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# Facebook Identity Formation: Observing the Dramaturgical Evolution of 'Self'

Krivan, Sabrina

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Facebook Identity Formation:

Observing the Dramaturgical Evolution of 'Self'

by

Sabrina Krivan

A THESIS

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study explores the relationship between online Facebook identities in relation to face-to-face, or offline, identities present in the social world. A two-month observational study of Facebook participant's profiles was conducted to determine how online identity was formed and what connection the offline world has to the Facebook platform. Typologies and persona categories were developed to explain how users navigate the online world and engage with techniques of self-presentation to produce a favourable impression. The main findings that developed out of the study were three-fold: 1) Online interaction on Facebook is rooted in the offline, in that content from the offline informs Facebook interactions and physical profile features; 2) Strategies of self-presentation occur online – as they do offline – but online presentation is performed through typology and persona qualities; online user behaviour is exhibited through 'type' definition, and development and management of identity is performed through self-presentation techniques to ensure consistency of persona characteristics; and 3) Facebook is an digital archive of online identities that are continuously performed and validated by our network of online and offline contacts.

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## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

### **Introduction**

This thesis explores social networking sites (SNS), specifically identifying the types of identity formation that occur within the Facebook platform. Facebook is currently the most popular SNS on the planet (Socialbakers, 2013) and has overtaken many popular social networking sites such as Twitter, MySpace and LinkedIn. Although there are many popular and emerging technologies such as Pinterest and Instagram, Facebook is still the largest SNS to date. Research was conducted in 2010 and therefore newer SNSs were not taken into account, however, since the initial research start date, Facebook has still managed to maintain its status as the most relevant and popular social networking site. The goal of the research is to illuminate how identity formation occurs on this popular social networking site and how it plays a role in the evolution of self.

### **Statement of the Problem & Contribution**

The SNS field is a relatively new area of research and there is much room to contribute to the growing body of academic knowledge. Facebook has dominated the social networking landscape since its public dissemination in 2006 (Ellison et al., 2007), but in-depth discussion of self-presentation within the platform is lacking. The main types of research currently available focus on uses and gratifications theory, socio-cultural theory, psychological theory, dramaturgical and symbolic interactionist theory to explain how certain age groups use and interact with the Facebook platform.

The study goes beyond the existing literature to construct a combined theoretical framework using both symbolic interactionism and dramaturgy to produce insights regarding

self-presentation in the on- and offline worlds. Symbolic interactionism and dramaturgy allow a researcher to move between the two realms the most cohesively. The combination of these two theories will uncover *how* identity performances occur in the online and offline contexts, and whether there is any intersection between the two. The research will provide insight into the fluidity of performance between these two realms.

Facebook identity presentations blur the line between offline and online reality. The fluidity of the identity negotiation process between the two realms is dependent on shared symbols that are attributed to the performance of 'self.' Through discussions of identity roles, self-presentation and on- and offline communication, it will be demonstrated that the online and offline are both performance presentations that blend into one another. The goal is to move past the 'accurate' or 'real' identities argument to understand that identity is something that is constantly performed and negotiated across different environments. Facebook is a place where our digital identities are portrayed and stored for others to access. I am proposing that Facebook is an online archive of our digital identities that are constantly performed and validated by our network of online and offline contacts. Digital identities are influenced by the offline world, as Facebook identities are not simply crafted online. There is circularity between the online and offline, and our identities are bound by this cycle – the offline directly informs the persona qualities and identity characteristics that are communicated online, and online interactions have a place in our daily conversations and transactions. This mutual influence helps to sustain our most desirable identity performance. Similar online personas are constructed offline and brought back into the identity cycle to be performed to a new audience.

## **Purpose of the Study**

This study aims to discuss how Facebook identities play a role in the face-to-face interaction that we experience in everyday life. Online identity is an important component of who we are, and the goal is to explain how this type of identity occurs and how it plays a role in the evolution of the self. How we choose to portray ourselves online can vary depending on what type of impression we seek to bestow onto others (Goffman, 1959). How we manage this impression not only affects those around us, but it affects the way that we view ourselves (Goffman, 1959). The aim of the study is to understand how Facebook users construct their online identities through their profiles and how these profiles interact with their sense of self.

In order to develop categories for observation, it will be important to understand the tools that Facebook users employ when creating an image for themselves. These tools allow the user to develop and change their image through a variety of symbolic means. These tools include the use of pictures, status updates, videos and the management of friends, for example. Whether the representations created through these tools remain the same or change depends on what type of an identity a user wants to portray (Goffman, 1959). I want to understand how such changes (or lack thereof) compare to the type of personality presented in face-to-face interaction. I also want to understand whether it makes a difference to be constantly updating (or not) and how this affects interactions on Facebook. I want to understand how these interactions help create, maintain or change a person's online identity and how much influence our daily lives has on this identity formation.

## Significance of the Study

Although many Facebook articles and theses have been published, they tend to focus on Facebook as a social and political tool, either for employers to keep tabs on potential and current employees or how politicians can utilize the network as a major tool for their campaigns (Pasek, More & Romer, 2009). There are many interesting articles that speak about the benefits of Facebook and how, for example, it provides users with social capital (Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe, 2007); however, our understanding of the interplay between offline identity and the one presented in Facebook is still insufficient. Although theoretical studies about cyber identities exist (Robinson, 2007), I believe my study adds to the literature a vital empirical account of how these identities are perceived by users along with a close examination of the connection between the practices of identity construction online and offline. The theoretical package that I am using to analyze Facebook identities will uncover *how* offline and online identities interact, and perhaps are interwoven.

Online identities are an important aspect of our lives because of the amount of time that we spend on the Internet. Social networking is a large part of what we search and participate in when online (Robinson, 2007), and therefore it shapes what we see, read and choose to share in our daily interactions. We cannot ignore the time that we spend online, as this becomes a part of who we are (Robinson, 2007). We have the ability to express ourselves in similar or different ways from what we convey in face-to-face situations when on Facebook. The online world is powerful in shaping and portraying identities in limitless ways. I hope my research will explain how this occurs and why this becomes significant in a world increasingly influenced by social networks.

## **Primary Research Questions**

The main research question that I am interested in exploring is: How do Facebook identities function in relation to face-to-face identities in the social world? This question is of interest because every form of identity that we express, either online or face-to-face, varies depending on the situation and the people we are surrounded by (Blumer, 1969). I am interested to see how Facebook users' identities vary from what they present in daily interaction. Although the online sphere is a place for users to create images that are appealing to either themselves or to their friends, there is still an element of a user's social identity in their profile (Robinson, 2007). It is not that Facebook is a place to become a completely different person; it is rather a space in which the portrayal of identity is mainly constructed by the user. The user is in more control of their online identity than in a face-to-face context.

Four sub-questions will be utilized to further the development of the research plan and understanding of data: what is the significance of Facebook profile and album pictures remaining the same or changing? What tools are utilized in creating change or maintaining consistency? What is the importance of identity creation or maintenance in the Facebook world? How does face-to-face interaction play a role in the way online identity is portrayed? These research questions will be useful in thinking about the project as a whole, and will aid in the development of questions and 'identity categories' (Heritage, 1987) when observing and interviewing subjects.

## **Hypothesis**

I am suggesting that Facebook has become yet another stage where identities are dramaturgically performed through new forms of "presentation of self" (Goffman, 1959) and

interaction rituals. My study endeavours to understand the ways in which the identities created in Facebook contribute to users' evolving sense of self. This approach is the most appropriate for this study as online identities will be difficult to contextualize without the element of daily interaction. Identity is a constant performance dependent on context, time and place (Goffman, 1959).

I am also proposing that Facebook is a place where digital identities are stored and modified as part of a digital archive. Users access the site in various time contexts to interact with their network and contribute to these stored identities. These stored identities, however, can be edited at any time to reflect the most-current online identity portrayal that a user is interested in expressing. These digital identities are archived in the online context, but stem from our offline connections and interactions.

### **Research Design**

In order to effectively develop answers as to how an online identity functions in relation to a face-to-face one, a two-part study was conducted. 18 university students between the ages of 18 to 24 were recruited after official ethics approval was granted. The main methods of recruitment were through Facebook, university outreach emails and classroom announcements with faculty permission.

The first phase of the study asked that all participants allow the researcher to observe and analyze their Facebook pages for a period of two months, and observational notes were taken during this time. In the second stage, seven participants were interviewed with the purpose of understanding their perspective on the role Facebook plays in their interactions and sense of self, and to gauge the level of consistency between their offline self-image and the online identity

they portrayed. Patterns emerged from the two-month observation period, which helped to develop distinct ‘identity categories’ (Heritage, 1987) that were subsequently used to determine the connection between online and face-to-face interaction. First, a typology of users was developed to determine how each participant engaged with the platform, and second, persona categories (Mulder, 2007), or identity types, were developed to help explain how online identity formed.

Two instruments were used to collect data: an observational protocol and an interview guide. The observational protocol standardized the two-month research taking place and defined the Facebook profile elements that were observed, such as user activities and profile attributes. The observations were documented in a simple Word document format detailing the specific sections/areas where identity was performed in each participant’s profile. These observations allowed me to develop typologies and persona types, which informed the interview guide as part of the second phase of research. The participant interviews that were conducted after the two-months of observation were over provided further insight into how participants themselves made sense of their online identity formation.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Symbolic interactionism and dramaturgical sociology helped me move between the two realms of offline and online, and provided the best theoretical framework for understanding how identity is performed in front of the overlapping audiences in these two contexts. Symbolic interactionism addresses the inherent social nature of the Facebook platform, and provides insights into how interactions with others form our sense of identity (Jenkins, 2008). For symbolic interactionists, behaviour is fundamentally social and identity is formed through our

social interactions. Symbolic interaction also provides conceptual tools for capturing the process of constructing identity as it happens in the everyday. Dramaturgy, on the other hand, posits that every action is a performance through which we negotiate our identity (Goffman, 1959).

Dramaturgical sociology centers on aspects of performance that produce identity, and specific tools such as impression management, dramatic realization, idealization and expressive control to explain how identity is presented.

The blended approach of symbolic interactionism and dramaturgy will be the most successful in showcasing how online identity is formed and how it overlaps into the offline. The two streams can be associated as they both view symbolic actions as the method through which identity is constructed; dramaturgy sees identity as something that is performed vis-à-vis diverse situations and audiences, while symbolic interactionism understands identity to be symbolically understood through the eyes of the generalized other. From the perspective of this thesis, identities are produced in public and private realms that span the offline and the online world, and validated by the responses of the respective audiences. My hope is that the study to be presented in the following pages will cast light on the specific techniques and practices in which this happens.



## CHAPTER 2: FACEBOOK LITERATURE REVIEW

### Introduction

If you have not heard of Facebook by now, then you have been living under a rock. The site has become so pervasive that we, generally, cannot go a day without hearing about Facebook in some capacity: either in our daily interactions, on the news or in our workplaces. With over 500 million active members, Facebook is the largest and most popular social networking site currently on the internet (Ellison et al., 2007). Young adults make up a large percentage of Facebook users – 27 percent to be exact (Socialbakers, 2011) – and 83 percent of young adults between the age of 18 and 24 are members. Sixty percent of these users access the site on a daily basis (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith & Zickuhr, 2010). These numbers may or may not shock you; however, one thing is for certain: a significant amount of young people rely on Facebook as a staple communication tool. Communication is at the centre of this phenomenon and the way we communicate contributes to the type of identity we give and give off (Goffman, 1959).

Due to its prevalence and vastness, I will not spend time discussing the history and growth of Facebook – that can be done by simply watching *The Social Network*. Although this film provides only one version of the history, it does provide a fairly comprehensive review of how the site came to be. The majority of North American internet users are familiar with the site and what I would like to focus on, instead, are the aspects of Facebook that make it so popular in today's youth culture, what allows it to continue growing in popularity and how it continues to incorporate itself in the daily functioning of our lives. It is perhaps the youth culture of needing to be constantly connected that allows Facebook to thrive, however, without background knowledge and research; it cannot be said with conviction that this statement is true. That is why

I would like to spend some time speaking of the research that has been done, in terms of identity and youth, on Facebook.

This literature review is not designed to give a history of Facebook or a play-by-play of activity and key components of the site. The chapter simply serves to showcase *how* Facebook has dominated the social networking landscape and *why* it is the most used online network by young adults. This chapter will lead with a discussion of social networking site usage, which will then transition into a discussion of how Facebook, specifically, is used by young adults. Afterwards, the process of identity formation on Facebook will be explored, as well as the most recent Facebook studies concentrating on the topic of identity. Lastly, theoretical approaches to current Facebook studies, that are both similar to and different from my own, will be examined.

### **Use of Social Networking Sites**

With the introduction of social networks like Facebook, MySpace, Friendster, Nexopia and Bebo, their popularity has become so vast that millions of users have now incorporated the use of these sites into their daily routines. Most of these sites are based on pre-existing friendship networks; however, some connect users through mutual interests, activities and political leanings. Half of my own interest in the social networking phenomena revolves around their incorporation into our daily practices, through both web and mobile use.

Although social networking sites (SNSs) are a growing scholarly field, it is a field that has not quite caught up with the phenomena that it is following. The amount of scholarly writing and studies that currently exist do not match the vastness of sites available to the user. The field of social networking is one that is gaining much more attention; however, there is much to contribute from a scholarly standpoint.

boyd and Ellison's (2007) article "*Social Networking Sites: Definition, History and Scholarship*," provides extensive background information about previous social networking research and how this work has contributed to the growing body of knowledge that currently exists. In the article, boyd and Ellison (2007) reveal that the majority of scholarship to date "has focused on impression management and friendship performance, networks and network structure, online/offline connections, and privacy issues" (p. 219); therefore, the research from this thesis will be of value to this growing, yet small, field. As well, the majority of studies are quantitative in nature, thus the qualitative method I am using will provide an interpretative insight.

Before diving into how SNSs are used, the most logical place to start would be to define what social network sites are. Leading scholars in the field, boyd and Ellison (2007), define SNSs as:

Web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. (p. 219)

While many definitions of SNSs exist, the one provided by boyd and Ellison is the most encompassing and descriptive definition that provides a useful starting point for distinguishing SNSs among other Web 2.0 media and examining their specific characteristics and uses.

No SNS is complete without a user profile. Profiles consist of text boxes for the user to attribute personal characteristics and individual identifiers to, "which typically include descriptors such as age, location, interests, and an "about me" section" (boyd & Ellison, 2007, p.

219). The user is free to upload profile pictures that are showcased alongside their personal information, as well as photo albums, video, web links, music and other similar applications. The idea is that the user has full control to choose what aspects of the profile they choose to complete, and decide which elements are to share with the public or keep private with their online friends.

Now that we know what SNSs are and their interface features and functions, the more important question is how are they being used? I would like to focus on the use of SNSs by young adults between the age of 18 and 24; from this point forward, the term ‘young adult’ should be synonymous with the 18 to 24 age group. These young adults, the majority of which are university students, use SNSs for a variety of reasons; however, there are three main aspects that researchers have argued keep them coming back: friendship, self-expression and social capital (Pempek et al., 2009; Livingstone, 2008; Ellison et al., 2007).

### *Friendship*

A Facebook ‘friend’ is an online connection with another user – this connection may or may not have been formed through offline engagement. Online friendship is different from offline in that the relationships that are formed online may not reflect a person’s true offline relationships. One may not be as close in real life with the ‘friends’ they have online, and one does not have the ability to have a face-to-face conversation in the online context. However, the online and offline relationship is based on similar motivations: a want to connect with the people one knows whether they are close friends, old friends, acquaintances, co-workers and so forth (Subrahmanyam, Reich, Waechter & Epinoza, 2008). Subrahmanyam et al. (2008) believe that online and offline networks are connected because the majority of interactions in the online

world stem from our offline connections. Yet, online friendships differ from face-to-face interactions in that these interactions are delayed in time and space (Urista, Dong & Day, 2008). A SNS user does not need to respond in real time, like in a face-to-face conversation, when online. Hours, days, even weeks can go by before a person responds to another's online interaction. Sometimes no response is even made. The 'no response' experience, however, would not disqualify someone as a friend, as even offline relationships are elusive - no response could be attributed to a lack of user activity. The types of interactions discussed above were researched as part of Urista et al.'s (2008) study on MySpace and Facebook use by emerging adults. Five main themes came from this study, which is also supported by Subrahmanyam et al.'s (2008) SNS use research. The participants in the study admit they use SNSs for the following reasons: efficient communication, convenient communication, curiosity about others, popularity and relationship formation and reinforcement.

Efficient communication is an important feature of SNSs. The ease with which comments and status updates can be made allows users to spread information to *all* their friends much faster than having individual conversations. It prevents 'a million questions from being asked' and allows users to communicate with a group of friends simultaneously. The convenience of communicating with family and friends was cited as the number one reason for using SNSs by the participants: "it is an easy way of keeping in touch with people and is good for long distance relationships" (Urista et. al, 2008, p. 222). The efficiency and convenience of communication that SNSs give young adults is what entices them to use these sites.

Plain old curiosity is another reason why people use SNSs. The majority of the participants admitted to using MySpace and Facebook to acquire information about people who interest them; these could be new or old friends, romantic crushes, classmates or basically

anyone they would like to know better (Urista et al, 2008). Users feel that they can accurately judge what a person will be like in the offline world if they are able to inquire about their interests and beliefs. However, this type of ‘spying’ or ‘stalking’ can backfire, as most of these sites allow users to see who has been viewing their profiles. Some users even reported that they use SNSs to spy on those who may have wronged them in the past: “I look to see if anything bad has happened to them. Especially if they were mean to me” (Urista et al., 2008, p. 222). The most interesting result that came from this discussion of curiosity was that the majority of these users had issues with others searching their profiles, even though they expressed that they like to ‘read up’ or ‘check on’ others. Again, the majority of participants have their profiles set to private to avoid online stalkers, yet they seem to be upset when they cannot access others’ information: “we like snooping, but don’t like it when participants snoop on us” (p.223). Extreme voyeurism, which only accounts for about 10 percent of users (Subrahmanyam et al., 2008), is a concern for SNSs users and more and more users have started to place a greater emphasis on increasing and maintaining their privacy settings (boyd & Hargittai, 2010). Even with these concerns, the primary purpose of SNSs is to find out information about others, and users spend a lot of their online time doing this.

Popularity is another reason for SNS use. The more friends, comments and interactions a person has on SNSs, the more popular they appear (Urista et al., 2008). Appearing popular was important in the study because it meant that a person’s social status was raised. By having more friends, one seems well-liked, however, many participants stated that “for many people with hundreds of friends on SNS, these “friends” in actuality are not as dependable or close as “friends” one has in real life” (Urista et al., 2008, p.223). But the feeling of acceptance is what

counts for these users: the more comments on pictures and wall postings that a user has, the more popular they seem because they are receiving attention.

The last aspect of ‘friendship’ revolves around relationship formation and reinforcement. Many users find it easier to maintain pre-existing and new relationships on SNSs because new information that is obtained through these channels allows users to develop stronger bonds with their contacts. It becomes apparent who a user is and is not close with on SNSs due to the kind of interaction that takes place. SNSs allow users to form more meaningful relationships with their friends and acquaintances: “without MySpace or Facebook, I wouldn’t be in touch with that many people...it allows you to maintain relationships at your own or their own convenience” (Urista et al., 2008, p. 224). Relationships are reinforced through repeated interaction and communication, however, lack of communication can signal a weakening friendship. The relationships developed online can either strengthen or weaken SNS interaction.

One of the main reasons that young adults use SNSs revolves around wanting to stay in touch with family and friends (Urista et al., 2008; Subrahmanyam et al., 2008). Subrahmanyam et al.’s (2008) study found similar results of overlap between a person’s online and offline networks, however, the overlap did not reflect the fact that young adults use “different online contexts to strengthen different aspects of their offline connections” (p.420). As well, the group found additional reasons for SN use: keeping in touch with relatives and family, making plans with friends they see often and maintaining account membership because their friends do.

Thus, friendship is a very important aspect of social network use. Bonds can be built more easily because of the efficiency and convenience of communication that social networks provide, as well as their popularity among the youth population. With the added element of

curiosity, online relationships are able to form and be maintained through social networks. As well, the online and offline world are not two distinct realities. The two merge into one another as online technologies have become embedded into our daily routines.

### *Self-Expression*

Of course not all young people use SNSs, but for those who do, self-expression is a significant part of the social networking experience. Self-expression, for the purposes of this section, can be described as the personality and feelings that an individual shares online. Not only do users have the ability to see what others are up to, but they have a chance to showcase their own life through pictures, videos and textual descriptions, and this showcase is a part of their online self-expression. A large predictor of SNS usage revolves around the use of these sites for expressive purposes like creating web pages and instant messaging (Tufekci, 2008), and engaging with ‘social grooming:’ the act of improving “one’s reputation and status as well as access to resources and social and practical solidarity” (p.546). Profile content is created to attain recognition from the community of SNS users (Urista et. al, 2008; Kayahara & Wellman, 2007); it becomes difficult to remain an active part of a SNS community if the user is not continuously contributing. Users of SNSs, for the most part, enjoy sharing elements of their personalities personified through text, photo and video, but only with approved friends (Livingstone, 2008). Sonia Livingstone’s (2008) research on teenage use of SNSs found that younger teenagers tended to use MySpace predominately to showcase their personality through pieces of flair, bright colours, emoticons, and flashy web page elements. Whereas, older teens moved away from this behaviour and preferred more simple designs so they could establish their adult independence by showcasing authentic relationships with their connections. Although Livingstone’s study focuses on teen youth, some of the results apply to the young adult



population: self-expression is based on a want to share life experiences with pre-approved friends and family on social networks.

Self-expression does, however, come at the price of privacy. Not all users have issues with displaying their lives on social networks, but the vast majority prefers to keep some type of privacy setting to avoid information being leaked to unwanted users (boyd & Hargittai, 2010). Among non-users, the primary reason for not signing up to SNSs is the reluctance to reveal too much personal information (Tufekci, 2008). The results from Tufekci's (2008) study of college students' rapid adoption of SNSs shows that self-expression is constrained by issues with privacy – some users choose to disengage with SNSs because it runs the risk of implicating their offline lives with voyeurism. There are, of course, other reasons for not engaging with SNSs, but the issue of privacy is still a large concern for some undergraduate students because it limits their comfort with online self-expression.

### *Social Capital*

The initial appeal of social networks for young people was that it was a place of their own (Farquhar, 2009). A place that was not only free from parental eyes, but a place where social standing and popularity was dictated through prominence of online interaction (boyd, 2004). Now that these online spaces have become more open and accepting of older generations, a better reason to stay connected exists: social capital. Social capital is “the resources available to people through their social interactions (Lin, 2001; Putnam, 2004)” (as cited in Valenzuela et al., 2009, p.877). The idea that the network one builds of friends, family, colleagues and so forth can reward or help one to further themselves in life is part of the reason we communicate with large amounts of ‘friends’ online (Ellison et al., 2007). Not every member has a large network, but for

those that do, maintaining communication with other members has potential to pay off in terms of resources in the future. Creating social capital is not always a conscious goal for social network users, but it is a by-product of communicating online (Valenzuela, Park & Kee, 2009).

Returning to the notion of social grooming (Tufekci, 2008), SNS users engage with the medium to improve their social status by connecting with new and old friends. Through this improvement of social status comes social capital. However, if a user does not engage in this type of social behaviour, they lose the opportunity to gain social capital. Thus, the level of social capital that social networkers can build is dependent on how large their network is and how often they communicate (Valenzuela et al., 2009; Ellison et al., 2007). Individuals with large and diverse networks are thought to have more social capital than those with smaller, less sundry networks. People accumulate social capital through daily interactions with friends, co-workers and acquaintances; however, this capital can be accumulated in the online sphere through online social networking as well. The bonding that occurs through social networking use is a type of deliberate action used to maintain and strengthen social capital (Ellison et al., 2007; Joinson, 2008; Valenzuela et al., 2009).

Being part of a social network allows individuals to develop trust and reciprocity within a community. Trust and reciprocity are necessary for collective activities to be worked on. Social networks facilitate trust by allowing users to connect with pre-approved 'friends,' which helps to dissolve these trust issues (Putnam, 2004). The social capital that is built from this work helps users access information and opportunities that may not otherwise be available (Lin, 2001). Therefore, the by-products of social capital, like access to job openings, improve an individual's well-being and quality of life (Valenzuela et al., 2009).

The effects of social capital, however, are difficult to prove. Scheufele and Shah (2000) believe social capital can be broken down into three domains: intrapersonal, interpersonal and behavioural. “The intrapersonal domain is related to individuals’ life satisfaction. The interpersonal domain refers to trust among individuals, also called social or generalized trust in others. The behavioral domain involves individuals’ active participation in civic and political activities” (p. 877). Although the intrapersonal domain may seem contradictory to the terms ‘social’ and ‘capital,’ life satisfaction is a by-product of maintaining social capital. The social capital that comes as a result of social network use can embody any of these three areas. It is, however, the combination of the three that produce higher levels of participation in the outside community. Social capital has the ability to not only satisfy an individual’s social well-being, but to also build that capital outside of the online world.

For the most part, social capital is built among a user’s current network. Social network users do not try to make friends with strangers, but rather focus on building their social capital with the people they already know (Ellison et al., 2007). Social networks have the ability to increase the weak social ties users may have since communicating through this medium is relatively cheap and easy (Donath & boyd, 2004). Ellison et al.’s (2007) study found that Facebook was a space where offline relationships were maintained and even strengthened. The researchers believe that this type of interaction improves a person’s self-esteem and life satisfaction. Thus, an individual’s social network builds emotional confidence in communicating, which in turn improves one’s social capital.

### *Types of Users*

With a wide selection of social networks, comes a varied audience. There are different types of users that engage with the medium and it is important to discuss whom accesses social networks and how they do so. Although a more in depth analysis of the way different individuals use Facebook specifically will be discussed, it is important to note the four types of social network users found in Hargittai and Hsieh's (2010) study.

A study as recent as Hargittai and Hsieh's proves that social networks are some of the most accessed spaces on the internet to date. The scholars believe it is limiting to view social network users as either users or non-users; they deem the level of engagement, frequency of visits and the number of SNSs an individual is part of more important than the on/off binary. The duo concluded that four types of social network users exist in the young adult demographic and each engages with social networks in diverse ways:

Those who only use one such site and do so only sometimes are Dabblers. Those who visit more than one SNS, but none of them often, are Samplers. Users who are active often on one such site only are Devotees. Finally, those who are visitors to more than one such site and use at least one of them often are Omnivores. Dabblers are the least engaged group of the four. Samplers are not active on any particular SNS, but spend time on more than one so their engagement is likely higher than that of Dabblers. Devotees only engage with one such service, but do so often. Omnivores have embraced SNSs the most by using a diversity of them and spending considerable time on at least one such service. (p.150)

The results show that students who have internet access at home tend to exhibit high levels of internet knowledge and skills. These types of students tend to be Omnivores and Devotees of social networking sites. Gender is also an important factor, as females tend to use SNSs more than males and their intensity of use is higher in comparison to males. Students who live independently from their parents have a larger personal network because of increased access points and use SNSs more intensely than those who live at home. Hargittai and Hsieh's study not only validates hypotheses put forth by early researchers in the field, but the methodology has provided substantial contributions. Researchers must be careful to understand the extent to which individuals use SNSs and how they are incorporated into their daily practices. Due to outside social, cultural, political and psychological influences, not all SNSs users utilize the medium in the same manner. There are varying levels and purposes of use are not necessarily synonymous with all social networking users, thus this should be taken into account when describing social networking use in the general population of undergraduate students. An individual's gender, context of use and online experience is dependent on use intensity. As well, some social network users have incorporated their SNS use into their daily routine, which ultimately affects their opinions and approaches to privacy, the way they construct online and offline self-identity and how they interact with others in the real world.

Social networking use is a daily, common place practice for young undergraduate students. Friendship, self-expression and social capital are key reasons for social networking use. Not all students use social networks in the same manner, and much of that depends on how they choose to integrate social network use into their daily lives, whether that is frequently, infrequently or somewhere in between.

## **Facebook Usage**

Since its inception in 2004, Facebook has become one of the most popular SNSs (Ellison et al., 2007). The tagline on the current site reads: “Facebook helps you connect and share with the people in your life” (Facebook.com). As can be inferred from its tagline, Facebook use focuses on relationship building and maintenance as a primary motive. There are other reasons to use the site; however, upholding friendships in the online sphere is the largest draw for the undergraduate population (Sheldon, 2008).

