"This is me"

A look at user self-presentation on Facebook:

Navigating tensions in the online world of identity creation

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Abstract

More than one in five people worldwide use Facebook on a regular basis. Since its inception in 2004, it has grown to be the most popular social network in the world, with huge profits and number of employees. There is little doubt that Facebook has a major presence in our lives, and due to its relatively recent conception, an under-researched one. Studies have included areas such as identity presentation, social anxiety, health benefits and disadvantages and whether Facebook use changes our offline behaviour. The aim of the present study was to hear the voices of Facebook users, and find out what they think, feel and do when they use the platform. Analysis of semi structured interviews with nine female participants from the Auckland area aged 25-34 was conducted. One key finding was that rather than presenting a version of their own identity on Facebook, people were *creating* identities *using* Facebook. A second important finding was that they were doing so in a sea of contradictions and tensions. Unease was apparent when users said they would not do a certain thing on Facebook and then found evidence to the contrary, and also when their desire not to appear judgemental was voiced in the midst of a judgement. Extremely visible was the effect and presence of the 'audience' and associated expectations, while participants also uneasily recognised the agent-like nature of Facebook as a part of their identity creation. Finally, it was clear how important it seemed to be for users to acknowledge the distinct existence of the 'Facebook world' as a distinct identity, despite citing their struggle to remember this in their everyday lives. Future research would help to understand more about the effects of Facebook, given its power and non-neutral presence and the findings of this study that users are not always fully aware of the details of Facebook, extending to their own usage of it.

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"Online social networking sites have revealed an entirely new method of self-presentation. This cyber social tool provides a new site of analysis to examine personality and identity" (Mehdizadeh, 2010).

Introduction

Facebook has just passed 1.49 billion monthly active users. That is more than one in five people *worldwide* that use Facebook at least every month. According to Facebook, the average American spends 40 minutes a day using the site, more time spent than checking other communications such as email and postal mail, or taking care of their pets (Frier, 2014), and a whopping 6% of all digital time combined is spent on Facebook (Boris, 2014). In 2011, it was reported that 48% of 18 to 34 year olds in the Western world check Facebook immediately when they first wake up in the morning (Digital Buzz, 2011), and in 2015, around 63% of all Facebook users surveyed said they get their news from the platform, rather than any other source (Greenberg, 2015). Millions of photos are posted, messages sent and comments posted, every few minutes. The average user creates 90 pieces of content each month, and 20 million applications are installed on the Facebook platform every single day (Chan, 2012). This trend in growth is showing no signs of slowing (Protalinski, 2015).

When we look at the figures in this way, it is undeniable that Facebook has a very real presence in our lives. Yet, many of us do not seem to realise it. Castells (2002) calls Facebook an 'unremarked part' of the fabric of our everyday experience, saying that it is something many people do mindlessly but yet regularly. Already in 2003 (pre-Facebook) researchers described how social network sites penetrate their users lives,

and tend to become invisible once they are widely adopted (Luedtke, 2003). We do not seem to realise the significance of our use of Facebook: the same users who say they get their news from Facebook paradoxically do not rate it as an 'important news source' (Greenberg, 2005). This stealthy presence in our lives is not wholly surprising, indeed it seems hard to believe that just seven or eight short years ago, Facebook did not exist in mainstream awareness, and pre-2004, did not exist at all.

The theory of ritualised media use says people consume media habitually, as part of everyday life routines. Thus, media consumption can be connected with temporary structures, such as watching your favourite TV programme at the same time every day (Couldry, 2002; Liebes & Curran, 1998). If we apply this theory here, we can expect that the use of Facebook may well be ritualized for some people, and thus subtly built into the very fabric of its users' lives. This apparent routine 'blindness' is an excellent reason to try to shed more light on how people interact with the network, to try and draw it a little further out of the shadows of our routines.

In fact, to some, Facebook is so important in their lives that it now even has a so-called 'legacy setting' in place, introduced February of 2015. This is a feature that allows users to nominate someone to take over control of their page and its associated content after they die. To be clear, this is not so they can access the information (messages and other content stays private to the original owner), but so that the designated legacy person can take it over once it has been memorialised. They are able to continue to post on the page (and broadcast to the user's audience) after the person has passed. This may seem a fairly extreme action to take, but Facebook has indicated that many users have already chosen to utilise this setting, and designate a

legacy owner. To put this in perspective, less than half of American adults have life insurance, (LIMRA, 2015) and I would hazard a guess that even less have appointed an executor of their will. Facebook has certainly found itself a very prominent position within our everyday lives, both as a routine activity, and one with many different uses.

Before we go any further, it may be useful to describe Facebook in more detail, so those who are unfamiliar with the platform may have a better understanding of what we are working with. As Christine Hine, a qualitative researcher who has worked a great deal with internet-based technologies has said, we are best to situate our research with an arrival story, which is useful in order to evoke the style of the interaction (Hine, 2013). An arrival story is an outline of what the technology is and how it is commonly used. There are hundreds of features Facebook offers, but I have attempted to provide a succinct 'arrival story' of the most important features in order to give a useful background to the research.

Originally designed for college students and launched in 2004, Facebook is a social media platform available in 37 languages and growing, which allows people to create themselves a 'profile' and add the profiles of other people as connections, or 'friends' online. Once a user has a profile page (which they can customise with profile image and header image) they can view what their connections are posting, in their 'newsfeed'. This is a collection of everything that is happening on Facebook, that they have chosen to follow. If they themselves post content (put up an image or text update, called a 'status'), this will be seen by their friends or the audience they have

chosen. Someone who posts, can be called a 'poster', and I have used this terminology in this paper.

There are a number of different ways broadcasts can be modified, for example by celebrities who wish to broadcast some content to a large number of public viewers, but restrict other content to the pages of people they know offline. Facebook also allows you to post to the profile of another person (so their audience will see it) or privately, in a message. One way to describe Facebook could be as an online timeline of the life of an individual, where users chronicle their activities, illustrate them with photos, and interact with other users and their content.

Facebook is free for users to sign up to, and has the statement on its homepage that it 'always will be'. However, naturally it does have a financial interest in its users, earning more than $1b per quarter in revenue from advertisements that companies place on the site, which are targeted to specific users depending on the audience the advertiser desires (Frier, 2014). It also sells credits within games, and once allowed users to purchase 'virtual gifts' for one another. These side lines are not insignificant, with the gifts earning Facebook over $50m in their penultimate year of being offered, 2009 (Carlson, 2010).

The usage of Facebook (and thus its reach) runs far wider than just being a social network for people to connect with other people (which is what Facebook themselves promote as their 'purpose'). It is used by companies to promote products, run competitions and interact with their consumers. It has a messenger app so people can message directly from their phones, but only with people they are connected to on the

site. Millions of third-party applications have been developed to integrate with Facebook. Events, groups and entire organisations are run from within Facebook pages. You need only watch a news broadcast in New Zealand to hear about the police using Facebook in various ways to help in the process of arrest in various ways. Employers are admitting looking up employees as part of the interview process, and in fact in America, the Patriot Act even allows some state agencies to bypass privacy settings Facebook so they can view the profiles of potential employees (Smith & Kidder, 2010). There now exists even a whole language around Facebook, terms that refer to different actions and behaviours on the site that are frequently used in everyday language. Terms like 'stalk' (to hunt information online) and 'lurk' (read other people's posts without posting their own) have grown to be associated with Facebook use, and new words like 'frape' (to post as someone else without their knowledge) have been invented. What started as a social network for connecting with friends has grown to support usage we didn't dream about when we initially signed up and sent our first 'friend requests'. The sheer speed at which usage of Facebook is changing is something I find incredibly interesting, and requires a lot more research if we are going to attempt to keep up with it!

Research on Facebook has been vast, even in the 11 years since it was first online. The literature covers a number of aspects as we will see; from its effect on healthy relationships (Castañeda, Wendel, & Crockett, 2015) to social anxiety, (Timpano, Tran, & Joormann, 2015), to purchasing intentions (Dehghani & Tumer, 2015) and the psychological effects of use across generations (Hayes, van Stolk-Cooke & Muench, 2015). While wading through all this research however, I constantly felt as though what was missing was more in-depth studies to find out what people actually

do when they are on Facebook, how they go about showing their identity, and what their feelings are around these topics.

Researchers have always expressed an enduring suspicion that the Internet may change things for the people who use it. 'Will we live our lives differently?' they asked. 'Will we become different people?' (Hine, 2013). Among other things, it was questioned whether it would change the ways we learn (Fleming, 1996), love (Cornwell & Lundgren, 2001; Whitty, 2003) and even manage our own health (Evers, Cummins, Prochaska & Prochaska, 2005). As a technology, Facebook is a prominent one, so what effects might it be having on the way we live?

It is my argument that the sheer prevalence of Facebook use, the speed at which it has spread and the number of ways it can be utilised, mean that it warrants a great deal of research to find out more about the way people use it, and the effects it has on them. Facebook is a hugely significant social phenomenon of our time and a fascinating field site for research of all kinds.

Additionally, Facebook is changing constantly, with new features and functionality changes released almost every day, reinforcing the need for more studies as the changes occur. Studies from as recent as 2007 describe Facebook as being designed for a college audience (DiMicco & Millen, 2007), and studies even from the last 3-4 years describe Facebook features that now no longer exist. This shows the need to continue researching Facebook as it evolves, and understand that new features mean changes it its use, and potentially new issues to consider.

Frequently debated is the question of whether Facebook has a negative or positive effect on its users. The literature certainly documents many potential negative effects; Facebook Addiction scales have been developed (Andreassen, Torsheim, Brunborg & Pallesen, 2012) and Social Network Addiction has been suggested as a new clinical disorder (Karaiskos, Tzavellas, Balta & Paparrigopoulos, 2010). We see numerous stories in the media showing various kinds of 'diaries' of different users, and how individuals are affected by their constant usage of the site (Edmunds, 2015), and some studies go so far as to say that regular Facebook use can be physiologically compared to a drug addiction (Hormes, Kearns & Timko, 2014). These kinds of studies are not without controversy, and in my view there are a number of questions to be asked about the medicalization of Facebook usage, but it adds to an interesting picture of concern over what Facebook means to its users.

Other negative effect assertions made by studies have included that Facebook may be linked with high levels of psychopathology (Brunskill, 2013) lower levels of self esteem (Gonzales, & Hancock, 2011) and lower general wellbeing (Kross et al., 2013) with one study showing that using Facebook scored low on scales relating to pleasure, engagement or meaning. In fact it scored just above being sick! (Grimm, Kemp, & Jose, 2015). Facebook has also been linked with body dissatisfaction (Stronge, Greaves, Milojev, West-Newman, Barlow, & Sibley, 2015), disordered eating (Walker et al., 2015; Mabe, Forney & Keel, 2014; Fardouly, Diedrichs, Vartanian, & Halliwell, 2015), higher suicide risk (Ruder, Hatch, Ampanozi, Thali, & Fischer, 2015) and social anxiety (McCord, Rodebaugh, Levinson, 2014). Some research has focused on the way Facebook affects certain social behaviours, such as drinking. One

study found that the harms of drinking are frequently removed from posted Facebook photos, and the activity is glamorised as a result (McCreanor et al., 2013).

While there are many potential negative effects on users of Facebook, there are a number of researched positive ones also. Positive effects of 'social connectedness' have been linked with Facebook (Grieve, Indian, Witteveen, Tolan, Marrington, 2013). Additionally, there are the possibility of benefits to audiences lacking access to regular human connection, such as the elderly or physically/intellectually disabled (Sundar Oeldorf-Hirsch, Nussbaum, & Behr, 2011; Baker, Bricout, Moon, Coughlan, & Pater, 2013).

It is the positive possibilities of Facebook that have lead to the development of 'Koko', a version of Facebook that helps crowd source instances of positive thinking (Fastcompany, 2015). Another similar social media platform, Panoply, gives its users crowd-sourced interactive feedback when they complete expressive writing journal entries. This one has already had some success when compared a creative writing platform where there is no 'audience' (Morris, Scheuller & Picard 2015). These two examples show us the possibilities of utilising the more 'beneficial' aspects of Facebook. Of course, both of these are modified 'versions' of Facebook, thus neither actually show the benefits of using Facebook 'as is'; so we should keep that in mind. But what it does show is that if we understand more about Facebook, we can possibly use it to have a positive effect on users.

Some researchers theorise that we do not yet know which variable may moderate the relationship between Facebook use and psychological wellbeing. Rae and Lonborg

suggest that much research has focused on quantity consumed (or time spent) whereas it should have focused more on motivation for use (Rae & Lonborg, 2015). Whether negative or positive effects are postulated or proven, studies agree that there is a possibility for Facebook to have some effect on users, making this area of study even more essential.

As we have seen, since its early beginnings, questions have been raised about the way that social media affects the way we relate to one another, and this propels us into the domain of the social 'rules' around Facebook, and how people are affected by their audiences online.

Facebook themselves carried out an experiment where they altered users' newsfeeds to show them more negative or positive content in order to see if this would affect what the individuals themselves would post. Apart from widespread dissent and concern over opt-on and consent procedures, what resulted was a finding among the enormous study population (n = 689,003) that emotional states could be transferred to others (Kramer, Guillory, & Hancock, 2014). In other words, what we see other people do on social media affects how we feel. The implications for identity construction here are of course significant.

Much has been made of the strict social 'rules' that should be followed while on Facebook. Various articles and websites refer to the way Facebook should and should not be used, and a study has attempted to come up with a definitive list (Bryant and Marmo, 2012). The 'should not' list includes social faux-pas situations such as boring your 'listeners', airing personal laundry or posting 'opener' statuses, aimed at

prompting people into engaging (seen as attention-seeking behaviour). One magazine article I found went a little deeper, 'teaching' readers *how to* Facebook (the article was entitled Social Media 101) and providing advice about how to make social media work for you. It talks about choosing the right platform, not 'being a dick', and remembering that you are the one in control: "This is your time, your experience, and you have every right to make it as safe as possible, and if that means shutting the door on someone who is ruining it for you, then by all means, [shut the door]" (Dixon, 2015). Kinder rules maybe, but rules nonetheless.

Linked to this there are also a number of Facebook 'roles' which have made their way into modern language as colloquialisms also. These roles include types of users such as the 'lurker' (who reads posts but rarely interacts) and the 'oversharer' (who provides the audience with too much detail about their private life). Earlier I mentioned quizzes which determine one's user type or role, and also which kind 'annoys' other users the most. There is a distinct sense that to be a 'good Facebooker', you should know how to use Facebook, and to do this you must follow good Facebook rules.

Interestingly, Facebook does not come with an instruction manual. While it has help pages available, there is a minimum amount of information that actually teaches one to get started. This may be because the organisation wants users to learn as they go, without being daunted by explicit instructions, but rather as a natural process to adjust to something that will become a part of your everyday life before long. This has lead to a slew of books to be published, various guides for using Facebook, (for adults, for dummies and so on).

