findings illustrate the importance of Finkenauer et al.'s contention that "self" is a concept that refers to feelings of stability and "identity" is a concept that refers to "aspects of the self that are salient and activated by the social and environmental context in which a person functions." (p. 28). This notion of identity is more aligned with Stern's (2008) view of teens who constantly negotiate their identities. The teens interviewed clearly feel they have multiple facets to their identities that contribute to who they are as a whole. Unlike Erikson suggested, this does not suggest that teens have undergone myriad experiences that have resulted in one constant identity—an end product of some process. Instead, teens are continually reflecting different aspects of their dynamic identities online, and then changing their self-representations in response to input from friends and peers. SNSs truly reflect the concept of identity itself as a process.

Through the constant renegotiation of identity reflected through changing pictures, status updates, and other characteristics of SNSs teens manage and reflect what they see as authentic identities. However, whereas Erikson (1968) suggested that identity was static in nature, my findings indicate that teens express a more dynamic identity; an identity that is constantly in flux and represents a negotiation of how their peers view

85

them. While Erikson writes that teens eventually establish one uniform identity, I suggest that for teens today, SNSs are tools that allow teens to constantly express and renegotiate representations of themselves. This suggests that on a scale where on one end of the spectrum we find static identity, in which a singular uniform identity is formed and then presented in all situations, and on the other end lies dynamic identity, where myriad presentations of self are evident and one's ever-changing identity is dependent on the social context in which he or she exists, SNSs support a conceptualization of identity locate somewhere in between. The teens I interviewed found themselves somewhere in between these two extremes; in a constant renegotiation of self based on feedback from peers, yet using SNSs to express an authentic or whole self. It was important for the teens that the profile page reflects many if not all aspects of their identity in order to show a true self.

Thus, based on my analysis, the most appropriate description of what teens present has been conceptualized by scholars as identity as the result of bricolage. Teens have to present themselves so that people from a variety of contexts can recognize them and effectively interact with them online, such as people from school, after-school jobs, clubs, sports teams, among others, and thus they have to find a way to present a self online that is consistent (or at least consistent enough) with who they think they are. Therefore, what teens present is a result of bricolage, a term Baudrillard (1998) used to describe the process of assembling various artifacts together from bits and pieces of other artifacts. Baudrillard used the term bricolage to convey the idea that there no longer are any such things as original or authentic works of art – everything is based on something

86

that came before. As related to SNSs, teens use different aspects of their identities that they present in different social contexts to create one authentic representation of themselves online. Their online identities are negotiations of the process of using all aspects of themselves to build an authentic identity that they believe reflects their true personality. This identity is formed through "artifacts" such as their social interactions, the social contexts in which they find themselves, and the continual stream of feedback from peers. Thus, bricolage doesn't represent a final or static representation of self, nor a completely dynamic identity, but a constant negotiation of self.

Gergen (2002) also suggested that teens do not have a singular, unified identity, and they portray many different selves under different situations. However, my research related to Facebook does not fully support Gergen's assertions. Teens in my study use SNSs to portray several aspects of their identities, not to reflect a context-specific identity that was different than identities they would portray in other situations. While teens might present different identities to outsiders, or outsiders might perceive different identities, the teens interviewed for this project suggest they are trying to use SNSs as an opportunity to reflect a full and complete identity they couldn't fully convey in other situations, not as a means for representing a completely different self. This decision-making process of self-display is related to the process of identity but differs from Gergen in that teens do want to portray an authentic identity, something that Gergen does not acknowledge. My findings are more consistent with Stern's (2008) suggestion that identity is a "process of stage reorganization rather than a mere unfolding of static personality characteristics" (p. 97). Teens will change their Facebook pages as the social

87

contexts they encounter change, rather than as a result of a clean link between a static person that they "are" and a representation of that person online.