Facebook was originally only available to students, but has now expanded to include anyone with a valid email address. When the site was first introduced it was unique and different from other SNSs because it was free and an exclusive space for university students (Birnbaum, 2008). University networks were developed and only individuals who attended these institutions could view profiles of those associated with the network. This exclusivity provided a feeling of intimacy and security for its users (boyd, 2004; Ellison et al., 2007). The profiles that college students were creating provided an outlet for self-presentation through the uploading of photos, videos and personal interests and likes. As well, students were able to form and join groups, privately message friends and modify, delete and add information and posts at any time. The ability to change the profile at any time allows users to express their personality and interests as an accurate reflection of their identity in that specific time and place.

Many social networking sites exist, but what makes Facebook so special? The site integrates the offline activities with that of the online in a seamless way:

From the point of initial contact, we can assume that users see Facebook as integrating or mirroring offline lives, rather than a place for identity play or strong anonymity as has

been suggested for other technological contexts. This is especially likely given that most participants reported joining at the behest of their friends. Thus, even a user's introduction to Facebook generally emerges from a pre-existing connection. (Elder-Jubelin, 2009, p.45)

In comparison to other social networks, Facebook's structure originates from offline social networks that a user brings to their online experience (Lampe et al., 2006). The online network that an individual builds is based on the offline context; the identity that is thus produced is more in-line with an individual's offline life. Acquisti and Gross (2006) highlight Facebook as unique because of its strong presence and success amongst university students. The information that is provided by the user is more accurate and complete, and personal information is more identifiable than on other SNSs. Facebook promotes an identity more in line with offline user behaviour, as users tend to use their real names and list connections to work and educational intuitions. Users need to maintain some essence of their offline life in order to find friends on the site. If a user is unidentifiable by friends, colleagues and family, it becomes difficult to engage with the medium. McClard and Anderson (2008) affirm that Facebook has a more 'real world' focus on connections and networks in that users interact and present themselves in a manner more consistent with their offline image and behaviour than on other SNSs. The researchers conclude that "Facebook is not about page content; it is about social interactions between individuals and groups. These exchanges can take many forms, depending on the applications a particular user chooses to use" (p.10); the site "is dynamic rather than static; it constantly updates itself" (p.12). Thus, Facebook is unique from other SNSs in its approach to communication.

Two central themes emerge from current Facebook literature: communication and privacy. Although research outside of these categories does exist, the majority of writing focuses

on how people use Facebook to connect with family and friends, and how privacy settings play a role in their use of the site.

### *Communication*

According to Sheldon (2008), there are six main reasons that people use Facebook: to maintain their relationships, to pass time, to belong to a virtual community, for entertainment, to embody ‘coolness’ and for companionship. Each of these six categories revolves around communicating and feeling connected to the online community, however, one category accounts for over a third of Facebook transactions: relationship maintenance. Sheldon (2008) found that users maintain their relationships by sending messages to friends, posting message on friends’ walls, communicating with friends, staying in touch with friends and getting in touch with people they know and those that may be hard to reach. Sheldon’s results indicate that women are much more likely to use Facebook to maintain relationships, pass time and be entertained, while men use the network to develop new relationships and meet new people. The researcher also found that 81 percent of undergraduate users log into Facebook on a daily basis and spend 47 minutes a day on the site. Bainbridge’s (2008) findings echo Sheldon’s results; however, Bainbridge found that entertainment, social searching and event planning were important factors in maintaining relationships. Quan-Haase & Young (2010) would agree with Sheldon and Bainbridge’s findings, but would add that Facebook is about “having fun and knowing about the social activities occurring in one’s social network, whereas instant messaging is geared toward relationship maintenance and development” (p.350). Quan-Haase & Young, however, did not explore the interactions that occur on Facebook Chat, thus their findings can still be applied to the Facebook site as a whole – communicating through the wall feature, inbox messages or chat function. Pempek et al. (2009) would argue that students use Facebook to communicate in a



‘one-to-many’ style in which they create one piece of content to be disseminated to all their friends. Facebook users tend to spend more time observing than posting content and primarily communicate with people that they have already established an offline relationship with (Pempek et al., 2009). Pempek et al. (2009) would also include development of identity as a reason for use; however, undergraduate students would likely not recognize ‘identity development’ as a blatant part of the Facebook experience. What students would agree with is that expressing information about one’s basic demographics (ie. hometown, birthday), interests and media preferences are an important part of the Facebook experience.

The amount of friends a user has has an impact on Facebook use and perceived attractiveness. According to Tong et al. (2008), the majority of Facebook users accumulate several hundred friends, however, the more ‘friends’ a user has, the less appealing they are to other users in terms of popularity and desirability. Walther et al. (2008) found similar results in that a profile owner is judged on what their friends post on their walls and if the postings are deemed ‘socially inappropriate’ they lessen the attractiveness of the owner as a Facebook friend. What can be inferred is that Facebook users are judged by the company they keep online. In their 2009 study, Ross et al. found that personality had a lot to do with Facebook use. Students who were more extroverted tended to use Facebook as a social tool, but not as an alternative to social activities. One might assume that extroverted students would have a higher friend count, but this was not the case: “Levels of extraversion were not associated with number of ‘Facebook Friends’ or communicative functions of Facebook” (Discussion section, para. 2). Those students who were shy were categorized as ‘neurotic’ and were more likely to control what their friends were posting online and how much information they were willing to share. These are the types of

users who will erase friends' comments or take their time to respond to comments because they are worried about the impression they are making.

### *Privacy*

With the increasing amount of information that is shared on Facebook comes an increase in privacy and security concerns. Although researchers have found that privacy concerns are a weak indicator of social network use (Acquisti & Gross, 2006), they are still none-the-less a concern for most users (boyd & Hargittai, 2010). Back in 2005, Govani and Pashley found that Facebook users were aware of the privacy features that the site provided, but the majority of users did not activate their settings. Fast forward to today (only eight years later) and one will find that Facebook changes their privacy settings on a semi-annually basis. College students tend to provide more personal information than any other demographic – and if they are unaware of their privacy settings and who can view their profiles, they run the risk of having their information used in harmful ways (Lewis et al., 2008). boyd and Hargittai (2010) still find that some users are simply unaware of their privacy settings and allow complete strangers to view their personal information. Lewis, Kaufman and Christakis (2008) argue that privacy behaviour is based on social influences and personal incentives: “students are more likely to have a private profile if their friends and roommates have them; women are more likely to have private profiles than are men; and having a private profile is associated with a higher level of online activity” (p.79).

Acquisti and Gross (2006) recognize that even those who are concerned with privacy share large amounts of personal information on Facebook. These individuals use Facebook regularly and trust their ability to control their desired privacy settings on the site. The

researchers also found that although young people are concerned with privacy in a general sense, they are less concerned with privacy on Facebook specifically. The students feel confident with Facebook's ability to alert them to important privacy setting information. Acquisti and Gross did, however, find a dichotomy between having high concerns about privacy, but mixed positions towards actually activating those settings. Possible reasons for this behaviour include peer pressure, unawareness of true visibility of profiles and level of trust with the Facebook network itself; undergraduates tend to trust the site and its users more than any other social network in terms of privacy.

So what kind of personal information are students leaving visible to the public? Acquisti and Gross (2006) found that young adults tend to post accurate and complete information about their birthdays, AIM, sexual orientation and political views, while their home phone number, personal address, partner's name and cell phone number were rarely provided. Individuals voiced concerns about their privacy and security if they revealed such personally identifying information like where they live and their telephone number, which could in turn lead to offline stalking. Acquisti and Gross' study was completed five years ago and I would argue that a larger percentage of students provide cell phone information today due to the growth of cell phones and mobile applications (Vladar & Fife, 2010). One might argue that young people provide more identifying information today; however, students are still concerned about their online privacy. The only difference is that young people now have more control over their security settings due to improvements in Facebook's privacy setting layout than in previous years.

boyd and Hargittai (2010) argue that a young person's computer savviness and gender shapes their confidence in manipulating Facebook privacy settings and using these settings for online security. Essentially experience and skill are the most important factors in determining

how stringent a user will be with their privacy settings. The researchers also found that women were “more confident in their ability to address privacy settings and were somewhat more engaged in doing so than men.” boyd and Hargittai “suggest that the ongoing public messaging targeted at women concerning the safety of social network sites may explain this gender difference” (Research questions section, para. 3). Their research participants reported changing their privacy settings at least once in 2009, while those numbers increased significantly between 2009 and 2010. boyd and Hargittai found that all categories of users engaged with their privacy settings, including occasional, frequent and former users. The duo believe the spiked interest in privacy settings is due to a combination of public discussions about privacy between 2009 and 2010, and Facebook’s changes to the site. The more time a user spends on the site, the higher their confidence level in using and maintaining privacy settings.

Facebook is a place for undergraduates to connect with their offline friends to maintain relationships, pass time, be entertained and belong to a virtual community. Facebook is a unique platform that has had great successes with the undergraduate population because of its effectiveness in connecting users while protecting their privacy and security simultaneously.

### **Identity Formation on Facebook**

A problematic dichotomy exists between ‘real’ and ‘artificial’ identity within the online SNS sphere. Identity cannot simply be determined as ‘true’ or ‘false,’ as there is much more depth involved than simply ascertaining a difference between reality and representation. Identifying what a ‘real’ personality is is not only arguable and questionable, but does little to further the theoretical discussion. The concept of the ‘real’ is slippery and contested, and the theories of identity that ground this thesis [symbolic interactionism and dramaturgy]

problematize the notion of a 'real' identity. For Goffman (1959), identity is a series of presentations of performances, and the authenticity of these performances cannot be distinguished, as each performance is a valid representation. A distinction can be made between an 'online' and 'offline' personality, life or behaviour, but a distinction cannot be made whether one is more 'real' or 'true' than the other. Identity is presented through performance and in the online realm, identity is as real as 'real life' itself.

The first step in forming an online identity is joining a social network. As rudimentary as it may seem, this crucial, and often forgotten, step is the prerequisite to the online experience. When a user joins Facebook for the first time, they are asked to fill out a profile and include information about their background, their interests and a photo for identification purposes. The profile information can be added to at any time, but it is essential to fill something out so a user can add contacts to their network. This is where the process of online identity formation begins.

Facebook is unique from other social networking sites in that its members use their real names and merge their offline identity with that of their online (Ellis, 2010). Because the majority of members uses real names, their online identities are associated with their offline lives, and thus are more accurate representations of who they are. Of course, not every aspect of a Facebook account is 100 percent accurate, however, Facebook profiles tend to provide better insight into the offline than previous social media profiles like ICQ and even MySpace. An online profile is not an identical reflection of a user's offline life; therefore users need to determine how they want to be perceived. Many individuals engage in performance of gender and social identity when forming an online identity (Ellis, 2010), but use their real names in an attempt to represent who they really are. As Lev Grossman (2007) wrote in Time magazine:

“[Facebook users] declare their sex, age, whereabouts, romantic status and institutional affiliations. Identity is not a performance or a toy on Facebook; it is a fixed and orderly fact. Nobody does anything secretly: a news feed constantly updates your friends on your activities. On Facebook, everyone knows you’re a dog” (para. 4).

It becomes difficult for users to separate their offline identities from their online because they are representing their real selves on Facebook. Individuals select their social identities based on the group memberships that are available to them online. In order to use Facebook successfully and be recognized as being part of these groups, users must present personal facts that are validated through social interaction. However, users still have the ability to communicate their identities in whatever manner they see fit. People from their distant past may see a difference from the person they once knew to the person that is currently portrayed online; or they will at least notice a change.

George Herbert Mead theorized that the self is established through communication and is a product of social interaction (Mead, 1934). Who we think we are is based on what others conceive of us. We are initially seen as objects to others and once we take the perspective of the other through language, “we become an object to ourselves” (Ellis, 2010, p.39). Facebook profiles, then, become objects to our ‘friends’ and through the language and interaction of wall postings, status updates and photos, we communicate as we want to be seen through the eyes of the other. Thus, the user communicates their identity based on what they think others believe it to be. The “I” (the internal self) and the “me” (the social self) are the basis of Mead’s understanding of identity communication. This theory can be applied to the online world of Facebook in that the self is intertwined in the social representations the user offers. Identity portrayal is still a

choice; however, that portrayal is dependent on the social identities that have been presented in offline interaction.

Mead believed that communicative identity is a three-step process and it can be directly applied to Facebook profile pictures. Profile pictures are one of the first elements a user adds to their profile, and these photos are crucial in choosing an identity on Facebook. In the first step of Mead's process, others are alerted to a user's intentions by the actions they take on the site. When posting a profile picture, the user communicates a particular identity that they want to portray. The identity the user has chosen is significant because it demonstrates an aspect of their lives they want to communicate. For example, showcasing a photo of a wedding day or a nightclub has vastly different connotations and produces identities of being married or single through just one photograph. The second step in choosing a profile picture is based on the reaction the user thinks they will receive from their network. This communication and photo selection is unconscious, but reflects the manner the "I" chooses the "me." Therefore, the woman choosing to showcase herself at a nightclub could perhaps insinuate that she is single and that brings on all types of social meanings. In the final stage, the user negotiates their identity based on available social identities (Ellis, 2010). The photo a user posts means something to them and represents a part of their personality, thus, the identity that emerges on Facebook is based on the social process and interaction taking place within a user's network.

Facebook identity presentations blur the line between offline and online reality. Due to identity negotiation being such a fluid process, not every user is *truly* aware of how a person's life on Facebook is similar or dissimilar from their offline one. The Facebook profile is a view into a person's life that they wish to portray as positively as possible (Ellis, 2010; Zhao, Grasmuck & Martin, 2008), and may not necessarily be an accurate reflection of what is and has

happened in their lives. This communication behaviour drastically impacts personal identity formation and exemplifies the notion that social interaction is at the centre of identity creation and portrayal.

Personal identity construction on Facebook is enabled by “multiple channels for interpersonal feedback and peer acceptance” (Valenzuela et al., 2009, p.881). Walther et al. (2009) presented the warranting principle as an explanation for how online identity is validated by a user’s network. The warranting principle (Walther & Parks, 2002) suggests that “observers place greater credence in information about the personal characteristics and offline behaviors of others when the information cannot be easily manipulated by the person who it describes” (p.229). Therefore, warranting refers to “the capacity to draw a reliable connection between a presented persona online and a corporeally anchored person in the physical world” (p. 230), and Facebook users only trust information that has a greater warranting value. Sometimes offline identity can be elusive and this theory proposes that only information presented by outside parties validate a self-presentational claim made by a Facebook user. The types of claims made by individuals may be false in the online context, therefore the network of Facebook friends confirm the identity being presented is authentic. Thus, our online self-presentation is validated by our networks and is only seen as truthful when ‘friends’ confirm or deny the presentation through online commentary and interaction.

A study put forth by Zhao, Grasmuck and Martin (2008) speaks specifically to how the warranting theory helps to validate online identity. Zhao et al.’s (2008) research was based on a content analysis of 63 undergraduate Facebook accounts of how the users experienced identity production. The researchers found that:



Identities produced in this nonymous environment differ from those constructed in the anonymous online environments previously reported. Facebook users predominantly claim their identities implicitly rather than explicitly; they “show rather than tell” and stress group and consumer identities over personally narrated ones (para. 1).

The users neither produced “true selves” that are commonly seen in chat rooms, or “real selves” that are found in face-to-face interaction. The Facebook selves that were presented were “highly socially desirable identities individuals aspire to have offline, but have not yet been able to embody for one reason or another” (Discussion section, para. 1). While the nonymity of the Facebook environment causes the user to be more “realistic and honest” (Ellison et al., 2007) in the identity presentation, there is still room to embellish truths to present a self-identity that is more socially desirable than their “real” offline identity. Facebook is an identifiable, therefore ‘nonymous,’ setting that positions identities in relation to their offline equivalents; offline details such as real names, biographical information and photographs are associated with online identities and users want to appear as desirable as possible in this non-anonymous setting. Zhao et al. (2008) found, however, that this presentation of “hoped-for possible selves” that Facebookers try to showcase is executed in a unique way: users showcase themselves in group photos more than single-portrait style photos of themselves, and communicate indirectly through other friends’ walls and photo albums. This behaviour demonstrates the warranting principle in action: users validate their identity through interaction with other members’ profiles. Therefore, the communication present on Facebook is predominately visual and causes the audience to be more aware of an individual’s social milieu. The researchers conclude that this type of ‘showing’ over ‘telling’ identity claims may be attributed to the “prevailing youth culture, the campus

setting with its dense possibilities for offline socializing, as well as the distinctive features of the Facebook environment” (Discussion section, para. 2).

Zhao et al.’s (2008) study produced five key takeaways for understanding online identity construction through Facebook. First, the findings support the notion that identity is not an individual characteristic, it is instead a social product that is born out of a social environment and performed in different contexts: ““True selves,” “real selves,” and “hoped-for possible selves” are products of different situations rather than characteristics of different individuals” (Discussion section, para. 3). Secondly, in a nonymous environment people are more likely to present themselves closer in line to normative expectations than in a completely anonymous environment. The online world of Facebook is not a place for deviant behaviours, in terms of personal identity, because individuals are identifiable and are held responsible for their actions online. Third, one should not make distinctions between the online and offline world because they are interwoven into one another. Users must learn how to coordinate their behaviours in both realms as both are sites of social communication. The online self that is presented on Facebook is very much as real as the self that is presented in daily interaction. The ‘digital’ self that is presented can help to enhance a users’ overall image and identity, which increases connection in the offline world. Fourth, the dichotomy between ‘real’ and ‘virtual’ selves, or ‘true’ versus ‘false’ selves, should not be seen in complete distinction. The ‘virtual’ self commonly refers to the online self while the ‘real’ self refers to the offline self. However, this study found that both of these identities are very much real and have real consequences for the users who create them. On Facebook, users produce the “hoped-for possible self” (Zhao et al., 2008), which is the most socially desirable self-presentation an individual can present to others. However, not all ‘hoped-for’ selves are established offline, but that does not mean that the

Facebook identity presented is not a true representation of a person - it is only a partial representation. Identity is something we convince others of; therefore it does not matter what occurs on or offline. Lastly, Zhao et al. caution that Facebook is a “multi-audience identity production site,” (Discussion section, para. 5) where users have the ability to utilize their privacy settings to showcase specific elements of their profiles to select friends. The “front” and “back” regions that Goffman (1959) theorized are personified through Facebook, as users partition their profiles to showcase different identities to varying audiences. However, the researchers were not able to see all the different identity shows available, thus the user has complete control over showing a specific identity to each of their network contacts. The five findings that Zhao et al. found are key elements in which personal identity formation occurs on the Facebook site.

Identity formation on Facebook is based on the social interactions that take place online that validate put-forth identities. The warranting principle speaks to this notion in that a users’ network of contacts confirm or deny the authenticity of personal information that is posted. Users, therefore, must merge behaviours in the online world with their offline as both are sites of social communication and identity construction. There is no need to distinguish the online from the offline self, as both are interwoven into daily interaction and are representative of a ‘true’ self.

### **Iconic Facebook Studies**

Facebook research is a growing field that many scholars are interested in researching. However, in comparison to more prominent communications fields, Facebook is still an area of study that requires further development. Within the umbrella of Facebook, varying topics have been studied such as privacy, social capital and employment recruiting. Although some work has been published on Facebook identity formation, there is a need for further exploration.

In this section, I would like to outline four studies that have been published in the last few years that really speak to the problems and issues that I am researching. Some of the details may seem similar; however, I will outline how I will be adding to the growing body of research. I cannot speak to every study completed, but the following are the most relevant to the type of work that I am doing. The following work done by the subsequent scholars will be discussed: Matthew Birnbaum, Katie Bainbridge, Lee Keenan Farquar and Jeremy Elder-Jubelin. I have spoken to elements of their work in the previous sections of the chapter; however, a detailed account of their specific research would be beneficial.

*Matthew Birnbaum (2008)*

The study entitled “*Taking Goffman on a Tour of Facebook: College Students and the Presentation of Self in a Mediated Digital Environment*” focuses on how university students present themselves through their Facebook profiles and the impressions they purposefully foster amongst their social network. The principles present in Goffman’s dramaturgical and impression management framework served as the theoretical basis through which the profiles were investigated. For eight months Birnbaum studied his participants through an ethnographic research design composed of participant observation, 30 photo-elicitation interviews and a photographic content analysis. Undergraduate students have been quick to take up Facebook and mainly use the platform to maintain their existing relationships and present their identities through photographs. Because photographs are a large part of the Facebook experience and also a big part of identity sharing, the study focused on the use of photographs for self-presentation purposes online. At the time, the study of photographs for self-expression was limited and thus was ground-breaking academic research. Birnbaum hoped to provide college administrators

information on how undergraduate students use Facebook so that they would be better able to understand their institutions' student culture.

So what did Birnbaum find? He concluded that university students are active/keen Facebook users who believe other university students are the main audience viewing their profiles. These users feel that they must present some type of 'university' image which can be personified through the following categories developed by the researcher: 1) partier; 2) social; 3) adventurous/risk-taker; 4) humorous/funny/silly; 5) part of a larger community and 6) unique. The combination of these categories is what forms an undergraduate profile page. To achieve these personalities, students use "props, settings and gesture to provide their audience members visual cues to help form the desired impressions" (p.10). The majority of the data presented within these profiles, however, is intended to be amusing and implicit to close friends only. Birnbaum also found that these undergraduates were concerned about privacy and thus only showcased a small snippet of their activity within their profiles.

*Katie Bainbridge (2008)*

Although Bainbridge's research work focuses more on campus culture through social networking sites like Facebook, it is still an important study to consider as it discusses how students use the site. The paper entitled "*The Facebook Campus: Exploring the Evolution of Facebook Culture in University Students*" speaks predominately to the growth and development of online social networks and how they contribute to the undergraduate campus experience. Bainbridge conducted three focus groups consisting of 12 participants who spoke to their experience with Facebook in high school and compared it to that of their university experience. The goal was to understand how institutional culture is reliant on Facebook student use, and how

the understandings of use can address student issues. Bainbridge's goal was to provide student affairs professionals with information about how students use the platform so that the campus community can be improved.

From these focus groups, Bainbridge found that students felt their peers were more involved with SNSs than they were themselves, "but this perception may be distorted as there is no statistical measurement of usage patterns involved in this particular study" (p.66). Undergrads are concerned with maintaining their privacy; however, they embrace their need for instant communication and information. Thus, a problem arises between limiting personal information on a platform that encourages information sharing. Campus administrators should try to encourage Facebook involvement of campus events and initiatives, while still respecting their students' privacy. The best way to encourage a campus community online is to monitor and participate in the Facebook world and provide outlets for students to become involved. Facebook provides a great space for students to interact with their virtual university community and remain connected to that community. Although personal identity forms from such interaction, a larger campus identity emerges from maintaining university network connections.

*Lee Keenan Farquar (2009)*

The study that Farquar presents in "*Identity Negotiation on Facebook.com*" examines identity presentation on Facebook. The study was broken down into two phases of research: participant observations of 346 university students' Facebook profiles, followed by 48 interviews. Farquar researched the key identity markers present in Facebook profiles through the symbolic interactionist perspective "to determine common characteristics of Facebook profiles, importance of performance components, and categories of identity performance" (p.1). The

research questions were aimed to answer questions of self-presentation intentions, how these intentions are showcased, and the importance of symbols in identity performance. Profile components were categorized into static or dynamic categories, where dynamic components were found to be the most important places for self-presentation to occur. Dynamic components are the active, updated and more viewed material on Facebook and thus drive all the engagement that occurs on the site.

Farquar (2009) found that his research was in line with Mead's main claims:

In often vivid ways, Facebook manifests processes central to symbolic interaction, including observation, internalizations of norms, development of and response to generalized others, performances, feedback, and subsequent performances. In terms of specific identity constructions within the Facebook context, my study helps show how so called Digital Natives craft a nuanced self from a host of larger cultural symbols as well as through fulfilling roles in interpersonal or small group communications. (p. 208)

The study also found that important identity markers are present and formed in a user's interpersonal conversations that occur mainly through public wall postings.

The most prevalent area within Facebook where identity gets played out is in the news feed. The feed is a place where constant updates are made and all current postings are displayed. When a user logs into their account, they are prompted to post status updates, respond to status updates and view current postings such as photos and videos. This endless array of performances prompts the user to click on specific profiles to learn more about a user's self-presentation. Farquar noted that Facebookers tend to pay attention to the dynamic elements and not so much to the static components found in the 'about me' or 'info' section.

Other interesting findings include the notion that Facebookers do not post unflattering pictures of themselves and rarely discuss negative experiences because they are aware of the impression that this information might make on their identity. Self-presentation judgments by others were made based on the details listed in self description, profile pictures, uploaded photos and the wall. However, some interviewees felt that it was difficult to understand a person's identity through a Facebook profile without knowing them outside of that context first. Interestingly, impressions were strongest when they were negative because there was something to react to:

The difference between “successful” and “unsuccessful” profiles is based, of course, on the goals of the profile owner. Success would equate to viewers getting the impression intended by the presenter. However, participants tended to view successful presentations as having a consistency and avoiding unflattering behaviors (based on general social norms). (p.137)

*Jeremy Elder-Jubelin (2009)*

The study that is featured in *“Face(book)ing a Crowd?: An Exploration of Audience, Context, Privacy and Self-Presentation on Facebook”* focuses on how self-presentation is performed on Facebook through the theoretical lens of Goffman's dramaturgical theory, specifically focusing on issues of audience and context. Elder-Jubelin explores how participants define Facebook as a space and object, how relationships and audiences are formed and maintained, and how self-identity is presented on the site through an ethnographic approach. Elder-Jubelin is interested in “the role(s) played by the composition and perception of audience(s), understandings of Facebook's function, structure and characteristics, and a related



consideration of privacy, in participants' descriptions of usage and self-presentation practices and concerns" (p. iv). The data suggests that Facebook is a space overflowing with intersections of "audiences, relationships, anticipated access and desired disclosure levels" (p. iv) in which the user presents their identity and integrates their privacy settings. Elder-Jubelin goes on to reframe Goffman's theory and apply it to the technological context.

Individuals present their identities through the creation and use of a profile, but also through interaction with their network of friends. Profile owners have the ability to reduce or remove material from their profiles, whether it is self-contributed or posted by other users, thereby managing the content present in their profile and their overall online identity. However, this type of practice is not common as Facebook is a space of trust and removing comments betrays that community trust. Participants are also aware that their self-presentation on the site is "imperfect or incomplete" but "partly accurate and adequate" (p.169), and that it occurs within an understanding of audience and technological context.

Elder-Jubelin found that Facebook is generally a social site that composes one of many modes of communication. It is a place for maintaining communication, presenting identity as a form of online presence, and discussing events from the offline world. Facebook becomes a public space where these conversations occur regardless of who has access. The conversations that occur here, however, are not very personal because of the public context. Therefore, more superficial conversations are had online that include a low level of detail and depth. Because Facebook is anchored in the offline, the majority of relationships and friendships on the site originate outside of Facebook, and are generally contacts that a person knows quite well. This explains why strangers, in general, are not added to one's network. Elder-Jubelin's findings are congruent with current identity work that suggests online and offline selves are closely related.

The studies discussed in this section all provide interesting and relevant facts that are directly applicable to my own study. My work does speak to some of the elements within each of these researcher's reports, however, I will be developing discussions of friendship, self-presentation and communication. Mobile-use is another aspect of the research that could be expanded on, but the results of my study showed that the majority of participants only used their mobile phones to review updates. Although discussions of mobile use is lacking in the current literature, I was unable to add to the gap as no other forms of mobile Facebook interaction were observed.

### **Theoretical Approaches Taken to Studying Identity on Facebook**

The research that currently exists about social networking sites and Facebook has various theoretical leanings. The most common that I have come across are uses and gratifications theory, socio-cultural theory, psychological theory and dramaturgical and symbolic interactionist theory. I would like to briefly outline what each approach brings to the research table and how studies have utilized them.

Uses and gratifications theory explores how students use Facebook in terms of getting something out of it. The theory looks at how motivation becomes a factor for using social networking sites and what kind of benefits emerge from such use (Foregger, 2008). The vast majority of the articles and studies that I came across utilize the uses and gratifications paradigm. It is one that has been around since the 1940s when radio first became popular. Researchers were interested in understanding why people listened to the radio and how the popularity of that medium drove people to use and invest in the technology (Foregger, 2008). The studies focused on "describing audience motives for media use and represented a sharp departure from previous

mass media research, which either focused solely on intended media effects or considered only the sender's end of the communication and ignored the audience's motives" (p.9). Krisanic's 2008 doctoral thesis focuses on Facebook users belonging to unique networks, or user groupings, on Facebook and the reasons behind doing so. Uses and gratifications theory is a good approach for explaining such observations because the theory assumes an active audience is present that consumes and creates content in an online platform. Contributions such as posting comments, uploading content like photos, adding profile information and sending messages are motivations for use and the gratification that comes from participating creates a sense of online community, one of many reasons for using social networking sites (Krisanic, 2008). Quan-Haase and Young (2010) is yet another pair of researchers using the paradigm in today's online context focusing on how users have adopted digital technologies and have incorporated them into their daily routines.