So here we have a ubiquitous platform with a number of possible risks attached, some acknowledged possible benefits, a strict set of social rules to use it, and no one to learn from but other users that were there before us. What might this all mean for the ways we choose to present ourselves on the platform?

If we turn to the question of self-presentation, we see a number of research projects focussing on identity in anonymous online environments (Zhao, Grasmuck, Martin, 2008). With the increasing popularity of websites like Facebook though, interest has been widened to include self-presentation when the subject is identifiable.

Facebook allows for both explicit and implicit identity presentation, the 'telling' of text and the 'showing' through photographs (Mehdizadeh, 2010; Zhao, Grasmuck & Martin, 2008). As well as posting and sharing created content, users are also able to join groups and publish preferences, relating to things such as religion, political ideology, work and media choices (Pempek, Yermolayeva & Calvert, 2009). This makes for a wide choice of different ways users can present themselves if they wish.

When looking at 'self-presentation' in whatever medium, we must examine what exactly is being presented. Identity can be defined as a form of self-representation, often in relation to others. Social media is an interesting site to study identity, as it offers users the ability to select the things they wish to show, and those that they wish to hide. The primary purpose of social media is the social element, the interaction with other people. Without the input of others, it would not be social media! The connection between identity formation and social media has been examined in a

number of contexts: for example how activism finds momentum in collective social media identity (Coretti & Pica, 2015; Trere, 2015), online authorship and the narrative or story of identity being told through social media (Page, 2013), and online harassment and how perpetrators benefit from a hidden or constructed identity (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2008; Valkenburg & Peter, 2011). There are numerous contexts relating to Facebook within which identity can be examined.

As mentioned earlier, social anxiety has been strongly linked with social media (Schlenker & Leary, 1982; Burke & Ruppel, 2014) and now we can understand better why this may be. Social anxiety has been said to arise when "individuals are motivated to make a preferred impression on real or imagined audiences, but perceive or imagine unsatisfactory evaluative reactions" (Schlenker & Leary 1982). This 'preferred impression' seems to be exactly what is sought on Facebook, and while social anxiety has commonly been studied in terms of in-person interaction, this similarity adds a further dimension to the relevance of studying self-presentation online.

Everyone on Facebook can be deemed both a broadcaster, and an audience. Whichever kind of profile you set up (even a bare one) is sending some kind of message, and if you have Facebook friends, you will be receiving content. So it is highly social in the true sense of the word; as a user is consuming content, they are also producing it.

When we look specifically at the way Facebook allows users to broadcast to their audience, we see that it is based on a 'one-to-many' structure, in which users are the

creators disseminating content to their audience. Users are encouraged by Facebook to restrict this audience, keeping what they share to only people who they have 'friended', and exclude strangers. So users are repeatedly advised that they are communicating within a 'safe' space, to people they know, in a way that they control. When first started this project I wondered whether or not users take this to be true or not. Do users know who can see what they post? Is the audience visible or invisible? It does seem as though the audience is not as hidden as it might be if a user broadcasts using a blog (or similar), because the identities of other posters/friends can be easily seen, and receive posts feedback in the form of 'likes' and 'comments' which cannot be anonymous. This sense of 'visible audience' is another reason why Facebook is an interesting site of self-presentation study.

There is vast disagreement in the literature over whether individuals present idealised versions of themselves, or present a reasonably accurate picture (Back et al., 2010; Michikyan, Dennis, & Subrahmanyam, 2014). It does seem as though Facebook allows for selective presentation if that is what is desired. Brunskill (2013) has asserted that the negative effect of Facebook on our mental health is down to this very gap between the version of ourselves we present, and the truth. As I was reading the literature throughout this study, I noticed that most research on Facebook refers to either the presentation of identity, or the construction of the concept of identity, for people. What appeared to be far more infrequent were studies that acknowledged the possibility that users are not presenting an existing identity on Facebook (however selectively), but that they may be using Facebook to *create* their identity of choice.

It is difficult to talk about self-presentation and the audience, without raising the issue of privacy. Privacy online has long been an important topic, and with the rise of sites like Facebook, the incidence of identity theft, cyber bullying and offline safety threats are on the rise.

Debatin et al., (2009) say that so-called 'pervasive technology' such as Facebook often means unintended consequences, such as risks to user privacy, and blurring of the lines between what is visible and what is not, what is public and what remains private. Specific privacy concerns of Facebook use include things like hacking or identity theft, backtracking functions that results in unwanted surveillance, accidental disclosure of personal information, risk of damage to user reputation (due to gossip), unwanted contact and harassment, or even stalking (Boyd & Ellison, 2008).

A whole industry exists around anti-virus software, and now there is a new industry that can teach you how to keep your online information safe, and control the privacy settings on your Facebook profile. Aside from protecting yourself, there is a lot of money being made from instructing people how to improve their online presence, control the impression people have of them from their online actions, and how best to cultivate their 'digital body language'. Additionally, it is worth remembering that Facebook itself earns revenue from targeted advertising, meaning that user disclosure of personal information is useful to Facebook. The more information that is used to target advertising to specific consumers, the more Facebook is able to sell advertisement space to advertisers.

When looking at research on privacy, there has been a focus on the factual details of who can see each piece of information shared (Taraszow et al., 2010). Other studies have looked at the different things that are shared depending on the different reasons people use Facebook (Joinson, 2008), for example in profile images (Strano, 2008). By contrast, this project looks at the experience of the user of self-presentation on Facebook, and their view of what it means to protect their own privacy or not.

One theory is that people simply are not aware when their privacy is at risk. Perhaps, as mentioned earlier, this is due to the effect of ritualised media use, which says that checking Facebook has become a routine activity. Thus users may not even think of their Facebook use in terms of being on a website, but rather in terms of its purpose to them; to connect with friends, to get the latest news, and so on. This suggests that perhaps they do not apply the cautions they usually would regarding privacy.

Of course, it is difficult to have a discussion about privacy in social media without touching on the complex issues of women and their bodies. Earlier I mentioned the contradicting findings from studies on eating disorders and body dissatisfaction, and because the population of this study is younger females, it was important to hold this broader picture in my mind as I conducted the interviews. Images of the female body can be seen as a type of 'currency' online, used to lure people into compromising situations and transactions, or just to sell and market products and services. When women put up photos of themselves, they can of course choose which ones. They can select flattering images if they wish, or edit pictures before posting. The modification of photos to remove flaws and improve appearance has been utilised for a long time in the advertising spheres, and now, it is possible for individuals to edit their own

photos. Comparison is another issue here, where individuals are able to see photos of other women and their bodies, and compare these with their own.

Before we move on to the explanation of the demographics chosen for this study, I though it was worth mentioning a few key points about the organisation behind Facebook.com, the website. It is important that we do not forget that Facebook is not just a social networking website, but a privately-owned, extremely profitable company. Facebook has 10995 employees (Facebook Newsroom, 2015) and is posting increasing profits every year; last year it earned close to $US12.5b (Statista, 2015). When we remember that there is an organisation behind the popular tool we understand more clearly what it means for Facebook to have an interest is what its users do and do not do. Users are encouraged to do various things on Facebook, while others are made impossible or nearly so. Sharing information, posting content and interacting with other users are behaviours that are encouraged. Customising accounts too much, registering with fake names, or attempting to delete a profile are all discouraged. We need to remember that as a profitable business, there is unlikely to be any coincidence when certain behaviours are encouraged of its customers. I will leave this observation for now, but it is worth remembering as we go through. Facebook is not just a website, it is a company, a huge one.

Demographics reports have shown that Facebook users are more likely to be female (53%), and that the population that uses the site is getting older. Even when adjusting for the users that have grown out of the youth age bracket, teens appear to be leaving (6.7 million users 13-24 deactivated their accounts permanently in the period 2011-2014), and the older age group appears to be growing. Facebook added 10.8 million

adults in the 25 to 34 demographic, (a growth of 32.6 percent) (Duggan, M, 2013; Neal, 2014). A reasonable amount of study has already been done on the teen/young adult bracket, and to respond to the changing Facebook population, the focus of this research will be on females aged 25-34. I myself belong in this gender group and age bracket also, meaning I felt comfortable relating to the audience of the study, and felt well-situated to do so.

New Zealanders were a logical population choice for this study. This was based on my own location and thus ease of access to participants, as well as feeling comfortable with interviewing this population. New Zealanders are also frequent Facebook users, with Facebook demographic data showing that it is our fourth most commonly visited site, with around 70% of Kiwis over 18 using the site. In fact, statistics show we spend close to one full working day a month (7.43 hours) on social media, placing us firmly at the top of the list of 'countries that spend the most time on social media' (Hedquist, 2013). Around 16% of the population say they are always logged in to Facebook, and 68% of users say they frequently use it for more than 30 minutes at a time (IDC, 2015).

I chose to utilise a qualitative methodology, both because I was seeking an in-depth understanding of user experience in their own words, but also to fill a gap in the literature. Previous studies and a multitude of demographic reports on the area of Facebook and identity have resulted in a fair amount of quantitative data, such on number of hours spent, number of photographs posted, quantity of engagement measured in likes and comments and so on. It has been said that that Facebook lends itself well to quantitative study because of its 'structured fixed format, which allows

for easy analysis' (Mehdizadeh, 2010). Being able to accurately measure what people are doing, and provide data around exact numbers of viewers, clicks and engagements, that is of course also a large part of the equation of how Facebook earns its revenue!

So this quantitative information is available, able to be verified, and can be published as a snapshot of who is looking at what on Facebook. However, I would argue that the very nature of the many topics embedded with Facebook as a site of study, cry out for qualitative study. As I was researching for this project, I craved more depth in the studies I was reading. While I learnt the demographics of users, I wanted to know what those people were thinking about when they signed up. I may have found the exact numbers of posts made and viewed, but I could not tell how those posters and viewers were feeling, or why they did what they did. This in-depth coverage by way of qualitative methodology, is what this project seeks to present.

As we have seen, Facebook is an incredibly important topic of study. It is widely used, ever changing, has rapidly grown, has measured effects of different kinds of its users, and is the site of a number of interesting issues. These include things like privacy, identity, social behaviours, perceived audiences and potential harms (and benefits) to users which all makes Facebook an essential site for the study of self-presentation. It is also something that has a particular relevance within my life personally, and I felt well-situated to be able to undertake this research.

My chosen research question was: What do people do when they choose how to present themselves on Facebook? This question was chosen as it most clearly

summarises what I was setting out to find out. Facebook is about presenting oneself, so what are people thinking about and feeling, when they do so? It was left sufficiently open, so as to enable findings to present themselves as the research progressed, but tight enough so I knew what I was looking for while I was analysing the data.

Method

Orientations to the research

Choosing a research topic related to the Internet had a number of benefits and also implications. It allowed me to consider a number of different ways to gather information, such as speaking with people online, (knowing their identity or perhaps anonymously), viewing their public Facebook pages without them present, obtaining consent to view private Facebook pages, speaking with them directly about Facebook, and watching as they completed on online task either in person or over the internet. I opted to speak with participants in person, and then also to ask if they would show me their Facebook pages so they could talk me through what they were thinking as they viewed them and so I could see how they interacted with the content. This meant I was able to gather information from more than one source, their interview answers in absence of Facebook, and then their descriptions of what they were doing and seeing while Facebook was open. The part of the interview that involved looking at people's Facebook pages was more 'concrete' in a way: while there are infinite interpretations of something on a Facebook page, there is still something concrete to look at. It meant that they could be right or wrong about something that was there, or could show examples to illustrate their points. The purely conversational part of the interview yielded more fluid description, in that there was no prop to illustrate the language. Hine (2013) speaks of the value of this multifaceted approach, allowing a subject as complex as social media use to be approached in a number or ways, including while actually using the social media in question.

I chose to utilise a qualitative methodology in order to get richer and more in-depth answers to the questions I was asking (Patton, 1990). I wanted to be able to interpret the answer of each participant as they presented them in their own words, as

descriptions of their experiences. Additionally, a lot of the research I had read was quantitative, which gave a good overview snapshot, but not much delved more deeply into what people were thinking and feeling. I wanted to understand more about what people thought about and felt when using Facebook, and I did not think that quantitative study would give me the understanding I was pursuing. My choice of thematic analysis as a method of analysis meant I was able to understand and draw out the themes in the participants' dialogue (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

The other major influence on the study I undertook was the fact that I utilised a social constructionist epistemology (Gergen, 1985). Social constructionism revolves around the idea that we as people have changeable understandings of the world and our society, which we create based on our interpretations of these things. As an approach, it rejects the idea of a simple ultimate truth, and instead posits that individuals understand the world in different ways, largely dependent on context (Willig, 2001). Thus, individuals negotiate truth among one another and in different contexts. Social constructionism also aims to understand exactly how people make meaning, and thus create different understandings of culture and society (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Multiple truths are possible, and they are always incomplete and relative to context (Taylor & Wetherell, 2001). This is very different from traditional positivist research which aims to find one singular truth, independent of people and their interpretations. I thought a social constructionist epistemology fitted very well with the topic I was researching, and was the best approach to finding out more about what people understand that they are doing when they use Facebook. Facebook would not exist without people, and it evolves and develops constantly because of people. Indeed you might say that in some ways, Facebook *is* people. So social constructionism enabled

me to witness the negotiation of meaning and identity within such a complex sphere, allowing me to explore the things people said about Facebook, and look more deeply into the meanings and realities they were making as they talked. A conversation about social media draws heavily on socially available meanings, and necessarily involves particular social references and indeed consequences. The decision to utilise a social constructionist epistemology also affected aspects of research design, such as the number of participants required. The in-depth and exploratory nature of this research meant I did not need to find a large number of participants, rather it was more about the content of their answers that I was seeking to analyse (Braun & Clarke, 2013).=.

The above assumptions led me to select an interview method. Interviews are frequently used in qualitative research, as they enable researchers to gain complex in-depth information from participants (Wengraf, 2001). I chose to use a semi-structured interview (the researcher asks some pre-set questions, but also is able to include additional questions, depending on participant responses).

But what of my own presence as researcher in the study? In traditional positivist psychological research, the relationship between researcher and the objects of study is seen as straightforward. There exists a position of objectivity which can be achieved as long as an appropriate procedure is followed. This allows the researcher to discover a singular reality, as long as a 'recipe' is followed and can then be replicated (Willig, 2001). From a social constructionist perspective in qualitative research, however, the researcher is acknowledged as a part of the process of the study. Because meaning is produced in a context, the researcher cannot be removed from the equation completely. As Patton (1990) says, it is the human factor which is the strength and

also weakness of qualitative study. In order to be aware of these potential strengths and weaknesses, we must be able to fully acknowledge as far as possible, the influence of the researcher. Thus, it is important to acknowledge my presence in the research. Firstly I will examine my presence as interviewer, and then more broadly as researcher, taking into account my own experiences with Facebook and the effect these may have had on the present research.