Overall, my findings coincide with the ideas brought about by Chandler and Roberts-Young (1998), who also suggested that creating a profile page is a process of bricolage. According to the authors, this involves "the inclusion of particular elements; the indirect allusion to others; the omission of what 'goes without saying' or of what 'is noticeable by its absence'; the adaptation of 'borrowings' by addition, deletion, substitution, or transposition; and finally arrangement: overall organization, sequencing and emphasis" (p. 6). Mark Deuze (2006) also used the term bricolage to describe the process of constructing online a form of self-representation that is a "highly personalized, continuous, and more or less autonomous assembly, disassembly, and reassembly of mediated reality"(p. 66). The results of my study exemplify how the processes of posting and deleting photos, publishing status updates, choosing profile songs, and displaying top friends are conscious decisions teens make in order to display identities.

In addition to these authors, Hebdige (1979) used the term bricolage to describe how members of subcultures draw upon a variety of artifacts and reinscribe new meaning to them in relation to the new context of the subculture. A bricolage that's engaged in and that results in a self-presentation constructed online by these teens, like the bricolage constructed by members of subcultures who bring together seemingly disparate elements of fashion, draw upon resources that are recognizable to others, that have meaning because they allude to other things. For example, you recognize the Facebook profile and

the back-and-forth of status updates and comments on a person's page because there are elements that allude to other things you know about the person.

Young people need to engage in this ongoing process of bricolage to be able to maintain a self-perception of an "authentic" or "true" self, which are words they use. And even though Baudrillard (1998) contends that there is no "authentic" self, there is still a felt need on the part of teens to present something that is not false or misleading. They find this authentic or true way of presenting themselves and interacting with others by continually reflecting on whom they've already presented themselves to be, using the responses they've received from others as tools to help them recognize whether they are or are not maintaining that authentic self.

Other Findings and Suggestions for Future Research

In addition to documenting the importance of peers' influence on identity, my findings also suggest that parents can be influential to the online teen identity process and did not fully support the generational digital divide that Herring (2008) suggests is prevalent. While two of teens said their parents do not or would not have the technological capabilities to access Facebook, most of the teens said their parents have a MySpace or Facebook account themselves. Callie said her mom doesn't even know how to turn on her cell phone, but Reede is friends with his mom on Facebook and. Brit's mom has also requested her as a friend on Facebook. Although this study does not claim to be representative, these two parents are obviously capable of functioning on Facebook, suggesting variation in how much the digital divide influences online identity.

Furthermore, it is also important to note that even if a generational digital divide

does exist, this does not necessarily mean that parents will not influence online identity in other ways. For example, Thomas stated that he would not want an online identity that his parents would see as inappropriate. He wanted his page to reflect that values that his parents had instilled in him. Also, Reede said he does not post information or images on his Facebook that his parents would be embarrassed to view. Both of these teens noted that even though their parents have online profiles, the teens would still post information aligned with what their parents find appropriate even if their parents did not have SNS accounts.

A second interesting finding deals with the difference between online and offline friends and how this might affect identity. While Facebook is comprised of users and their friends, being someone's friend on Facebook has a different connotation than the common use—or offline use—of the word friend. The teens with whom I spoke said they often added coworkers, schoolmates, and others who were acquaintances as opposed to friends. However, these acquaintances had access to the same information about the teens as the teens' closest friends. For example, as noted above, after Brit's breakup, she used Facebook as a way to communicate her feelings and relationship status to her on-line friends. However, when she arrived at work after changing her Facebook status to single and a coworker and Facebook friend commented about the breakup, Brit said she was surprised that this person would bring up the subject. To Brit, it was something she had never or would never before have discussed with him offline. It appeared that Brit thought this incident was somewhat private, even though she had posted it on Facebook. While Brit was comfortable with having this information shared on Facebook with

friends and acquaintances, she was uncomfortable with discussing her relationship issues in an offline situation with someone she did not consider a close friend. That is, a friend was a close enough online friend to read the information, they were not a close enough friend to discuss it in person.

Similarly, Callie, who had also gone through a breakup during the course of this research, said she was surprised when people at school talked to her about her relationship. Callie said she hadn't told anyone personally about her breakup, but changed her relationship status to "single" on Facebook. Callie received over 45 online comments about her status change, and several people spoke to her about it in-person. Callie noted that even people whom she would not consider friends brought up the breakup in offline conversations, something with which Callie said she was uncomfortable. "I hadn't even told anybody about it," Callie stated (12/19/08). This suggests that while someone might be close enough to you to be your online friend, that doesn't indicate that you think they can engage in offline conversations with you about your posts online. While this finding does relate to notions of private space and public space, concepts beyond the scope of this thesis, this finding suggests that online and offline identities are different even if teens are attempting to portray one "true" identity online. While teens want to portray themselves consistently online and offline, and are concerned about others' acknowledging this consistency as well, teens view online and offline communication and relationships—both important aspects of identity— differently.