The socio-cultural perspective of situated cognition and activity theory was utilized by Kirsty Young in her 2009 study of Australian uses of SNS. The theory that underpins her study of how 15 to 65 years olds in Australia utilize Facebook and other SNS showcases that learning and communication of knowledge through social platforms provides an opportunity for online communities to learn from its members. The two theories have a focus on online identity formation and that is what makes them relevant to my research. Young looked at privacy issues, relationships between online and offline friends, photos and statuses, time spent on SNS and negative and positive experiences of SNS from the socio-cultural perspective. Situated cognition refers to "'communities of practice' whereby learning is tied to one's desire to engage with, and become an active member of society" (p.41), while activity theory "considers that human cognition occurs as individuals engage in motivated, goal directed activity. This activity is mediated by tools, which are culturally developed and valued" (p.41). Online identity and these

socio-cultural theories are linked in that learning comes from the use of a culturally valued and widespread tool.

The psychological aspect of identity research focuses on personality predictors of Facebook and SNS use. Researchers discover what types of psychosocial characteristics explain young people's use of popular SNSs and what sorts of addictive tendencies they may have to these sites (Wilson, Fornasier & White, 2010). These types of researchers not only see the positive benefits to Facebook use, but also the negative and identify what personality types succumb to negative or positive SNS experiences. Hargittai and Hsieh's (2010) study of the types of SNS users falls into this type of psychological outlook of users, however, they tend to outline more social reasons for use, not necessarily personality features. Wilson et al.'s study attempted to predict how young people use SNS and how much of an "addictive tendency" they have towards these sites based on personality characteristics and self-esteem levels. By employing quantitative, psychological tests such as the NEO Five-Factor Personality Inventory and the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory, these researchers were able to report that outgoing and extroverted personality types tend to use SNS at a larger rate and produce addictive tendencies towards their social networking use.

The dramaturgical and symbolic interactionist perspectives have been spoken to in the previous section and will be expanded on in the upcoming chapter; therefore I will not spend time going into detail about these theories here. What is interesting is that more studies investigating identity on Facebook are utilizing these two theories for exploring how online identity is formed and the significance behind this self-presentation.

Although not a lot of research exists about Facebook and self-presentation, the research that does tends to focus on the uses and gratifications theory, psychological theories, socio-cultural theories, dramaturgy and symbolic interactionism. The combined theory package of dramaturgy and symbolic interactionism will serve me well for describing online identity formation on Facebook and the experiences that I encountered. Symbolic interactionism addresses the inherent social nature of the Facebook platform, and provides insights into how interactions with others form our sense of identity (Jenkins, 2008). S.I. also provides conceptual tools for capturing the process of constructing identity as it happens in the everyday. Where symbolic interactionism describes the social interaction that occurs on Facebook, dramaturgy provides the detailed account of *how* identity happens in everyday social life and throughout an individual's personal life. Goffman (1959) provides the tools to understand how performance influences identity production throughout one's life. Although uses and gratifications and socio-cultural theories address the social disposition of Facebook, neither of these theories provide as deep of an understanding of social identity performance than S.I and dramaturgy combined. The focus on learning from the socio-cultural theory is interesting, but does not lend itself to the identity aspects of my research. Psychological leanings are always interesting to me, but due to their focus on personality predictors and quantification, psychological theories do little to further the proposed research. Symbolic interactionism and dramaturgy move between the two realms of offline and online the most cohesively of the social theories, and provide the best theoretical framework for understanding how the audience is performed to in an online and offline context.

### **Summary**

In this chapter I have identified what SNSs are and how they are used by young adults. The chapter then led into a discussion of general SNS uses and how Facebook has become the

most prevalent social networking platform. Subsequently, a section discussing how young adults interact with Facebook was presented, and this led into a discussion of how identity is formed within the Facebook platform, highlighting key identity studies that exemplify how this comes to be. Finally, theoretical approaches were discussed to examine which aspects are most useful to the goals of this study.

Social networking sites have been defined and their uses explained. Young adults use SNS to maintain online friendships that stem from offline connections, to express their personalities and to improve their social capital. The use of such networks becomes part of their daily interactions and is incorporated into their daily routines. Types of social networking users have been outlined as well.

Facebook is the most used social network by university undergraduates, and interaction with other users is a requirement for successful Facebook use. It is an online space where students can connect with their network which is mainly composed of offline contacts, but still maintain privacy and security through the controls that Facebook provides. Although not all young people engage with privacy settings, they are at least aware of them. The main reason for Facebook use amongst this demographic is for communication with friends and family, planning events and expressing self-presentation onto their network.

The identity that forms on Facebook through self-presentation is dependent on the validation of a user's network of friends. The warranting principle encapsulates the notion that a users' network confirms or denies the validity of put-forth presentations through the communication that occurs on the user's profile. Therefore, individuals must unite their online and offline behaviours in order to produce a believable and 'true-to-self' persona on Facebook.

Four studies were presented in depth that discussed findings similar to the research questions put forth by my own study. Each study brought its own theoretical leaning and results that are useful in producing a framework for the types of features that I want to speak to. Birnbaum's (2008) study focuses on the university image that students communicate in the 18 to 24 year old age group. Birnbaum's findings are very valid to my study, but I want to further his research to include the types of identities consistent with the university experience that embrace more than a student-only audience. Bainbridge (2008) speaks to how social networks can be used to understand the undergrad campus experience. Bainbridge's findings are useful in providing context for the demographic being studied. My research will involve the university experience, as the subjects all attend university, but will explore other areas of online and offline life. Lee-Keenan Farquar's (2009) approach to researching using the symbolic method is very similar to the way my study is organized; his study answers questions about self-presentation intentions and how those are showcased through symbols. I am taking his work one step further by including dramaturgy as part of the theory package to speak to how these symbols are involved in performance presentation. And lastly, Elder-Jubelin's (2009) work provides excellent insight into the notion that the online is rooted in the offline. This is a major underlying hypothesis of my study, and I will expand on this assumption through discussion of the fluidity of performance between the two realms. Although I will be expanding on what each theorist has researched, it is none-the-less a good starting point when reading this thesis.

And lastly, theoretical perspectives employed in the Facebook research that currently exists were presented. The uses and gratifications theory is one of the most widely utilized in all of the studies that I have come across. Psychological and socio-cultural theory also dominates,

but the dramaturgical and symbolic interactionist perspective is the most applicable and relevant due to their focus on symbolic performance within the online and offline experience.

This thesis will borrow elements of previously published research, but will be filling gaps that exist in the current research. Online identity is an important component of who we are and the goal is to explain how this type of identity occurs and how it plays a role in the evolution of the self. Much of the research is focused on either symbolic interactionism or dramaturgy as singular theories, looking at specific sites or symbols of the online experience. I want to combine both theories to uncover *how* identity performances occur in the social context of the online and the offline. The research will provide insight into the fluidity of performance between these two realms, which is currently lacking in the literature. I am proposing that Facebook has become yet another stage where identities are dramaturgically performed through new forms of “presentation of self” (Goffman, 1959) and interaction rituals. I am also proposing that Facebook is a place where digital identities are stored and modified as part of a digital archive. Users access the site in various time contexts to interact with their network and contribute to these stored identities. These stored identities, however, can be edited at any time to reflect the most-current online identity portrayal that a user is interested in expressing. These digital identities are archived in the online context, but stem from our offline connections and interactions.

Now I would like to move onto chapter three, where Goffman’s dramaturgy and Mead’s symbolic interactionism will be discussed in great depth. These two theories will help address my research questions by providing the symbolic performance tools to explain how identity is formed in the online and how it relates to the offline experience.



## **CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Introduction**

Identity is a term that we utilize in daily life, but when reflected on, do we really know what it means? It can be employed in a variety of situations and it is a term that encompasses a plethora of definitions and explanations. Identity becomes taken for granted because of its ability to explain various conditions of being in a temporal and spatial state. Scholars have been trying to understand what identity means and entails since the early 1900s (Weigert, Teitge & Teitge, 1986). It becomes difficult to explain what it is and where it comes from without categorizing and over generalizing. But it must come from somewhere, if we believe we all have an identity and that it is different from others.

The notion of ‘identity’ and what it entails is at the center of this thesis. Various social science scholars have conceptualized identity in different ways, highlighting the way in which it forms and functions in accordance with our personal growth and in relation to our daily lives. Various forces in our lives shape identity, and there is much debate within the academic world of whether it is something that is fixed or something that changes depending on social circumstances. This thesis focuses on identity research and a working definition of identity needs to be defined in order to theoretically analyze the results of the study. Before a definition of identity can be provided for this thesis, however, the different stances on identity within the social sciences need to be explored.

The way in which identity is formed and constructed will be analyzed throughout this chapter. Because there are various ways in which this occurs, the different types of identity streams will be discussed in detail. The goal is to showcase the various streams that exist within

the social sciences and conceptualize the best combination for supporting this thesis. The main theoretical approaches to identity formation and construction will be discussed and extended to create a sophisticated and helpful framework of my own.

Once a definition has been established, I would like to focus on the two theories that underpin this thesis and how identity formation has been expressed within the symbolic interactionist and dramaturgical traditions. The goal will be to explain how identity is formed, how it continues to be shaped and how it lives on. Because the dramaturgic tradition extends symbolic interactionist theory of identity, it will be important to document how each tradition has conceptualized identity formation and production over the years.

This chapter provides background information about identity theories that are rooted in their traditional sense and then applied to an online context such as Facebook. This chapter will lead with a discussion of the various streams of identity theorizing found within the social sciences, where a workable definition of identity will be formed and my own theoretical choices and my respective theoretical framework will be established. Afterwards, the key theoretical leanings and assumptions of symbolic interactionism and dramaturgy will be discussed in detail. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of how ideas stemming from symbolic interactionism and dramaturgy have informed my thesis, and how the theories have shaped my research questions, methodology, interview questions and how they will guide my analysis.

### **Theoretical Approaches to Identity**

Within the social sciences, I have found that there are five main streams of conceptualizing identity. The first is the psychological perspective in which scholars believe identity resides within the individual (Erikson, 1959). The second major view on identity draws

from Foucault's perspective in that identity is shaped by outside forces that implicate us in interaction (Foucault, 1982). The third take on identity is the ethnomethodological perspective, which explains that identity does not exist as an ontological entity, but is produced through social interaction and only within that interaction is it real (Garfinkel, 1984). The fourth is the work of symbolic interactionists in that identity resides within social interaction and requires interpretation on behalf of the researcher (Jenkins, 2008). Although ethnomethodology and symbolic interactionists agree that identity meanings are generated in a social context, symbolic interactionists focus more on what those meanings are and less on how meanings are recognized and transformed during interaction like ethnomethodologists do. The fifth school of identity thought is a variation of the symbolic interactionist approach: dramaturgy. This type focuses on Erving Goffman's explanation of identity as something that is constantly produced through performance. Although Goffman draws from the symbolic interactionist school, he does not fully invest his time in explaining identity as a form of social interaction – rather, it is a form of performance that we are constantly generating, even when alone (Goffman, 1959). In order to effectively analyze each stream of identity theories, this section will discuss the categories mentioned above in terms of their main premises in conceptualizing identity, their strengths and weaknesses related to discussions of identity formation. Lastly, my approach in choosing symbolic interactionism and dramaturgy as my main identity theories will be examined.

### *Psychological Perspective*

Identity theorists, in this perspective, view identity as something that resides within a person, and thus its focus is on the individual (Erikson, 1959). This perspective can be traced back to the work of Freud and his concepts of the id, ego and superego (Erikson, 1959). Erik Erikson was one of the earliest psychologists to focus on researching identity and in his view, identity consists

of three components: 1) a sense of personal continuity (ego identity or the self); 2) a sense of uniqueness from other people; and 3) a sense of the social roles a person engages with (Erikson, 1959). Erikson advocates that it is the combination of these three components that form our identities. Group identities, in addition to personal identity, help people define who they are. The way identity is actually formed is influenced by developmental stages that occur from birth through adulthood (Erikson, 1959). We constantly form our identities based on the experiences that we go through and how we differentiate ourselves from others in similar situations. According to psychologists, identity is a lifelong development that is largely unconscious to both the individual and to society.

The fundamental issue with the psychological perspective is that identity is something that resides within an individual's core, yet we all go through the exact same life stages. Erikson fails to discuss that identity formation, according to his eight stages, may not be the same for every person. Not everyone fits into these categorical constructions of when certain events need to occur. For example, Erikson believed that after the stage of 'young adulthood' where we learn to achieve a degree of intimacy with others, adults move to the stage of 'middle adulthood' where we achieve a balance of "generativity and stagnation" that only occurs through raising children (Erikson, 1959). This stage does not occur for all adults, as not all heterosexual and homosexual couples have children. Also, Erikson's framework cannot be applied to all societies, as the timings of these developmental stages have a lot to do with how each society constructs its expectations, and the opportunities and limitations with which it presents individuals.

Although there are inherent issues with the psychological perspective of identity, there is an element that I find useful to pull out: that we try to distinguish ourselves from others through

our identities. It seems that this notion of having an ‘identity’ is meant to showcase how you are different from the others around you and what makes you unique.

### *Foucauldian Perspective*

Foucault believed that identity is a fluid product comprised of cultural circumstances and is defined by a continuing discourse that we communicate and experience in relation to others (Foucault, 1982). ‘Identity’ is communicated through actions individuals place on themselves, such as self-contemplation, self-disclosure and self-discipline, and these actions work their way into discourse; identity, however, is never fixed and is part of a shifting and temporary construction (Foucault, 1982). In works such as *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault argues that identity is actually produced through the discourse surrounding the liberation or domination of the self. For example, he claims that identity, and the self, is defined through public discourses within a medical, psychological and sociological context (Foucault, 1977). Therefore, our identity is based on an internalization of public discourses that eventually become reality.

Foucault discusses identity through the notion of power and the subject. His writing traces the history in which our culture has made human beings into subjects through the technique of power (Foucault, 1982). His work has identified three modes of objectification in which humans become subjects, but the mode that most pertains to identity has to do with division: “The subject is either divided inside himself or divided from others. This process objectivizes him. Examples are the mad and the sane, the sick and the healthy, the criminals and the “good boys”” (Foucault, 1982, p. 777). It is through these divisions, which are prominent within public discourse, that we produce an identity. Foucault believed that identity was brought

into action through power. People do not blatantly possess power, it is rather a technique or action that individuals can engage with and exercise (Foucault, 1982). Power is not simply a relationship between people, “it is a way in which certain actions modify others” (Foucault, 1982, p. 788). It is the power that exists within institutions and dominant discourses that shapes our identity. The subject is tied to his or her identity through a type of “conscience” or “self-knowledge;” this power subjugates the person and in turn creates their sense of identity (Foucault, 1982). Thus, it is important to analyze institutional discourses from the standpoint of power relations, as they generate the identities that we take on.

Foucault’s account of identity may seem pessimistic in the sense that power struggles exist within relationships and that the subject has little power in controlling institutionalized discourses, but his stance speaks to a humble framework of identity. The idea that individual identity is something that is constituted in and through culture is important, as dominant discourses do affect the way we choose to function and identify in society. Foucault also sees identity as something that limits who you are and makes you subject to cultural power relations. This is an interesting notion, as identities are never fixed and power differences change in different situations.

### *Ethnomethodological Perspective*

In the ethnomethodological view, identity is instead produced through social interaction and only in those instances of interaction is it real (Garfinkel, 1984). Social life is a continuous display of people’s local understandings of what is occurring and it is from this local site that identity emerges (Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998). Ethnomethodologists believe that a person’s identity is a display of membership of some feature-rich category – and each person belongs to

more than one; examples include male/female, adult/child and brother/daughter. Analysts are interested in which of these identifications people actually use, what features those identifications seem to carry and to what end they are put (Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998).

The ethnomethodological spirit is to take it that the identity category, the characteristics it affords, and what consequences follow, are all knowable to the analyst only through the understandings displayed by the interactants themselves. Membership of a category is ascribed (and rejected), avowed (and disavowed), displayed (and ignored) in local places and at certain times, and it does these things as part of the interactional work that constitutes people's lives (Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998, p.2).

The idea here is that people do not possess or 'have' types of identities, but that they "work up to or work to this or that identity" (Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998, p. 2) either as an end or towards some other result. The earliest ethnomethodologist to take up this notion was Harvey Sacks. He pioneered the use of 'identity categories' in the early 1970s and described them as "the ways in which people organize their world into categories and use the features of these categories to conduct their daily business" (Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998, p.2). These identity categories became the basis of investigation for ethnomethodologists and conversation analysts wanting to carry out categorical work. They became interested to see which attributes helped to identify each category and what 'having' a type of identity made people do or feel. These identity categories provide explanations of how identities are produced within local contexts.

Critics take issue with the inclusion of certain words and expressions within membership categories; therefore ethnomethodologists must make it absolutely clear that what they recognize as culturally significant must be recognizable as culturally significant by the participants in their

speech as well. The ethnomethodological perspective seems to be one that is complicated, but one that can deliver tangible results as to what constitutes identity. Identity is something that people do that is embedded in social activity and not something that they 'are' (Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998). Ethnomethodology understands identity to be something that we perform instead of something that is innately present on the inside.

### *Symbolic Interactionist Perspective*

The symbolic interactionist approach is based on the works developed by George Herbert Mead and Herbert Blumer and posits that society predates individuals, who acquire minds (ability to use symbols in interaction) and selves (looking glass self) in the process of interacting symbolically with other members of a culture (Faules & Alexander, 1978). Individuals acquire their identities from interacting with particular (family and friends) and generalized (media and social community) members of society. We learn to see ourselves in terms of the labels that others apply to us and through these interactions we form our identity (Jenkins, 2008).

Identity within the symbolic interactionist vein conceives of the self as a social construct. The self is a collection of identities that reflects the roles that a person occupies in the social structure (Robinson, 2007). Although this is an interesting way to construct identity, it leaves little room for self-esteem within the individual. The theory does not discuss how different experiences and labels that others use to mark us enhance or diminish self-esteem. Symbolic interactionists disregard any internal consciousness or individual agency in shaping identity. Although Mead provides a general explanation of how others influence our personal identity, he fails to explain the exact process by which people construct meanings and shape communication behaviours (Wood, 2004).



While this theory lacks in explaining individual agency within identity creation, symbolic interactionist thought is an influential body of ideas that speak to the influence others have on our identity perspectives. We come to see who we are based on the opinions of family and friends, and through the eyes of the generalized other. These cultural influences are significant in developing our identity. The notion that identity is shaped through social interaction is a useful component in addressing how culture has a prominent role in identity construction. The value of the symbolic interactionist approach is that identity occurs in social locations, not just somewhere from the deep abyss in our internal psyche. We are influenced by outside forces that shape who we are; identities reflect the labels people use to describe themselves which are developed through social interaction with others.

### *Dramaturgical Perspective*

According to Goffman, “The self, then, as a performed character, is not an organic thing that has a specific location, whose fundamental fate is to be born, to mature and to die; it is a dramatic effect arising diffusely from a scene that is presented, and the characteristic issue, the crucial concern, is whether it will be credited or discredited” (Goffman, 1959, p. 127). In this view, identity is something that we perform on a daily basis and is something that needs to be accepted by others in order for it to have relevance. It is through the drama of everyday life that people give meanings to themselves and to others in specific situations. The dramaturgical perspective likens everyday interactions to a dramatic performance in which actors may not be aware of their performance, but others attach judgments to them regardless (Goffman, 1959).

Goffman goes on to say that there are two kinds of sign activity in which actors engage with: “the expression that he *gives* and the expression that he *gives off*” (Goffman, 1959, p. 120).

The first involves verbal symbols that are used to solely convey information that others attach to these symbols. What an actor is *giving* is what he is intentionally trying to portray, it is an indication of the actor's true intention. The expression an actor *gives off*, however, is not intentional. It is rather what others perceive and gather about an individual from their behaviours (Goffman, 1959). This notion of what an actor *gives* and *gives off* is important in creating and portraying a specific identity. It is through these performances that we are both aware and not aware that others interpret our identities. Our identities are constant performances that are shaped in social interaction; however, they are not limited to only the social. Our identity is a performance even when we are alone. What we convey about ourselves, publicly and privately, shapes how we define our identity (Goffman, 1959).

The three main concepts on which the dramaturgical theory of identity rests are those of frames, impression management and front and back stage. These concepts are intended to capture how identity is produced in social interaction. The frame is the context of the situation that we use to make sense of an experience, and is important in understanding why certain actions occur in specific settings (Goffman, 1959). Impression management is the process by which people control the impressions others form of them (Goffman, 1959). According to Goffman, people are constantly managing their impression, whether consciously or not, for others. He believed that when an individual comes into contact with other people, that individual will attempt to control or guide the impression that others might make of him by changing or fixing his setting, appearance and manner. Lastly, the concept of front and back stage is viewed as a metaphor of the theatre to explain the connection between the kinds of acts that people put on in their daily life and theatrical performances (Goffman, 1959). The basic idea is that the front stage is all that is visible to an audience, while the back stage is that which is not. The front stage

refers to the identity performance that we consciously put up for those who we consider our audience. This is also where aspects of the self align with the social expectations of a particular context and desired impressions are highlighted (Goffman, 1959). The back stage, on the other hand, is where actors can vent their feelings without interrupting the front stage performance. It can also be considered a hidden or private place where an individual can rid themselves of their societal role (Goffman, 1959). These three components of dramaturgy explain how identity comes to be. We are constantly producing some type of impression that *gives* and *gives off* an identity to others and to ourselves. Goffman's notion of identity is important because every individual's actions influence the definition of the situation that they come to.

There are a few critiques of dramaturgy. First, there is the problem of whether this theory is a metaphor or a reality. As Wiltshire argues, theatre is a useful metaphor for understanding performance; however, it provides a limited description of social life and interaction (Wiltshire, 1977). Another problem is that it is difficult to prove or disprove whether people adopt roles and give performances empirically. There is essentially a lack of testability with this theory, in an empirical sense, as it becomes difficult to prove whether or not an individual is performing and how that connects to a 'real' or 'invented' identity (Wiltshire, 1977). In response to the critiques, Goffman would argue that it is not about proving the testability of performance, but the capability of explaining identity as something that we are constantly performing. There is no need to distinguish between an authentic self and a performative self because all actions are performances. Goffman views every moment of our lives as a performance and this is where identity grows. Goffman's description of performance really helps to provide a more unique understanding of how identity is produced. The notion that we perform an identity and manage that impression provides an explanation as to how this specifically occurs, which the other

theories have failed to showcase. Dramaturgy also takes into account that identity is performed in a context, whether social or not; and it provides the conceptual tools to capture the process of identity constructions in familiar everyday settings.

### *My Approach*

Although the approaches discussed are each unique in their conceptions of identity, there are two that not only have similar theoretical leanings, but work well together to provide an appropriate concept of identity for this thesis: those being symbolic interactionism and dramaturgy. Because I am interested in researching the concept of ‘identity’ and how that is created through the social networking medium of Facebook, these two theories fit as they both describe identity as being socially formed and performed uniquely based on the environment or context. Facebook is a social space that changes and refreshes itself on a constant basis; therefore the identity that develops is constantly shifting and changing, but still allowing for a consistent, or stagnant, image in certain sections such as the profile. When it comes to our offline identities, or face-to-face relationships, identity can be conceptualized in the same manner because both theories suppose social actions are performances, therefore online and offline identities can be compared. The way in which identity is formed online and offline is comparable and is best viewed through the dramaturgical and symbolic interactionist lenses.

I will be looking at how online identity is formed and determining what connection the online sphere has to the offline. The main research question driving the study is: how do Facebook identities function in relation to face-to-face identities in the social world? I want to understand how Facebook users create and maintain identity within their profiles, what tools are utilized in creating change or maintaining consistency within these profiles, what the importance

of identity creation and maintenance is in the Facebook world, how privacy plays a role in this identity expression and what type of significance there is between the online and face-to-face interaction of identity, if any.

I am proposing that Facebook is a place where digital identities are stored. Facebook is a digital archive in itself, the same way in which a journal or photo album stores memories of our activities and thoughts, and can be accessed at any point in time. As long as Facebook exists, it is a place users access on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis to interact with their network of contacts and contribute to these stored identities. Not only are our digital lives stored online, but the digital selves and identities that are produced online stem from our offline connections. The digital identity that is produced on Facebook makes up a portion of our offline identities, and the communication that occurs online, as well as offline, legitimizes these identities. The dramaturgical and symbolic interactionist perspectives corroborate this notion of online identities being validated in the offline because all identities are based on our social interactions that are performed in varying contexts, such as the Facebook environment.

From what has been discussed thus far, identity is the combination of societal and individual forces, opinions and judgements that form an overarching ‘self.’ It is through a symbolic interactionist and dramaturgical lens that this definition is applicable to my study of online interactions within the context of daily life. This chapter will now discuss each of the theories supporting this thesis and delve into the theoretical leanings and most relevant aspects of identity that are applicable to the study. Once each stream is discussed, I will provide my own theoretical framework that will be referenced throughout the thesis and especially during the results section. Now that we are acquainted with the idea of identity within the communications field, we must explore the beginnings of the symbolic interactionist method.

## **Blumer and Symbolic Interactionism**

The nature of identity, presentation and meaning are central concepts within this study, as well as within the general CMC research field. Not only must Facebook be justified as a site where real research can take place, but the epistemological and ontological leanings of the theories that underpin these types of studies must clearly be connected. The goal of the next two sections is to highlight the main theoretical components of each theory that support the methodological approach taken to the research. Only the most relevant elements of each theory will be discussed in their application to my thesis research.

Symbolic interactionism can be traced back to George Herbert Mead who wrote and taught at the University of Chicago during the early 1900s (Morris, 1934). Mead was a highly respected scholar and professor who established the foundations of symbolic interactionist thought. Although Mead is seen as the godfather of the perspective, he actually published very little during his time at the university. His students wrote the famous *Mind, Self and Society* as a tribute when he passed. Many scholars contributed to the field during Mead's time, such as John Dewey, William James, W.I. Thomas and Charles Cooley, but it was Herbert Blumer who integrated these perspectives to give symbolic interactionism its central theoretical premises and principles (Charon, 1979). Blumer's account of the symbolic interactionist perspective was born in the 1950s and influenced a variety of social science theoretical streams such as Goffman's dramaturgy, Garfinkel's ethnomethodology and labelling theory (Charon, 1979).

Symbolic interactionism focuses solely on the nature of interaction. From the viewpoint of this study, identity arises partially out of societal and group life interactions. The symbolic interactionist tradition is the theoretical vein of this thesis that stresses the formation of identity

through societal interaction utmost. Symbolic interaction is also the foundation for dramaturgical theory, which later expands on societal actions as forms of presentation (Goffman, 1959).

Symbolic interaction is the process of interpreting symbols to produce meaning; this interpretation provides incentives for appropriate forms of action. The symbolic interactionist tradition focuses on three main premises:

- 1) “Human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them; 2) The meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one’s fellows; and 3) These meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters” (Blumer, 1969, p.2).

We communicate through the use of symbols and understand another’s actions through the meanings present within these symbols. However, multiple meanings can be associated with one symbol and so interpretation is required to understand the intended meaning of another actor’s action. Symbols are representations of things present in daily life, and symbols are also a type of social object. Objects are “anything that can be indicated or referred to” (Blumer, 1969, p.11) and are given meanings through social interaction, and thus they are social objects. Objects exist in the physical world, like trees, homes and chairs, but members of society engage with social objects in order to communicate and find common understandings and meanings in symbols. Social objects are symbolic as “each social object stands for a line of action that we may take toward it” (Charon, 1979, p.40) and we also use social objects to communicate. For example, a horse is a social object when it is used for riding, but is a symbol when it represents prestige, wealth or happiness. Objects, however, do not have fixed meanings as they constantly shift to adapt to new interpretations and definitions. In the symbolic interactionist world, human group

life revolves around the dynamic shifting of meanings and definitions. Each meaning is “created, affirmed, transformed and cast aside” (Blumer, 1969, p.12) as the world in which people live changes.