I had to be very aware of my own presence in the interviews, and the possible effect on participants and on the data gathered. My main aim was to allow the participants to feel comfortable and willing to share. I was interviewing a sample from a population of the same age and gender, and same city as me, which I felt meant I was able to better relate to their experiences and make them feel comfortable. I used a number of Facebook-related terms during the interview, as it was difficult to talk about Facebook with this population without doing so, and because it was language they themselves frequently used which helped give me credibility and allowed participants to be able to more easily relate their thoughts. I did have to be aware of the way I asked questions, as well as my responses to participants' answers. I attempted to be as neutral as possible, while making the participants feel heard and encouraged to continue sharing. Interviewer responses to answers can be accidental and invisible to the interviewer themselves of course, so I had to be as aware as possible that I did not show any signs of agreement, disagreement or any kind of judgement (Braun & Clarke, 2013). I watched participants closely in an attempt to determine how comfortable they were with the interview, and attempted to always do what I thought would make them feel more comfortable. This is not an exact science of course, but I refer to things such as allowing for longer pauses if the participant seemed like they

were ready to talk but still searching for the right words, and so on. I did find it a reassuring sign that frequently people talked for many minutes in answer to a question I had asked, without interruption. When I checked in to be sure participants were ready to begin, it was also reassuring that the questions were always about my research, rather than the process. This made me think that participants felt they were well informed about what was to take place. Likewise when I checked that participants were happy with what they had said being used for the study, apart from some general interest questions about the research, no one had any questions or issues with the data being used.

One thing I had to keep in mind while interviewing, was that some people would give much more information than others. Some gave shorter answers and then looked for another prompt, while others started talking after the first question, and continued for some time, with only minimal encouragers from myself. This meant it was my role as interviewer to manage this process, and ensure that at the end of each interview, participants had said all they wished to say, even if they were not a prolific talker.

When I think about my personal relationship with Facebook and related media, I must state that Facebook and social media in general have always had a reasonably strong presence in my life. We got our first home computer when I was eight years of age and dial-up internet a few years later. Broadband became popular when I was a student, and I set up my first Facebook page when I was 22. All these technological developments were widely discussed all around me as I was growing up, and I witnessed a lot of 'firsts' in terms of social media. Technology and its related developments were always a positive novelty, with a lot of conversation happening all

around these topics as people learnt about the technology and how they could use it. This has made me think about how much age group matters in this kind of research, especially presently. Someone who is currently 50 years old would have had a completely different experience of Facebook in their lives, as opposed to someone who is currently 7, and may have had Facebook for their whole lives. Or indeed, have had parents who had Facebook pages and thus uploaded photos of them since birth, or even before! Every year the number of people who did not have Facebook all their lives diminishes, and the age group that first set up profiles when they were in their twenties, is an aging population. This means I had to be aware of my own personal relationship with the 'advent of Facebook', and how I felt about it entering my awareness somewhere around the age of 22. The women I spoke to were of a similar age and population as I, but this did not mean they would have the same views and memories of when it was first introduced to them.

This is linked with the fact that I had to consider how certain terms used in the research were conceptualised for the participants. For example, using Facebook 'often' for one person was not the same as for another. Likewise, the very use of Facebook for a person that uses it to share photographs of their holiday might represent a completely different thing compared with someone else who does not know how to upload pictures and uses it purely to view news articles from their favourite newspapers. As Silverman says, the use of Internet technologies may appear homogenous at the surface level of behaviour, but there are many different uses and purposes (Silverman, 2013). These need to be taken into account when researching a particular medium. For example posting a message on someone's Facebook wall could be conceptualised as an opportunity to present oneself, to wear a mask, as part of a conversation, a sign of status and so on. My own expectations and assumptions of

how people conceptualised Facebook needed to be considered the whole way through the research, for example while I was thinking about which questions to ask, and how to analyse the data I gathered.

Beyond setting up a personal profile, I have used Facebook for work, to sell goods, place advertising, connect with clients, organise events, set up groups, follow brands and organisations, keep up with news and many more uses beyond those, including now, recruiting participants for research. I have not personally had major negative or positive experiences with it, although I have witnessed close friends and family appear to suffer greatly, and benefit greatly from it. This in part drove my research, wanting and understanding of why it seems to be a positive presence in the lives of some people and a negative one in others.

Overall, Facebook certainly has had, and continues to have, a very real presence in my life. The irony was not lost on me how often I was distracted by Facebook while writing this research up! My phone was often sitting next to me, the 'ding' interrupting me with a message, 'like' or 'comment'. I felt very embedded in the population of the research, comfortable in the language used, and able to relate strongly to a lot of what was said. This meant I also felt welcome when asking questions about experiences I could relate to, allowing me to feel more credible as an interviewer on this topic.

Research Procedure

I posted on Facebook asking for female participants that I did not know personally, aged between 25-34 from the Auckland area who would have 1.5 hours available for me to come and interview them. See Appendix A for a copy of the advertisement I

posted, asking friends I was connected with on Facebook to pass on the advertisement to their friends, so they could get in touch with me if they were willing to participate. This did make it a little more difficult as it relied solely on the volunteering of participants I did not know, whereas if they were people I knew directly it would have been much easier to recruit them. I also set up a new email address for the purpose of the study, to keep separate from my own address. I offered $20 in the form of a petrol, supermarket or bookshop voucher (of the participant's choosing) as a thank you.

I aimed to find between five and ten participants in order to allow for an in-depth exploration of key themes and discourses, while restricting the amount of data collected to remain manageable for a project of this size. I ended up with nine participants, with ages ranging from 25 to 32. They were all female and from the Auckland region, with varying levels of usage of Facebook.

Once I had a response from a potential participant, I sent them the information sheet (see Appendix 2 for a copy of the information sheet) to read over, and made sure that after reading they were still prepared for me to come and interview them. I checked their age and asked if they had any questions and then organised a time and place to meet them. The only stipulation was that it should be quiet and reasonably private if possible, ideally with an Internet connection so we could load Facebook and take a look at it. Linking to the Internet via Bluetooth from my phone was my backup, but this was never required. Most of the participants suggested their own homes which worked well. I also checked which kind of voucher they would most like, and then went and purchased the appropriate one so I could present this at the end of the interview session.

I brought a copy of the information sheet to each interview, and gave the participant time to read through it again (as well as it being in the email) and ask any questions they had. I then asked the participants to sign a consent form to confirm they were comfortable with all the information given and were happy to proceed (See Appendix C for a copy of the consent form). Participants were given the chance to say they would like to see a summary of the findings at the conclusion of the project, by giving me their email address.

I moved from the general questions to more specific ones, and used questions that were open-ended enough to allow for interviewees to express their perspectives on a topic, but also allow for data which can be compared across interviews with different respondents (Bryman, 2012). When designing prompt questions and readying myself for the interviews, I read a great many examples of other interviews that researchers of all kinds had carried out, and a number of best-practice guides on how to ensure questions are clear, simple and elicit helpful and informative responses. One such guide was Patton's *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* which gave a useful amount of detail on how to ask truly open-ended questions, where the question itself has a limited amount of influence on the way the participant answers (Patton 1990).

I started each interview with some general warm-up questions, and then allowed the participant to guide the conversation, depending on what it seemed like they wanted to talk about, how much they talked, whether they looked to me for prompts or wanted to guide the conversation more themselves. As information came up, I allowed the interview to be fluidly guided by the participant. If there seemed a natural need for a redirecting prompt from me, I had a series of question topics prepared that I

could then reach for. They were deliberately general, asking about their experiences

with posting and reading, whether any particular events stuck in their minds and so

on. I had prompts for initial questions, questions to elicit more in-depth data and

questions designed to follow up or prompt further on particular topics. Figure 1 shows

the types of questions I used for each of these purposes, and it gives examples from

the interviews carried out. As can be seen in the question prompt examples, they were

all written in straightforward language, so it made them easy to read out if I needed

them. The prompts were designed to be short, direct and contain only the one

question, as recommended by Savin-Baden and Major (2013).

Figure 1: Interview questions

Purpose of question	Type of questions	Examples used in my interviews
Initial questions:	Direct/linear questions to elicit general information	'Could you tell me on which devices you use Facebook?'
	Narrative questions to elicit stories	'How did you first sign up to Facebook?'
	Structural questions to learn about basic processes needed to understand the interviewee experience:	'What does setting up a profile involve?'
Questions to get in-depth data:	Contrast questions to elicit information about extreme cases:	'What makes for a good, or bad experience on Facebook?'
	Evaluative questions, to encourage participants to talk about a judgement:	'How do you feel when that happens?'
	Circular questions, which prompt meta-thinking:	'What do you think your sister felt when she said that?'
	Comparative questions, to ask participants to put their experiences in perspective:	'How do you think your life would be different if you did not have Facebook?'
Follow-up questions	Verification questions to check understanding:	'You said that you felt upset when you saw his photos, is that correct?'
	Prompting/probing questions to ask interviewee to elaborate on an idea:	'Could you tell me a bit more about that? What do you mean when you say 'revealing pics''
	Follow-up questions to elicit clarification or elaboration:	'Could you give me an example of that?'
	Closure questions to tie up a line of enquiry, or an idea that has been explored:	'Did anything else happen that could help me understand your experience so far?'

I audio-recorded each interview, and also observed the behaviours of the participants as they talked, including mannerisms and attitudes towards the questions, shifts in mood and so on. After the conversational interview portion, I asked whether there was anything else they wanted to tell me and if not, I asked them to scroll through their Facebook page and talk me through what they saw. I gave little guidance here unless it seemed like it was required, and just showed gentle curiosity as to what they wanted to show me. Some people started with their photos, others started scrolling through posts and others started with their newsfeed, showing what information they could see of the pages of other people. Eventually we usually worked our way around all aspects of the pages such as their own profile, the newsfeed of info from other people, and some photo albums and other aspect, but it felt right to go in the order of what the participants chose to show me.

At the end of the interview I again checked if there was anything else they would like to say and then went through the debrief process, checking if there was anything they would like to ask, or anything they needed any further support with. I also checked whether they were happy that everything they had said being used as part of the analysis for this research project. At the end I presented each participant with the voucher they had specified, and asked them to sign a sheet saying they had received the voucher.

After the interviews I transcribed each one from the audio recording, and then completed a thematic analysis. See the analysis section for more detail on this process.

Ethical considerations

When designing the research approach, I went through the full ethical approval with Massey University's ethics board, after thorough discussion with my supervisor. Their queries were focused on where my data would be stored, how much 'observation' I would be undertaking, and a recommendation to set up a separate email address for the study, not using my personal address. I was able to address and answer all of the above to their satisfaction: Transcripts would be anonymised and stored on my computer within a password protected file, the observation would be as a part of the interview, and I set up the separate email address.

Other considerations and processes I followed included the following: I ensured I was comfortable with my level of experience and expertise to be able to undertake the project, including supervision. I had to consider participant comfort and safety in organising the interview time and place, as well as ensuring they were comfortable with the audio recording of the interview. I anonymised the transcripts and replaced them with pseudonyms for the purposes of this paper (all names used in this paper are pseudonyms). One thing I needed to think about was the fact that participants were showing me their private Facebook pages. I ensured that they were comfortable with this by checking numerous times, reminding them they only had to show me what they chose to, and that they could log out at the end, so they were aware I no longer had access beyond the end of the interview. I did need to consider the unpredictable nature of Facebook though, in the sense that because we were looking at the page together individuals did not always know in advance what would appear, or how they might feel about it as I watched. I was prepared to minimise any occurrences such as these, and reassure participants that everything was confidential, and they did not

need to elaborate on anything that appeared. This situation did not eventuate. When recruiting, I needed to make sure I did not know the participants personally, which I did by recruiting through friends. New Zealand has a small population however, and the sample was further narrowed by the fact I was selecting from an age group similar to my own, in the same city. When I received a participant response, I ensured that they were not a personal Facebook friend. If I recognised anyone in the photos of the participant, I did not mention this to them. Finally, I spent a great deal of time making sure I had taken cultural considerations into account. While there was not a specific cultural group selected for my sample, the only requirement was that they were able to converse in English, so this meant that no cultural groups were excluded. I set up a Korero with Massey University's Kaumātua, to ensure that my methodology was safe for all involved and satisfied relevant cultural considerations.

The nature of this research project did not pose any specific threat of harm to participants, myself or anyone else, but it did involve interviewing and a topic related to identity and personal use of a social network, so I needed to be aware of these aspects.

Analytic process

I transcribed all the interviews from the audio files, making notes at particular places where tone of voice or affected the meaning of the text. If someone began speaking excitedly or changed their tone to sound sarcastic for example, I made a small note of this. As mentioned earlier, I made some observational notes during the interviews also to show body language, for example if someone was shrugging while they made a statement, it would provide a slightly different interpretation that if they were

nodding. Also during the portion of the interview where people were viewing their Facebook pages, I noted down any important context of what they were looking at while speaking. As I was transcribing, I added these notes into the transcriptions to show context.

The transcriptions gave me the primary data for analysis, alongside the contextual notes, and my own recollection of the interviews. Once I had the transcriptions completed, I printed these out with double spacing and read over each twice, noting any items of interest. I noted things that I saw come up a number of times, things that were unexpected, and things that were relevant to my research aims. I also noted anything that really stood out, such as things people said with strong conviction, change of emotion or things that were a confirmation or contradiction. I then went through a process of coding, going through all the data and sorting it into overall codes. I continued to go back and forth over all the material until I was satisfied that most of the content fitted into the codes, and if a code needed adjusting or splitting I did so. I drew a number of mind-maps, arranging the different ideas into different categories, and aligning them where I could see clear similarities. If I found a subtheme beneath a theme, I included this on the map, to ensure that my themes were broad enough to cover what I needed them too, but specific enough to accurately describe what they contained. In the end I came up with six codes. I called these:

- What I 'do' on Facebook.
- What I do not do on Facebook.
- What others do on Facebook.
- What others think when they see my Facebook

- Facebook as an agent.

- The Facebook 'world' versus real life.

Originally I had thought the first two, 'do' and 'do not do' fitted under the same code, but quickly realised that there seemed to be two different things at play here. One was about all the things people wanted to see about themselves, how they were constructing their identity piece by piece to show a version on Facebook that was complete and ready for viewing. The other was about prohibitive rules that they follow, things they would never do and why. This one was talked about in a different way. Each had their own tensions, so needed to be pulled out and discussed separately.