In addition to this concept, another interesting aspect of the research that demonstrates the need for additional research into teens' use of SNSs was the correlation between the degree of openness and amount of information the teens posted online and the number of friends they had. While Reede has the most friends out of all the teens interviewed, at 979, he also appears to post the most information about himself. As noted earlier, Reede posts what some may consider more private information, such as a video of his mom asleep. Reede has also posted nearly 20 childhood photos, arguably a very personal glimpse into his life. While intuitively it would seem that Reede would only post information that he comfortable with his least close friend on Facebook seeing, Reede posts the greatest amount and seemingly most personal information. While this also deals with notions of privacy, this study underscores the importance of future research on SNSs and teen identity.

My research also suggests that future research would benefit from looking at SNSs through the lens of developmental literature. Although the teens I interviewed suggested that Facebook is a more "mature tool" than MySpace because they started using Facebook later in life and Facebook was once only accessible to students of higher education, the nature of the sites indicate that the popularity of the sites might be based on the developmental appropriateness of the functions they provide. The group membership and approval aspects of Facebook are particularly well suited to dealing with the angst many individuals feel as they move from pre-teen to teen. As group membership becomes more important to these individuals, they might naturally gravitate toward a SNS that promotes group membership through communication and instant

feedback. However, because this was not a longitudinal study and the interview guide used was not developed with developmental literature in mind, these issues are beyond the scope of this thesis.

Finally, further research should also look at how the widespread use of SNSs is making teens more or less connected to one another. In one interview, Reede mentioned that he read an article about how his generation was the least connected generation to their friends because of the amount of mediated communication through sites like MySpace and Facebook. However, Reede said he felt he was probably more connected to his friends and classmates than any generation so far. He said that because he was friends with his peers on Facebook, he could keep in constant contact with them, rather than relying on infrequent emails and phone calls or high school reunions to keep in touch. While it has been argued that mediated communication makes lessens personal, face-to-face communication, future research is necessary to explore the levels of connectivity teens feel to their peers. I would argue that sites like Facebook increase the level of personal feelings of connectivity rather than diminish them, but more research in this area is warranted.

Finally, as noted above there has been little research about the impact of SNSs on dating and posting information about romantic relationships should be explored in future studies And, because the teens interviewed did not mention being "MySpace official," it appears this research should be geared more toward exploring SNSs that foster communication and group connectivity.

Conclusion

In sum, this research adds to the body of knowledge about teens, media, and identity, particularly in the areas of the influences of others' perceptions on teen identity. Overall, it appears that communication, peer feedback, and social interaction play the most significant roles in teen identity, especially as it relates to Facebook. It should be underscored that the umbrella term of SNS leads to the assumption that all SNSs function the same way, which is misleading. While teens once used MySpace as a means for representation, teens are now transitioning to Facebook where communication trumps representation. Further, as the movement of teens from MySpace to Facebook indicates, the role of communication and feedback ties into group membership, a concept that is extremely important to teen identity. Interviews with teens revealed that these teens are joining Facebook and using the site more because all of their friends are migrating to Facebook and the site facilitates almost instantaneous communication and feedback, which provide teens with a greater opportunity to belong to and stay in touch with their social group. Although these teens say group membership and the perceptions of others are not important to them, a deeper analysis of the interviews provides evidence of the significant role group membership plays in teen identity. Additionally, through pictures, status updates, and other facets of the teens' SNSs' pages are reflections of identity that

are in large part reactions to others' perceptions of the identities displayed on the profile

pages, which is particularly well represented by the idea of identity as bricolage.