For symbolic interactionists, human interaction and action are related; interaction consists of individuals interacting with one another in society, while action refers to actors understanding the symbols being communicated and tailoring their behaviour to the interpretation of these meanings: “Interaction implies human beings acting in relation to each other, taking each other into account, acting, perceiving, interpreting, acting again. Hence, a more dynamic and active human being emerges, rather than an actor merely responding to others” (Charon, 1979, p.23). Reality is created and defined by our actions; we do not simply respond to situations that present themselves. Humans will respond to stimuli, however, response is not the only form of action – interpretation is. We must guide our actions based on our interpretations of symbols and social objects. The actions we take in the situations in which we are put define who we are: “Fundamentally, action on the part of a human being consists of taking account of various things that he notes and forging a line of conduct on the basis of how he interprets them” (Blumer, 1969, p. 15). We, as actors, determine our conduct based on the process of indication and interpretation. We interpret others’ actions, and then signal to one another what behaviours are appropriate in the context of a specific situation.

Mead identified two forms of social interaction that we engage with: “the conversation of gestures” and “the use of significant symbols” (Blumer, 1969, p.8); Blumer refers to these as non-symbolic interaction and symbolic interaction, respectively. Non-symbolic interaction involves no interpretation on the part of the actor responding, while symbolic interaction does involve interpretation. Non-symbolic interaction generally refers to reactive behaviour, such as a



boxer responding to an opponent's hit by automatically raising his arm; if the boxer were to engage in symbolic interaction, he would identify the meaning behind his opponent's move and understands the action to be a trick. Much of our interactions with others require indication and then interpretation, and that is why symbolic interaction is crucial in the navigation of the social world. Our identity is formed based on how we indicate and interpret interaction with others, whether these others are close friends and family, or what Mead categorizes as the 'generalized other.' "the individual's "society," the society whose rules becomes his or her own" (Charon, 1979, p. 161). Society, or the generalized other, is constituted of those people who the individual sees as the judge of his or her actions and by whose rules he or she feels compelled to navigate the social world. Non-symbolic interaction is also important in establishing initial reactions and physical responses to situations that we then internalize and interpret. Interpretation helps humans navigate social life and establish an identity in society.

In order to become an object to yourself, each and every situation requires individuals to 'role-take' (Blumer, 1969), or see yourself from the outside, during each interaction. We form objects of ourselves through this process of role-taking because we learn to see ourselves through the lens of the 'other.' This is the concept commonly referred to as the 'looking glass self' (Reynolds & Herman-Kinney, 2003). Charles Cooley is the theorist responsible for coining the term 'looking glass self,' and defines this process as one "in that a child obtains an identity only with the realization that his or her picture, idea, or image of himself or herself "reflects" other people's picture of him or her" (Reynolds, 1993, p.38). As individuals we perform actions based on the opinions of others; we internalize the images that others have of us and perform in line with these images. An example of this is seeing myself as a struggling graduate student - I have learned to internalize this image based on my interactions with others who see me this way. I

have an innate ‘self’ and can communicate with myself when say, I am displeased with my work, or when I am ecstatic that I have written a chapter. This interaction is social in that I address myself and respond to myself. Not only do humans interact with others in interpreting the public image that forms about them, but humans learn to carry out internal conversations with themselves that define their identity. Self-action is the process of making indications to yourself, and according to symbolic interactionists, all human beings engage in this social behaviour (Blumer, 1969).

Interaction and interpretation within human society are the central concerns for symbolic interactionists. Humans learn to see themselves as objects of their own actions based on the interactions they have with others, and they internalize the image that they think others hold for them based on these interactions with others. The central themes of meaning, interaction and interpretation shape the theoretical leanings of this thesis. Blumer has moulded Mead’s ideas about the mind and self, and applied them in a way that is transferable to any type of human society. When Blumer wrote the internet did not exist, however, the key concepts of symbols, social objects and the looking glass self that are part of the symbolic interactionist tradition transcend technology and can be applied to an online context such as social media. The ‘Facebook society’ that has since emerged is the site where these themes will be identified and examined in particular detail. Let us now move onto the second portion of the theoretical foundation of this study: dramaturgy.

### **Goffman and Dramaturgy**

The theory of dramaturgy is an extension of the symbolic interactionism method in that the principal point of concern revolves around ‘social interaction’ (Burns, 1992). Although the

two theories vary slightly in their epistemological leanings, dramaturgy, to an extent, picks up on signifying acts where symbolic interaction left off: “Humans cannot help but communicate with symbols ... and cannot help but be aware that the others around us are interpreting the world around them ... the world consists of communication-worthy social facts or social objects that dramatically develop and present a theme” (Perinbanayagam, 1985, p.62). These themes that develop provide the researcher with the tools to explain how specific objects are used by actors to create situations that other actors then interpret. Erving Goffman, the founding philosopher of dramaturgical theory, believed symbolic interactionism lacked a testable structure and his research focused more on human behaviours than the interaction itself: “I assume that the proper study of interaction is not the individual and his psychology, but rather the syntactical relations among the acts of different persons mutually present to one another ... Not the men and their moments. Rather, moments and their men” (1967, p.2). These ‘moments’ refer to the performances, regions, roles, and impression management that performers put on in the dramatic space. Goffman was determined to develop a unique method in capturing the essence of human presentation, and the metaphor of the theatre that he developed speaks to this.

Goffman refused to align himself with a specific school of thought but was greatly influenced by symbolic interactionism while studying under Herbert Blumer at the University of Chicago. Goffman was a graduate of Blumer’s Chicago school of sociology and was greatly influenced by Mead’s *Mind, Self and Society* during his time of study. The comparisons, however, end there as Goffman was not interested in studying psychological factors at play, but focused instead on the acts specific to each moment. Goffman wrote during the 1950s, 60s and 70s, and the vast majority of his work were famous after *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* was published in 1959. This pivotal book launched Goffman’s career and solidified the

theory of dramaturgy in the sociological field. He established a pronounced method in establishing human interaction through his dramaturgical metaphor. Goffman was interested in understanding the moments that occur and what performance factors are at play. There was less focus on the social process and more focus studying the individual moments of interaction. We will now move into a discussion of the fundamental aspects of dramaturgical theory that inform the rest of this thesis.

The basic premise of dramaturgy is that our actions are dependent on time, place, audience and context (Goffman, 1959). Actors engage in performances and take on a played part or role. The relevance of whether this role is authentic or not is not at the center of this discussion; the focus, rather, is on how these performances occur. An individual must believe the part they are playing in order for it to appear sincere, otherwise the performance is deemed ‘cynical’ in the sense that the impression a performer is trying to give off has ultimately failed. The ‘self,’ however, is a dramatic effort formed by the scene in which it is being played. Therefore, for dramaturgists identity is not a stable, independent entity – it is a constantly changing performance that is dependent on the setting and the roles played by other social actors.

Performance is at the centre of this thesis and the following themes are prominent points of discussion: dramatic realization, maintenance of expressive control, misrepresentation and reality and contrivance. Each of these pillars encompasses the definition of performance, in that individuals play parts to bestow a certain impression of themselves onto others, whether genuine or manipulative (Goffman, 1959). As discussed in the previous section of this chapter, there are ‘front’ and ‘back’ regions of stages on which actors perform – in the case of the definition above, Goffman refers to the front stage as the place where expressive tools are inadvertently or intentionally used as part of the performance. When in the presence of others, actors will

typically tailor their actions to provide confirmatory cues and signs to ensure their performance are accepted as true, as in the case of the attentive student who appears to be paying attention by listening and maintaining eye contact with the professor. This is known as dramatic realization. In order for a performance to be accepted, gestures and cues must be believed *in the moment* in which the presentation occurs. Of course dramatic realization can be used for manipulative purposes as well, but arguably this is another type of performance. Actors do, however, tend to present idealized versions of themselves at the front stage, as it seems to be human nature to appear more desirable than we may actually be (Cooley, 1922). Although we want to remain desirable in the eyes of others, actors' signals can be misunderstood by the audience, and in a situation such as this individuals employ expressive control. This tactic allows the actor to 'stay in character,' to complete the scene so as to not disrupt the performance that has been established and curb any signals that may have been misread. Misrepresentation is possible when performing as certain physical cues can signal inconsistencies with the original message. The goal is to ensure contradiction is not present so that the presentation can continue to be believed as true. Certain communication tactics such as innuendo, strategic ambiguity and crucial omissions can help to change any misrepresentation that may have occurred. Although performances are meant to come off as genuine, there usually is an element of management that is expended to ensure the performance is accepted as true. Performances can be completely dishonest, but it is the management of the factors contributing to the performance that make it believable in reality. It is neither advisable to be completely honest or dishonest when performing – the goal is to be believable. It is then through maintenance and management of the front stage, dramatic realization, idealization, expressive control and misrepresentations that performances are accepted as real. Dramatic realization is engaged with when a performer wants the audience to

know something, and the information is usually spun in a positive light. Idealization ensures that the actor is only presenting a view that they want to portray as part of their performance; dramatic realization helps to ensure only strengths are being communicated and misrepresentations, or confusions, are kept to a minimum. Actors must stay in character in order for idealization to be successful, and this is known as expressive control.

The two regions of performance, front and back, contribute to the success of the performance as they maintain and embody certain standards that are given off. “The impression and understanding fostered by the performance will tend to saturate the region and time span, so that any individual located in this space-time manifold will be in a position to observe the performance and be guided by the definition of the situation which the performance fosters” (p.106). When an actor is performing there are certain cues that are ‘accentuated’ and ones that are ‘suppressed’ and it is in the front, or ‘mask,’ region where accentuation occurs. The performance needs to be believable, which usually means acts are positively emphasized. The back region, however, is a place where impressions and storylines are constructed, even fabricated, and become part of the illusion being presented. The backstage is an area where the performer can relax from the audience and take a break from the frontal performance; it is a place where audience members will not be able to access the performer’s inner thoughts. It is a place of privacy and refuge from the external performance visible to outsiders. The front and back regions, however, can at times blend and become the same site of performance. For example, the front region of an executive’s office showcases the status of his/her position, but this office is also a place where the executive can unwind, take their tie off and relax. The executive does, however, need to be on guard as employees can approach their front stage office

at the same time as their back stage is present. The back region does tend to be a place where action related to the front is present, but is inconsistent with the performance being put forward.

The most important element of performance revolves around impression management. As it has been previously defined, impression management techniques are utilized in order to successfully stage a character. Unmeant gestures can be revealed if the performer is not diligent in his/her “expressive responsibility” (p. 208) to the performance. Actors engage in expressive responsibility by consciously choosing how they interact with others. The audience and outsiders can enter the performers’ backstage if expressive responsibility is not engaged properly and eventually ‘inopportune intrusions’ will occur. Performers can mitigate inopportune intrusions into the back stage by keeping secrets that would discredit or weaken their claims. When an inopportune moment is introduced, it usually opens the performer up to embarrassment. Impression management is very important in avoiding embarrassing moments to keep the performance on track. Certain defensive attributes and practices must be initiated to preserve the impression being fostered. Dramatic loyalty, discipline and circumspection are aspects of impression management that must be engaged with in order to sustain the secrets held by the team (Goffman, 1959). Team members must be loyal to the group’s secrets and be disciplined enough to not accidentally reveal the interactional secrets. It is through dramatic circumspection that the team members exercise caution when performing through the front stage. The audience can enter the back stage and the performer has to consider how the audience could access information from external sources. The audience, however, helps to regulate the performance by applying tact to their reactions. When a performance starts to stray, the audience will provide the actor with hints and clues that the interaction is not being well received. In order for the performance to go on, the performer must pick up on these hints and tailor their interaction or it

will be a failure. Defensive attributes are generally expended when trying to keep secrets, which is an important aspect in managing the overall impression being made.

It is through “shared staging problems, concern for the way things appear, warranted and unwarranted feelings of shame, and ambivalence about oneself and one’s audience” (p.237) that connects these dramaturgical elements to the expressive human experience. These dramaturgical foundations incorporate the themes of performance, regions and impression management into expressions of identity, which directly correlate to the actions taken by individuals present on Facebook. Identity formation in the dramaturgical vein focuses on both the social and individual sites of interaction in conveying more of a constructed identity. In comparison to social interactionism, dramaturgical theory focuses more on the individual’s need to foster a positive impression of their outwardly portrayed identity.

### **Symbolic Interactionism & Dramaturgy Identity Formation**

Now I would like to showcase how symbolic interactionism and dramaturgy are comparable theories that can be contrasted to obtain a fuller understanding of how identity formation occurs. I would like to showcase the strengths of each theory in its conception of identity formation: symbolic interactionism develops the idea of identity formation in social interaction, as opposed to stemming from the inside or core of the individual psyche, while dramaturgy offers a detailed account of *how* social identity happens in everyday social life and throughout an individual’s personal life. These two theories can be compared on the basis that they both view identity as something that is innately social. Both streams focus on identity negotiation as dependent on time, place and context, and the Facebook setting where research takes place also functions in a similar manner to these factors. The two theories then diverge as



dramaturgy; more so, provides the tools to showcase the ways in which performance contributes to identity negotiations.

According to Mead (1934) and Cooley (1902), the self is a product of social interaction because people socialize within groups. The self is a social object that we communicate with based on the judgments placed on us by others. Identity is formed in social interaction as the outlooks that others have of us are internalized: “As other labels me, so I come to label myself” (Charon, 1979, p.76). We come to an agreement about ‘who we are’ by learning what others think of us; we internalize this image that others have of us, and announce it to ourselves and then declare this identity to others – this is the process of symbolic interactionism. However, we do not always just internalize these judgments at face value; we want to appear as desirable as possible by communicating our strengths to particular and generalized others: “Interaction is a two-way process by which others identify us and by which we influence others to identify us in ways we desire” (Charon, 1979, p.77). In the symbolic interactionist vein, identity is formed by interacting with other social objects and understanding the ‘self’ as a product of this interaction.

Dramaturgy also posits that identity emerges from the social context, but also places focus on the individual effort put forth through performance. Actors perform identity socially as well as internally and every action that we perform is part of our identity and ‘who we are.’ Goffman provides techniques to describe the ways in which this performance is done: through front and back stage performances, impression management and dramatic realization. Front stage performances allow an actor to tailor their communication and only output an image of themselves that they want their audience to take in. These front stage communications are managed through the process of impression management. Back stage communications are had with the self and these are inner thoughts and beliefs that we internalize about ourselves.

Performers engage with dramatic realization by only portraying positive qualities and information about themselves to gain a favourable view of themselves from their audience. It is through various frames, or contexts, that we communicate identity based on cues we want our audience to pick up on.

The combination of these two theories produces a unique theoretical outlook onto the data. The notion that identities are not stagnant, but are fluid, shifting and changing dependent on context is only one part of how identity exists online. Identity is also socially constructed by our interactions with our online contacts, and become validated in our daily lives through interaction with our face-to-face friends, which sometimes overlap. The online space is a place for self-expression and that is one of many performances we give on a daily basis. The performances that we give off online and offline are connected and validated by our networks of contacts. It becomes difficult to form a digital identity that is radically different from the offline because it can be questioned in the Facebook realm. Facebook itself insists that users portray their offline selves so that they can better connect with their family and friends (Facebook, 2013). Symbolic interactionism and dramaturgy have the most impact on this study due to their ability to explain *how* identity occurs through their core theoretical assumptions. The theoretical leanings have positively shaped the methods employed in the research, which will allow for unique interpretation of the results.

### **Facebook as a Region of Social Life**

Identity can be understood as something that we do and perform within a particular context or situation. The identities that are created in each of these realms are connected in that what occurs online becomes a topic of conversation in the offline. Thus, the Facebook identity

that forms is consistent with identities presented offline because users move between the two realms fluidly and perform for the same audience both online and offline. Facebook is an arena in which inaccurate identities will be identified due to a system of checks and balances put in place by the individuals who have known us in the various stages of our lives. This section will discuss how Facebook qualifies as a realm of social life, and how symbolic interactionism and dramaturgy play a role in this new region. The relationship between offline social stages and those of the online, through Facebook, will be explored as well.

The Facebook realm offers a visible portrait of the generalized other. Facebook ‘friends,’ in a sense can be seen as the generalized other because not all online ‘friends’ are as close as offline family and friends. Particular others can be included on a user’s ‘friends’ list, but the majority of Facebook ‘friends’ are acquaintances that the user has met in some sort of offline interaction. The Facebook society, if you will, is also a type of generalized other as the pieces that make it up – other users, companies, interests, media and so forth – belong to the typically defined offline generalized other. There is a commerciality added to the platform where interests and likes are concerned as musicians, politicians and anything media related have their own pages in the Facebook realm. The generalized other that is found within Facebook is made up of online ‘friends,’ media, news outlets, interests and so on, that help us navigate the Facebook stage. Symbolic gestures within the platform are inscribed with shared meaning as users interact with profile identity tools such as status updates, profile photos and wall postings. Users explore their identity through these tools as shared meanings are communicated. Users write comments and upload images for other users to comment on, and identity spawns from these interactions.

In the theoretical conception of this thesis, Facebook serves as an online region of social life. The online platform represents an online stage where front and back stage equivalents can

be found. From a purely theoretical standpoint, the front stage can be encompassed by individual profiles as well as the news feed. The newsfeed is the public space where only public updates are posted; every user has a newsfeed and is the starting point of the Facebook experience on login. Profiles are generally accessible through friendship with another user – some users allow access without this credential, but this does not seem to be the norm. How much content a user chooses to disclose is based on their privacy settings, and the relationship that the user has with a particular ‘friend.’ The back stage works to conceal the outer workings of Facebook – these areas can include account settings, privacy settings, personal inbox messages and any other areas where ‘friends’ are not privy. In terms of the user experience, inbox messaging serves as the backstage where users are free to communicate with specific friends privately. Facebook is a ‘stage’ but is comprised of many stages, as there are too many spaces, groups, profiles and interests within the platform to be able to conceive of it as one stage.

The offline and online performance regions are connected. Theoretically, the offline stages are clear in their formation of identity – the front stage is where identity is negotiated and managed, while the back stage helps the actor to identify where these performances may be lacking. In the online, the front region plays a much larger role in the development and maintenance of a specific identity. The front region is also very similar to the back region as much of what is posted in profiles is vetted first before ‘going live.’ If an identity is communicated that is no longer desired, the user can simply delete that posting as if it never existed. This is different from the offline front stage, as actors cannot simply take back their actions as they can online. Perhaps some online ‘friends’ may notice that a post is missing, but unless someone writes a public wall message about it missing (which is fairly unlikely), there is no real repercussion from an identity standpoint. Identity in the online space can be updated at

any point, to add or remove any identity profile pieces that the user wishes to communicate. The two realms do, however, interact with one another to produce identity, as much of the offline regions end up in the online. Much of the communication that is posted online stems from our offline relationships, interactions and activities.

### **My Approach**

My interpretation of identity is based on the blended approach of the symbolic interactionist and dramaturgical methods. The symbolic method describes identity as a social construct; the behaviours we exhibit are based on the roles we take on in society and these social forces shape identity. This vein focuses on the identity roles individuals play in the social structure, and how our identity is reliant on the reactions of others. For symbolic interactionists, behaviour is fundamentally social and identity is formed from our social interactions. From the perspective of this thesis, symbolic interactionism only partially explains how identity is constructed, and although it is useful in highlighting how other Facebook users influence the impression we put out, dramaturgical theory helps to define how identity is communicated. The two streams can be associated as they both view actions as the method through which identity is expressed; dramaturgy sees the identity as something that is performed on a consistent basis. Where symbolic interactionism and dramaturgy overlap is in their belief of multiple identities present within social situations. Multiple identities speak to the dramaturgical performance, as all interactions are performances that produce an intentional identity. I will be viewing identity through the lens of symbolic interaction and dramaturgy; specifically focusing on the blending of social *and* individual factors in the formation of identity. From my perspective, identities are produced in public and private realms, contributed to through group and individual life, and are validated in social settings.

These two symbolic and dramaturgical theories have significantly shaped the main research question of this thesis. I will be viewing human society as comprised of online and offline life. I believe the offline and online worlds cross and sometimes become interchangeably referenced as one and the same, as both of these realms function socially and privately simultaneously. The online intersects with the offline, as discussion of what takes place on Facebook comes into daily conversation within the offline. It becomes difficult to distinguish between the two because the line of distinction blurs, however, each online and offline stage performs identity with varying degrees of the front stage. The Facebook stage can be broken down into specific groups, actions and interpretations, and the offline describes the daily world that we inhabit with our physical bodies.

The main points of discussion regarding symbolic interactionism center around interaction and interpretation, symbols, social objects, generalized others and the looking glass self will be examined as part of the analysis. Dramaturgy centers on aspects of performance that produce identity, and specific tools such as impression management, dramatic realization, idealization and expressive control will be applied to the data. The analysis of the findings will be guided by the theoretical underpinnings discussed in each theory section to describe how identity formation occurs and how it plays a role in the evolution of self. It is the hybrid approach of blending theoretical concepts from symbolic interactionism and dramaturgy that will make this thesis successful in explaining how Facebook identities play a role in the face-to-face interaction that we experience in everyday life, and how Facebook identities are portrayed and what this portrayal says about who we are.

## **CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY**

### **Introduction**

The blended approach of combining the social aspects of symbolic interactionist theory and the performance aspect of dramaturgy is what drives the distinct methodology taken to the research of this thesis. This chapter focuses on the specific methods and methodological standpoints that structure the research. The chapter begins with a detailed description of the research methodology and design, which includes discussion of research questions, epistemological leanings and overall theoretical orientation. It will then continue with a discussion of how the research site and participants were selected, and a section about instrumentation detailing interview questionnaires and how these documents were developed is reviewed. This leads into a discussion of data collection and recording that specifies how the data was processed and analyzed. The chapter then addresses methodological assumptions and limitations of the theory and research. The chapter concludes in describing how credibility was established and discusses ethical considerations taken to the research as participants were involved.

### **Research Methodology & Design**

The theoretical combination of symbolic interactionism and dramaturgy as a research methodology are the driving force behind the design of this study. Both theories are grounded in similar ontological and epistemological principles. These theories focus on qualitative methods of research rather than quantifiable methods, as quantitative methods provide only a numerical explanation of data, missing the richer and deeper contextual understanding. Quantitative methods best serve studies focused on recording objective facts. Qualitative research is uniquely

positioned to reveal shared meanings that actors use to understand and navigate their world. This type of research focuses on the words that are communicated and dialogues that take place between actors in social settings (Seale, 2004). These words provide insight into the shared subjective meanings that are present, and these words help researchers to explain how communication occurs and what that communication means in our social world. The conducted study is not focused on capturing objective facts; identity and privacy within an online context cannot be concretely defined and demonstrated, as the Facebook landscape is ever shifting and requires a flexible methodological approach. Identity and privacy cues must be interpreted and so a qualitative methodology is best suited.

Although quantitative data is very valuable and provides repeatability and strong validity to a study, qualitative methods are more appropriate for the descriptive and exploratory nature of the research this thesis undertakes. The data that has been collected will be analyzed in an interpretative and subjective manner pertaining to the main research questions. The aim of this study is to explain how online Facebook behaviours play a role in user's everyday life through the examination of identity performances.

### *Theoretical Perspective*

This study aims to discuss how Facebook identities play a role in the face-to-face interaction that we experience in everyday life. Online identity is an important component of who we are and the goal is to explain how this type of identity is constructed and how it plays a role in the evolution of the self. How we choose to portray ourselves online can vary depending on what type of impression we seek to bestow onto others (Goffman, 1959). How we manage this impression not only affects those around us, but it affects the way that we view ourselves



(Goffman, 1959). The aim of the study is to explain how Facebook identities are portrayed and what this portrayal says about who we are. In answering this overarching research question, the theories of symbolic interactionism and dramaturgy are pulled in as a theoretical framework to help define the distinct methodology taken to the research.

There is no distinct method that symbolic interactionists and dramaturgists work in. The two theories focus their efforts on retaining a scientific approach in embracing the empirical world as a place of study, observation and analysis. The empirical world stands above the researcher and it is only within this empirical world that theories can be confirmed (Blumer, 1969). However, not all theories founded on interpretive knowledge can be replicated in precise, preceding conditions and therefore complete confirmation can never be found. Conversely, absolute confirmation is not necessarily the end goal for symbolic interactionists and dramaturgists, as multiple meanings can be inferred, depending on the purpose of the research. Therefore, the qualitative method of observation and analysis is the most appropriate from a symbolic and dramaturgist perspective, as finding singular meanings in human communications can never be entirely conclusive; meanings and their significance are contingent on the scholar's interpretation.

Symbolic interactionism and dramaturgy are both concerned with strict observation and analysis of data, and both understand 'reality' to exist in the empirical world through verification of these observations. These two theories work in conjunction with one another as their epistemological leanings are parallel, but are not completely focused on similar outcomes. Symbolic interactionism focuses more on understanding the meanings behind the symbols that humans interact with, while dramaturgy emphasizes the context of these interactions (Charon, 1979; Goffman, 1959). Symbolic interactionists observe the use of symbols in human interaction

and develop central themes that explain what these symbols mean, and explicate how meaning and mutual understanding is exchanged. Dramaturgy builds on this symbolic meaning through the addition of contextual analysis. Dramaturgy is not interested in explaining the cause of human behavior, but is focused rather on understanding the context of human interaction (Goffman, 1959). The regional and environmental factors of any performance will influence how an impression is presented to an audience. Dramaturgy affords the researcher the flexibility to view performances from a contextual perspective, allowing much interpretation on the researcher's part in recognizing the level of impression management practiced in both the front and back stage regions.

Although symbolic interaction and dramaturgy do not prescribe specific methods, nor do they offer any methods exclusively their own, their theoretical underpinnings allow for a variety of interpretive approaches rather than focusing on quantifiable, scientific methods. Herbert Blumer sums up the methodological stance of the combined theories the best: "It can be expressed as a simple injunction: respect the nature of the empirical world and organize a methodological stance to reflect that respect" (Blumer, 1969, p.60). Because the two theories have such similar epistemological leanings, observation and analysis help to provide insight into the empirical world without limiting the researcher's reading of the data.

### *Research Questions & Hypothesis*

The main research question that I am interested in exploring is: how do Facebook identities function in relation to face-to-face identities in the social world? This question is of interest because every form of identity that we express, either online or face-to-face, varies in terms of the situation and the people we are surrounded by (Blumer, 1969). I am interested to

understand how Facebook users' identities vary from what they present in daily offline interaction. Although the online sphere is a place for users to create images that are appealing to either themselves or to their friends, there is still an element of a user's offline identity in their profile (Robinson, 2007). It is not that Facebook is a place to become a completely different person; it is rather a space in which the portrayal of identity is mainly constructed by the user. The user is in more control of their online identity than in a face-to-face context.

Four sub-questions will be utilized to further the development of the research plan and understanding of data: what is the significance of Facebook images remaining the same or changing? What tools are utilized in creating change or maintaining stagnancy? What is the importance of identity creation or maintenance in the Facebook world? How does face-to-face interaction play a role in the way online identity is portrayed? These research questions will be useful in thinking about the project as a whole, and have aided in the development of questions and 'identity categories' (Heritage, 1987) when observing and interviewing subjects.

In terms of keeping the entire thesis in context, a few overarching goals and points of discussion help to hone in on the main research question. To help understand how Facebook identities are influenced by the day-to-day identities presented in the social world, the following points were kept in mind when developing questionnaires and interpreting data: 1) How do Facebook identities play a role in the face-to-face interaction that we experience in everyday life; 2) How is online identity formed and how does it play a role in the evolution of self; and 3) How are Facebook identities portrayed and what does this portrayal say about who we are. These three principals help to provide clarity and context when interpreting results.

I am proposing that Facebook has become yet another stage where identities are dramaturgically performed through new forms of “presentation of self” (Goffman, 1959) and interaction rituals. My study endeavours to understand the ways in which the identities created in Facebook contribute to users’ evolving sense of self. This approach works the best for this study as online identities will be difficult to contextualize without the element of daily interaction. Identity is a constant performance dependent on context, time and place (Goffman, 1959).

### **Selection of Site & Participants**

I made a decision to focus my study on student users of Facebook between the ages of 18 and 24 because young people are the most active SNS users, and because Facebook is the most popular SNS. A two-part study was conducted to investigate the identity behaviours of selected participants when engaged with the online platform of Facebook ([www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)). Through direct participant observation, I conducted a two-month observational study of 18 student participants who allowed me to follow their actions on Facebook. The data that was gathered from the Facebook observations helped me to develop a typology of users, as well as a typology of image categorizations known as ‘personas’ (Mulder, 2007), that were used to generate interview questionnaires for the second part of the study. The participant interviews that were conducted in the second phase of research provided further insight into the identity behaviours exhibited by these Facebook users as participants’ understanding of these actions was the focus.

The research site of Facebook was chosen, as it is one of the most popular, if not the most popular, social media network used across the world. The participant segment that I studied, university students between the age of 18 and 24, also primarily use Facebook. According to media research site Socialbakers (2013), the second largest group of Facebook users in Canada is

18 to 24 year olds with a market penetration of over four million young people, that being just under the largest segment of 25 to 34 years old reaching close to four and a half million citizens.