The other two themes that I didn't immediate realise were distinct, were 'Facebook as an agent', and 'The Facebook 'world' versus real life. I first thought people were talking about Facebook and the way it acts in their lives, and how this was somehow differentiated from the 'real world' for them. I soon realised that the two were distinct though. The idea of how Facebook has an agent-like effect on what they can and cannot do, was such a strong idea by itself, and it contrasted quite strongly with the idea that the participants knew their real world was different to their Facebook world. The latter was more about how they claimed to know how to avoid feeling envious of what they saw online, and how they managed what was 'healthy' for them to see and not see. Once I separated the two, the data fell much more neatly into one or the other theme so it felt much more logical that way.

I took my time sorting and coding, and made a number of passes through the material at different times, acknowledging that personal factors would influence the way I was coding. If I had just been reading about a certain topic, or was in a particular mood, it would be possible that my interpretation was affected. So by repeating the process a number of times I was trying to ensure I was doing a thorough analysis, finding everything that was in the text, and never forcing an interpretation that was not there. I also kept reading while I was coding, both literature I had previously highlighted, and also finding and searching out new material to understand more about what I was finding.

Once I was almost certain I had my six themes, I pulled apart the transcripts and allocated pieces of each interview under each. I was satisfied when there was an extremely small amount of text left that did not fit under one of the headings.

I then started writing about each one, describing the evidence that led me to identify it, alongside any theory that existed to elaborated on any points made. I listed the examples I thought would illustrate each one, and began to form the basis of what is now the 'findings' chapter of this paper. As I was writing, it became clearer and clearer that what I was looking at was a collection of contradictions. As will be explained further in the next chapter, every theme was set amidst tensions. This became an overarching theme in itself, and a helpful way for me to understand what was happening in the ways people talked about their experiences on Facebook.

As I carried out my analysis, I put a number of things in place to ensure that my research and analysis was of the highest quality I could carry out. Clive Seale (1999)

has said that quality is rather elusive when it comes to qualitative research. But there are a number of things we can do to ensure the best quality we can. If we take a conventional view, we assess the 'objectiveness' of an interview in terms of reliability and validity (Kirk & Miller, 1986), but according to Silverman, when we see the interview as a dynamic, meaning-making event, we must apply different criteria. He says the focus is then on the way and circumstances within which narratives are constructed, as well as the content of the answers (Silverman, 2013).

I followed the fifteen-step checklist of criteria as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2013). The checklist included items such as checking the transcripts against the recordings, that themes are coherent and distinctive, that enough time has been allocated to complete all phases of analysis, and that themes have been checked and rechecked against the data. Additionally, I recorded and described my entire research process in enough detail so that it could be replicated, as Willig (2001) recommends. The interpretation of course takes into account the presence of the researcher so it is not certain that an identical interpretation would be generated by another researcher even if an identical process is followed. It is hoped that similar themes would be discovered and overall interpretation made.

Patton (1990) also cites numerous ways qualitative research can be 'tested' for quality. He says that credibility can be achieved through applying rigorous methods, credibility of the researcher themselves, and a philosophical belief in the value of qualitative inquiry. When reflecting upon these criteria I felt satisfied I had spent a reasonable amount of time making as certain as possible of each requisite. Patton also says that rigorous analysis benefits from generating and assessing rival conclusions,

and finding negative cases. If rival conclusions cannot be plausibly argued for, and negative cases not found, this is a positive sign for any conclusions made and positive cases discovered. During the analysis portion I spent a great deal of time attempting to envision and test possible alternatives to what I had found, in order to satisfy this requirement. I tried alternative theories, alternative themes, and attempted to 'explain away' my findings with alternate interpretations. When I was unsuccessful, I was satisfied.

There were a number of surprises while I was coding. When I first started this research, I was expecting people to talk about methods of communication and connection, the way Facebook affects or does not affect their connections with other humans. I was expecting to hear about social anxieties, and how people feel that it is easier to communicate online than offline, or perhaps how it has affected their offline relationships, or how they communicate differently when they use social media. But instead, people talked about how they 'do Facebook' and the rules they have for themselves, the identity they have created on Facebook as distinct from their everyday lives. They did mention communication on Facebook, but it was part of a larger theme, as part of 'who they are' when they are using Facebook.

The pre-reading I had done centred largely on the positives and negative of social media in the light of connection with other people. The negatives frequently sounded like 'we think we are connecting, but it is a poor substitute, and we forget how to do it in real life' and 'being constantly connected makes us unhappy'. The positives argued that people who find it difficult to connect (those with social anxiety, disabilities or even simply those in big cities with busy lives) find a way to do it online that is

'better than nothing'. Others promoted social media as a way to find others who support our ideas (known as 'supportive exchange'), that sharing in itself lowers stress, and that for women, it allowed them to do more efficiently what they are tasked with: 'maintaining household family relationships' (Hampton, Goulet & Albanesius, 2015)

I thus expected a lot of the conversation to be around the 'effect Facebook has on me', and while there was some of this ('I know what is healthy for me, I am aware it's not real life') actually it was a much bigger and more complete picture, complete with thoughts about interactions from all perspectives and filled with contradictions and complications.

My original slant towards people 'presenting themselves' skewed me into thinking that it would be about people taking their existing identity, and using Facebook to present it. What I found was, that people were building a (sometimes entirely new) identity on Facebook. This 'building' was riddled with contradictions and tensions as mentioned above.

In summary, my expectation was that I would be hearing a lot about a 'preferred impression' of our real lives but it was more about Facebook being an impression all on its own. Something to be created, managed curated and presented as 'me'. Now we will move onto the findings section, where I will discuss each of the six themes, and how they play out amidst tensions.

Findings and Discussion

A number of tensions became rapidly apparent when people talked about the ways they use Facebook. There were a series of conflicting elements that framed up the thoughts and feelings of participants about their use; indeed, even the phrase 'use Facebook' presented some problems, as we will see. Researcher Robert Shields, writing in 1996, already explored some different ways he had observed tensions in Internet usage: "The Internet creates a crisis of boundaries between the real and the virtual, between, between time zones and between spaces, near and distant. Above all, boundaries between bodies and technologies, between our sense of self and our sense of our changing roles: the personae we may play or the 'hats we wear' in different situations are altered" (Shields, 1996, p.7). As I progressed further into the participants' exploration of identity and self-presentation, battles appeared to be waged on several fronts.

As mentioned above, I was able to differentiate the ways people talking about 'doing' Facebook into six different categories or themes, which came up over and over again. Each of these contained their own set of tensions and contradictions. Interestingly, this theme of contradiction has reared its head in different ways in the literature on Facebook. I have already mentioned the way that individuals claim to understand privacy settings and then behave in ways that put themselves at risk, or how people claim Facebook is not important in their lives and later admit how essential it really is. One possible explanation here is the third-person effect argument. This states that people expect mass media to have more of an effect on other people than on themselves (Brosius & Engel, 1996; Davison, 1983; Salwen & Dupagne, 2000).

Perhaps this means that they do not see how they themselves fit into the picture, how their privacy matters or whether they feel addicted to Facebook.

Under the six categories mentioned, people talked about the way they developed and presented content for viewing by others, in relation to how others presented and viewed information for themselves, and how the Facebook 'world' was different to 'real life'. They also talked about the 'rules' of Facebook, and how using it meant they had to stick within certain boundaries set by the website itself.

After coding for these six ways and documenting the tensions discovered among each it became very clear that these were all strongly linked under the one theme, of 'my identity on Facebook'. Even this overall theme itself proved to be a source of tension for the participants, as I will unpack as we progress through the analysis further.

This central notion of 'identity creation' differed to what I had expected to find, thinking that people would be more likely to talk about using Facebook to 'present' their identity, to show it through a lens, to use Facebook as a platform to display the aspects they wanted shown. Instead it was as though their Facebook page itself was an identity – they were creating something distinct and specific, ready for sharing.

This can be compared to the identity creation researched by McCreanor et al. (2013), who found through a number of studies that women create a 'drinking' profile online, one which showed all the best bits of drinking, and nothing they didn't want to show. The profiles were carefully curated to ensure the owner didn't look too drunk or

unattractive, and never showed the negative bits of the activity, such as injuries or hangovers.

Much like the women in McCreanor et al's study created their profiles, the participants of mine were talking not just about displaying an identity they wanted visible, they were talking about *creating* one. This provided a site for enormous contradiction and crises as we will see.

Here's what I do on Facebook. I know how to use it… Do I?

Almost immediately in every interview, participants appeared eager to begin to talk about the way they 'do' Facebook. This showed as their way of showing that they considered Facebook familiar territory, that there was no question they knew what they were doing, and felt secure in doing so. But after a time, often a small question mark drifted in, and they unhappily questioned things they did not appear to enjoy being seen as not knowing.

They frequently began by presenting information on *how* they use Facebook: Cathie said *"I send stuff to Facebook from my phone…. And now, just having this open and scrolling through it, it's the longest I've had Facebook open in one single go for a really long time. I would normally go in, scroll through and leave again."* Tanya said: *"I'm respectful of how Facebook should be used. I have an account on Facebook and Twitter and Pinterest and I know and respect how to use each of them."* Claire as well had her way: *"I'm not so up to date with it all, I just use it the way I use it."* They used words like Cathie's 'normally', spoke with certainty. We sense that a sense of

control is being established, a designation of what is normal for them, and that they are the centre of their own description of what they do.

Another way people explained the way they 'do' Facebook was to cite how they benefited from their way of using it. Claire said: *"Commenting is cool. I think it's just that extra layer of being involved in someone's life, other than what you see at work or whatever."* *"Messenger makes my life so much easier – it's so much quicker!"* said Nicole.

Then they often presented what 'type' of user they consider themselves: Bex said *"I'm not very engaged, I mainly use messenger to keep in touch with friends."* While Tina labelled herself: *"I'm not much of a poster, I'm more of a lurker and consumer."* This further elaborates the sense of a descriptive account of 'what I do' as important. The terminology is familiar, the language certain.

They talked in details too, for example how often they log in and out: Billie said: *"Oh I use it every day! It's like, my way to be in touch."* For Nicole it was: *"I definitely go on every day, it's always open."* Tanya said: *"I never log out of Facebook. I check it when I get up, on the bus, when I have lunch, at work, when I leave work, and before going to bed."*

And they talked about which devices they choose to use it on: Sophie said *"I never really use Facebook online. I haven't used it online in a really long time."* Tanya said a similar thing: *"I'm always on it on my phone, especially in bed before I get up. See, you can see the light is dimmed here?"* Nicole on the other hand: *"I've never used it*

on my phone, because I don't like using my phone. So I only use it on my computer." So we are getting a complete picture of how they see their own usage, and their level of awareness of it.

We also get to hear what they like to see, what they go to Facebook to receive: Claire explained: *"I like to keep in touch with the news about brands I like. If you look at my newsfeed it's going to be people, news from groups and company news. I like community pages"* Billie said: *"Now that I'm away from home, sometimes other people put up information, like news and stuff that's quite useful. Also I love looking at pictures from people who are travelling. You think 'oh I want to go there!' and so it's cool."* Note Claire's certainty in her words: *"it's going to be.."*. She is sure about this.

Then we see some details about what they like to post themselves: Billie said: *"I post things about nutrition, because I'm a nutritionist. And pictures of travel, and things about looking about the environment, ecology – like petitions for animal rights, yep I put those on."* Tina explained: *"When I post stuff, it's either really weird bizarre stuff, or cute stuff, and probably mainly photos these days".*

And finally, there we see how the women choose to curate their friends and the content they receive: Cathie said: *"I'm not someone to unfollow someone's timelines, I'll unfriend. Nope! If we have so little in common that I don't want to see any posts you make… you're gone."* Nicole told me: *"It's really just a small circle of friends really, maybe five or six people that are always all on here. So like, it's always people I actually see."* Said Billie: *"I try to only be friends with people who I would stop in*

the street and say hello to. And I see 401 friends and I think that's quite a lot of

people! But not compared to lots of other people I know who have like 800 or 1000

friends."

Here we are privy to more sophisticated actions on Facebook, beyond simply posting and browsing. They are modifying the content and people they see, with a purpose.

Note the frequent and confident usage of the word 'I' throughout all these transcripts. The women are talking about what they do and why, and there is not often an attempt to dilute this with the third person, or a general statement of what is commonly done by others. This is them, and they are clearly presenting how they behave.

Once this strong desire to establish a sense of control was set up in the narratives, it was often just as swiftly countered, as the women were unable to find something on their page, or made an error in their operation of the website. There was a distinct sense of discomfort around this interaction, as though some level of fraud had been uncovered, and the language showed participants frequently leaping to the defensive.

Here is how it often happened: as the women were showing me their pages, there was something they were unsure about, could not find, or did not work as they had expected. This was interesting to watch, as some people defended this as evidence of how little Facebook really matters to them: Nicole exclaimed: *"See, I don't even know how to use it! I don't even know how to upload photos!"* and some seemed irritated at the feeling that they didn't know how to do something within a place they deemed their own sphere: Tina said: *"Oh more photos. I think I did them in batches,*

maybe that's why they've come through twice. That's weird, it's like the exact same

thing. Facebook! I don't know what's going on!"

It was as though people were defending their lack of knowledge of Facebook by either diminishing its importance/value, or by blaming the role of Facebook, in that it changes frequently and they can hardly keep up. Tina continued to search for the reason for some time before finally giving up.

A similar thing was reported in a study by Debatin et al., (2009) where researchers asked participants about the importance of Facebook to them. They found that many of the participants initially said it was not very important, despite evidence to the contrary. In one example, a participant had over 500 Facebook friends, and the researchers concluded that she may be making an attempt to downplay and rationalize the significance Facebook has for her.

Questions around features they did not know much about were also not answered as happily as the ones where they were able to just discuss what they usually do. *"I don't even know what all this stuff is!"* says Bailey, referring to an interests/about panel, which a number of others also did not know much about. *"I've never looked at that, what's that all about?"* Cathie asks. She moves on quickly, unwilling to linger in the acknowledgement that there are parts of her page she is not in control of.

This lack of control is linked with a later theme too: Facebook as an agent in users' lives, whereby they feel a certain loss of certainty, Facebook just 'is the way it is', and if things had changed or were unclear to the user, it was an annoyance and possibly a

threat to their carefully constructed online identity. But there was a clear sense of there being no point in arguing with Facebook! This theme is explored further in the 'Facebook as agent' section.

Initially, the level of detail present in the accounts of 'how I do Facebook' surprised me. It was a sudden, certain, complete story, from every person I spoke to. I was expecting people to waver to some extent, some to have less strong views, or some to admit they were unsure of what they do/do not do. But this was not the case. With minimal prompting, every individual launched directly into the 'story' of what they do on Facebook. They also seemed very safe talking about this topic, my prompts were barely needed, and frequently the dialogue went on for many minutes where the women were telling me about different aspects of their Facebook usage. I got the impression they were talking about a favourite recipe, or directions along a route they knew well. Other questions I asked prompted more thought, but on the topic of 'tell me how you use Facebook' – everyone had a lot of detail to impart. This only changed when they came across evidence that there were some things they did not know. And even then, it seemed preferable to minimally acknowledge this, and move back to the safety of asserting their practices as an intact part of their identity.