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Appendix A

Interview Guide

Section I. Operationalizing Identities and Reflexive Identities

1. I'd like to get to know more about you. First, I'm going to ask you some questions about how you think people who are important in your life would describe you. Then, I'll ask you about the extent to which you think their assessments of you are accurate.
   a. How would your mother describe you?
   b. Father?
   c. Sibling(s)?
   d. Best friend of same gender? Best friend of different gender?
   e. Boyfriend or girlfriend?
   f. Boss?
   g. Teachers?
   h. Friends (classmates, sport team colleagues, club members, neighbors, former schoolmates?
   i. Ex-friends?

2. Whose assessment do you agree with most? Least? Why?

3. How would you describe yourself?

4. Have you ever thought that your personality was very similar to someone famous? Who? Why?

Section II. Constructing Yourself in Relationships Online

5. What about on MySpace/Facebook, how are the various ways people see you reflected in your profile? Is there a particular "you" that is most reflected in your profile? Can you tell me about that?

6. Do you feel like your profile reflects your personality? In what ways? Why or why not? Do you feel like your profile reflects parts of your personality that are less obvious to some people? Can you tell me about that?

7. In what ways do your photos on MySpace/Facebook say something about you? (Those in your profile as well as those in your albums, if you have them, or photos in which you've been tagged by others.)

8. When you put up profile on the Web, did you try to portray a certain image? What was that image? Was it one that was different than how you are in "real life"? Do you know

anyone who has tried to portray a certain image on their page that is different from how people see them in person?

9. When you first created your page, how did you decide what information you wanted to post? Has that changed since you created your page? For example, did you initially post information that you have since removed, or have you continued to post more information, or just change/update info on your page?

10. How do you feel about the ability to see all of your info and your friends' info through the news feed features?

> Probe: What is it like when someone brings up something from your news feed in an in person? Can you tell me a story about that?

11. Have you ever had someone mention that they were surprised by something they learned about you from MySpace/Facebook that they hadn't known before? Tell me about that.

12. Have there ever been occasions when you've though about how someone might see a different "you" online than the one they know in person? Tell me about one of the times you thought about that (e.g., maybe you were posting something a friend would like but you wouldn't want a different friend to see it).

13. Can you tell me about a time or times when you stopped yourself from posting something (or seriously thought about stopping yourself) on your page because you thought it might make someone think differently of you?

14. In what ways do you think the online profiles of your friends reflect who they really are?
> Probe: To what extent do you think MySpace and Facebook pages are a good place for teens to portray different parts of themselves that people may not really know that much about?
> To what extent do you think MySpace and Facebook pages are a good place for teens to post things that reflect how they see themselves even if others disagree?

Section III. Changing One's Page as a Result of Negative or Positive Feedback

15. How much time do you spend on MySpace/Facebook on a daily/weekly basis?

16. Do you use MySpace or Facebook more? Why?

17. How often do you update or change your page(s)? Why?

18. When was the last time you changed your page? What info did you change? Why?

19. Do you usually change the same things? Why?

20. Do you change your top friends often? Why or why not? (e.g., is it so that people notice, popularity, to get updated on the news feed…?)

21. Can you tell me about a time when you have had a friend block you? Have you ever had to block someone? Can you tell me about that?

Section IV. Costs of Investing in an Online Identity

22. Have you ever decided to spend less time online for some reason? Why?

23. How do you know when to take something personally online, or when to shake it off?

24. Have you ever or do you know anyone who has ever had to delete his or her page(s)? If so, why did they do so?

25. How would you feel if you had to delete your page(s)? How important to you are these pages, and how important are these sites to you, in general?

26. Can you tell me about a time when you realized how important or unimportant MySpace/Facebook is in your everyday life?

Section V. Influence of Parents in Online Identity

27. Do your parents have a MySpace or Facebook account? Are you "friends" with them?

28. Do your parents check your page(s)?

      If *yes*: Can you tell me about a time when your parent(s) said something to you about something they saw on your profile? How did that make you feel?

      If *no*: Do you feel like your parents know how to use MySpace and Facebook?

29. Do you have your profile set to a certain privacy level so that your parents can only see a limited profile? Why or why not?

30. Knowing that your parents can/cannot see your profile page(s), how do you think that influences what information you post online? Can you tell me about that?