As mentioned, participants chosen for this study were university, or college level students, between the ages of 18 and 24. Although the research above suggests that the next age range up uses Facebook the most, I wanted to be realistic about being able to recruit enough participants to provide validity to the findings. Choosing students within this age range helped to ensure the results were comparable from a demographic perspective, and also helped me to find participants using the contacts I already had at the University of Calgary. The educational level of my participants also helped to indicate how students used school networks to perform identity.

My goal was to recruit 30 students total; however, the recruitment process was not as easy as I had anticipated. I put in quite the effort to seek out individuals that were appropriate for the study, and although I feel I was still successful in recruiting 18, it was not the 30 that I had hoped for. However, the recruited 18 were a well-rounded group of university and college level students that came from a variety of socio-economic, cultural and academic backgrounds that made observing and analyzing their behaviours quite informative. The sample was small enough to draw comparative conclusions and broad enough to encompass a variety of experiences. All the participants but one were from Calgary (one lived in Edmonton), and this made meeting with participants for the interview phase more convenient.

I first reached out to the department of Communication and Culture, at the University of Calgary, to send out a mass email to the then-current undergraduate students to garner some interest. I provided the recruitment messaging and attached a consent form with further details about the study in an email. I placed posters around the University of Calgary, with the

appropriate approvals, that explained what the study was, how interested participants could get involved and provided contact information for myself. I also contacted instructors teaching undergraduate spring and summer courses about my study to ask if I may have two minutes of class time to talk to the students directly, and a few professors allowed me this privilege. Once I received ethics approval, I followed up with interested students through email, attaching the consent form. I reached out at work, a digital marketing agency that employs many young people, by sending out a mass email with the attached consent form to determine if anyone in the office or anyone they knew were interested. I also used Facebook itself to recruit, as I reached out through my own networks to obtain potential participants that I had no former relationship with. Each of these avenues was successful in recruiting participants that met the requirements, and the recruitment poster can be found in Appendix A.

Of the 18 participants that were recruited, 12 were female while six were male. Just over half of the students were between the age of 18 and 20, while the rest were 21 to 24 years old. The majority of the participants attended the University of Calgary, with only three attending other university or college institutions. Many students majored in business and/or communications; however, a strong sample of desired participants was gathered for the study.

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Educational Institution</b>	<b>Major</b>
1	23	M	University of Calgary	Education + Communication
2	23	F	University of Calgary	Communication
3	21	M	University of Calgary	International Relations
4	21	F	University of Calgary	Business
5	20	F	University of Calgary + SAIT	Communication + TV Production
6	22	F	University of Calgary	Business
7	18	M	University of Calgary	Film
8	19	F	University of Calgary	Psychology
9	19	F	University of Calgary	Business
10	24	M	University of Calgary	Communication
11	18	F	University of Calgary	Communication
12	20	M	University of Calgary	History
13	20	M	University of Alberta	Communication
14	23	F	University of Calgary	Communication
15	20	F	ACAD	Graphic Design
16	22	F	University of Calgary	Communication
17	18	F	University of Calgary	Business
18	18	F	University of Calgary	Business

Table 4.1: Participant Characteristics

I created a Facebook researcher profile, separate from my personal profile, and a Facebook research group specifically designed for the study. I used the group as a platform to reach UofC students and advertised it on related group pages. I spread the message by contacting

my own ‘friends’ and asking if they knew people who would be willing to participate in the study. I directed them to the Facebook group page and my researcher profile for further details. A copy of the researcher profile and group page that was created can be found in Appendix B.

Overall, the selection of the site and of participants was successful. Although I did not get as many participants as I initially sought to have, it turns out that 18 profiles is quite a bit of information to sift through and pull data from. Plenty of comparable data was discovered that will be detailed in the findings chapter.

### **Research Instruments**

Two instruments were used in the research process to collect data – an observational protocol and an interview guide. An observational protocol, or template, directs and standardizes the research taking place. In the case of this thesis, the observational protocol defined the Facebook profile elements that were observed, such as user activities and attributes. In the first phase of research, a two-month observation of participants’ profiles was conducted during the period of August 10<sup>th</sup> to September 26<sup>th</sup>, 2010, and observational notes were taken during this time. The observations were documented in a simple Word document format detailing the specific sections/areas where identity was performed in each participant’s profile. Because content is unique per participant profile, the notes that were captured were tailored to each research subject. Notes that provided descriptions of what were presented, who presented the information, and how that information was presented were recorded. The main areas of the profile that were subject to meticulous scrutiny were profile and album photos, tagged photos, wall postings, status updates, videos, friends and ‘about you’ sections. Each of these sections indicates a type of identity that is being portrayed – and sometimes there was more than one type



of identity being presented. Detailed descriptions of each of these categories were recorded and categorization of the data was refrained from during this process. The goal was to capture what was accessible in each participant's profile and capture what updates were made during the observational period. I did not want to interpret any of the postings and recorded unique factors, on top of the main identity features, that were present in each profile that later help to develop an interview questionnaire. Some of the less engaged with areas of the Facebook profile include the notes section, likes and activities section, biography description and links. With today's Facebook use there is an increase in the use of many of these less engaged profile pieces as the platform has made these more accessible through share functionality. Since the time of this observational study, the Facebook platform has been upgraded several times. The timeline feature has since been introduced and share functionality has changed profile engagement tactics. The newest addition to Facebook, Graph Search, can be pre-ordered but has not been officially released. The focus of the observational study results will be for 2010 Facebook profiles, and although timeline improvements have shifted impression management processes, the essence of the identity presentation has remained the same even with the many Facebook upgrades.

<b>Area of Facebook Profile</b>	<b>Research Questions</b>
Profile Pictures	What types of images are posted [ie. photographs, cartoons, etc.]? Who is in the pictures? Where are the photos taken? How many photos posted? What activities are taking place?
Photo/Videos Albums	What types of images are posted [ie. photographs, cartoons, etc.]? Who is in the pictures? Where are the photos taken? How many photos posted? What activities are taking place? Tagging – by who and where?
Tagged Photos/Videos	What types of images are posted [ie. photographs, cartoons, etc.]? Who is in the pictures? Where are the photos taken? How many photos posted? What activities are taking place? Tagging – by who and where?
Wall	What messages were posted? Who posted them? What types of topics and conversations were covered? What sort of interaction occurred afterwards?

Status Updates	What messages were posted? What topics were covered? How often were updates made? What comments did updates receive? Who commented on the updates? What sort of interaction occurred afterwards?
‘About’ Section	What information is posted in this section? How much information is a participant willing to divulge? What areas do participants update the most?
Friends	How many friends does a participant have? How do they know their friends? Which friends is the most interaction had with?

Table 4.2: Observational Protocol Research Questionnaire

The second instrument utilized in this study was an interview questionnaire. Once the results of the observational study were gathered, identity categories (Heritage, 1987) were developed to describe the types of Facebook users that defined the testing group. A total of six categories were defined for the small sample and not all users fit neatly into one of these categories. Because identity is never stagnant and is engaged with on a social level (Goffman, 1959), multiple personas were applicable to a participant. Based on the six typologies, an interview guide was developed to ask participants, that best personified each of the user types and persona categories, about their online engagement behaviours. The interviews were designed to gauge each participant’s level of consistency with the online identity they portrayed with that of their face-to-face engagement. Seven participants were selected as interview subjects and all seven agreed to take part in the second phase of research. The seven were selected for an interview based on desire, as well as the amount of Facebook activity they exhibited. I wanted to gain a good mixture of those who fully engage with Facebook, those that do not, and those that fall somewhere in between. I did not focus on non-Facebook users as that seemed to be out of scope for the research being taken on. The interviews lasted approximately two hours each and discussed themes from the observation period such as profile organization, privacy, the role of ‘friends,’ wall posting purposes, photos and impression management, content sharing, tagging,

commentary and the overall usability of the Facebook site. The interview questionnaire can be found in Appendix C.

### **Data Collection & Recording**

In order to effectively develop answers as to how an online identity functions in relation to a face-to-face one, a two-part study was conducted that consisted of observation and analysis, followed by interviews. Once all 18 participants were recruited and had read and signed the consent form, I added each of them as ‘friends’ to my researcher profile account. I found each participant on Facebook by his or her full name and requested to add him or her as a ‘friend’ to my research profile. It is from this research account that I began online observation of their profiles. I observed their Facebook pages for a period of two months and took field notes. The participants were asked to continue with their Facebook interactions and behaviours as they normally would. All participants understood that they were being observed and could have tailored their interactions accordingly, however, all posts previous to my research period were observed, if available, and allowed for verification of profile characteristics. Comparing posts previous to the research period to that of the research period allowed for verification of the results. Although there were themes and topics that were of central concern for the study (ie. identity), I did not want to influence the data collection process by creating themes too early, so I recorded information pertaining to the areas of the profile that were vehicles for presenting identity such as status updates, photos, videos and wall postings. The objective was to monitor and gauge how identities were formed through participants’ engagement with their own profiles and how they engaged with others’ profiles. I looked at the information posted about each participant through text, image and video. I observed conversations with other Facebook users and what kinds of conversations were had in public view, posted pictures and videos, updates,

status postings, and so forth. I took notes that were specific to each profile detailing what was posted, who posted and how interaction was performed. I did not ask participants to allow me full access to their profiles – I asked that they provide me with whatever access they wanted, whether that was a limited profile or full disclosure. All of the interview participants allowed me full access to their profiles; however, I am unsure of the level of access I was granted from the rest of the participants. I did not feel limited in my observations as all profiles provided substantial amounts of information to analyze. The period of observation lasted for two months during August and September of 2010. During these two months I focused only on monitoring and recording the data, and from this data I developed categories for discussion in the second phase of research.

The observation results were carefully investigated and from that data came two typologies: user-type categories and ‘persona’ categories (Mulder, 2007). The two typologies differ in their focus of the use of the Facebook platform: user-type typologies define a participant’s use of the physical platform and its features, while ‘personas’ focus on the use of personality characteristics and traits in conveying online identity.

Six user types emerged from the research observations and each type is labeled based on the most dominant characteristics of the grouping: 1) Always On; 2) Status Updater; 3) Attention Seeker; 4) Friend Collector; 5) Minimalist; and 6) In Moderation. Each of these labels refers to a particular type of behaviour observed in one or more participants, and interview participants were chosen based on their personification of these user-type groupings. The following chapter will detail the specific characteristics of each user-category to understand how these categories came to be.

‘Persona’ categories are exemplified online by Facebook users and help in communicating a preferred personality or identity characteristic about themselves. “The term ‘persona’ originates from website usability studies, and although it has been used to describe consumer profiles, I have applied it to the context of online identity:

A persona is a realistic character sketch representing one segment of a website’s targeted audience. Each person is an archetype serving as a surrogate for an entire group of real people. Personas summarize user research findings and bring that research to life in such a way that a company can make decisions based on these personas, not based on themselves (p.19).

Although the persona term goes on to describe archetypes of online use, personas in the context of this thesis are used to differentiate among the types of self-presentation strategies and techniques in communicating identity characteristics. Persona categories are constructed by Facebook users in their interaction with the platform and how they choose to express themselves through the use of Facebook tools such as photos, status updates and wall postings. The types of identity that one wants to maintain on Facebook is captured by persona categories that they express on that platform, and users must utilize impression management techniques to maintain their desired persona qualities. The personas, or identity types, are useful in communicating a desired impression and some of the personas that emerged from the study were: socialite, beauty queen, partier, student, activist, comedian, serious professional, technology junkie, athlete, artist and traveler. Persona categories are intentionally and strategically constructed by each user in order to maintain a preferable impression of themselves; personas are also interpreted by the others viewing a user’s profile and this audience confirms or denies the accuracy of these persona qualities through online interaction.

Once the two-month observation phase concluded, I contacted seven of the participants to discuss their online engagement in an interview context. If a participant did not feel comfortable being interviewed, they were not required to participate, but luckily all seven agreed. All interviewees met with me in person and one-on-one, for about two hours each to discuss their Facebook behaviours based on the interview questionnaire I had developed. I conducted the interviews on the University of Calgary campus in an available, private space where I was able to audio record each interview with the participants' permission. The purpose of the interviews was to discuss the observed Facebook identities in a face-to-face context. Interviews were scheduled according to participant availability during the months of October and November 2010, and refreshments, such as food and drinks, were provided. The two-hour interview sessions were all audio recorded and transferred to a removable drive for transcription. When the interviews were complete, I observed the profiles of the seven interviewees for two more weeks to verify the data and then terminated the data collection. Once the study was officially over, I notified all participants that they no longer needed to keep me as their Facebook friend, and were free to remove me as their 'friend' and the research caveat from their Facebook account.

### **Data Processing & Analysis**

The theoretical focus of this thesis lies more so in that of the dramaturgical method, and is supplemented by the social interaction principles present in symbolic theory. Dramaturgy, however, does not follow a distinct 'method' and due to its qualitative nature, analysis of data is subjective and requires much interpretation. Four dramatic techniques do, however, exist that have helped with the processing and analysis of the observational and interview data. These techniques include scripting, staging, performing and interpreting (Benford & Hunt, 1992).

Scripting refers to “the construction of a set of directions that define the scene, identify actors and sketch expected behaviour” (p. 107). Scripts are not laid out communication plans, but rather guides for action. They emerge from the various audiences that protagonists and antagonists interact with. Scripts generally consist of a cast of characters [*dramatis personae*] and provide rationale for actors’ actions through dialogue and direction. Four main framing tasks encompass scripting: “A) a diagnosis of some inputted problem; B) a prognosis for corrective action; C) a rationale for taking particular action; and D) strategic and tactical directions” (p.107). The first two describe *dramatis personae* in the form of identities and roles, while the latter two describe meaning and action through dialogue and direction. Scripting occurs in the front and backstage interaction with an audience, as well as in the off-stage area of performance. Staging refers to “processes of acquiring and administering materials, audiences and performing regions” (p.110), and staging works to ensure back stage views are not seen by the audience during a performance, otherwise the performance is discredited. Costumes and props, audience segregation and backstage control are implemented to ensure full belief in the presentation by the audience. As previously defined in the theoretical review chapter, performance through dramaturgical loyalty, dramaturgical discipline and dramaturgical circumspection are employed by the actor to ensure a performance is believable and committed to on behalf of the actor. By interpreting these acts of scripting, staging and performing, “we refer to individual and collective efforts to give meaning to symbols, talk, action and the environment to explain what is going on” (Blumer, 1969 in Benford & Hunt, 1992, p.48). All three acts are not dependent on each other and can occur at any point in time and overlap one another; interpretation is the most important role of the researcher as it is the foundation of social interaction and a continuous process that must monitor the interaction taking place before, during and after a performance. These four

dramatic techniques help to define the actions taken by Facebook users within the sample. These are merely guiding principles in analyzing the subjective data, and the results section will provide detailed analysis of the research based on thematic categories.

When developing the personas from the observational research, I compared the Facebook profile characteristics (ie. photos, status updates, friends) that most frequently appeared to develop specific categories. Segmentation “is the art of taking many data points and creating groupings that can be described based on commonalities among each group’s members” (Mulder, 2007, p.41), and this technique was used to develop the personas – by grouping individuals into categories defined by the patterns present in the data. Each category was organically conceived as they were all based on the information that presented itself. This process helped me to standardize each grouping and develop categories out of the data. The characteristics within the observational protocol questionnaire were the identifying factors that contributed to the development of each persona. How little or how much a participant engaged with a certain section of their Facebook profile indicated the persona classification. An identity category, within the context of this thesis, is two-fold: 1) it defines the characteristics of an individual’s online usage; 2) it differentiates among the strategies of self-presentation inherent in determining the connection between online and face-to-face interaction. Once the personas were created, interviews were transcribed and coded through content analysis and key word/phrase analysis. The content analysis was thematically based on the original interview guidelines categories, such as identity and privacy, drilling down to specifics such as photos and impression management.



## **Methodological Assumptions**

Both theories rest on the main foundations of empirical science, which assumes an empirical world exists that researchers can study, observe and analyze. This empirical world stands above the researcher and requires rigorous observation and analysis, and it is only within this world that a ‘reality’ exists (Blumer, 1969). This ‘reality’ can only be sought in the empirical world and only there can it be verified as well. The empirical world is the “central point of concern” and “is the point of departure and the point of return” (Blumer, 1969, p.22), and this methodological assumption is the driving force behind the approach taken to the data collection and analysis. The empirical world exists beyond the mere realm of human ‘imagery and conception’ – the empirical world is able to speak back and challenge established norms and ideas, and thus, leaves us in a position to question our indications and meanings.

Symbolic interactionism and dramaturgy also assumes interaction to be a mainly social endeavour, and much of the interpretation of the data is based on this assumption. Behaviour is fundamentally social and identity is formed from our social interaction (Blumer, 1969) for symbolic interactionists, but dramaturgists stress that individual agency plays a large role in identity formation and explains that our internal consciousness is more of a factor in identity construction than solely social aspects (Goffman, 1959). Where symbolic interactionism and dramaturgy overlap is in their belief of multiple identities present within different social situations, and this is an underlying methodological assumption of the study.

## **Limitations**

Interviews as accounts are limited due to their very nature. The researcher determines what will be talked about and what is considered to be relevant to the interview. The interviewee

not only feels the need to ensure their aptitude as an information-provider is acknowledged, but what seems like a conversation is actually a structured and deliberate opportunity to discuss what the interviewer is interested in. Should the interviewer not provide topics to discuss, the interviewee will grasp at cues to ensure they are delivering what the interviewer is interested in hearing about:

Whether of interest or not, the respondent is still concerned to bring the occasion off in a way that demonstrates his or her competence as a member of whatever community is invoked by the interview topic. This is an inescapable constraint on face-to-face interaction. The consequence is that the data produced by interviews are social constructs, created by the self-presentation of the respondent and whatever interactional cues have been given off by the interviewer about the acceptability or otherwise of the accounts being presented (Miller & Dingwall, 1997, p.59).

It becomes difficult to confirm whether the offline presentation of the self matches the online presentation, as this cannot be observed directly. The participants, however, provide perspective on their online and offline interactions through the interview. The interview is also another instance of identity performance vis-à-vis the researcher as an academic and a peer. There are also limitations regarding the small sample size and having limited access to participants' profiles.

Participant observation can become biased by the researcher's goals as well; however, there is more of a focus on finding data than there is in constructing data, as in the case of interviews. Researchers may be interested in swaying the results by placing certain strains on the process to 'construct' data [ie. biased interview questionnaires]. Although I have followed a

research process, the data that surfaced was analyzed in a purely organic manner. Documenting information about participants in their natural state helps the researcher uncover data, but also understands how members interact with members to maintain a sense of social order. The researcher observes how everyday life is produced in a broader setting so that questions around the construction, organization and functioning of society can be analyzed and answered. There is less of a risk to influence observational data as participants themselves influence the interaction order by trying to appear rational to each other (Miller & Dingwall, 1997).

### **Establishing Credibility**

Due to the very subjective nature of the research process, triangulation was used to establish credibility. Triangulation is the “combination of two or more different research strategies in the study of the same empirical units” (Denzin, 1989, p. 302). By engaging with participant observation and confirming those results through the interview process, the results of the study are much more credible. Although the process can be replicated, the results that will emerge will not be the same as the platform that is being researched is ever changing. All steps that could be taken to ensure the research process and analysis is unbiased and informed were taken. Due to the study’s lack of quantitative methods, credibility is more difficult to establish. The study can be replicated and the results can be analyzed using similar methods, but the interpretation of the data will be contingent on research objectives and theoretical disposition.

### **Ethical Considerations**

In order to conduct the study as proposed, a research ethics application was required due to the involvement of human subjects, please find it attached in Appendix D. Recruitment, observation and face-to-face interaction with participants required strict ethical procedures so as

to not harm participants or reveal any personal information. The site of study [Facebook] is an online space that provides much insight into the dramaturgical workings of identity, but is a privately maintained page on the Internet, that when exposed, could create risk for participants. The following procedures were put in place to ensure complete anonymity, safety and privacy of each participant.

When participants were first recruited, they were made aware of their right to withdraw from the study at any point verbally, as well as in the written consent form. For those participants who did wish to withdraw, they could do so without any repercussion. It was expressed on the consent form that if a participant wanted to withdraw they could do so as long they informed the researcher. The data that I would have collected up to that point would have been destroyed, but would have contributed to the overall data collected about online Facebook identity. Fortunately, no participants withdrew from the study once they had signed the consent form.

It was expressed to the participants that should they agree to participate, they would be expected to provide their gender, age and academic major information. No other personal identifying information was collected, and all participants remained anonymous. Each participant's contributions are cited under pseudonyms. Participants were given the chance to select their own pseudonyms, if they so desired. No images or videos are included in the reporting of data. Participants were also made aware that I do not have control over their Facebook information, as data collected on Facebook is stored and routed via American-based servers and are therefore subject to United States legislation, including the USA Patriot Act.

Once recruited and participants had become my 'friend' on the researcher Facebook profile, they were expected to post the following statement on their Facebook pages for the

safety of their online friends: “A researcher, who is conducting a study regarding communications on Facebook, is currently enjoying access to this site; visitors to my Facebook page are not considered study participants and none of their information will be recorded or retained for the purposes of this research.” I also put a block on my ‘friends’ list in place so that all participants could only see me as their friend – this created extra protection so that the participants in the study were not aware of who else was participating. The research did not require formal debriefing, so once the study period was over, I posted a status update indicating so and thanked the participants for their time and for being a part of the study. This let them know that I was no longer observing their Facebook profiles, that the data collection had come to an end and that they were able to remove the researcher profile from their ‘friends’ list.

For those participants in the Calgary area, I emailed each of them a copy of the consent form and ask that they drop it off in my mailbox on the UofC campus at their convenience. For those participants who did not live in Calgary, I emailed them a copy of the consent form, but needed to obtain written consent through email. The reason for this is that I wanted to have a written copy for my own records. For those participants who only participated in the observation portion of the study, I required email consent. Only participants from Calgary were interviewed, and required to submit a signed consent form. There were two separate consent procedures for observation-only and observation plus the interview. Please find the consent form attached in Appendix E.

## **Summary**

Examining how online Facebook identities function in relation to face-to-face identities in the social world is the central focus of this research study. The study aims to discuss how

Facebook user's identities vary or are similar to the action that is presented in their offline communications. It is not that Facebook is a place to become a completely different person; it is rather a space in which the portrayal of identity is mainly constructed by the user. The user is in more control of their online identity than in a face-to-face context. I am proposing that Facebook has become yet another stage where identities are dramaturgically performed through new forms of "presentation of self" (Goffman, 1959) and interaction rituals. These new forms of identity are expressed online through Facebook and seem to have an influence on the daily interaction that takes place outside of this medium. Identity is a constant performance that is dependent on context, time and place (Goffman, 1959). The participant observation and interview methods used in gathering research data help to uncover the forms of presentation present in the online space, so comparisons can be drawn to the interaction order present in daily life.

## **CHAPTER 5: RESEARCH FINDINGS + ANALYSIS**

### **Introduction**

The theoretical approach taken to the research has provided much insight into the online behaviours of undergraduate university students. The two-part research study has yielded results that clearly present identity as a form of communicative expression on the Facebook platform. The goal of this chapter is to discuss the research findings of the participant observation phase and the interview phase, so as to reveal what participants communicate about and how they communicate in their online and offline worlds. These ‘worlds’ are neither separate nor the same, but simply blend into one another. The first section will discuss the observation results found in the two-month study of participant’s Facebook profiles. This will then turn to a discussion of typology and personas, describing in detail how they came to be and what characteristics make up each category of user. The last, and densest, portion of the chapter will discuss the interview results in terms of the concepts that were specifically researched, for example profile organization, privacy, photos, friends, wall postings, impression management, and so forth. The goal of this chapter is to discuss the findings of the research study in detail to provide context for the evaluation in the following chapter.

### **Observation Results**

In order to develop categories for observation, it was important to understand the tools that Facebook users employ when creating an image for themselves. These tools can say anything about a person and it allows the user to develop and change their image as often as they like. These tools include the use of pictures, status updates, videos and friends, for example. The significance of whether these images remain the same or change depends on what type of an

identity a user wants to portray (Goffman, 1959). I want to know what this says about a person and whether that syncs up with the type of personality they present in face-to-face interaction. I also want to understand whether it makes a difference to be constantly updating or not and how this affects interactions on Facebook. I want to understand how these interactions help create, maintain or change a person's online identity and how much influence our daily lives have in this identity formation.

Study participants' online Facebook profiles were observed for a period of two months to determine what type of information was posted. These online observations were recorded according to the features that each participant had active on their pages, which included profile, album and tagged photos, wall postings, status updates, videos and biographical information. At a minimum, most participants engaged with photos and wall postings, but each user posted information according to their privacy settings and level of engagement with the platform. Because each participant allowed the researcher a certain level of viewership, whether that was fully disclosing their profile page or only revealing particular portions of the page to be viewable, the results of the observational study are conclusive to only what the researcher was permitted to observe in each profile.

A correlation between the amount of friends and the level of activity seemed to appear – the more friends a user had, the more interaction there seemed to be on each of their pages. Although some participants that did not retain a high friend count had a large amount of activity on their profiles, the general conclusion was that the more friends a person has, the higher amount of wall and status commentary was expected. Most of the participants were friends with anywhere from 200 to 400 'friends' on the platform. Those participants with 500 or more friends tended to have more daily postings than those in the two-to-four hundred range. Those users with



less than 100 friends typically displayed very limited postings, sometimes dating back weeks or months since the last visible post.

<b>Level of Facebook Activity</b>	<b>Average Number of Friends</b>
High	>700
Above Average	500-700
Average	200-400
Minimal/Low	<100

Table 5.1: Level of Online User Activity in Correlation to Number of Friends

The most engaged with piece of the profile was photographs. Three different types of photographs typically emerged from the Facebook profile features: profile photos, photo album pictures and tagged photos. The current 2013 version of the platform allows users to share third party pictures more easily than that of the 2010 platform, so there were not many anecdotal or serious news photographs observed during the time of the study. The majority of the photos were those posted by the participants in their own photo albums and their profile pictures. The more friends a user had, typically the more tagged photos they were featured in. Many of the photos featured typical activities for the age group being researched: parties, going out to a bar or club, drinking festivities and hanging out with friends. However, not all participants engaged in this behaviour and tended to feature activities that pertained to their interests ranging from sports activities, travelling, exploring nature, inner city cultural experiences and family outings. Profile photos featured most of the participants and tended to be single photos of themselves. Many participants posted profile pictures of themselves with friends or family, but some engaged with altered photographs of themselves, funny images or cartoon-like images. The majority of these profile photos were conducive to showcasing the participant as attractively as possible, unless the

photos were meant to elicit some sort of emotion – for example, to be purposely funny, by say applying a stretching application to make the image appear non-linear or taking photos in black and white to draw a more artsy, emotional response. Photographs were the largest vehicles for identity expression on Facebook profiles – each participant posted photographs that presented the types of activities they engaged in in their offline lives. Photographs provide a window into a person's life to understand their interests, values and associations. Judgements can be made based on these identifiable factors, however, that is not the purpose of this thesis. Images and photos help to explain how identity is portrayed through moments captured in time.

The wall is the main area of the Facebook profile where the owner can post status updates, or where 'friends' can write wall postings or comment on status updates. The amount of activity that occurs on a participant's wall is dependent on profile settings that allow others to post there. Some participants choose not to allow others to write on their walls completely, and users have the ability to remove wall postings if they feel inclined. The majority of participants, however, allowed their friends to post onto their walls. Approximately half of the participants posted status updates heavily; taking up much of their wall, while the other half of the sampling's walls consisted of the messages left by others. Status updates that were written tended to focus on positive, upbeat topics refraining much from negative or self-defeating messaging. Only a small amount of these statuses referred to a negative event, and regardless of how negative the happening was, the messaging was written in a way that portrayed the negative event as a positive learning. For example, one participant wrote about being rejected for a job that they interviewed for. They saw this as an opportunity to network amongst their friends for a better position and to gain positive feedback on what a great employee they would make. Status updates tended to revolve around the current activities that participants were engaging with, their

feelings, their future prospects, general observations and plans. The majority of users allowed commentary of these status updates and for the most part supportive or funny banter occurred on these statuses. Wall postings were generally used to catch up with friends and make plans to get together. It was evident when postings were deleted or removed when a participant did not like what was written on their wall, as the conversation was missing pieces in the order flow. When postings were removed, this was a clear indication of impression management at work. Status updates were intentional acts of identity as each participant posted each update on their own free will to say something about their life. Wall postings are posted by 'friends' and so less control over what is said is available to the user. The only control the profile owner has is to delete the post entirely, straining their relationship with the 'friend' that posted it. Otherwise the profile owner must allow a permanent anecdote about themselves, written by someone else, to live on their wall for all others to see.