This seemed to indicate the clear feeling that it was beneficial to know how they use it, and indeed a safe and desired way of interacting with social media in general. This may be related to privacy issues; that it is accepted as important to control your Facebook presence, privacy and security.

Participants also seemed to want to place a narrative alongside the interaction. Rather than showing me their page and letting it speak for itself, things were explained, justified, defended – people appeared to enjoy explaining their 'rules'. They were talking about a 'right' way to use Facebook (Tanya went so far as to say that she 'respects' how it should be used, while Nicole acknowledged she is not a "huge Facebook user for how it's meant to be used") but it appeared to be the way that was 'right' for them. It was even acknowledged a number of times that not everyone uses it the same way, but the message seemed to be that as long as you have 'a way' to use it, that was okay. Bex said: *"Like, it's each to their own. If you really love it, then fill your boots, like actually. I'm saying, that's my perception and what works for me."*

This deliberate 'ring-fencing' of personal preferences when it comes to Facebook use supports the notion that people are using the platform to build an identity, and are able to describe the 'rules of the game' to create a feeling of safety and security around their own individual identity. As mentioned earlier, it has been often attempted to cite a complete list of these social media 'rules', different to situation and type of interaction (Bryant and Marmo, 2012). But whether there is one set of rules for everyone or an infinite set, it does seems as though people have a set of governing rules they are aware of, and they do not enjoy any challenge to their usage of the platform. Thus 'getting stuck' in using it was not a welcome feeling!

This falls in line with many theories of identity formation, whereby the individual sets down rules (perhaps after examining others in existence) and is able to converse clearly about these and desires to defend them once challenged (Lile, 2013). Lile also says that these rules serve as 'boundaries' to identity, both delineating and regulating.

While I did not challenge any of the participants' ideas of their own Facebook identity, I was asking questions about them, and strongly felt the discourse of defence rise up. The 'it works for me' was strongly present through the interviews.

It is been asserted that humans feel a strong desire of people to construct identities (Lile, 2013), and it is interesting to look at how Facebook might deliver. The 'uses and gratifications theory' for example, looks at the different uses that people might have for using social media; for example, how Facebook fulfils a desire for identity construction (Malik, Dhir & Nieminen, 2015). It follows from this that once an individual has their identity constructed, they are resistive to anything challenging this.

What I never ever do on Facebook… or do I?

As mentioned in the method chapter, I originally had this theme as part of the previous one, so 'what I do, and do not do' was one larger theme. As I looked further though, I realised it as two separate ones. The below examples and interpretation will explain this decision.

All the women spoke very clearly and decisively about what kinds of things they did not post, and what kind of users they were not. The additional layer here though, is that frequently they said things in the initial 'offline' portion of the interview, only to discover that they were actually incorrect, when it came to talking while actually looking through their Facebook pages. People then had a variety of responses, but mainly justifying the existence of the contradiction. They didn't enjoy spotting the

contradiction (which they always voiced themselves) and often seemed in a crisis with themselves to try to explain it.

People discussed 'what I do not like to see', 'how I do not behave' and 'what I do not post'. Not everything said had contradictions immediately appear in the course of the interview of course, but it is possible that even those that did not, may at times not be true. A comparison that rings similar is that we would all probably say we do not read celebrity gossip magazines, but could be found flicking through when at a hairdressers or medical waiting room!

For example, we can take the sentiment of 'what I do not like to see'. I did not see any contradictions to this in the true sense, that is, that people detailed something they did not like to see and then realised they did actually like to see it. But at the same time, this may have gone on in their thoughts and not been voiced. It is a difficult one to check on, as there is little evidence that could be found to the contrary. So when Cathie says: *"I don't want to see anything intolerant. Like racist jokes, homophobic jokes, things that.. anything misogynist, even if it is trying to be funny, I am not your audience!"* It is unlikely she will voice a realisation that actually there were occasions when she found the things she has mentioned amusing. Even if she did have that realisation there is no need for her to say so, she can stick to her story and there wont be an overt contradiction unless she chooses to make it known herself.

Sophie comes closer to acknowledging that there are two sides to what she does not like to see. She first says: *"I hate it when people have their arguments on Facebook for everyone to see."* And then doubles back and says: *"But then again, we all like to*

have a look don't we? I could just not read it but I do..". It feels very much like she is conflicted over whether it is acceptable to complain about something that she *could* choose to avoid, but perhaps does not, and even perhaps in fact does derive some enjoyment from seeing.

When people discussed how they do not behave, we began to see some clearer contradictions. Not all of them of course. Billie said: *"You know how people plaster their kids all over Facebook? I would not do that."* And also: *"No personal posts, no way, I hate that stuff."* And I saw no evidence of her contradicting her statements during the interview.

Rachel on the other hand said: *"I'm not going to whinge and whine about work or whatever,"* and then when she saw something that could be considered so: *"oh well I suppose some might say that's a bit… [trails off]".* Tanya too, said: *"When I sign up for something, I read all the terms and conditions. Well, I wouldn't, but I'd like it to be the first thing I'd do".* She retracts her first statement and seamlessly turns it into the second, possibly because she hears how unlikely it is sounding, even as she says it. Sophie's contradiction came later then her initial statement. First she said: *"I hardly ever post."* And then later: *"Oh I've posted some… well I could be wrong about not posting."* With all of these, the acknowledgement is there, but the speakers are distinctly uncomfortable about it. They say 'well', trail off mid sentence, and often wanted to talk about something else.

By far the largest area of contradictions between the things people say they do not do, and what there is then evidence of them doing, is in their descriptions of what they

would *not ever* post. Nicole starts off with: *"I don't do selfies. I just don't get it. I think some are okay if you're out drinking and you're with your friends or out somewhere cool but I just do not get the whole selfie thing."* Later she discovers quite a number of these images: *"Oh look a selfie… another selfie, maybe I do put some up! But that was because…[trails off]"*. Again, she is uncomfortable about the discovery, so she first makes light of it, saying 'oh look', and then does not even complete the sentence she has begun, which sounded as though she was about to justify the contradiction.

Bex also talked about photos she would not put up: *"Nothing showing my body."* And then, later: *"Although in saying that about body pics, look I do have a couple of bikini shots up…"*. She, like Nicole, trailed off and changed the subject.

Cathie used an interesting justification for her contradiction: *"I never talk about work stuff,"* she asserts. But then later: *"When I worked at the Auckland food show I put up heaps of pictures. But that was because I was allowed to, obviously."* She has rewritten her original assertion, saying that in fact it is fine to talk about work if it is permitted, and that she would not do it only if it was forbidden.

There were four separate occasions where Billie appeared to contradict her own statements of what she does not post: *"I don't put up any details,"* she says. And then later, she says with genuine-sounding shock: *"Ahhh it says my age! Wow, interesting! Ah, it's alright, I put that there.."*. So again we see the immediate need for some kind of justification. As with our first theme, it is uncomfortable to acknowledge that there

is a part of this arena they are unfamiliar with, and the attempt at justification seems to take the power back into their hands.

She also said *"I don't put up motivational sayings, those ones with a picture,"* and then later, looking at a saying she has posted: *"That one, ahhh I do not know. I do not know why I did that."* A number of times she comes across things she is sure she would not put up. So even as she is describing the image we are looking at, she is saying it is not something she would do. For example: *"This picture, you never put up a picture in a bikini, that's a rule. But I haven't had time to delete it…"* And also: *"This is a stuffed cat. It's disgusting, I'd never post a picture of that. But I put up that one… maybe I did, but it doesn't make sense to me why it's there."* She is caught in the middle of her own deliberations over what appears to her to make no sense. And yet she does try to make sense of it, saying she has not had time to remove the image, or that she simply does not know why it would be there.

Tanya too, contradicts herself in the same two ways. The first time it is when she says things at two different times. First: *"My profile picture – I always have to be the one in the photo,"* and later: *"I'm not in this photo… oh I don't know.. maybe..".* The second time, like Bille, she is caught mid-description. She is talking about the photos she would not post: *"For cover photos I would never put up a bad quality photo. Oh, except for this one."*

One thing that made an impression on me at this stage was how forceful people were about what they did not do. The language used was incredibly strong, and the descriptions of the unwanted behaviours were extremely negative. 'Whinge and

whine' and 'plaster their kids all over Facebook' places these things into a hugely negative context. It is not just something they would not do; it is a negative thing in itself. The women often did not have to think for too long about what they would not do, they had those answers ready right away.

The main things people talked about not doing were: Put up 'selfies' (photo of oneself taken by oneself) or photos of themselves wearing revealing clothing, work-related things, or discuss things that were 'too personal', including 'rants' and emotional posts. Also discussed was the question of putting up photos of other people without asking them first.

The topic of selfies and photographs of bodies links with the idea of 'rules' around showing the female body for public consumption, especially on social media where it is so often seen. The women I talked to all mentioned pictures of themselves. Some seemed to want to justify them: *"Pretty much always if I'm having a selfie I'll be talking about products, like the lipstick colour or the eyeshadow or something, it's not just me,"* said Cathie, others discussed when they are and are not okay: *"You never put up a picture in a bikini, that's a rule."* This, along with the stated privacy around work-related things and protection of personal info, shows a strong adherence to societal rules within the formation of their identity. They are free to do as they wish, but they know there are some rules they must follow to be accepted. These societal rules have transferred into the world of Facebook, to govern the within-website experience and interaction as they might govern in the real world.

However, as we have seen, frequently, people contradicted themselves when talking about something they would never do on Facebook. This happened largely when people described something they would never do, and then upon scrolling through their page, they discovered that they had done so. This was often met with some slight defensiveness, or an explanation of why this instance was acceptable.

Other studies have found similar contradictions. In a study by Debatin et al., (2009) it was found that one participant initially claimed that Facebook was not a big part of her daily life but later she acknowledged that she often looked at photos belonging to other people on Facebook and that these became important subjects of conversation for her. Another participant made the same initial assertion, and then admitted that it had in fact become an integral part of her life.

These instances, along with what I observed, appeared to me as though people were feeling a threat to their 'ring-fenced' and rule bound identity that they created, and were not thrilled to find it. When we again look at the development of identity formation, we see that several theories cite 'threats' to the rules of their identity, as being threats to the identity itself (Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1999). It appears as though this Facebook identity is rather a fragile one, and individuals are very keen to protect it. If they themselves break their own rules, and do not realise it, it is a threat indeed.

What others do on Facebook: It is their business and it does not affect what I do. Well, except..

As we scrolled through the Facebook pages of participants and sometimes their newsfeeds, the women frequently got talking about what other people do and do not do on Facebook. That included things like the posting habits of other people, the content they chose and what they are intending to achieve as they post.

The comments the women made were often emphatic, certain, and contained a sense of strong judgement and 'othering' of the posters. Bex said: *"See like these skiing photos, they just want to make it look like they're having fun!" "Those are ugly pants! People I know have liked them. God they're ugly!" "This is my stepsister, she's a real Facebook user. I know she's not that busy, and she doesn't exercise much" "This is my friend, a constant poster! He is one of those people who loves to talk about what he's doing, even when it's watching TV, he'll tag people!"*

Almost all the women I spoke to had strong negative comments such as this. Claire said: *"So this guy I flatted with, he fully used it as a personal brand, like brand management. It's just cringe worthy, if you're having to manage your own… how people view you."* She also said: *"I hate opinionated political ones [posts] like this one, I hate that! It's like preaching. That's your opinion and you just keep it to yourself. You don't need to project it onto anyone else."*

Tanya also used the word 'hate' to describe the behaviour of others: *"I hate this - when people put up the same pictures on Instagram and Facebook. It doesn't make sense. It's like, bad advertising".* And Tina's tone of voice and language showed

when she did not approve: *"So here I got tagged because I was at a funeral. Wow. I guess she tagged everyone who was there that day. Ok!"*

Despite these judgemental and often negative comments though, it appeared as though the participants were keen to show that they were not judgemental, and that whatever someone chose to do was okay. There was a strong dichotomy between the judgemental comments, and the notion of 'each to their own' that went alongside those comments. It was as if people wanted to be able to judge, but did not want to accept the label of 'judgemental'. It is possible this is related to the widely publicised 'anti-bullying' campaigns, and the rising awareness of cyber bullying as an issue. It did feel as though the participants were 'torn' between making the judgement they seemed so strongly to believe, and the fact that they did not want to appear as though they were making a judgement!

For example, Sophie started off with: *"This is the sort of thing where I think it's too far. Like, if someone puts a photo up, a selfie, I honestly would not care if it was just a really nice photo. But this! She posts these all the time. That is when I'm sort of like, that's a bit much. I cringe, like 'why are you doing this?'"*. After this she quickly added: *"But I don't judge her, I just notice it."*

Bailey talked about a fight she had had with a friend about their posting habits, indicating she felt reasonably strongly about it. She finishing off by explaining that she sees her friend's point of view, which was surprising as she had seemingly deemed it foreign enough to her to get into a fight about it: *"I had a big fight with one of my closest friends about six months ago because I told her… she's a single mum*

and I think she's quite lonely and bored sometimes, so she seems to post everything on Facebook and I said to her 'you need to pull it back just a wee bit' but I kind of understand her point of view because it's her way of connecting with people."

Nicole said: *"My sister just put up a photo of herself, and it was a selfie. And, I mean, I love her, she's great, but she's wearing like, an undergarment. And I saw it and thought 'I just don't understand, why?' Like, if you're wearing a swimsuit at the beach, I get that. Or if you're at the gym, tank top and shorts, going for a run, then that's cool. But I don't get the whole undergarment in the bathroom type thing. But everyone to their own, I mean it's fine!"* She says she loves her sister, as though she needs to make this clear because her evaluation of her is about to be fairly harsh. There is a strong sense of 'I love her, *however'*. She then makes the harsh comments, but ends them with a statement about how people can do whatever they like, which is a strong contradiction.

Interestingly, in comparison with the more negative posts, when a post made by someone else was met with approval by the participant, this frequently appeared as a subtle acknowledgement, rather than praised as positive. The approval was often just a hint, detected in the tone, in Cathie's words: *"oh look, she's put up some photos, and these are of her travels, cool"* – rather than matching the much more derisive negative comments: *"Ohhhhh why would you do that, I mean that's just cringe!"* It also didn't happen nearly as often as the negative judgements.