Biographical information that is generally posted in the 'about' section of the profile, is upfront, frank identity. Here participants describe themselves based on selected pieces of information they would like to others to read about them: interests, work and education, political and religious views, relationship status, quotes, birthdate, hometown and current city status, likes and notes. Each of these categories is not necessarily available on each profile, as each participant chooses what information they would like to reveal about themselves. The biography section is a clear area where impression management is performed. No 'friend' can add or comment on anything in this section. All participants posted some type of biographical information to the profile, but very few went to full disclosure extremes to indicate their home address and cell phone number, for example. Most of the participants provided information that was important in creating an identity for themselves that they wanted others to believe. Many

participants indicated their birthdates, political and religious beliefs, relationship status, educational networks and interests. The research cannot qualify the assertions as true or false, and must simply take self-indicators for what they are.

Other fringe pieces, such as videos, notes, links and applications, helped to provide additional identity cues. Almost all participants engaged with videos that featured them personally, allowing the researcher to see their interactions in a 'live' and offline setting. More than half wrote notes or were tagged in notes by other 'friends.' Notes can range from writing a personal, online journal to being asked to fill out a chain mail style questionnaire about their personality. Links were used to promote news articles, funny videos and images, and anything outside of the Facebook platform worth sharing. This feature was still in its inception during 2010; so many users were not exploring share options for links. Today's Facebook platform has made it easy to share any online document, including other social media sites such as Twitter and YouTube. Applications are downloaded by each user individually and require the user to share a certain level of profile information with Facebook in order to use the application. Applications can range from games to drawing programs. A few participants used the 'Graffiti' application for their photos as an additional filter, while some sent 'Gifts' to each other. Each of the fringe applications served to showcase the participant's daily interactions outside of Facebook.

Photos and images, status updates, wall postings and biographical information are the dominant portions of the Facebook profile that indicate towards identity portrayal. Each participant has the use of an inbox, but because inboxes are for private messaging only, the research was not accessible to those conversations. Observations were strictly recorded based on what was available to the researcher per profile. Each user tailors their profile viewership in their privacy settings, and can provide different settings for each 'friend,' if so desired. Because

participants controlled the level of research visibility, it was indeterminable what each participant's privacy settings were and how information was controlled from the back end. Changes were observed as well, as some participant's removed content during the study. However, substantial change was only seen in the amount of wall postings and commentary made, as no other part of the profile refreshed as quickly. The overall observational findings are on par with the hypothesis that Facebook is yet another stage where identities are dramaturgically performed through the use of impression management and other interaction rituals.

### **Typology & Personas**

The data gathered from the observational research helped in grouping the types of users present in the sample to produce typologies and personas. Each of these personas helped to identify the categories that participants fell into and to provide better analysis of the term 'identity.' Personas are identifiable ways to group people based on personality behaviours to communicate a desired impression (Mulder, 2007), while the user typologies help to define how participants use Facebook as a social platform. The following sections will highlight the types of users that exhibited special characteristics to be grouped into a persona. Each typology was given an appropriate name according to the actions exhibited.

Six types of users presented themselves as clear categories for analysis: 1) Always On; 2) Status Updater; 3) Attention Seeker; 4) Friend Collector; 5) Minimalist; and 6) In Moderation. The '*Always On*' category reflects a user that tends to be online the majority of their day, whether this be through the desktop or mobile Facebook experience. These users make multiple posts per day through status updates and posting photographs. There is much activity on their

walls as friends comment back and forth on the items that are posted. These users tend to have much wall traffic from other friends posting singular messages as well. These profile pages have heavy traffic as each time the researcher checked back to the page, it had refreshed with more updates and conversations. New photo albums, profile pictures and tagged photos pop up regularly on their profiles. Someone who is ‘Always On’ posts often and is generally available through their mobile phone to continue making updates throughout the day.

The ‘*Status Updater*’ communicates with friends mainly through status updates. This type of user tends to only post status updates and does not focus so much on photo or video postings. There is a tendency to disallow friends to write on the Status Updater’s wall, as this functionality has been physically removed from the profile as a feature. This user stays in touch with friends that comment on their posts more than the rest of their friends. This person posts on other people’s walls, but it comes secondary to responding to their own status update posts. The Status Updater tends to use their mobile device a lot more as well, posting statuses throughout the day, as they tend to have a high level of engagement with the Facebook platform, checking it minimally once a day.

The ‘*Attention Seeker*’ tends to fall on the younger end of the spectrum around the 18 to 19 year age range. The general majority of their photos feature them drinking with friends and out and about in social settings. Their status updates revolve around their friends and the events that they will be attending. Very little is shown or referenced to in terms of family and interests. The typical photo album contains over 100 pictures that are all very similar in composition, and feature themselves and friends ‘hanging out.’ The Attention Seeker is that – constantly seeking attention through the statuses and images they post focusing on partying with friends and hanging out at social gatherings. The Attention Seeker is not only a self-proclaimed party animal,

but tends to post photographs that are narcissistic in nature. Of course, many Facebook users post narcissistic images of themselves, but this group is the guiltiest of posting this style of photograph in excessive amounts. Attention Seekers focus on showcasing only appealing and attractive photos of themselves and maintain high traffic walls consisting of posting pertaining to the parties they attended or will attend in the upcoming weeks. Mobile devices are utilized for much of the posting to maintain conversations in real time.

The '*Friend Collector*' persona is a Facebook user with over 700 friends. Based on the number of friends each participant had, the average amount was anywhere from 200 to 400 people. Users who participated above average had anywhere from 500 to 700 friends, but those participants who were included in the 'Friend Collector' category tended to focus most of their Facebook efforts on collecting and interacting with friends, and each of these participants had over 700 friends. It is safe to say this type of user has a large network of people that they know. Whether this user knows each one of these friends personally is difficult to assess. Users that are Friend Collectors tend to have higher volumes of traffic on their profiles and reveal more biographical information about themselves. Much of the users in this category use Facebook for self-promotional purposes to sell their personal agendas – for example, one user promoted his personal YouTube channel in an effort to gain more likes and views. Much communication is observed on their walls, as they tend to be outspoken and post many links and videos and like to share their personal opinions and beliefs with others. Mobile communication is equal to desktop usage, but the sheer volume of posts is high.

The '*Minimalist*' or what is sometimes referred to as the non-user, describes someone who is rarely online. This person seldom posts pictures and is tagged in very few photos. The Minimalist displays a small amount of profile pictures, anywhere from five to ten, for their

friends to view. This type of user tends to have a lower amount of friends, usually less than 100, and profile activity is very low. Because the content is minimal, the interaction is minimal as well. The Minimalist will post status updates once in a while, which can range from a few weeks to a few months. It appears that this user does not access the Facebook platform very often, or if they do, it is to view other profiles. Minimalists are limited in their engagement with the Facebook platform and their online friends.

The '*In Moderation*' user is what can be referred to as an 'average' user. Not all those who behave In Moderation exhibit the same patterns, but these types of users are characterized by not exemplifying one extreme over another. In Moderation types are not heavy users of the platform, but still engage with photos, wall postings and status updates with a sizeable amount of 'friends.' They may not post updates as often, but they post enough to maintain their online presence.



<b>Type</b>	<b>Persona</b>	<b># of Logins</b>	<b>Friend Count</b>	<b>Wall</b>	<b># of Status Updates</b>	<b>Photos (Posted + Tagged)</b>
Always On	Beauty Queen, Student, Activist, Serious Professional, Artist, Traveler.	Usually do not log out; approx. 5 – 10/day	200-400; 500-700	Enabled	2-3/day	500-1500
Status Updater	Serious Professional, Athlete, Student, Artist, Activist, Comedian, Technology Junkie, Traveler.	1-2/day	200-400; 500-700	Disabled	1-3/day	300-500
Attention Seeker	Socialite, Beauty Queen, Partier, Athlete, Traveler.	1/day	200-400; 500-700	Enabled	1-2/day	2000+
Friend Collector	Serious Professional, Athlete, Student, Activist, Traveler.	1/day	700+	Enabled	1-3/day	300-500
Minimalist	Student, Artist, Traveler, Subdued.	1/week or 1/bi-weekly	<100	Enabled but patrolled	1/bi-weekly; 1/month; sometimes never	<150
In Moderation	Socialite, Beauty Queen, Student, Artist, Athlete, Serious Professional, Traveler.	1/day or every other day	200-400	Enabled	1/every 2-3 days; 1/week	300-500

Table 5.2: Participant Typology and Persona Characteristics

These six types have helped to determine how each participant ranks as a user of the site. The personas were used as a basis for interview subjects to get a better understanding of how these types engage with the platform specifically for identity purposes. Personas, in the context of this study, are the personality traits that users identify with when describing their online behaviours, interests and interactions. As a researcher, these persona categories help to determine

*how* users negotiate and maintain a certain impression of themselves online. These self-identified personas help users navigate the online space and maintain a consistent image through the use of self-presentation strategies that stem from the persona categories that they embody. It is important to understand that many users embody multiple personas and that not all participants fit perfectly into a typology grouping. Due to the smaller sampling size, there are likely more than six categories to describe the millions of Facebook users that exist in the 18 to 24 year age category. Another implication of these persona groupings is that not all participants can be boxed into one persona, as some exhibited behaviours that crossed two or more categories, and that is consistent across the study. The idea that multiple types of users exist is part of the theoretical stance of this thesis; therefore multiple identities can be portrayed in an online setting. Personas help to create clear characteristics of user behaviour to better describe the methods in which users express their identities.

### **Interview Results**

Interviews were conducted with seven participants who best idealized the typology and persona categories or who were able to speak to multiple categories. The interview results are analyzed based on the themes that have emerged from the observational study.

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Typology</b>	<b>Persona</b>	<b>Friend Count</b>	<b>Wall</b>	<b># of Logins</b>	<b># of Status Updates</b>	<b>Photos (Posted+ Tagged)</b>
David	Status Updater; Friend Collector	Comedian, Student, Traveler, Technology Junkie.	202	Enabled	1-3/day	2-3/day	391
Katy	Always On; Status Updater	Socialite, Beauty Queen, Artist, Student, Traveler, Technology Junkie.	381	Enabled	Never logs off	2-3/day	~1500
Rosie	Minimalist	Student, Artist, Traveler, Subdued.	101	Enabled	1/week	3 total in FB lifetime	104
Laila	Always On; Status Updater	Serious Professional, Student, Artist, Activist, Traveler.	330	Enabled	1-2/day	1-2/day	~1000
Kaela	In Moderation	Socialite, Beauty Queen, Family-Oriented, Student, Traveler.	342	Enabled	1/day	1/2-3 days	~1000
Adam	Status Updater; Friend Collector	Serious Professional, Athlete, Student, Traveler, Comedian.	701	Disabled	1/day	1-3/day	~500
Maria	Attention Seeker	Socialite, Beauty Queen, Partier, Athlete, Traveler.	513	Enabled	1/day	1/week	~2000

Table 5.3: Interview Participant Characteristics

### *Facebook Basics*

Interviews commenced with questions surrounding the participant's general use of Facebook. Questions about their use of the platform and how long they have been members were discussed. Over half of the interviewees joined Facebook during their final years of high school, and the rest joined during their first year of university or a few years after the website was becoming more popular. The decision to join Facebook was mainly based on influence from offline friends, as Adam, an Education major confirms: "I joined three years ago because a buddy said I gotta get this thing and he was showing me it." Rosie, another Communications student, joined the platform to share photos with a group of friends: "It was because we had just gone on a science field trip and we decided that's how we were going to share pictures. So that was the only reason I joined really." Other interviewees were already active on social media sites such as MySpace and Nexopia, but wanted to switch to Facebook because of ease of use and privacy settings. David, an International Relations student, joined to stay in touch with high school friends: "I do have a lot of friends, but using Facebook I could stay in contact with the people that I *liked* from high school without having to communicate with the ones I didn't." For those students who joined after high school, Facebook was used to stay in contact with friends that had moved away or did not attend university with them. The students who joined in high school expanded their high school network to include university friends they met in college. Facebook became a stronger force in the social media world during 2005 and by 2008 each interviewee had joined the platform.

Most of the participants admitted to checking the site on a daily basis and some kept the application running on their desktop and laptop computer throughout the day, like Katy: "I check at least 20 minutes a day...at least! Sometimes I'll have Facebook on in the background as I'm

doing stuff on my computer.” Laila, a Communications major, checks her Facebook daily “for maybe an hour or so, and then I also have it on my phone. So maybe like twice a day on my iPhone but not spending anytime on it, just to check.” It appeared that there was heavily mobile use by this participant group, but only half of the participants used their mobile phones to interact, the other half viewed updates only.

In terms of activity, many participants like David focused their attention on responding to their close friends in everyday life: “I don’t go through a lot of effort to maintain close ties with my acquaintances or anything. It’s usually more for my close circle of friends.” The users that fell into the *Always On* and *Status Updater* category tended to respond to their notifications in a quick and timely manner, while those in the *Minimalist* and *In Moderation* groups tended to respond at a slower rate, getting back to friends within a couple days versus a few minutes or hours. One *Always On* participant, Katy, admitted to checking Facebook on such a constant basis that it became an unconscious act: “I go on it just to see what’s going on. I try to click away but I end up clicking back – sometimes I don’t even know why I’m on it. Sometimes I just want to know what people are up to and if I have any notifications.” *Friend Collectors* and *Attention Seekers* tend to also respond to their notifications fairly quickly, usually within a few hours of something being posted. Adam’s use of mobile allows him to respond within a short period of time: “I get all my FB messages to my phone so it’s really convenient because it’s right there and I’ll respond like a text message – right away.”

### *Profile Organization*

The features that each interviewee chooses to display in their profiles are unique to their Facebook page, but tend to be fairly consistent across most Facebook profiles. The widgets, or

features, that the interviewees chose to display were biographical information, wall postings, status updates and photos, as a general consensus. One *Friend Collector*, Adam, removed his wall so that others could not post comments directly to his profile; however, this was a unique case of the seven interviewees. Another *Friend Collector*, David, allowed the use of wall postings, but because his identity was shared with the *Always Online* persona, David responded to the wall postings as part of his need to constantly stay engaged with ‘friends.’ Although each participant has the option to turn on and off whatever profile features they like, there are more popular features that are dominant throughout, such as photos and wall postings. Participants also choose which of their ‘friends’ can see each of these areas, and some were adamant about hiding photographs from those ‘friends’ who were really acquaintances in real life. *Always On* user, Katy, added friends whom she met strictly online and did not allow these ‘friends’ to view any private, family-related pictures because she made a clear distinction between Facebook life and real life. For her, Facebook is a reflection of your offline life and hiding elements of her profile from her online friends put her at ease to know her privacy is not being violated. Katy employed expressive control, as a tool in her front stage to ensure the online performance she was putting out was consistent with the elements of her profile that informed the offline. Katy’s persona of technology junkie allowed her to manage this impression by hiding personal elements of her profile in the back stage and bringing forward her interests in online gaming for her select audience of gaming ‘friends.’ Katy’s online technology junkie persona intersects with her offline interests in video games: “Now that they’ve introduced games and applications, lately I’ve been playing Tetris on it all day. If I can get away with it at school, I play there too.” Facebook game applications are online symbols that are similar to offline gaming symbols for a technology

junkie. Profile features that are made available to other Facebook users are strictly based on the privacy settings of the profile owner and what type of persona is displayed.

About half of the participants allowed all of their ‘friends’ to view their full profiles because they felt it was an intuitive part of the Facebook experience. However, the other half of the sample did not grant all their ‘friends’ full access and blocked certain status updates and photo albums from their view. Kaela, a business major, engages with profile idealization to ensure her ideal image is communicated: “It’s kind of weird that people I met two years ago can see what I’m doing daily, you know? And so yeah, I do have a lot of people on limited profile. I don’t really know how I decided, but I just want basics for everyone that they can see of me, just cause it kind of creeps me out. I have lots of pictures and only close friends can see those.” This does beg the question ‘why add these people as ‘friends’ if you are not comfortable with them viewing everything you have posted?’ but the typical response from participants was that it would be rude to erase these ‘friends’ after they’ve been on your friend list for some time, or that ‘they would feel bad’ for excluding them, or that they are mutual friends and that they would run into them on a regular basis in everyday life. It seems as though these participants want to maintain the impression they have put out there by continuing to bestow a specific image onto their audience by communicating the most idealized image they can control. Typically this participant group hides photos of themselves drinking with friends or going out to clubs from their families like their parents, aunts and uncles, but they also block ‘friends’ that are either acquaintances or people that they do not know that well in an offline context from seeing more intimate photos of their daily lives. A great example is how Kaela, an *In Moderation* type, blocked her grandmother from any albums that were not family related:

“I just don’t want her opinion of me to change, you know? She’s this sweet catholic woman who’s really conservative, so I’m more so worried about her impression of me cause in her mind I’m little Ms. Perfect, and that’s the way I want it to stay! I just want her to see me the way she’s seen me my whole entire life.”

Clearly Kaela utilized impression management techniques to ensure her Facebook photos did not negatively impact an image she had cultivated with her grandmother in the offline. Kaela engaged with her family-oriented persona to ensure her grandmother’s online view of her was consistent with that of her offline. In choosing the profile features that are available to each of their ‘friends,’ participants took the opportunity to tailor their impression to each party accordingly.

### *Privacy*

Privacy is a hot topic for this group, as Facebook went through and still continues to go through changes to their privacy policy on a regular basis. Aside from one interviewee, privacy took significant precedence in participant’s interactions in the online space. Concerns over how their profile is accessed on Google and what other Facebook users can see of their profiles took precedence. Many participants engaged with strict privacy settings to ensure non-friends were not able to access their information.

As the researcher, I was fortunate enough to gain complete exposure to each interviewee’s profile, as was confirmed during the interview process. Each participant’s profile reflected factual information about himself or herself, including full names and biographical details, which help to compare and contrast offline and online interaction. Just under half of the interview participants place strict privacy settings on their accepted ‘friends,’ however, most place a heavier weight on the screening process when accepting friendship requests, like Laila a communications major: “Normally if there’s anyone who comes through who I don’t recognize



at all on Facebook then I won't add them at all." The main occasion for taking away access for users is when they have not met a person outside of the platform, but a bigger reason to accept someone's request is based on the user's comfort with the content that is posted on their profile. The Always On, Status Updater and Minimalist types admit that they filter their profiles so much that any posts they have made could be viewed by anyone: "Because I try to limit my profile so much, I don't have something that I'd be worried about someone seeing." Rosie, a Communications major, employs so much impression management that she feels comfortable with the academic and artist personas that are portrayed online and rarely updates her profile. The other half of the participants, however, post pictures and statuses that perhaps are not as filtered and would rather have the opportunity to update permission settings, over the content itself. This is the dichotomy of Facebook impression management – either the impression is managed strictly through the content that is put up, which leads to a *Minimalist or In Moderation* profile, or trust is put into properly fixing privacy settings for specific 'friends' so that all content is only visible to a select few. Adam explains how removing the wall functionality has helped him to control the content on his page:

"I went through all the people I didn't want to see my wall and I thought it was so tedious... and then I figured out how to get rid of my wall. Leading up to that though, there were definitely people I blocked from seeing my wall like ex-girlfriends and psychos I know. Now I can control what other people put on my wall, which is nothing, and that is way more private for me then having it on public display for everybody – some people write weird stuff and I don't want that on my wall representing me."

Adam's fear of what the generalized other will perceive him as is a motivating factor for removing the wall feature. Wall posts made by others discredit Adam's personas of serious professional, student and athlete, and he maintains expressive control over his image by removing the Facebook wall. In his offline life, Adam may not be able to control what others say about him, but it is clear that Adam is dominated by his looking glass self in his online

interactions because he feels labeled by the generalized other. Profile privacy is then either based on the user's need to filter the content they put up, or filter the privacy settings they have for each 'friend.'

From placing privacy settings on 'friends,' a clear distinction between the type of 'friends' emerges: those that are close in everyday life, and those that are acquaintances or that were known in the past. 'Friends' then can be clearly indicated towards if they are close or distant - those that are close and interacted with on a daily or weekly basis are reserved the right to view the full profile. Friends that have been distant or are acquaintances are shown snippets of a profile and what the user wants them to see.

### *Portrayed Facebook Image*

When it comes to portraying a certain image on Facebook, the user must determine how they express their desired image through the platform. The study cannot confirm or deny if what is posted online in someone's profile is consistent with their everyday interaction, but it can provide some insight into that process. The main questions revolve around the type of person each user is trying to portray themselves as, and if they believe they are successful.

Only a couple of the interviewees believe the type of person they are portraying online is inline with how they behave offline: "I don't think there really is a difference between the two, apart from venting to friends which I keep discreet and not on Facebook. The things I say on Facebook are things that I am excited about and will be talking about in real life." This type of user mirrors their Facebook content to that of their daily interactions. From the quote, however, it is evident that negative experiences are not shared through the platform as they might be in an offline setting. Negative commentary and self-defeating posts tend to be absent from all the

participant's profiles as Laila explains: "I'm really conscious to keep it positive. I may rant about having a bad day in private messaging, but not publicly." Comments that had negative tones are quickly followed with positive remarks to deflect any pessimism. All persona types re-iterated the need to maintain a positive image through the statements made on a profile – it is undesirable to be negative and could cause someone to de-friend you. Being de-friended is the ultimate blow in the Facebook world, as that means you are no longer part of that person's circle of online friends and that is a negative image to have. As David explains, "It's kind of douche to remove someone as a friend because it's like saying you're too good for them. I don't want to hurt someone's feelings and portray myself as someone like that. It just seems like you're shutting people down and I don't like to do that."

The vast majority of the sample felt that their Facebook image is not exactly a replica of their day-to-day interactions, and that it can sometimes be a misrepresentation as Attention Seeker Maria demonstrates:

"I don't try to portray myself as a partier on purpose on Facebook but it's not like you're going to take pictures of yourself when you're in the library or going to class and stuff, you take a camera when you go out, so I guess that would portray me as a partier."

In Maria's case, it seems as though she is not interested in employing impression management or expressive control over her online image, as her offline life is less reflective of a partier persona. It appears that special occasions are those that really define who we are on Facebook, as those are the times photos are taken and posted to Facebook, not during our normally scheduled daily routines. Depending on the intention for Facebook use, whether it is to communicate with one's friends, catch up with old acquaintances or to be entertained, some users, like Adam, felt that their profiles are not accurate representations of who they are because they are not engaged with the platform in a serious manner: "I try to get a rise out of people, stir the pot a bit and I laugh at

people's responses. It's just a good time for me. A lot of the stuff I do on Facebook is just so I can have a laugh about it, it might not be a true representation of who I am." David went so far as to claim that he is not conscious how others perceive him on Facebook. David may have a relaxed performance approach, as most of his posts are personal videos that some might be embarrassed to show online 'friends,' but I do not believe he is completely oblivious to others viewing his profile and employs dramatic realization to ensure his comedic persona is believable. Rosie, The *Minimalist*, who rarely posts believes she may be seen as boring and dull, but prefers not to reveal too much about her offline life. Rosie, however, performs the most identity control over her image, as she tends to over-think every posting to the point where nothing gets posted at all:

"Sometimes I'll do something on impulse and put something funny up, but then other times I think, "What is this going to look like on my profile?" I'll do that consideration. I like to think about, "what will this look like when I post it," and sometimes I gauge it by the responses that I get. Like if sometimes you post something and no one comments on it, you feel weird. Like, "why did I bother with that?" because that is the whole point of posting something. Sometimes I get so wrapped up in it, that I don't end up posting anything at all."

Rosie's shy persona makes her worry about her public image to the point where she employs so much impression management that she lacks online identity performances. Image portrayal on Facebook is based on a user's ability to contrive content to a level that they are comfortable posting for a large audience to see.

### *Daily Life*

Interviewees were asked about their conduct in daily life to compare their online persona with their interview. The goal is to understand how Facebook plays a role in everyday life, and how Facebook is combined with other communication platforms as part of daily interaction rituals. What is interesting to note is that those users who fall into the *Always On* category tend

to be more shy in real life, than those who fall into the *Minimalist* and *In Moderation* categories, as Katy explains: “Online it’s like full-out personality. I’ll talk to people more often than I do in real life because either I don’t see them much or they just don’t talk to me.” Facebook is used as a social tool to become more comfortable communicating with others:

“In social settings I’ll let loose more with my friends or people that I am familiar with, and I guess on Facebook it makes it easier to talk to people that you don’t really know that well. I guess you could forge a friendship more easily on Facebook than maybe you could in real life.”

Katy’s socialite persona shines through online more than in person because she employs online misrepresentation of her offline social behaviours. Katy feels more comfortable on her online front stage than her offline front stage, and therefore employs herself as social object and symbol online.

With Facebook, there is less pressure to engage in constant communication because the platform can be accessed whenever the user has time. The *Minimalist* understands there is a difference from their daily life because they are more open to those experiences than they are on Facebook: “I’m more likely to discuss how someone’s bad day went with them in person because I feel like it happened in that time and then it’s gone [the conversation]. We’ll remember having had that conversation but it’s not engrained in writing on Facebook for the next millennium.” It is difficult to clearly state whether a participant’s daily interaction is consistent with that of their Facebook profile, but from self-reflecting and asking questions about those activities, it is evident that Facebook is another place where identities are expressed, as all identities are performances.

Facebook plays an interesting role in daily life, as it can frustrate and enhance users' interactions with their online friends. Facebook enhances offline conversations through the inevitable discussion of online events in the offline:

"I always think it's interesting when I over hear conversations that revolve around something that was said on Facebook, you know, "Did you see that on Facebook?" and you have a conversation regarding what was discussed on Facebook. I think it's really inevitable that the two would combine that way. I find it very annoying and try not to do it, but I think for me, it's largely just an extent of in-person conversations. So I suppose in that way it enhances it because you're continuing your conversation with that friend outside of Facebook."

Facebook has also become a place where gathering information about another person is very easy and can be classified as 'creeping.' Creeping is generally a non-harmful act where a user clicks on other user's profile to see their photos and read their biographical information and status updates. Creeping can be performed on any profile, but will be limited to the privacy settings that are placed if one is not 'friends' with the person being creeped. Because users cannot see who has viewed their profile, 'creeping' has become common practice in the Facebook world, as Kaela explains:

"Ok this is weird, but if you were ever jealous of your boyfriend or something and some other girl wrote on his wall, you could creep that girl and find out the activity that they're having between each other, you can find out everything! If you're creeping and sometimes I do that because I'm like, "Who is this chick?" and I can figure it all out, so that way it's awesome. But at the same time it's like kind of creepy because I know everything about this stranger."

Kaela understands the negative implications that the 'creeping' symbol has, but engages with it anyway to gain online impressions and information about other users. Kaela has revealed misrepresentation, as the creeping story above strays from the socialite persona she portrayed earlier. Creeping does have a negative connotation as it makes the user performing the creeping feel strange about their behaviours and that they know so much about a complete stranger.

Creeping brings into play the offline world, as the people we engage with in an offline context

can be followed online. Online behaviours are discussed in offline conversations that take place in-person, through text or on the telephone.

### *The Role of 'Friends'*

Without 'friends' in the Facebook context, the online site would not exist. The focus of this section is to understand the types of people that qualify as 'friends,' and how they are communicated with. David made an interesting observation that sums up the role of Facebook 'friends:' "Every time you add a friend to Facebook that is the only time you are actually acknowledging that they are your friend. You don't do that with the people you see every day and confirm you are friends in person, whereas Facebook has the opportunity to do that and it's a nice acknowledgment. It's mainly for accessing people's profiles and staying in touch." Facebook is the only social networking site where you actually acknowledge that you are someone's friend and it helps to identify the uniqueness of the platform.

The majority of participants 'friends' consist of elementary, high school and university friends, co-workers, family members and friends of friends. When friendship requests come through, the study group unanimously agreed that they need to know who this person is, which means having had at least one conversation, to add them as a 'friend.' Facebook friends can be divided in many categories, but there are two categories that this study focuses on: close, real life friends and distant, online friends. Adam, a *Friend Collector*, explains how he differentiates between friends and communicates with them:

"Well I have my close friends that I communicate the most with and I talk to in real life, then I got the ones that I keep in contact with because I only see them once or twice a year, and then I have those friends that are distant that I have no connection with at all. I would say that at least half of my friends are distant. I mean we'll have an initial conversation when I add them, talk six to 12 months later, and then it kind of fizzles out, and that's the usual cycle that it runs through."

The amount of communication that occurs with ‘friends’ depends on how strong of a bond one has with a person and how regularly they see this ‘friend’ in everyday life. Friendship as a Facebook symbol signifies interaction on the site. Facebook communication, however, is largely dependent on who is in your life at the current moment:

“Friends they drop off eventually. I go through phases where I’ll talk to people I haven’t spoken to in a really long time and we’ll talk for about a month and then never talk again. People will randomly come up and talk to me and then we won’t talk again. I feel like there is a year and half expiration on talking to friends on Facebook because I used to talk to my res friends every day for a long time and now we don’t ever talk.”

Interaction with Facebook ‘friends’ is dependent on an existing relationship to maintain its relevancy, however, if the relevancy is not there participants agreed that they would not delete the friend necessarily: “I would never delete people unless I can’t be friends with them or something, but a personal thing like a fight or something, then I would delete them. I would never delete people because I’m all about networking and keeping in touch,” says Always Online Katy. Participants commented on their friends cleaning up their ‘friends’ list by purging the ones they no longer stay in touch with, but none of them actually engaged in this behaviour. Facebook friendship is an interesting phenomenon as the looking glass self comes into play; interviewees were too worried about how they would look if they removed someone as a ‘friend.’ Not only is impression management at play, but dramatic realization takes effect as participants want their Facebook friends to know that they are valued as online friends by keeping and maintaining their friendship. This is not necessarily the case in the offline, as most participants do not feel obligated to have as many Facebook friends; Adam provides some clarity:

“I have two or three close guy friends that are like brothers to me, a girlfriend and people that are very important in my life and those people know who I am and probably describe me better than I can. The person I am on Facebook is only a slice of who I am in real life, and that slice is accurate. I have something like 700 Facebook friends and neither of those people are as close to me as my real friends.”



Much of the interaction that occurs with friends is had through wall-to-wall messages, status updates or private inbox messages: “My wall-to-wall communication is with close friends mainly, and I have conversations with friends through private messaging where we will continue our conversation in person.” Many participants discussed using the inbox tool to have more private conversations that they did not want others to read: “Yeah, I do inbox messaging for sure. I get kind of creeped out when people know what I’m writing to people. They can basically read about my life and I don’t like it!” Because this study did not have access to inbox messages, it becomes more difficult to gauge how information is exchanged through the platform. It can be inferred, though, that private information and conversations are had through the inbox and messages that are public approved will be posted on walls. Impression management of what is posted on walls is very high, as information that is displayed is generally very surface level and superficial – the more in-depth and telling conversations are had offline.

### *Wall Posting*

Wall postings are used to communicate with individual friends directly or to post status updates. One participant removed the functionality for others to post on his wall directly; however, the rest of the group allows their friends to communicate as they wish on their walls. Although some participants admit to erasing messages on their walls that they deem inappropriate, most have wall-to-wall conversations about upcoming events, past events and opportunities to connect, and to make general comments. Status updates make up a large part of the wall area where much commentary between friends occurs.

The wall area is a public place where ‘friends’ are able to view conversations that are being had. Anything that is written on the wall is visible by all friends, unless a privacy setting

has been put in place. Walls can be used to discuss any topic and as Katy puts it: “It pretty much makes Facebook worth going to because that’s where you have conversations with people if they’re not on Facebook Chat.” Again, because the chat functionality is unavailable to the researcher, identity and interaction can only be gauged from what is permanently posted on a profile. Although the Chat functionality is an important part of the experience, at this time it is out of scope for the thesis. Wall information feeds the newsfeed and is a way to monitor all the activity on Facebook:

“I’m trying to imagine it without and it definitely wouldn’t be the same. I’m just wondering what I would do then because if I’m checking up on what happened on Facebook at the end of the day I think a big part of that is looking at the newsfeed and seeing what other people are posting, but another big part of that is seeing what people have posted directly to me on the wall. I don’t think there would be that much content that I would be interested in if it wasn’t directly related to me! I know that’s narcissistic but I think it factors in hugely.”

The wall is an important part of not only the Facebook experience, but with engaging with other ‘friends’ to discuss topics that provide insight into the type of identity that is being performed. However, not everyone likes the wall feature because of its impact on misrepresenting a portrayed image. The image that has meticulously been built can be torn down by one opposing post, as Adam elaborates:

“The issue is that I don’t want personal things to come about. People perceive things and they come to assumptions, and they simply misinterpret the situation. I try to limit as much personal information as possible. It’s to stop people’s misrepresentations of who I am or misinterpretations. I’m on Facebook to have fun, but on the same note there’s having fun, but then there’s things that will negatively come back to haunt you later on in life, so I try to have fun without having that. You have to assume that everyone on your Facebook is reading your profile.”

By removing the wall functionality, Adam has a greater opportunity to engage with front stage techniques, such as impression management, dramatic realization and idealization to create and

support the image he desires. The image he is creating has a stronger chance of being accepted because he has limited who can post opposing comments about his persona.

Another feature of the wall is the status update. Status updates can be made about anything and typically concern what is on a person's mind. Laila describes her use of status updates as pieces of text aimed at getting people talking about something interesting. Maria believes they are "a way to tell everyone what major things are going on, or just thoughts you're having, or things that are coming up." The more interesting the post, the more commentary will be made. Status updates are a fun way to liven up your wall, but can also be intimidating.

*Minimalists* like Rosie post statuses so infrequently that they worry what people will think of their ideas: "It feels like I'm just fishing for comments, putting myself out there. I view it kind of like trying to get attention and I don't really want to be doing that. I don't feel comfortable with it. It feels weird because I would spend so much time crafting a message that it would be a waste of time." For those that engage with status updates, they add a bit of personality and identity to who they are, what they are looking forward to and the activities they are involved with. The significance and challenge of frequent status updates to the performance of identity is that there is a risk of misrepresentation and conflicting personas to the ones already captured in the profile. Should this occur, the performance is discredited and no longer believable.

### *Photos & Impression Management*

Photographs are an integral part of the Facebook experience. Profile pictures, photo albums and tagged photos are the three main areas where pictures get posted, and are the focus within this study. Questions around what is being portrayed and how photographs are managed from an impression standpoint will be discussed. The amount of photos that can be posted is

unlimited, and any user can post them, which can pose problems with privacy and persona performances. If another friend posts a photograph of you, the original content cannot be removed from their profile, it can only be removed from your own.

Profile pictures are the central component of identity on the profile page. They are a clear window into the mood of a user and define their interests. Most profile pictures are of the participants themselves, or showcasing themselves amongst a group of friends. Some participants show images that are cartoons, landscapes, art pieces and ‘random’ photographs that are not of themselves. The profile photo is the prime real estate for the *Attention Seeker* like Maria: “I always choose the pictures that I think are the most attractive or the coolest. Sometimes I’ll think a photo is cool and I’ll want it to be my profile picture, but if it’s not attractive I won’t put it up. I guess I want to portray that I’m pretty and fun and that I do fun things.” Maria perpetuates the Beauty Queen and Socialite personas through the photographs she posts. She is purposefully posting these photos and employing impression management when selecting which pictures to post.

Profile pictures can be very superficial, as photos that are not attractive will not be posted, even if there is something of beauty in the image. Many participants posted attractive pictures of themselves. Does this make them narcissistic? Perhaps. But when constructing identity, showcasing deficiencies and imperfections leads to a certain impression being bestowed onto its audience, and all the participants see this as a negative. They may showcase themselves in funny or serious situations, but no situations that they feel make them unattractive either physically or emotionally to the audience. One participant also noted that profile photos are not about appearing ‘pretty’ or about the personality aspect that is portrayed, it is “about the way I feel about a picture.” There are various reasons for posting profile photos, however, the main

conclusion that can be drawn is that they are a system or language of significant symbols used to communicate persona characteristics.

Each user posts photo albums and therefore their owner controls the contents of that album. Any content is allowed, unless of course it is illegal or immoral as Facebook will remove it from your profile, but otherwise anything photo-wise can be posted. Most of the participants posted pictures of their trips, outdoor adventures, hanging out with family and friends, events such as parties or weddings, activities and personal interests, and funny internet pictures, to name a few. It is through the types of activities and scenery that is present in photographs that others gain an impression about you. Laila, an *Always On* participant, agrees that photos are a control mechanism to showcase an intentional identity: “I think a photo really defines a person because it shows their everyday activities and it’s also what they want to show the world. I assume that’s who they want to be and who they are.” For those *Minimal* and *In Moderation* users who do not post many photos, it seems as though their impression hinges more on the photos themselves, as there is not much content on their pages. This may be a limited view of who that person is outside of the platform, but on Facebook that person’s image can only be associated with the few photographs that are posted. As David put it, “You can judge the presence of the photos but I don’t think it’s fair to judge the absence of the photos.” The audience may, however, continue to judge a profile lacking content and make assumptions about an individual’s persona and perhaps not interact with this person.

Tagged photos are those that other ‘friends’ post of you and have associated your name and Facebook profile with. Tagging can be seen as a reflection of your image in the eyes of the other and is a symbolic representation of your persona. The generalized other perceives the image that is presented and if impression management techniques are applied, a positive

impression is made. The general consensus is that no one wants to be tagged in an unflattering photo and will de-tag themselves if they see fit, as Laila clarifies: “I’ll definitely un-tag myself if it’s an unflattering photo, but I don’t think that I’m alone in that. If I do take a lot of photos from one night, I will go through and pick only a few that I think capture the night the best. I’m definitely conscious of what I post with me in it.” Even the *Minimalist* who has a limited amount of photos on their wall spends much time filtering through tagged pictures to ensure their impression is consistent with the one they have been putting out there: “I don’t want to look like I’m de-tagging myself from everything. I don’t want to have that appearance of being uncomfortable with myself. So every once in a while I’ll leave a picture that I’m not so happy with just for the sake of having that, you know, looking like I don’t care! You know, I’d like to de-tag myself from this, but I don’t want to look paranoid, so every once in while I let a few go and then I go, “Aw, I wish I could delete that but whatever, I can’t.” It seems as though being tagged in photos is a great way to control your impression, but can also be seen in a negative light by others if one de-tags themselves too often. However, caring enough about what people think to not de-tag oneself is also an impression management technique.

### *Tagging & Commentary*

Content tagging and commentary are both interesting features that the Facebook platform offers to its members. Tagging helps to ensure that all associated content is reflected in your profile and helps to deter duplication of this content. Tagging, as noted in the above photo section, can be seen as a negative, but a few of the participants commented on what a positive tool it is as part of their interaction: “I tag because five years from now you’re never going to find that photo again. If somebody else has a really cool photo, I want to be able to kind of save it so I can view it later and so my close friends can see it too. I want to be able to preserve it by

tagging it.” Tagging serves an archiving purpose, where photographs, articles, statuses and wall posts can be pulled up years down the road and reminisced about.

Commentary is also a large part of the Facebook experience because without it, there would not be much content on the site. Facebook profiles suffer from lack of interaction, and commentary helps to further conversation and allow other friends to come into the conversation, so it is not just between two people. Commentaries are another outlet for maintaining social contact and impressions: “A lot of people won’t just post on your wall, they’ll comment on a photo that is interesting to them. It’s another way for them to communicate with you.” Although most of the personas in the group appreciate comments and enjoy engaging with them, the *Minimalist* does not always engage with commentary directly: “I feel like I deliberate what I’m going to write there. Sometimes I’ll do it on impulse and not be happy with it. I’m more likely to ‘like’ something than comment on it because ‘liking’ is like, you push a button, acknowledge that you’ve seen it, you acknowledge that you like it, but you didn’t have to come up with something to say.” This behaviour is consistent with Rosie’s shy persona as she interacts minimally on and offline. Although not all participants make direct comments onto photos or walls, they will ‘like’ postings and so they are maintaining a type of ‘commentary’ that is integral to being a part of the Facebook experience. By ‘liking’ postings, users are perpetuating the dramatic realization and idealization that is at play in posting photos and status updates.

### **Summary**

Facebook identities are consciously constructed from the offline interaction present in our daily lives. There are many tools and mechanisms at play in constructing and maintaining online identities. The results that came from the observation study helped to determine typologies, or

types of users, that define how each user is engaged with the Facebook platform. The interview results help to define personas and identify the main areas of the profile that are engaged with to provide explanations of how identity is formed and play a role in the evolution of the 'self.'

The identity cycle merges the online and offline stages to produce consistent identity performances. The persona qualities that have been highlighted within the Facebook platform are heavily influenced by offline persona characteristics. Users are influenced by their offline lives to perform identities that are consistent with their offline, but still leaving room for some embellishment as part of a 'performance.' It is the specific Facebook features, such as profile photos, photo albums and status updates that help construct the persona qualities that are influenced by the offline. Facebook features that are outside of a user's control, such as tagged photos, must be controlled through techniques of impression management in order to maintain the identity cycle. The relationship between the online and offline is mutually exclusive, and only through maintenance and performance of consistent persona characteristics are given off performances believed to be true by their audience.

The '*Always On*' type was one of the earlier adopters of the Facebook site, joining during their high school days. Their profiles consist of all available elements such as profile and album photos, wall postings and status updates, and also include fringe elements such as notes, applications and videos. The *Always On* persona is highly concerned with privacy on the site and ensures privacy settings are in place so they are searchable within the platform, as they tend to have a high friend count. The image they portray is an outgoing, but professional one that focuses on positive occurrences over negative ones. The activities they partake in their offline lives are reflective of their online profile, but their personalities may differ in their day-to-day interactions, as some 'Always On' types are more shy in face-to-face scenarios than they are



online. They allow their friends to post on their wall and heavily engage with status updates, photographs and commentary. ‘Always On’ personas revolve around: the beauty queen, student/academic, activist, serious professional, artist and traveler. These online personas are generally consistent with the offline although some are shyer in the offline, and these types tend to engage with impression management and dramatic realization the most.

The ‘*Status Updater*’ communicates strictly through status updates. Not much other activity is seen on their walls and photos are generally not posted, unless friends tag them. They are not as concerned with privacy, but still ensure that strangers are not able to see their profiles. This persona tends to be comfortable with their updates, as sometimes anything that comes to mind is posted; however, impression management is employed to maintain a positive and comedic persona. Friends are an important part of this persona’s profile as their commentary pushes the conversation on their wall. ‘Status Updater’ personas tend to exemplify the serious professional, athlete, student, artist, activist, comedian, technology junkie and traveler. These personas compliment their offline performance and expressive control techniques are utilized online to maintain the belief of the generalized other. The Status Updater’s conduct is most aligned with the concept of the looking glass self, as they internalize others’ images of themselves.

The ‘*Friend Collector*’ is someone who joined Facebook in the earlier stages and has a large network of friends, colleagues and acquaintances. This persona has over 700 friends and tends to engage with status and photo updates the most. The level of commentary on this profile is high, as there are more people to drive conversation. The *Friend Collector* is highly concerned with privacy and tends to not engage with personal conversation within the Facebook platform, as too much is at risk when so many eyes are watching. This persona tends to behave much

differently online than from their offline interactions. More caution is taken to their online interaction and nothing personal is revealed, as offline friends will likely know more about this persona's going-ons. The 'Friend Collector' persona gravitates towards being a serious professional, athlete, student, activist and traveler. Their online and offline personas tend to be inconsistent, as much of the online communication that occurs must be controlled and managed to maintain favourable interactions with so many online eyes watching. They also tend to have a small amount of close friends in the offline, as opposed to so many in online. 'Friend Collectors' engage with impression management and expressive control the most.

The '*Attention Seeker*' trends towards the younger end of the age group and provides access to all areas of the profile to their friends. Friends are highly valued by this persona, as much of the interaction on the wall, statuses and photo commentary is with friends. The *Attention Seeker* posts many narcissistic photos of themselves, and the photo albums they post revolve around parties, drinking and go out with friends. All written posts celebrate the previous weekend's affairs and discuss upcoming debauchery. Their weekly life is likely not a direct reflection of their profile, but their weekend life is likely right on point. This persona reflects the typical 18-year-old university student, which tends to exhibit persona qualities as socialite, beauty queen, partier, athlete and traveler. Their online life is fairly consistent with their offline, however, more embellishment of their persona qualities exists online. This group tends to perform impression management and idealization the most.

The '*Minimalist*' is someone who joined the Facebook community later in the game and does not reveal much about themselves. This person tends to not post much in terms of photos, status updates and biographical information, and is highly concerned with privacy. One might suggest this category is so overly concerned with the impression they give off, that they become

so wrapped up in perfecting the performance that a performance is never given. This persona tends to be much more open in daily life, and worries about their online impression the most. The *Minimalist* engages very little with commentary, but will provide feedback in the form of ‘likes.’ For the little amount of content that appears on the surface, the level of effort to control this image is quite high. The persona qualities the ‘Minimalist’ exhibits are student, artist, traveler and subdued. Their online identity tends to be on par with their offline, but are likely not as subdued and shy in the offline. This group is not anti-social in the offline, but employs so many online impression management techniques that they appear very hermit-like online.

The ‘*In Moderation*’ persona maintains a level of intermediate interaction that is the perfect balance of activity and engagement to appear active on the site. This user maintains an average amount of friends and posts status updates, photos and responds to wall postings in a timely manner. They are concerned with privacy and maintain strict controls over how their information is shared over the network. Their online postings are a small snapshot of their offline lives and much of their profile is managed. The *In Moderation* type engages with tagging and commentary on an as per-basis. In Moderation personas can range from socialite, beauty queen, student, artist, athlete, traveler to serious professional. These personas are maintained from an impression management and dramatic realization standpoint, and the majority of these online personas are consistent in their offline equivalents.

Each of these personas engages with impression management, front and back stage management and performance management to ensure a specific image of themselves is bestowed onto the audience. Some personas rely on these techniques more heavily than others, but all, no matter how small, utilize some type of dramaturgical technique to portray themselves in a desirable manner.

## **CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION**

### **Introduction**

As the most popular social networking site in the world (Socialbakers, 2013), Facebook has permeated the online space and extended itself into our offline interactions. Facebook has vastly impacted the way we communicate and express our identities, both in an online and offline format. Online interactions that occur on Facebook were juxtaposed to offline behaviours to determine what function Facebook has in relation to face-to-face identities in the social world. It was found that much of the online is grounded in the offline and that the majority of interaction that occurred on Facebook revolved around the activities, interests and behaviours of participants in the offline.

The main findings that developed out of the study were three-fold: 1) Online interaction on Facebook is rooted in the offline, in that content from the offline informs Facebook interactions and physical profile features; 2) Strategies of self-presentation occur online – as they do offline – but online presentation is performed through typology and persona qualities; online user behaviour is exhibited through ‘type’ definition, and development and management of identity is performed through self-presentation techniques to ensure consistency of persona characteristics; and 3) Facebook is an digital archive of online identities that are continuously performed and validated by our network of online and offline contacts.

### **Research Approach**

In order to answer the study’s main research question, symbolic interactionism and dramaturgical theories were employed to develop a suitable theoretical framework that helped determine *how* identity is expressed in each of these realms. Both theories view identity as

something that is socially constructed; symbolic interactionists believe identity is formed through the roles that individuals take on in the social structure and that we internalize the view others have of us through our social interactions with particular and generalized others (Blumer, 1969). Dramaturgy determines identity to be a series of performances that are consistently being given in a variety of contexts to a particular audience (Goffman, 1959). Symbolic interactionism provides theoretical insights into how the generalized other impacts the impression and view we have of ourselves, but dramaturgy uncovers *how* offline and online behaviours are presented. From the perspective of this thesis, identities are produced in public and private realms, contributed to through group and individual life, and are validated in social settings.

A study was conducted to determine the connections present between online and offline interactions pertaining to Facebook. 18 participants were recruited and their actions were observed through their Facebook profiles for a period of two months. After this time, typologies, or types of users, were determined based on user behaviours. Initial persona categories were also developed to provide context as to how these types of users personified a certain impression of themselves (Mulder, 2007). Seven of the participants were interviewed after the observation period was over to discuss their online and offline interactions, and determine what performance strategies were employed to bestow a certain impression onto their audience. These interviews were analyzed to determine what connection the offline has to the online, if any, and to understand how these users engaged with the Facebook platform through performance presentations to convey a particular impression.

## Summary of Findings

Early on, I had proposed that Facebook has become yet another stage where identities are dramaturgically performed through new forms of “presentation of self” (Goffman, 1959) and interaction rituals. This statement has remained true throughout the research process and analysis, as the results of my study suggest that users engage with online personas as a technique of self-presentation on the Facebook platform. Persona examples include traveler, socialite and athlete, to name a few, and users post photos and status updates that pertain to these persona categories to maintain a desired impression of themselves on the platform. Personas are another form of presentation that highlights specific aspects of a user’s offline life in a favourable manner. Facebook users can selectively choose which parts of their offline life they would like to expose in the online through photos, wall postings and status updates. It is when other Facebook users engage in photo tagging or profile commentary that impression management techniques are engaged. For example, if a user is tagged in an unflattering, unfavourable photograph to the persona characteristics their profile embodies, this tagged photo will disrupt the desired impression. If the user de-tags themselves from the photo, impression management is employed to maintain expressive control over any misrepresentations that may have been associated with the photo. Of course un-tagged photos still exist on Facebook, but these photos are no longer associated with a specific user’s online identity. It is, therefore, through personas and online self-presentation techniques such as impression management, expressive control, dramatic realization and idealization that Facebook users develop and maintain a desired impression. The second aspect of the online is that the offline has a direct link into the Facebook profile. The happenings in a user’s offline life are the basis for profile creation, friend interaction and overall Facebook engagement. In the context of this thesis, the online is simply another type of stage and form of

performance in the offline world. These online and offline stages make up the ‘identity cycle,’ where persona qualities are communicated through consistent performances to the various audiences present in the cycle. Breaking the cycle indicates a disruption in performance, but identity can continue once again as new persona qualities are performed as part of the evolution of the ‘self.’

Facebook is also a place where digital identities are stored and modified as part of a digital archive. Users access the site in various time contexts to interact with their network and contribute to these stored identities. These stored identities, however, can be edited at any time to reflect the most-current persona and identity impressions that a user bestows. These digital identities are archived in the online context, but stem from our offline connections and interactions. This digital archive is similar to that of a journal, in that photographs, messages and personal thoughts are captured in one central repository that can be returned to and reflected on. Because Facebook accounts cannot ever be completely deleted, only disabled, the storage of an identity is possible through the platform. The site is ever changing and users add content to the site frequently enough to be similar to nightly journal writing.

### **Implications for Future Research**

Future research efforts should focus on applying the methodology to the updated Facebook platform. The research for this thesis was completed in 2010 and since then Timeline functionality was introduced and the Facebook Graph feature is now the newest addition to the platform. The site is updated very frequently and this provides more data and context for further development of persona characteristics. There is also further opportunity to research a larger sample size to determine other typologies and their impacts on identity creation and

maintenance. Due to continuous platform updates, my developed framework can be applied to a variety of upgraded Facebook formats.

The online world is also changing to accommodate new types of social media into Facebook such as Instagram, Twitter and Pinterest. A study could be conducted to research the relationships between and impacts of these newer SNS posts in the Facebook realm. The offline world is shifting with the growth of technology and a study focused strictly on mobile and tablet use would also be beneficial in providing comparisons to the desktop experience that this thesis focused on.



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## APPENDIX A: Recruitment Poster



### Facebook Research Participants Needed!!

Are you between 18 and 24 and interested in how Facebook helps create identity? If so, you're invited to participate in a Calgary-based study exploring how Facebook influences face-to-face identity and interaction.

The study follows participants Facebook profiles, and discusses how online identity on Facebook is created, why it is important and how it plays a role in face-to-face interaction with others. It is being conducted for the purposes of my MA thesis in Communication. Participation in the study will involve you becoming my 'friend' on Facebook and allowing me to observe your Facebook usage for a period of two months to monitor your profile and how you engage with others. I will look at the information you post about yourself through text, image and video. I will observe your conversations with others and what kinds of conversations you have in public view.

Based on my observations of the profiles, in the second phase of the study, I will invite some participants to one-on-one interviews that will last approximately two hours. Snacks, refreshments and beverages will be provided. These interviews will explore questions about the place the Facebook profile has in your interactions with friends and how important you find it to be in your life. After the data collection for the study is over, you are not expected to keep me on your list of Facebook friends.

If you, or anyone you might know, are interested, please consider participating in the study. Facebook observation will occur from July to August and interviews will take place in September. Help me help you! You can credit this research on your CV or resume as well.

## FACULTY OF ARTS

## COMMUNICATION & CULTURE



*If you have questions or  
want to participate,  
please contact*

**Sabrina Krivan,**  
Masters in  
Communication &  
Culture Graduate  
Student

(xxx) xxx-xxxx

xxxx@email.com

This study has been  
approved by the  
Conjoint Faculties  
Research Ethics Board  
and has been assigned  
Ethics ID \_\_\_\_\_.

Sabrina Krivan, MA C&C, UofC <a href="mailto:xxxx@email.com">xxxx@email.com</a> (xxx) xxx-xxxx	Sabrina Krivan, MA C&C, UofC <a href="mailto:xxxx@email.com">xxxx@email.com</a> (xxx) xxx-xxxx	Sabrina Krivan, MA C&C, UofC <a href="mailto:xxxx@email.com">xxxx@email.com</a> (xxx) xxx-xxxx	Sabrina Krivan, MA C&C, UofC <a href="mailto:xxxx@email.com">xxxx@email.com</a> (xxx) xxx-xxxx	Sabrina Krivan, MA C&C, UofC <a href="mailto:xxxx@email.com">xxxx@email.com</a> (xxx) xxx-xxxx	Sabrina Krivan, MA C&C, UofC <a href="mailto:xxxx@email.com">xxxx@email.com</a> (xxx) xxx-xxxx	Sabrina Krivan, MA C&C, UofC <a href="mailto:xxxx@email.com">xxxx@email.com</a> (xxx) xxx-xxxx
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## Appendix B: Researcher Profile & Facebook Group Page

Facebook | UofC Facebook Research Group - Windows Internet Explorer

http://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100001073207440&ref=profile#/group.php?gid=116858775016527&ref=mf

UofC ethics board

UofC Facebook Research Group

Wall Info Discussions Photos Video Events

**Basic Info**

Name: UofC Facebook Research Group  
 Category: Student Groups - Academic Groups  
 Description: A study of how online identity plays a role in the overall functioning of our lives.  
 Privacy Type: Open: All content is public.

**Contact Info**

Email: sabrinakrivan@hotmail.com  
 Location: Calgary, AB

**Recent News**

News:

I am currently recruiting participants between 18 and 25, who attend the UofC, or any Canadian university, to be a part of my study. The study requires you to become my (Sabrina Krivan) friend on Facebook so I am able to observe your profile for about two months. I plan to make conclusions about identity and what that entails on Facebook. All information is confidential and the data will be utilized to write a Masters thesis in Communication.

I would like to interview a few participants after this two month period to discuss their Facebook experience and how it relates to communicating in face-to-face contexts.

If you are interested or know anyone else who might be, please join this group! Or pass the information along to other groups that might be interested. This study is beneficial for both parties - I will be able to write a thesis and you can utilize it on your CV or resume.

Thanks!!

Write something about UofC Facebook Research Group.

**Information**

Category: Student Groups - Academic Groups  
 Description: A study of how online identity plays a role in the overall functioning of our lives.

Done

Internet | Protected Mode: On

Facebook | Sabrina Krivan - Windows Internet Explorer

http://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=502090244#/profile.php?id=100001073207440&ref=profile

Facebook | Sabrina Krivan

Wall Info Photos +

**Tell us about yourself.** Begin editing your profile below.

**About Me**

Basic Info

Sex: Female  
 Looking For: Networking  
 Current City: Calgary, Alberta, Canada

Bio

Hello Everyone!!

This is my University of Calgary researcher profile. The purposes of this profile are only for that of my thesis data collection for a Masters degree in Communication. You can only be my friend if you are interested in participating in my Facebook research project.

If you are between 18 and 25 and attend a Canadian university, please consider participating. It would be preferable to be in the Calgary region, however, this is not necessary. All you need to do is become my friend and I will observe your profile for about two months. Afterwards, you are welcome to interview about your Facebook experience. However, no one is obligated to interview. All you need to do is allow me to view your activity on your profile to garner some sort of assumption about your identity. That is all!

What will come from this study? Well, I will attempt to gain some sort of understanding about the way online identity functions in relation to face-to-face interaction. I am interested in understanding the importance of online identity in our lives.

If you are interested, or know anyone else who might be, please message me for details. Thanks!!

Write something about yourself.