When coding for this theme of 'what others do', I wondered how it fitted into the overall pattern that was showing. People were talking a lot about constructing their

own Facebook identity, so where was the place for 'what other people do'? And why did people seem so uncomfortable to be judging, even as they were doing the judging? As I went further, I realised that the thought of 'what others are up to' might seem like a separate thing from 'my own identity' on Facebook, but I as I listened to the way the women talked about the 'behaviour of others', it was very often in terms of how it would inform the way they themselves would behave. For example, Bex says *"I know how I feel when I see loads of baby pictures and stuff, you know? So I just would not do that."*

So it seemed that while people were talking about what they see others doing, it was actually more to do two things: The first is that seeing what others do gives you an idea of how to behave and which rules to follow. This could happen covertly, or overtly. For example, you might get ideas of how to use Facebook best, or see a fun thing to try out for your own profile, or you might simply absorb the social 'code' of what people do and do not do on Facebook – based on the positive and negative feedback they might receive from their audience. For example when Cathie says: *"It's not that common for my friends to be ranting and raving,"* she also means that she wont be doing so either.

The second way that seeing other people's posts and content on Facebook might affect the way you do your own, is that you are then more likely to understand what annoys/pleases you when you see/receive it, and therefore you can adjust your behaviour accordingly. Another example of this is when Cathie says *"I would not post about work, because I find it weird when people do."* This second point relates to my assertion made earlier, that everyone on Facebook is both a broadcaster and an

audience. What you as a user put online, is being consumed by another user as your audience.

There seemed to be an uneasy awareness amongst the women that while they were observing (and critiquing) in other people's behaviour, they were also getting ideas of how they should behave, and how they themselves might annoy others if they got it wrong.

This area of 'what others do' appeared to be fraught with tensions and contradictions. It seemed like people did not feel overly comfortable making the critique they were making, nor even acknowledging the divide between their audience and themselves. Facebook places everyone in the same 'pot', generating, consuming, judging, and being judged. And it seemed as though it was not until people made the link to analyse someone else's content, that they were placing themselves in the same hypothetical firing line.

What others think/do when they see my Facebook. I know what they expect, and I know what I expect of them, but sometimes I am disappointed…

This theme was one that arose very clearly when people were talking about what they themselves do. They switched from talking about what they do, and began talking about what the 'audience' would see and do in response. This 'audience' was an unmistakable presence in everyone's discussions of what they think about when they post content.

Interestingly though, it was not just all about what people would think of the poster, it was also that they as a poster wanted to respect their audience, and take into account what they would like to see. It was almost as though presenting useful/interesting/relevant/funny material was an honour and responsibility, and one they took seriously. They had an expectation of how their audience would behave too, and disappointment was apparent if the reality was more negative. This led to a need to justify this reality.

First, let us look at how it seemed to be clear that when people discuss the content they put up, they know there is an audience who may be judging them: Bex said: *"Definitely travelling photos, you put them up because you want to make it look like you've done all this stuff and you want a good profile!"* And Sophie said: *"Well you don't want people thinking you're just sitting at home, so I don't put up those ones."*

Then we move to the examples where people are being 'respectful' of their audience, thinking carefully about what they might enjoy, and putting up only those things. Tina said: *"Lots of my Facebook friends have a snarky sense of humour so I know they'll appreciate these things." "I'll put 'people' pictures up, because those are the ones everyone wants to see". "This was an ask me anything with Jennifer Garner and I have friends who are into her so…."* Cathie explained: *"People always ask me for recommendations, so I'll put those up. I used to be a beauty editor and my friends know that so…"* Rachel said: *"My page is really for people overseas who want to know what's going on." "I put these photos up when I went to Christchurch. So people know what I'm up to."*

Claire pointed out the audience more explicitly, saying they were the ones who had specifically asked to see certain content, and she then obliged: *"I'll post if I've gone for a trip overseas and people are saying they want to see photos." "If I see something funny that I know someone will like, I'll tag them in."*

The editor of TIME magazine Nancy Gibbs said recently that 1000 friends is not friends - rather an audience, and one to be entertained (Storify, 2015). And with that, comes pressure to deliver. It seemed as though these women were talking about their Facebook profiles as being not simply something to be evaluated and judged by, but over and above this, they were there for other people. Other people are going to enjoy, or not enjoy, the content posted by me – so I should make sure it measures up. This seems to increase the pressure already felt when people are judging you as a poster, and elevate it to a level where you can deliver something that will please someone. In fact, it almost cloaks the element of judgement, burying it under a false idea of 'I am doing it to keep x happy' 'y will enjoy this post, I am doing it for them'. This makes the judgement much more innocent, but places the poster on an even more critical stage to perform.

This extended to *not* posting things as well. Tanya said: *"If it's important to me, I'll make a comment or post it. But if I have a close friend and he or she really likes that football team or that political view or whatever, I would change the privacy settings of that post. I don't want him/her to be offended or hurt, I don't want to lose a friendship about something like that."* She modifies her content for particular audiences, to avoid an outcome she does not want, because she knows how the audience will likely react. She is acknowledging the power her content has over

people; not just that they would enjoy certain things she puts up, but also that she could hurt or offend with it. She is taking care of the needs of her audience, and altering her content accordingly.

The audience was often referred to with a 'group' name, and a clear understanding of what that group would expect. For example, Claire said: *"It can be a way of getting to know people better, like starting conversations. For examples with your workmates, you can tell them a bit about yourself and it just sort of deepens that relationship."* Cathie mentions her work-related audience also, although she is more restrictive: *"I've always been pretty careful, like there's just going to be stuff your workmates don't need to see. But your friends want to see that stuff, so you just have to think about it."* Tanya mentions a different group of her audience: *"Parents! They are in their own group and I have to think about what I let them see. I think we all do that, don't we?"* These examples of 'naming' the audience appeared to make it even clearer that users felt they knew exactly who was watching them at any one time, and how they should behave to either satisfy this audience, or withhold content from them which they preferred to stay private.

Another way many people talked about their audience, was in respect of how they expected or liked them to behave:

Cathie said: *"If I post an article I'd like people to read it I guess. I hope that other people will. I don't do it with the idea that I'm necessarily going to change lots of people's minds or anything but it would be nice if they…"* Rachel said: *"Yeah when you're on a happy excited buzz and everyone kind of joins in, that feels good. They're clicking 'like' and commenting."* Claire mentions other people's behaviour on her

birthday: *"Birthday posts – love it. I love how you check your phone and it's like ooh! Notifications! Ooh 6, and you look at you see the numbers climbing and of course it makes you feel good. It's like positive reinforcement."* The women appeared to be acknowledging that the audience had an effect on them, and they did have an idea in mind of how they would like them to behave.

Of course, as mentioned this also means that there is room to be disappointed if people don't act in the expected or desired way when interacting with the poster's material. Nicole gave an example to illustrate this: *"When you're like 'I'm working on something, does anyone know…' and it's like a question and nobody answers and then it's like 'ohhhh'."*

Tina talked about disappointment after not receiving any 'happy birthday' messages one year: *"I got really bummed out, I was like, 'what's going on?'"* Said Bex: [Indicating a photo she has put up] *"And no one got my joke! So I was like 'no one gets it!' there were a couple of people who liked it. Not very many!"* And Nicole talks about how she knows how she would feel if this ever happened to her: *"Yeah, if I got no comments at all I would pretty much be like, 'friends? C'mon!' Just a few would be nice".*

There seemed to be a clear expectation of how users wanted their content to be interacted with, and it seemed if that expectation was not met, the users were often upset. This shows how the control people have over their 'Facebook identity' is strongly related to their audience, and how control is lost a little when people do not behave in the way they expected them to.

After discussing these disappointments, there was often another shift, to justifying the actions of the audience that did not fit with the expectation. Nicole justifies the lack of interaction she gets by explaining how that it is part of how Facebook works, which makes it ok for her: *"I know that the less you post, the less your posts will show on other people's newsfeeds. So that's kind of why when I made this post, and I was asking for help and I didn't get any replies and I thought 'man this is shit'. And I got it explained to me that because I never post, no one actually saw it."*

She also goes on to discuss how many birthday messages she received, and justifies that also: *"Oh here we go, I got 8. Which is like, it's pretty much gone down [from previous years]. But if I look at how many friends I've got, it's gone up. So I don't use it as a guide for how many friends I've got!"* Tina said something similar about her disappointment over not receiving many 'happy birthday' messages on her birthday: *"I remember one year, I'd like, taken my birthday off my profile… I was really bummed out… But I figured it out, it's because I'd hidden it – so nobody would have known!"*

When people justified their audience's behaviour in this way, it seemed to be to be much like an actor on a stage might respond to a poor reception on stage; saying an audience was tired, it was a Monday night, or the theatre acoustics were to blame. It is almost as though it is important to retain control of the 'stage' and that the art remains intact, the audience being the variable. This is an example of yet another tension in the creation of identity on Facebook. There is a desire to respect and please an audience, while keeping another audience safe or restricting the content they see.

At the same time, the audience is no passive consumer! Their responses are predicted and expected and have the power to disappoint – prompting the users to defend the situation in a number of ways so as not to lose control. When a creation of identity relies so heavily on an audience, they are an integral part of the build (Marwick, 2011). But it did seem as though it was the site of a number of conflicting roles, whereby the broadcaster is no longer certain of the response they will receive from their audience, but continues to curate their content to satisfy them anyway.

I rely on Facebook to create my identity. I am in control. Or am I?

The women I spoke to all seemed to be very aware of Facebook's 'role' in the creation of their identity. As they talked, Facebook became much more than a website. It was a medium through which they expressed themselves, and something that shaped what they were and were not able to do. At the same time it was a kind of invisible force that 'changed the rules' frequently, meaning they had to adapt the way they used it. This was not an entirely comfortable notion for the women to talk about it seemed, but they did appear to feel that if they knew it was happening, they were in a better position. To quote an oft-used phrase, 'knowledge is power', and it seemed as though through the participants knowing that Facebook had the control, meant they were able to take some of it back for themselves.

Facebook seems to be well aware of this perception, their 'role' in identity creation, and thus it allows people to do things on their pages to 'round out' a created identity. For example adding preferences, (such as movies and books) and personal information, add to the sense of creating a distinct and separate Facebook identity.

Another example is the way that Facebook recently added the option for users to extend their timeline to before the time when they actually joined Facebook. This allows users to create their Facebook identity even pre-Facebook… using Facebook! Researcher Georgalou (2015) has argued that Facebook both facilitates and hinders the construction of identity, depending on certain configurations. The timeline is an integral part of the way we construct identity, evoke the past and recall our memories. It reflects the way we naturally think of identity and our memories – as along a continuum, a timeline. I suggest Facebook is well aware of this, and have deliberately used the timeline device to evoke this natural tendency toward identity construction. This makes identity construction a collaborative process, rather than one carried out by the individual, with Facebook as a key player.

It also appears that the women were all very aware of these boundaries they have to operate within while they use Facebook. There is a limited amount they can do to customise their pages – unlike previous social networking sites such as Bebo – the colour scheme and design of the page is set, and backgrounds cannot be altered. This appears to indicate Facebook's intention that people must create their online identity within a specific framework. This framework may provide people with rules and boundaries that are familiar and thus safe (Eisenstadt, & Giesen, 1995). Perhaps the adoption of certain familiar devices across various online platforms (for example the ubiquitous usage of an 'avatar' or profile image) helps to allow users to feel safe in familiar surroundings.

Following on from this idea of feeling 'safe', it appears that Facebook has put a number of things in place so that people feel as though they are operating within well-

known confines. When Tanya discusses setting an audience for a post she has made, she feels a sense of security and safety that she is able to control her own privacy and shape her audience. In reality it is somewhat of an illusion of course, in that any one of the 'included' audience can share the information with an 'excluded' person. But Facebook has implemented this capability, giving people the sense that they have control over their own privacy. An uneasy feeling for anyone who begins to realise it is not as straightforward as it may seem!

Another example of Facebook's control, is that users are required to use their real name on the website. Facebook polices this carefully, and accounts with 'fake-sounding' names are removed. This has caused a stir, for example amongst transsexuals who have changed their names as they have transitioned between genders. One transsexual user (who in fact used to work at Facebook!), had her account shut down for using the name she was known as after her operation. 'Zip' writes: "By forcing us to change our names on the site, Facebook changes the names we are known by in real life—whether we like it or not," (Zip, 2015). She writes about how Facebook insists its users use only one name on Facebook, their legal, born name. Facebook allows others to report accounts to be shut down for using a name that is not theirs, effectively placing restrictions around the identity people are allowed to create, and allowing the other members of society to have a part in this. It is an acknowledgement of the power Facebook has. Zip says: "As a technology, Facebook isn't neutral. It's actually changing the way we interact with names." She also observes: "Before Facebook how many of your friends' surnames did you actually know?"

There is an interesting contradiction here: Facebook as an organisation appears to be aware that there is a fine line in what they allow their users to do using the site. Users must be able to create an identity, but know they are acting within certain rules and boundaries. The Facebook 'world' is separate from the 'real' world, but still linked enough so that people feel an attachment to what happens in it. Insisting on 'real world' full names, appears to be an effort by Facebook to firmly link the person with the online identity.

Following in this vein, the participants I spoke to were often unsure how they would delete or suspend their accounts if they wanted to: Claire said: *"To be honest I would not even know how to delete my account. Can you even do that?"* Sophie said something similar: *"I've got friends who've done it [deleted their accounts] so I know there's a way. But they don't make it easy, probably deliberately I guess!"* Facebook of course has a vested interest in keeping as many accounts active, both from an immediate financial perspective (advertising revenue) and to keep their business model alive into the long-term. Facebook without users is not a particularly promising business premise!

Also every single person who chose to 'log out' at the end of the session with me struggled to find where to do this. This was partially put down to 'never signing out' but also that it is not easy to find – Facebook wants its users to stay 'plugged in'. Even after you sign out, the homepage offers you the mobile app, so you can remain logged in. 'Heading out?' it asks, 'Stay connected.'

Everyone also appeared very aware that Facebook 'owns' their information and that they do not have much of a choice when it comes to privacy settings and so on. They appear to accept a certain lack of control over these things, they know of it but it exists within this safe structure that requires their acceptance/compliance or they cannot use the service. The fact that it is free for users likely plays a part too – it is difficult to complain about a service if it is not one you are paying for!

Bex said: *"Even when you delete your account Facebook still has all your photos and everything – your information isn't deleted."* She said this in a way that appeared to mean she would prefer if it were not the case, but is aware it is something that must be accepted if she is to use Facebook. It will let users create an identity, but once that is done, it cannot be reversed.

This notion of 'power' was further reflected in the way that people seem to be aware that they must accept when Facebook makes changes to the way the website operates which affects how they must use it. Bex said: *"It always ask me to put in private stuff and I don't want to do that. I don't know about my privacy settings. They keep changing that, I find it annoying."* Cathie said: *"I think now you have to always show who you're responding too, yeah, like a reply. It makes you do that."*

Changes to Facebook then meant as a result participants also often did not know how to use certain aspects of the website. They sounded reasonably irritated, or at least uncomfortable with this. Tanya thought out loud: *"Hmmmmm where do I find…. Oh it used to be here didn't it…"* Tina said a little more accusingly: *"What's Facebook doing now… I don't even know how to do this."* Tellingly, Tanya also commented: *"Well I guess they can do what they want can't they… I mean, it's Facebook!"*

People also seemed generally quite unsure of the purpose behind some of the decisions made by Facebook, but largely just accepted this as part of their usage of it: Tina: (about birthdays) *"I think Facebook has just gotten really smart and just tells people, it just knows."* Cathie said: *"It changes things all the time, doesn't it. I can't keep up!"* And again, tellingly, Tina added: *"I guess, they probably do it to make more money? Like, targeted ads and stuff? There's lots we don't know about Facebook!"*

As the women talked, they acknowledged that through Facebook's rules and boundaries, it is demanding, or at least asking that you use it a certain way. As with the 'real name' requirement we discussed earlier, there are other things it encourages users to do. For example, Billie said: *"It asks me all the time to add more information!"*
And when Cathie said *"It lets you add pictures.."* it was interesting to note that the word 'lets' might have meant both 'enables' as well as 'permits'. Facebook enables us to create our identities, but it also chooses how and when, and what it will not enable.

For more evidence of this, we can look at the introduction Facebook provides to new users. The very basics of the way users are 'shown' how to 'Facebook properly' are provided as a part of a site, from the very beginning. It advises you to only add people you know personally: 'Facebook's more fun with friends you know', and encourages existing users to help induct new users into the website: 'Welcome [name] to Facebook' it says, 'Help [name] find her friends'. From the very beginning, Facebook

is shaping the way they want users to utilise and interact with the website, and will recruit existing users to 'show' new ones the way.

There even exists a whole new language around Facebook use, terms all the women used while discussing their experiences, without explaining the meanings – just (correctly) assuming I would understand. Some of these examples are: 'Stalker' (in the online, commonly occurring sense) 'Lurker' (someone who is a member on Facebook but doesn't post or interact with others) 'Unfriend' (remove from Facebook friend list) 'Frape' (post status as someone else when they leave their Facebook logged in), 'selfie' (A self-taken photo), 'tag' (attaching a name to a photo or status, so it is linked with the profile of the person). It appears that Facebook is so entrenched in our lives that even those who claimed not to use it often, were well-versed in the appropriate terms.

Through researching for this thesis I discovered an action group called 'I am Facebook' dedicated to raising awareness that Facebook would not exist or make money without all its users as its assets. This seems an interesting commentary on how Facebook is lucky to have its users, and despite it being free to use, should be kinder and more respectful to those users, and perhaps take into account their wishes more often. The Internet and Facebook forums are littered with people complaining about how Facebook treats its users. There does appear to be a sense that there is not a lot that can be done about it however, unless everyone bands together and does Facebook damage by threatening to leave (boycott user ship). So the women in my study talked as though they knew what was happening, felt acknowledging the power of Facebook was something that gave them some power back, but were not prepared

to stop using the site just because of the restrictions and boundaries it was able to put in place.

All the above was well summed up by Tina: *"It's hard to imagine life without Facebook now. Especially sort of, around events. I mean, what did we have? Like, texting? I don't know, it would be really different, I just don't know how. Feels like it would be a lot harder."* She is aware of Facebook's place in her life, but unable to put her finger on what exactly it adds or has changed for her. She cannot even imagine what technology she used before Facebook, or indeed what 'life without Facebook' would be like. That is a fairly strong sign of the power its presence has in our lives!

Previous studies on social networking have also found a discrepancy between users reporting understanding and caution in regards to privacy and then actually implementing the necessary steps to safeguard themselves. This extends to personal demographic and contact data (Livingstone, 2008), disclosure of personal information (Tufekci, 2008) and trusting others with their self-expression (Dwyer, Hiltz, & Passerini, 2007). One example of this discrepancy is when researchers found that the users in their study reported a strong knowledge of privacy settings, and yet still frequently accept users as friends that they may not know at all (Debatin et al., 2009), which can be seen as one of the more basic rules of keeping private information private. This of course means they have large groups of these 'friends' who then have access to a vast amount of information about them. This is another example of how people feel they know about the 'tool' they are using to construct their identities.

When people are creating something, the tools they are given make a difference to what they are able to create, so when Facebook is a platform for identity creation, we need to look at the way Facebook itself is shaping these identities, or allowing others to shape them using this platform. It has a purpose, a 'correct way' to be used, and it has rules. It can be compared to the existence of the societal rules and norms of the real world, where agency exists to establish these. Likewise, Facebook has an agent-like role in the identity creation that is going on.

I know the Facebook 'world' is distinct from the 'real world', but I still need to be careful about what is healthy for me..

Now we will come to the sixth distinct way that people talked about their usage of Facebook. They seemed very keen to make it clear that they knew that Facebook was quite separate to 'real life'. This type of commentary frequently came up after people had talked about Facebook for some time, and looked at their own pages. It was often as though they would let themselves 'get carried away' talking about and looking at Facebook, and then they had talk about how they were well aware that Facebook was not the same as real life. I found this particularly interesting, as I was interested in how people were creating an identity separate to their real lives, one that existed only on Facebook. So while people were hastening to say they were aware that Facebook was a bit of a 'bubble' perhaps, they were confirming my hunch that what goes on within Facebook is in fact something special, distinct and discrete from their 'real life identity'.

This reminds us of the earlier discussion of the research on Facebook drinking profiles, where users are carefully curating one view of their identities to show other

people (McCreanor et al., 2013). The hangover is omitted, the smiling faces there instead. The users themselves know the reality, but they choose what to make visible. This appears to apply to their overall identity, as well as that of other people. The participants knew, and wanted me to know they knew, the difference between Facebook and real life.

This started with people talking about 'life before Facebook', and what was happening in their real lives when they first signed up. For Sophie it was her first year of University and she was using Bebo beforehand. For Nicole it was her last year of high school, and she was using MySpace. Tanya was in her first year of University and was using Metroblog and Photolog. For Bex, it was her last year of University and she had been using Ringo. Almost everyone felt the need to tell me more than just the year they signed up, but also what was happening in their lives at the time. It may be partly a way of recalling the date they joined, but it also felt as though they wanted to anchor the beginning of the existence of this new identity.

A lot of people also gave other details about signing up. They spoke of their reasons for it, and about how it was often because of what was already happening online which they wanted to join in on. Billie said*: "I was the last one of my group of close friends. Everyone got it and was like 'Oh Billie, you have to have it!' And I was like, 'what for?' 'oh, to be in touch with everyone' and so I was like 'Ok, let's do it.'"* Bex said: *"My flatmate had come back from doing a year abroad in Canada, so everyone was using it over there, so he said 'you should use this' and we did."* Rachel described: *"I joined because a friend of mine had posted up photos of an event and I*

basically wanted a copy of the photos. She was like 'oh they're on Facebook!' so I signed up and got sucked in!"

Talking about how they joined Facebook appears to be a way of talking about the 'advent' of their Facebook life – the beginning of their identity and a knowledge of how and why it started. This is possibly to feel more secure in the detail of the boundaries of their online identity. Knowing where an identity began reminds one of what things were like before it existed, and what still exists outside of the identity now.

It was important for the women to differentiate between real life and Facebook for another reason too, many of them mentioned the 'highlights reel' aspect of social media in general. It is unclear when the term was first coined, but it is used to describe the phenomenon whereby users see only the best parts of other people's lives and feel as though theirs does not measure up by comparison. According to research, even if we are aware we aren't seeing a full picture of someone's life, we still feel the pangs of envy (Muise, Christofides, & Desmarais, 2009). The women I spoke to frequently made mention of this phenomenon, and seemed to want to make it clear that they were aware of it. Further than this too, they wanted to make it clear that they knew themselves well, and knew what was good/ bad for them. There was a slight contradiction here too: people seemed to say they knew what was unhealthy for them, and therefore they knew just what to do to keep themselves safe. But the reality with which they discussed the 'unhealthy' aspects, made it seem as though it was not quite so easy to avoid.

Tina for example, explained: *"I think it's important to remember that Facebook, I mean, it's real, but not the full picture and sometimes it can be really easy to get down if you don't connect with people offline because then all you see is what they post and it's usually just all the good stuff. Yeah. I've fallen into that trap too. I stepped back from Facebook because it was like, everyone else's lives seemed to be going so well and mine's falling apart, that kind of thing."* She later mentioned being back online now, back to 'normal' levels.

Claire confirmed she was aware of the 'showreel phenomenon': I'm very aware of the whole 'people only post things that they want people to see' kind of thing."

Bex talked at reasonable length about how she is affected by Facebook: *"I don't think it adds much to my life, just a bit of FOMO* [Fear Of Missing Out] *and comparisons. So I try not to go on it. For me, I'm 30 and it's the stage where everyone's got partners, getting married, having kids and stuff and baby photos, and I'm not there – I'm living with two 25 year olds and I'm like flatting and while I'm quite successful career wise, with all that other stuff yeah I'm not really.* [Looking at Facebook has] *always left me with that gross feeling, that stomach dropping feeling. So when I look at that I just feel a bit jealous and compare myself and my stage of life and it's not that good for your mind-set, I just think it's better for me if I didn't…"* She widened this to say she thought it wasn't just her, that there were probably other people who would be better without it: *"If anyone's kind of insecure and that, it's probably really unhealthy. I mean, what you don't know wont hurt you."*

The notion of 'I know what is bad for me', is an interesting one when applied to a voluntary membership of a free-to-use networking tool, designed to allow people to connect with each other and create the identity they desire online. Again, it shows the power of Facebook to be involved in the creation of an identity, and perhaps also just how easy it is to let it get away from you. The existence of 'jealousy' sparked by seeing another user's profile has been well documented (Muise, Christofides, & Desmarais, 2009). Thus, clearly Facebook has a power within people's lives that needs to be acknowledged – by the people using it, designing it, and the people studying it.

It's also interesting that people talk about 'trying' not to use Facebook and 'stepping back a bit', as though Facebook has an inevitable presence in their lives. As mentioned, even Tina admitted that since her break her usage was now 'back to normal levels' and Bex explained that what allowed her to stop using it was the fact she deleted it from her work phone and thus was able to 'wean' herself from the usage. It is worth noting here that addiction to Facebook is a topic all of its own as touched on earlier, with people arguing for and against its existence (Andreassen, Torsheim, Brunborg & Pallesen, 2012).

One possible reason so many people are aware of and speak firmly of the division between real and Facebook is that it is something that has been well-covered in mainstream media. Many articles and blog posts cover the 'not everything on Facebook is real' theme. For example one post on the Fielekefrontporch blog site is tellingly called 'I'm not a liar, but Facebook sure is' and documents photos the user had put on Facebook, and then provides explanations of what was really happening in

her life as the pictures were taken (Fieleke, 2015). She calls them 'confessions' and talks about 'what is really going on'. The reality is often far more complex and possibly negative, than the images let on.

Another article that illustrates this issue can be found on the ESPN website, called 'Split Image'. It talks about the social media account 19 year old Madison Holleran left behind, which showed her life as a happy, perfect one. She took her own life yet left behind images showing nothing but happy faces, successful athletic events and positive-appearing occasions with friends and family (Fagan, 2015).

Pop culture often depicts the warnings of social media usage: The 2012 film *Disconnect* focuses on all the negative consequences of using the platform: depicting cyber bullying, online scams, identity theft and so on (Ferguson, 2012). The film *One Hour Photo* talks about how photographs depict the happy moments in life - anyone looking through your photograph albums would think that you had lived a happy, stress free life (Vachon, 2002). The inference is about how this can mean that support/help is not offered when it is needed, as no one is aware that the happy and stress-free depiction are not authentic.

Then there is the one about how the way people date, featured on Thoughtcatalog. The article asserts that too much connection with the outside world gives us an illusion of choice, therefore we do not treat our reality as well as we should, (Varon, 2014). Facebook has infiltrated every corner of our worlds and advice abounds, so we are content to live in a more shallow fashion, ready for the next 'option' or 'choice' that is offered to us.

These blogs and articles, along with the research on the 'showreel' phenomenon appear to have been rather helpful to users. The women I talked to appeared well-versed in the discourse of comparison, knowing that they need to think twice about believing what they see. It is an interesting and possibly worrying contradiction though, that despite appearing to know these truths, the women are still choosing to limit their use, 'step back' and restrict their usage, because of the effect Facebook has on them nonetheless. It is as though knowing that it is not real has not stopped them from believing it is when they see it. Thus the only solution is to restrict usage.

People are creating identities on Facebook in a sea of contradictions.

We have seen how the participants have talked about their Facebook use and how this is occurring in a site of uncertainty, contradiction and tensions. The themes identified represent the different ways people talked about these contradictions. We started with the way people use Facebook, and their unease when they were not certain how to do something. We saw what they said they did not ever do, and frequently their discomfort when they found the evidence to the contrary. Then users talked about what others do, and we saw their desire not to appear judgemental, despite often being right in the midst of a fairly strong judgement being made. We saw the effect and presence of the 'audience', how people saw it as a responsibility to provide their audience with what they expected, and how when the audience did not then respond in the right way, how it could be a disappointment. The participants recognised the agent-like nature of Facebook as a part of their identity creation, from the boundaries and rules it sets, to its financial aims and 'ownership' of its users. Finally, we discussed how important it seemed to be for users to clearly acknowledge the existence of the 'Facebook world' – both in regards to their own posting, and also

their view of the content belonging to other people. An uneasy relationship appeared at this site, showing that people asserted that they were aware of the existing difference, but still talked about feeling negatively affected by their use of Facebook. These six themes seemed to me as inextricably linked, connected threads that showed just how unsure and uncertain people were about their own Facebook use, while simultaneously working quite hard to tell a particular story they wanted heard.

Conclusions

So let us step back to the theme of identity creation using Facebook. The aim of this study was to hear the voices of Facebook users, and find out what they think, feel and do when they use the platform. I knew I had achieved this when, amidst all the tensions, I was able to recognise a distinct creation of identity happening on the website. Rather than using Facebook as a way to show people who they are, they are using Facebook to *create* who they are. Their identity on Facebook is a complete, constructed and discrete 'other'. This was evidenced in the many times people identified their page *as themselves.* For example 'here I am' and 'this is me' when clicking onto their page. Also 'I am all about food' or 'this is me to a T'. It struck me that this identity creation had some similarities with disorder such as Dissociative Identity Disorder, where people fragment their personalities and develop different parts to 'show' others, as a method of coping (Ross, 1997). Is the creation of identity on Facebook a similar 'way of coping'?