**Information**

Current City: Calgary, AB

**Friends**

0 friends

Find people you know

Create a Profile Badge

Chat (0)

Done

Internet | Protected Mode: On

## **Appendix C: Interview Questionnaire**

### **1) Facebook Usability**

- When did you join Facebook?
- Why did you join?
- How often are you on Facebook?
- How long do you spend on Facebook per session?
- What do you mainly use Facebook for?
- How active of a Facebook user do you think you are? Why?
- What do you see the purpose of Facebook as being?

### **2) Profile Organization**

- What features do you choose to show everyone?
- What features of Facebook do you find the most useful to you? Why?
- How did you decide on these features?
- Which features do you only show to select friends?
- How do you decide which friends see certain aspects of your profile?

### **3) Privacy**

- What features do you choose to show everyone?
- What are your current privacy settings? Why?
- Do you have privacy issues with Facebook? With certain friends?
- How do the privacy settings on Facebook play a role in how you choose and select friends?
- How do the privacy settings play a role in how you choose to portray yourself?
- On what occasions do you take away access?
- Why do you choose to use your real name? What about privacy? Would you use a fake name?
- How much did you filter when we became friends? What was I not allowed to see?
- Why do you allow me to see all the actions you take on Facebook?

### **4) Your Image on Facebook**

- How do you think others interpret/perceive your profile on Facebook?
- What kind of a person do you think you are portraying to others on Facebook?
- Do you feel your image on Facebook accurately reflects who you are offline?
- What elements of your Facebook profile most clearly define who you are as a person?



- Do you think you send multiple ‘images’ of who you are to people viewing your profile, or is only one aspect of your personality represented through this medium?
- Would you ever discuss negative experiences on Facebook?

#### **5) Your Everyday Life**

- Describe the way you conduct yourself online and in person? Is there a difference between the two? Why or why not?
- Does Facebook in any way enhance or frustrate your interaction with others offline?
- How does Facebook play a role in your everyday life?
- During your day, when do you make posts or communicate on Facebook?
- How do you combine Facebook with other communication platforms? (ie. face-to-face conversation, telephone conversation, etc.)

#### **6) On The Go (Mobile)**

- Do you have Facebook on your cell phone? Why/why not?
- Why do you use it?
- How do you use it?
- Are any features of Facebook not accessible through the mobile application?
- What features do you use the most on your mobile?
- Do you use Facebook Chat? Why or why not? What is the purpose of it?

#### **7) The Role of ‘Friends’**

- What is your criterion for adding someone as a ‘friend’ on Facebook?
- Who are your friends (co-workers, friends from high school and university, people you meet when you go out, family, etc.)?
- Who do you communicate with on a regular basis?
- What is the purpose of this communication?
- What do the people you are friends with say about you? The people that you are in pictures with, what do they represent about you?
- How do your ‘friends’ on Facebook influence you?
- Do you stay in touch with all your friends?

#### **8) Wall Posting Purpose**

- Do you have a wall posting feature? Why or why not?
- What do you use your wall postings for?
- How does the ‘wall’ feature enhance your Facebook experience?
- Do you expect, enjoy, control delete wall responses?

- Do you post status updates? Why or why not?
- What is the purpose of your status updates?

### **9) Photos and Impression Management**

- What do you try to project with your profile pictures?
- What do you try to portray with your photo albums?
- Do you provide information where an event took place and what it is? Do you give descriptions on photos, when they were taken, uploaded etc.? Why or why not? What purpose do you think it serves?
- In terms of the photos you post, what kind of impression do you think you give off to other who don't know you? What about those who do know you personally? Does it make a difference to you?
- Do you find yourself filtering what types of pictures you post? For example, never showing yourself in an 'ugly' situation, or being fearful a potential employer may see something inappropriate?
- Do photo albums reflect how 'active' a social life you have? Why or why not?
- Is there reasoning behind how many pictures you post in an album? (ie. Over 100)?
- How do you use photos to tell a story?

### **10) 'Information' Sharing**

- (This can encompass 'info' tab, links, videos, articles, notes, graffiti, games, etc.)
- What networks do you belong to? Why?
- How does being part of a network enhance your Facebook experience?
- What is the significance of the 'bio' section to you?

### **11) Tagging of Content**

- Do you tag photos or videos of yourself? Why or why not?
- Do you allow others to tag to you? Why or why not?

### **12) Commentary on Photos, Wall Posts or Videos**

- What role does outside and personal commentary play a role in your Facebook experience?
- What is your opinion on posting commentaries? Does it further conversation, stall it or make no difference?

## Appendix D: Ethics Application

**Be sure to consult the “Instructions to Applicants” when completing this form**

**Copies: Faculty (and students from those Faculties/Departments which do not have their own Ethics Committees\*):** Submit 1 original and 1 photocopy including all supporting documentation to Research Services, ERRB Building, Research Park

**Copies: Students – Variable\*:** Submit the original and the number of copies required by your Faculty/Department Ethics Committee

**\* See Ethics website for list of Committee Chairs and specific locations for submission of applications**

CFREB Ethics Certification extends only to those individuals who have a current University of Calgary affiliation (student, faculty, staff). For the purposes of this application, “applicant and co-applicant” refer to those individuals who are applying for ethical clearance from the University of Calgary. This may be different from the person who is listed as the Principal Investigator /Co-investigator on the project.

<b>1.1 Applicant:</b>	
Family Name <b>KRIVAN</b>	Given Name and Initial <b>SABRINA XENIA</b>
Department/Faculty <b>COMMUNICATION &amp; CULTURE</b>	
Mailing Address (complete only if different from Department/Faculty)	E-mail Address
	Telephone (local)

Title/Position (Check One)  <input type="checkbox"/> Full-time Faculty Member  <input type="checkbox"/> Adjunct Faculty Member  <input type="checkbox"/> Postdoctoral Fellow  <input type="checkbox"/> Sessional Instructor  <input type="checkbox"/> Professor Emeritus  <input type="checkbox"/> Staff Member  <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Graduate Student: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Master's <input type="checkbox"/> Ph. D <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify):  <input type="checkbox"/> Undergraduate Student  <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify):	
<b>1.2 Supervisor, if applicable:</b>	
Family Name <b>BAKARDJIEVA</b>	Given Name and Initial <b>MARIA</b>
Department/Faculty <b>COMMUNICATION &amp; CULTURE</b>	
Mailing Address (complete only if different from Department/Faculty)	E-mail Address  Telephone (local)
Title/Position (Check One)  <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Full-time Faculty Member  <input type="checkbox"/> Adjunct Faculty Member  <input type="checkbox"/> Sessional Instructor  <input type="checkbox"/> Professor Emeritus  <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify):	
<b>1.3 Co-Applicant, if applicable:</b>	
Family Name	Given Name and Initial
Department/Faculty	

Mailing Address (complete only if different from Department/Faculty)	E-mail Address
	Telephone (local)
<p>Title/Position (Check One)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Full-time Faculty Member</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Adjunct Faculty Member</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Postdoctoral Fellow</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Staff Member</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Sessional Instructor</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Professor Emeritus</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Graduate Student:    <input type="checkbox"/> Master's   <input type="checkbox"/> Ph. D   <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify):</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Undergraduate Student</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify):</p>	
<p><b>1.4 Additional Research Team Members: Provide as an attachment.</b></p> <p>If other person or persons is/are involved in the project, but not affiliated with the University of Calgary, please provide his or her name, organization/employer, affiliation and other details to identify them.</p>	

<b>2. Project Details:</b>
<b>2.1 Exact Title of the Project</b>
<b>FACEBOOK IDENTITY FORMATION: OBSERVING THE DRAMATURGICAL</b>
<p><b>2.2</b> Is this an amendment/modification to a previously approved protocol?   <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No   <input type="checkbox"/> Yes (Note: see Information to Help Applicants for more details. Separate procedures apply when modifications do not involve significant changes to the original protocol. Please contact the CFREB office [220-3782] if you are unsure whether the changes to an existing protocol constitute a modification/amendment, or are significant enough to warrant a new application.)</p>

<p><b>2.3</b> Status of funding/support for the project - please choose one:</p> <p>[ <b>X</b> ] Unfunded project    [ ] Funding pending    [ ] Funding received</p> <p>Sponsor(s)/funding agency(s): [ ] SSHRC    [ ] NSERC    [ ] CIHR    Other (please specify):</p>  <p>Name of investigator(s) applying for or receiving funding:</p>	
<p><b>2.4</b> Anticipated start date of work involving human participants (mm/yy)</p> <p><b>07/10</b></p>	<p>Anticipated completion date of research activity; for graduate thesis or dissertation, please list anticipated date of defense (mm/yy)</p>
<p><b>2.5</b> List the location(s) where the data will be collected</p> <p><b>UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY</b></p>	
<p><b>2.6</b> Are other approvals/permissions required where this research will occur? [ <b>X</b> ] No [ ] Yes</p> <p>If yes, provide a copy of the approval: [ ] Attached [ ] To follow (Specify where from):</p>	

**2.7** Provide a succinct summary of the purpose, objectives, and aims of the research. Describe your methodology, and what will be required of the human participants. Please use language that can be understood by a non-specialist. Up to 1 additional page may be added, if required. (Note: Project descriptions exceeding the two-page limit will not be considered.) **REMINDER:** Be sure to include a copy of any questionnaire(s) or test instrument(s).

This study aims to discuss how Facebook identities play a role in the face-to-face interaction that we experience in everyday life. Online identity is an important component of who we are and the goal is to explain how this type of identity occurs and how it plays a role in the evolution of the self. How we choose to portray ourselves online can vary depending on what type of impression we seek to bestow onto others (Goffman, 1959). How we manage this impression not only affects those around us, but it affects the way that we view ourselves (Goffman, 1959). The aim of the study is to understand how Facebook users construct their online identities through their profiles and how these profiles interact with their sense of self.

The main research question that I am interested in exploring is: How do Facebook identities function in relation to face-to-face identities in the social world? This question is of interest because every form of identity that we express, either online or face-to-face, varies in terms of the situation and the people we are surrounded by (Blumer, 1969). I am interested to see how Facebook users' identities vary from what they present in daily interaction. Although the online sphere is a place for users to create images that are appealing to either themselves or to their friends, there is still an element of a user's social identity in their profile (Robinson, 2007). It is not that Facebook is a place to become a completely different person; it is rather a space in which the portrayal of identity is mainly constructed by the user. The user is in more control of their online identity than in a face-to-face context.

**I am proposing that Facebook has become yet another stage where identities are dramaturgically performed through new forms of “presentation of self” (Goffman, 1959) and interaction rituals.** My study endeavours to understand the ways in which the identities created in Facebook contribute to users' evolving sense of self. This approach works the best for this study as online identities will be difficult to contextualize without the element of daily interaction. Identity is a constant performance dependent on context, time and place (Goffman, 1959).

Four sub-questions will be utilized to further the development of the research plan and understanding of data: what is the significance of Facebook images remaining the same or changing? What tools are utilized in creating change or maintaining stagnancy? What is the importance of identity creation or maintenance in the Facebook world? How does face-to-face interaction play a role in the way online identity is portrayed? These research questions will be useful in thinking about the project as a whole, and will aid in the development of questions and 'identity categories' (Heritage, 1987) when observing and interviewing subjects.

### 3. Recruitment of Participants

**3.1** Describe the “types” of participants (e.g. city planners, environmental specialists, minor age children, University students) to be involved in the research. Be very specific about your method(s) for recruiting them, and comment on who will do the recruiting. Describe how and where you will advertise your project. **Include a copy of your recruitment notice, advertisement, information sheet, as well as that used by a sponsor or supportive organization, if applicable.** If actively seeking participation by speaking to specific groups, include the text used for verbal presentations. If remuneration/compensation is offered, provide details, including amount and confirm the budget provisions to meet these obligations. Describe any provisions that have been made to accommodate the participants’ language.

Participants will be university students between the ages of 18 to 24. I hope to recruit mainly Calgary based students, as that will make interviewing easier. However, participants can attend any Canadian university. My main methods of recruitment will be through Facebook, university postings and classroom announcements with faculty permission.

I will create a Facebook researcher profile, separate from my personal profile, and a Facebook research group specifically designed for the study. I will use the group as a platform to reach UofC students and will advertise it on related group pages. I hope to spread the message by contacting my own ‘friends’ and asking if they know people who would be willing to participate in this study. I will direct them to the group page and my researcher profile for further details. Please find a copy of the researcher profile and group page that has been created, but not officially launched, attached.

I will also post posters around the university, with appropriate approval, that explains what the study is, how participants can get involved and contact information. Please find a prototype poster attached.

Lastly, I will contact instructors teaching undergraduate spring and summer courses about my study. I will explain what the study entails and ask if I may have two minutes of class time to talk to the students directly. Please find what the verbal speech will entail attached.



#### 4. Informed Consent

**4.1** Described the informed consent process. **Provide a copy of your consent form.** If there is no written consent form, please provide an explanation for this and details about your alternative procedures. If obtaining verbal consent, a script containing the same points normally covered by written consent is required. Are participants minors or, for other reasons, not able to provide fully informed consent? Explain and justify, and describe alternative procedures (e.g. parental consent).

For those participants in the Calgary area, I will email them a copy of the consent form and ask that they drop it off in my mailbox on the UofC campus at their convenience. For those participants who do not live in Calgary, I will email them a copy of the consent form, but will need to obtain written consent through email. The reason for this is that I would like to have a written copy for my own records.

For those participants who will only participate in the observation portion of the study, I will require email consent. Only those participants from Calgary will be interviewed, and they will require a signed consent form. There are two separate consent procedures for those participants for observation only and observation plus the interview.

Please find the consent form attached, as well as the written consent script.

**4.2** When and how will people be informed of the right to withdraw from the study? What procedures will be followed for people who wish to withdraw at any point during the study? What happens to the information contributed to this point? Please note that the CFREB does not require that researchers withdraw/destroy partial data in cases of participant withdrawal, provided that it is made clear on the informed consent form that data collected to the point of withdrawal will be retained/used.

These questions will all be addressed on the consent form. When participants are first recruited, they will be made aware of their right to withdraw from the study at any point verbally, as well as in the written consent form. For those participants who do wish to withdraw, they can do so without any repercussion. It will be expressed on the consent form that if a participant wants to withdraw they can do so as long they inform the researcher. The data that I will have collected up to this point will not be destroyed, but will contribute to the overall data collected about online Facebook identity.

The 10 people selected for interview will be based on desire, as well as the amount of Facebook activity they partake in. I would like to gain a good mixture of those who fully engage with Facebook, those that do not, and those that fall somewhere in between. I am happy to interview more than 10 people, so I will not turn away those participants who want to be a part of the second phase of research.

4.3 Do you plan follow-up procedures with participants? [ ☐ ] No [ ☒ ] Yes, if yes, what are they?  
Does your research design require formal debriefing? [ ☒ ] No [ ☐ ] Yes, if yes, please provide details about the procedures you will use.

The research does not require formal debriefing, but I will send a message through the Facebook group thanking the participants for their time and for being a part of my study. This will let them know that I am no longer observing their Facebook profiles and that data collection has come to an end.

## 5. Privacy: Confidentiality and Anonymity:

5.1 Check all that apply: **Participant contributions will be:** [ ☐ ] public and cited; [ ☒ ] anonymous; [ ☒ ] confidential. Explain the steps you propose to respect an individual's privacy. Describe these precautions in terms of access to raw data, as well as in terms of the write-up of the results. For example, will data be reported in aggregate? Will participants select a pseudonym? Will participants be asked to review their contribution before inclusion? (Please note that the CFREB does not require that participants be given the option of reviewing their data, provided they are aware that this opportunity will not be offered to them. Should you wish to provide participants with a chance to review material attributed to them, it is recommended that you set a specific time limit [e.g. within two weeks of receiving the material] by which participants must contact you with any suggested changes to material attributed to them, with a lack of response within that time indicating that the participant approves of the material as is, in order to avoid delays to your research. This timeline should be made clear in the consent protocol.) Who gets the data and in what form?

The data will be anonymous and confidential, however, I will likely need to discuss specific profiles in the thesis. These specific profiles will not be identifiable to anyone outside of the study. Real names will not be utilized, as each participant will be free to choose a pseudonym. Although participants may be aware of who might be a part of the study through the Facebook group, they will ultimately not be aware of who is officially part of it. Only those who are officially participating will be my 'friend' and I will only make my 'friends' list available to myself.

The participants will not have access to the data. I will collect field notes and filter the data to create identity categories for discussion in the interview. The data collected from the observation and interview phases will then be analyzed and discussed for the respective chapter of my thesis. The raw data will not be seen by anyone other than the researcher and the supervisor.

**5.2** Provide specific details about the security procedures for the data as well as plans for the ultimate disposal of records/data. Who will have access to confidential data now or in the future? Specify the length of time the data will be retained and the plans for disposal of records/data. (Note: The CFREB does not have specific data retention or destruction requirements. Researchers are free to retain data for long periods of time, or archive data indefinitely, provided this is made clear to participants in the informed consent protocol, and continued/future use of the data is consistent with what is described by the researcher[s] within this application.)

I plan to archive the data indefinitely on my personal computer. I am the only one with access to it through a protected password and security system. I want to keep the raw data and the results that I will have inferred indefinitely because of my interest in the topic and the possibility that I may return to it in future studies. I hope to complete a PhD in Communications and keeping the data would allow me to further my initial study.

<b>6. Estimation of Risks:</b> Will this study involve the following? Please check Y  <b>When responding, see also Section 3– Information to Help Applicants</b>	None	Minimal Risk	More than Minimal risk
<b>6.1</b> Psychological or emotional manipulations – might a participant feel demeaned, embarrassed, worried or upset? Could subjects feel fatigued or stressed?	<b>X</b>		

<b>6.2</b> Are there questions that may be upsetting to the respondent?	<b>X</b>		
<b>6.3</b> Does your study have the potential for identifying distressed individuals?	<b>X</b>		
<b>6.4</b> Is there any physical risk or physiological manipulation?	<b>X</b>		
<b>6.5</b> Is any deception involved? Withholding of information from, or misinforming, participants?	<b>X</b>		
<b>6.6</b> Is there any social risk - possible loss of status, privacy and/or reputation?	<b>X</b>		
<b>6.7</b> Do you see any chance that subjects might be harmed in any way?	<b>X</b>		
<b>6.8</b> Is there any potential for the perception of coercion? That is, might prospective participants feel pressured to participate in the research (due to, for instance, actual or perceived power relationships between those involved in recruiting and those being recruited, e.g. manager/employee or teacher/student)?	<b>X</b>		
<b>6.9</b> Are the risks similar to those encountered by the subjects in everyday life?	[ <b>X</b> ] Yes [   ] No if “no” , elaborate		

- If you answered, more than minimal risk to any of the above, describe the manipulations and/or potential risks as well as the safeguards or procedures you have in place. Please provide justification for any risks involved and explain why alternative approaches involving less risk cannot be used. Use additional pages, as required.
- If your study has the potential to upset or distress individuals, arrangements must be made to mitigate such effects. Describe the arrangements you have made. Have participants been informed of any costs to be incurred by them for services? **See “Provision for Rescue – Guidelines for Applicants”**
- If your study has the potential to identify upset or distressed individuals, you must describe the arrangements you have made (if any) to assist these individuals. If you do not make any arrangements, please explain why. Have participants been informed of any costs to be incurred by them for services?
- If, prior to the start of the research session, participants will not be fully informed of everything that will be required of them or deliberately misinformed about some aspect of the study, explain why. Please describe the procedures in detail and justify why deception is necessary to conduct the research.
- If the potential for any perception of coercion exists, please explain what measures have been put in place to minimize the possibility that individuals will feel pressured to participate.

## 7. Benefits

What are the likely benefits of the research to the researcher, the participants, the research community and society, at large, that would justify asking people to participate?

Although many Facebook articles and theses have been published as of late, they tend to focus on Facebook as a social and political tool, either for employers to keep tabs on potential and current employees or how politicians can utilize the network as a major tool for their campaigns (Pasek, More & Romer, 2009). There are many interesting articles that speak about the benefits of Facebook and how, for example, it provides users with a sense of high social capital (Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe, 2007), however, I have yet to come across anything that really delves into how identity is communicated online through the combination of the methodology that I have chosen. Although studies about cyber identities exist (Robinson, 2007), the approach I am using to analyze Facebook identities is unique. The theories and methods that are being utilized in my study are distinct and will develop interesting conclusions that will be able to add to the current body of research.

The importance of online identity is huge because of the amount of time that we spend on the internet. Social networking is a large part of what we search and participate in when online (Robinson, 2007), and therefore it shapes what we see, read and choose to share in our daily interactions. We cannot ignore the time that we spend online, as this becomes a part of who we are (Robinson, 2007). We have the ability to express ourselves in similar or different ways from what we convey in face-to-face situations when on Facebook. The online world becomes unique due to its ability to shape identity in limitless ways. I hope my research will explain how this occurs and why this becomes significant in a world increasingly influenced by social networks.

## 8. Signatures

I/We, the undersigned, certify that (a) the information contained in this application is accurate; (b) conduct of the proposed research will not commence until ethical certification has been granted; (c) the Board will be advised of any revisions to the protocol arising before or after ethical certification is granted; (d) an annual renewal report will be filed 12 months from the date that ethics approval is issued, and a final report will be filed immediately upon completion of research activity. Failure to submit renewal or final reports in a timely manner will be considered a breach of University and Tri-Council policy, and may result in the suspension of research funding and/or the research being rendered academically invalid; students who fail to submit reports may be barred from graduating. Conduct of research using human subjects that has not received ethics certification is a breach of University policy on integrity in scholarly activity.

Applicant's signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Co-applicant's signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Supervisor's Signature:** I have been involved in the preparation of this application, and agree with the information it contains.

Supervisor's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

<b>PROTOCOL CHECKLIST – required</b>	N/A	Attached
Copy of the verbal or written explanation that will be provided to participants before they are asked for consent to participate		X
Copy of the informed consent(s) that will be distributed to each participant.		X
If written consent is not used, a detailed explanation of alternative procedures is <u>required</u> in Section 4 of this application, along with one or more of the	X	

<u>following:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If verbal consent is to be obtained, (e.g. telephone surveys), a script containing the equivalent points covered by written consent is required.</li> <li>• Totally anonymous online or mail out questionnaires: Signed consent is not necessary.</li> </ul> A covering letter, containing the equivalent points covered by written consent, is required.		
Copies of questionnaire(s), sample questions or thematic overview, interview guide		X
Recruitment: Your recruitment notice, advertisement, and/or information sheet <u>as well as</u> that used by a sponsor or supportive organization, as may be applicable		X
Documents or information specific to or requested by the potential sponsor.	X	
Completed and signed application for review with the required number of copies.		X

Revised: 03/07

Note: The information contained in this application is collected under the authority of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (FOIP) Act. It will be used to evaluate your application for ethics certification. Anonymized data will also be used to fulfill reporting obligations.

If you have any questions about the collection or use of this information, please contact the Ethics Resource Officer (Research Services, ERRB Building, Research Park) at (403)220-3782.



## Appendix E: Consent Form

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### **Name of Researcher, Faculty, Department, Telephone & Email:**

Sabrina Krivan, Communication & Culture

### ***Supervisor:***

Dr. Maria Bakardjieva

### **Title of Project:**

Facebook Identity Formation: Observing the Dramaturgical Evolution Of 'Self'

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This consent form, a copy of which has been given to you, is only part of the process of informed consent. If you want more details about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

The University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board has approved this research study.

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### **Purpose of the Study:**

This study aims to discuss how Facebook identities play a role in the face-to-face interaction that we experience in everyday life. Online identity is an important component of who we are and the goal is to explain how this type of identity occurs and how it plays a role in the evolution of the self. How we choose to portray ourselves online can vary depending on what type of impression we seek to bestow onto others. How we manage this impression not only affects those around us, but it affects the way that we view ourselves. The aim of the study is to explain how Facebook identities are portrayed and what this portrayal says about who we are.

In order to effectively develop answers to these questions, the study will recruit 30 participants who will be asked to allow the researcher to observe and analyze their Facebook pages for about two months. In the second stage, some of these participants will be interviewed with the purpose of understanding their perspective on the role Facebook plays in their interactions and sense of self. Interviewees will be selected based on the conducted observations and the developing analytical categories.

### **What Will I Be Asked To Do?**

Once all participants are recruited, I will observe your Facebook profiles for a period of two months to monitor and gauge how identities are formed through your engagement with your own profiles and how you engage with others. I will look at the information you post about yourself through text, image and video. I will observe your conversations with others and what kinds of conversations you have in public view, your posted pictures and videos, your updates and status postings, and so forth. During these two months I will focus on monitoring and recording the data, and from this data I will develop categories for discussion in the second phase of research. Participants will need to become my 'friend' on Facebook and join the Facebook group,

however, after this time period you are not expected to be involved with the research. Participants will also be expected to post the following statement on their Facebook page:

*“A researcher, who is conducting a study regarding communications on Facebook, is currently enjoying access to this site; visitors to my Facebook page are not considered study participants and none of their information will be recorded or retained for the purposes of this research.”*

The second stage of the data collection process will involve interviewing. After the two months of observation are up, I will interview at least 10 students, in person and one-on-one, for about two hours each. I will conduct interviews on the University of Calgary campus, in an available space where I will be able to audio record each interview with your permission. The purpose of the interviews is to discuss the observed Facebook identities in a face-to-face context. Interviews will be scheduled according to your availability and schedule, and refreshments, such as food and drinks, will be provided. I will continue the observation of the Facebook profiles of the participants I interview for one additional month. After the data collection is over, participants will not need to keep the researcher as their Facebook friend any longer.

Participation is completely voluntary, and you may refuse to participate in any aspect of the research process. You may withdraw at any time from the study without penalty, but I do ask that you inform me if you wish to withdraw. All data collected to that point will still be retained for the purposes of the study, but will be completely confidential.

### **What Type of Personal Information Will Be Collected?**

Should you agree to participate, you will be asked to provide your gender, age and academic major. No other personal identifying information will be collected, and all participants shall remain anonymous. Your contributions will be cited under pseudonyms. Participants will be given the chance to select their own pseudonyms, if they so desire. No images or videos will be included in the reporting of data.

Data collected on Facebook is stored and routed via American-based servers and is therefore subject to United States legislation, including the USA Patriot Act.

There are several options for you to consider if you decide to take part in this research. You can choose all, some or none of them. Please put a check mark on the corresponding line(s) that grants me your permission to:

*I grant permission to be audio taped:* Yes: \_\_\_\_ No: \_\_\_\_

*The pseudonym I choose for myself is:*

\_\_\_\_ Yes: \_\_\_\_ No: \_\_\_\_

*You may quote me and use my name:*

### **Are there Risks or Benefits if I Participate?**

By participating in this research, you are at very low risk for any harm or inconvenience. The information collected will be strictly confidential and available only to the researcher and her

supervisor. Citations and references to the data will be made using pseudonyms. There is no mental or physical risk or cost to the participant. Note, however, that by joining the researcher's Facebook group, the fact that you may participate in the study will be known to the other participants. In order to provide privacy, I will make the 'friends' list on my researcher profile available to only myself.

### **What Happens to the Information I Provide?**

The data will be anonymous and confidential; however, I will likely need to discuss specific profiles in the thesis. These specific profiles will not be identifiable to anyone outside of the study. Real names will not be utilized.

Only the researcher and her supervisor will have access to the data. I will collect field notes and filter the data to create identity categories for discussion in the interviews. The data collected from the observation and interview phases will then be utilized for writing the respective chapter of my thesis.

Participation is completely voluntary, anonymous and confidential. You are free to discontinue participation at any time during the study. The data collected to that point will still be used, but will not be identifiable to any specific person. No one except the researcher and her supervisor will be allowed to see or hear any of the answers to the questions or the interview tape. The data will be kept in a locked cabinet only accessible by the researcher. The anonymous data will be stored indefinitely and may be used in future studies with similar topics and goals at later stages of the researcher's academic career.

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### ***Signatures (written consent)***

Your signature on this form indicates that you 1) understand to your satisfaction the information provided to you about your participation in this research project, and 2) agree to participate as a research subject.

In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the investigators, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from this research project at any time. You should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

Participant's Name: (please print) \_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher's Name: (please print) \_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Questions/Concerns**

If you have any further questions or want clarification regarding this research and/or your participation, please contact:

Ms. Sabrina Krivan  
Faculty of Arts – Communication & Culture  
And Dr. Maria Bakardjieva, Communication & Culture

If you have any concerns about the way you've been treated as a participant, please contact the Senior Ethics Resource Officer, Research Services Office, University of Calgary at (403) 220-3782; email [rburrows@ucalgary.ca](mailto:rburrows@ucalgary.ca).

A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference. The investigator has kept a copy of the consent form.