The literature has hinted at something similar. Ellis (2010) has said that Facebook is simply an extension of language, whereby we can witness the ways the concepts of personal and social identity influence one another. However, I would argue this concept has not yet been fully explored. Previous literature seems to be all about how people use Facebook to *show* others who they are – it is a channel with which to broadcast their identity, whether real or desired. That is the viewpoint I went into this project with, asking: 'how do people show who they are through Facebook?' But what I found over the course of these interviews was that it was not being used as a lens through which a reality could be projected, it was way to create. Facebook was

giving them the tools (and constraints/boundaries) with/within which to create. So even my expectation of what I might find conflicted with what I did find.

As companies have brand identities – identities on Facebook can be created, curated and cultivated (Labrecque, Markos & Milne, 2011). Facebook gives its users tools to do so, and even the users themselves talk about brand management. Bex mentions Facebook use as maintaining a 'personal brand' that can manipulate perception, and Tanya refers to bad Facebook use as 'bad advertising' as though she is aware it goes beyond personal choice of content to post, and more towards a created image that has to be maintained and upheld.

When Cathie says: *"What I put on Facebook in genuinely me",* she is aware that it need not be the case. You can choose for it to be 'genuinely you', or you can choose to construct something. Billie acknowledges this when she says, *"On Facebook you can create your perfect life. But you don't have it."*

The women I talked to all fenced off what they did and did not do, they discussed what others did and what others (the 'audience') would think, they spoke of Facebook as an agent, and they clearly demarcated the distinction between Facebook and real life. All of these tenets of thinking very clearly add up to the theory that these women were all busy 'building an identity' through the use of Facebook. And yet, each of the discussions brought with it a feeling of a 'struggle', of knowing something but preferring it was not so, of being aware, but it not helping.

In the interviews people often also spent some time talking about things they had posted about, but did not end up happening – but on Facebook they did. Tina pointed out a number of posts that were about future plans that hadn't eventuated but still existed in the realms of Facebook: *"We spent a lot of time discussing going to see this film for some reason… but it's not familiar to me. I'm sure we didn't go. But to anyone reading this is must really look like we went!"* Bailey talked about a photo of a meal she was tagged in *"Oh, my sister made me dinner. Oh no wait, I never ate that. Ok she tagged me in a photo of her dinner. So I didn't actually get to eat it."*

It has been argued that the introduction of cell phone use has forever affected our notion of 'the future' (García-Montes, Caballero-Munoz, & Perez-Alvarez, 2006). It increased our ability to make ad-hoc plans, forever compromising our commitment to the future. If cell phones ruined the future, perhaps Facebook ruins the past. A record of events exists, but as a distorted version of reality. We see this from the participants' stories of posts detailing events that did not happen; and are indistinguishable from those about events that did. We have curated 'drinking profiles' showing only the positive (McCreanor et al., 2013). And so it seems we have entire lives lived online, that do not tell the full story, or worse, modify the truth substantially. Facebook disrupts our reality while also affecting our very idea of what reality is.

As I have alluded to over the course of this paper, there are a number of signs that point towards Facebook as an organisation having an awareness of the social network's place in our lives. It was first launched as a simple network for college students to keep in touch. But over the years it has evolved, both to meet the demands of an audience, but also to better be able to shape user interaction. It is my argument

that Facebook themselves are aware that people have the desire to create identities using the site. Two excellent examples to illustrate this, are the introduction of the 'ticker', and the 'timeline'. The ticker was introduced in 2011, and showed people updates to see what their friends were up to, in real time. This meant that users could see even more detail about their friends' behaviours, promoting a feeling that 'everyone is online, all the time'. It could be argued that this lulls people into a sense that it is safe to share information, and lowers the perception of risk of addiction to Facebook; everyone else is online all the time, therefore it is not an issue for me. The timeline followed shortly after, turning Facebook into more of a platform for broadcasting than ever before. Where previously users had to actively navigate to a friend's profile, now updates would be shared directly from them, in a continuous stream. Users could now post statuses and photos, and these would be broadcast out to their audience. With this, came the possibility for users to scroll down the timeline, as it updated itself in real time. There was no more 'refreshing' to see new content; now we were able to relax into the repetitive motion so many of my participants described, and just keep on scrolling (Knibbs, 2014). The effect of these changes is that now we have a social network that rewards 'being online', allows and encourages 'broadcasting' to an audience, and removes barriers to idly scrolling, viewing and consuming the details of other people's lives.

Put simply, Facebook as a technology is not neutral. It affects the way we see people, even down to knowing their full names, and communicate with them. It encourages and discourages particular ways of building identities, and it informs and shapes this process. For an organisation that has a financial interest in obtaining personal

information from its users, it is also not surprising that it makes efforts to ensure users feel comfortable with, even encouraged to do so.

This research has been able to take an in-depth look at what individuals do when they use Facebook. While other research gives us a snapshot across many users, here we have a deeper picture of what nine women do, think and feel when they use the social media. In order to understand the social network better, we need more of this research to inform us of how it is used.

Future Research Directions

This project has only included interviews with female participants. It would be interesting to include male participants as well, and possibly compare/contrast the two sets of answers. The literature says males are less likely to lose sleep because of Facebook, less likely to spend unintended time on Facebook and less likely to report experiencing stress because of Facebook use (Thompson & Lougheed, 2012).

Different age groups is another area to examine, and perhaps compare/ contrast. A teenage or older adult view would be interesting too, they may have a different perspective on or awareness of identity creation, or knowledge of what the website parameters are. A younger user would likely be more familiar with Facebook, but an older adult may be more cynical of the purposes of the organisation behind the website. Being that Facebook has only been commonly used for less than a decade, it gives researchers a unique opportunity to speak to a population who did not grow up with Facebook profiles. Seven year olds in New Zealand have not lived a life where

Facebook does not exist. It is an interesting thought when deciding on an age group to research.

The participants were all from the Auckland region, in New Zealand, so it would of course also be interesting to do similar research in other less well-connected, more rural areas in New Zealand, or other country populations. Facebook has its origins in America and became popular there first, so perhaps this would be an interesting population to study to see whether it being around there longer makes any difference to how people feel about it. In contrast perhaps we could speak to a population drawn from a country where Internet access is less widespread, where Facebook has only recently become widely used, or indeed a country where it is not.

It would also be interesting to go back and interview the same participants again to find out how they respond after reading the findings drawn from all the interviews I did. How would they react to my identification of the many contradictions, uncertainties and tensions that were embedded in their stories and thoughts? While many appeared to be aware of the contradictions in what they were saying, it was always with some discomfort, and quickly moved on from. Are the participants themselves aware that this topics appears fraught with unease? Following this vein, it would be interesting to know what information might come forth if the questions were shaped a little further, or asked more directly. For example, a researcher could ask about the role of Facebook's rules, or how they feel when they think about the advertising revenue Facebook is earning.

It would also be interesting to ask about the link between projected image and private self-perception. To what extent do the participants begin to believe their Facebook identity? Does what happens on Facebook modify their offline world or identity in any way? I did not explore much in the way of multiple identities either. No one I spoke to had more than one profile or had shut one down and then opened a new one. Although of course, as discussed, Facebook discourages both of these things!

The population I spoke to were all current, somewhat satisfied Facebook users. It would be interesting to talk to users extremely unhappy with their Facebook experience, or also those who had never been on, and chose not to.

A different social media platform could be examined also of course. What about Twitter, or Instagram as sites of identity creation? Are there as many tensions that exist within their realms? Perhaps this theorising could extend to all social media, not just Facebook. Hine (2013) predicts that research involving the Internet will become much more common and even 'mundane', so perhaps we will see social media investigated in ways we currently cannot conceive of.

As acknowledged, the researcher has played a role in this research, from choice of topic, to framing of the questions to conduct of the interviews right through to analysis and interpretation of the data. Indeed, as I have progressed with the research, it has had an effect on me also. I have noticed myself utilising Facebook much less often, and thinking differently about the reasons I do log on. This strong link between researcher and project makes me think that it would be interesting to see what a different researcher might make of a similar project and question, or even given the

transcripts from the interviews to analyse. Using rigorous methodology has meant that I am confident that my method can be replicated, and that in fact the themes I have written about are of sound quality and validity, but there are still frequently nuances of difference between the findings different researchers come up with.

As I carried out this research, I talked socially about my topic when asked, and was forever surprised at how many people pulled me aside with their own stories and comments about Facebook. It was as though they wanted their viewpoints included, or wanted to share anecdotes about friends or family experience with the social network. Their comments frequently took the shape of 'oh you need to talk to me about this' or 'you will be interested in this, just listen'. This makes me draw two conclusions. The first is that it is interesting that people seem to have such strong feelings on the topic that they want to be heard, either simply to share, or perhaps in fact to contribute to research being done. And secondly, there is so much more to find out on this topic. When the researched population themselves are demanding to be included and heard, it makes the researcher think there is much more to be heard!

There are many different directions this research could be further developed into, and I think it is crucial we see more studies on the topic of Facebook as it evolves in our lives.

Concluding thoughts

To date, the literature on Facebook covers a diverse range of topics and seems unable to settle on a singular conclusion on almost all of them. Even after a literature review, we are unsure exactly whether Facebook has a positive or negative effect on people.

Quite possibly, it is true that Facebook is able to have both positive *and* negative effects, applications and implications, though we are not currently sure of the details of when and how much. Additionally, even if we knew, it seems that Facebook is changing so rapidly both as a technology and in the way people are choosing to use it so what we knew yesterday would already be changing tomorrow. Given its huge power, reach and usage across the world, its problematic that we know so little conclusively about it.

This study aimed to get a better look at how people use Facebook and how they think and feel about it, and thus it contributes to the on-going pursuit of knowledge about how Facebook and other social medias affects humans and their wellbeing. What it also does, however, is try to expose how people may think they are using the network, and how they may be mistaken.

It can be argued that before we can recommend, implement, restrict or change anything, we must know the details of the current status. As the current study has indicated, individuals are often mistaken even about their own usage of the tool. This clearly interferes with the goal of planning how best to assist users to maximise positive experiences with it and minimise the negative. If it is true that individuals need a clear and honest picture of their own behaviour before they can assess it, take advice and indeed make changes, then we are in trouble.

Unfortunately, it also seems as though Facebook has an active role in making sure individuals use the website as much as possible, and indeed deliberately in making it difficult for users to make an accurate assessment of exactly *how* they are using it.

The current study has shown how many ways individuals are operating under false beliefs about their usage, and how Facebook itself contributes to the confusion.

As has been shown, Facebook is incredibly powerful by a number of measures. It is widespread in its use and only growing. It is my hope that studies like this one will begin to shed light on the way people use social media, not to halt progress or restrict usage blindly, but to help users retain control and be able to manage effects. All of this, so we see less of the negative effects, and more of the positive. I envisage a social network where it is less common for people to compare, criticise and compromise one another's privacy. But instead, let us have a social network we can use to connect more, support more, teach more and help more.

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Appendix A: Advertisement to recruit for participants

The following post was placed on my Facebook page, asking friends within my network to share it with their networks.

Content of Facebook posting:

Hi guys, I would be incredibly grateful if you could share this post for me…

Can you help? I'm a Masters student at Massey University and I'm conducting research on how people use Facebook. I need female participants aged 25-34 that I do not know personally, to meet me for approximately 1.5 hours in a location of their choice (within Auckland) for an interview. There'll be a $20 supermarket, bookshop or petrol voucher available for each participant as a thank you. If you are interested in participating, please email me on Facebookstudy2015@gmail.com. Thanks in advance! Nadine.

Appendix B: Information Sheet

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES
AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
TE KURA PŪKENGA TANGATA

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Project title: A look at user self-presentation on Facebook

An Invitation

My name is Nadine Isler, Masters of Science (Health Psychology) student, and I would like to invite you to participate in a qualitative project entitled 'A look at user self-presentation on Facebook' where I will conduct interviews to find out more about what people do when they make posts and accept content on their Facebook pages. Your agreement to take part would be greatly appreciated.

What is the purpose of this research?

The purpose of this research is to learn from the experiences of Facebook users, in their own words, about what they think about when they are presenting themselves on Facebook. I'll be interviewing Facebook users as they show me posts on their Facebook pages, to find out about what they do and do not do as they post or allows content to be posted to their timeline. The focus has come about due to a lack of research in the area, and the desire to understand more about the way people use such a fast-growing and reasonably new platform: social media.

How were you chosen for this research?

I would like to invite you to be part of this research based on your response to my Facebook posting, which was shared by someone in your network. The project is open for participation to any females between the ages of 25-34 (that are not known to me personally so as to avoid a conflict of interest), and you have volunteered as matching that criteria. I have asked for 10-15 participants, as this is a sufficient number to provide in-depth data for the project.

If you participate, what will you be doing?

The interview will take roughly an hour, in a location of your choice, during which time I will be asking you some questions as prompts to start a conversation about your Facebook use. I'd like to ask you to scroll through your Facebook page and show me what you and other have posted to it, and talk to me about your thoughts and feelings as you view these. The interview will be audio-recorded. Including the consent process and debrief, I'd like to ask for approximately 1.5 hours of your time.

If you participate, what are the benefits?

I would like to offer you a token of appreciation (koha) at the close of the interview, of your choice of a $20 supermarket, petrol or bookstore voucher. However the greatest benefit is likely to be through the activity of self-reflection, as you talk about your behavior on Facebook. Additionally, the results will help us understand more about the complex nature of social media and how people use it. If you like, you can provide your email address on the consent form, and I'll send you be sent a copy of the summary of research findings.

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If you participate, what are the implications of being involved?

We will make sure your interview remains confidential and all identifying information is removed. It is possible that during the course of the interview some topics of conversation may come up that make you feel uncomfortable. You can decline to talk about any issue, decide not to show me something on your Facebook page, have the recorder turned off or terminate the interview at any time. We don't anticipate any risk of harm coming from this project.

If you participate, what are your rights?

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you decide to participate, you have the right to decline to discuss any topic; ask for the recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview; withdraw your data from the study at any time up to one week after the interview; ask any questions about the study at any time; provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used. Your data (the recordings of the interviews) will be anonymised and stored securely in password-protected electronic file.

If you like, you can request to receive a summary of the project findings when the project is concluded.

Who should you contact if you have further questions about the research?

Should you have any questions, you can contact me (the researcher) on Nadine@isler.co.nz or 027 463 9308 or contact my supervisor Professor Kerry Chamberlain on (09) 414 0800 ext. 43107 or k.chamberlain@massey.ac.nz

Yours Sincerely,

Nadine Isler

Nadine@isler.co.nz

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, Application 15/008. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Andrew Chrystall, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, telephone 09 414 0800 x 43317, email humanethicsnorth@massey.ac.nz.

Te Kunenga
ki Pūrehuroa

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Appendix C: Consent form

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Project Title: A look at user self-presentation on Facebook

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM - INDIVIDUAL

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Signature: .... **Date:** ....

Full Name - printed ....

If you would like to receive a copy of the summary of findings of the research, please provide your email address here:

Email address ....