A Case Study of Adolescent Girls' use of Social Media and its Influence on Identity and Belonging.

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Acknowledgements

This thesis is dedicated to the girls who volunteered to tell me their stories. Negotiating a life on and offline represents a major challenge for many adolescents and it is only by listening to them that educators, policy makers and parents can provide the kind of support they need, as and when they need it.

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Abstract

Adolescents are using social media at a rapidly growing pace, with some twelve to fifteen years olds spending in excess of twenty hours a week chatting, socialising, sharing information and just hanging out with friends (Children's Commissioner for England Growing Up Digital Taskforce Report January 2017). This study investigates the influence of social media on the lived experiences of a group of thirteen girls who were fifteen years old at the time of the research. The purpose of the study was to examine their use of social media and what that might reveal about its influence on their identity and sense of belonging in social groups. A single case study design was used to investigate the research questions which asked what social media mid-adolescent girls were using, how were they using the technology and how it influenced identity and belonging. The study was grounded in a socio-cultural understanding of identity as a social construct. Mixed methods of data collection enabled respondents to tell of their social media experiences through semi-structured interviews, a questionnaire and a diary recording social media use. Using a thematic coding method of analysis the data showed that the respondents had experience of using a wide range of social media but their engagement at the time of the study was focused on two social network sites, Facebook and Twitter. The data showed the respondents used social media as a tool to manage the way they presented themselves and to reinforce shared understandings of social group norms. Some respondents experienced the negative effects of peer pressure and parental expectations.

Key findings suggest that some mid-adolescent girls are not being equipped with adequate skills to negotiate their lives online. Therefore, interventions are needed to give them resilience, knowledge and power to engage with their choice of social media as creative citizens, not just addicted users of technology.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction to the thesis

Adolescence is defined as

> *"the period in human growth and development that occurs between puberty and adulthood."*

> (Collins English Dictionary, 2014 page 24).

It is a period of significant change characterised by rapid physical growth and shifts in cognitive and emotional capacities as individuals strive to achieve autonomy. At the same time, the progression from childhood into young adulthood brings new opportunities and expectations. Traditionally, notions of adolescence were defined by biology and culture and understood in a social-historical context. Early research on adolescence followed separate disciplines as biologists described physical changes, psychologists studied cognitive development, sociologists examined how social arenas influenced adolescence and educationists studied motivation. The findings provided a detailed account of development and a common assumption held that adolescence was a time of 'storm and stress' characterized by anti-social attitudes and recklessness (Steinberg and Morris 2001). It is important to understand the process of identity development because it contextualizes the values, norms and patterns that moderate an individuals' behaviour and how they are perceived by others. Knowledge of adolescence and identity development is fundamental to anyone working in a professional capacity to ensure a young person maximises their potential.

In 1959, Erikson presented an influential eight-stage theory of psychosocial development that examined the impact of parents, society and environments on personality development from infancy to adulthood (Gross 1997). The fifth stage of Erikson's theory argued that adolescent development was dominated by the individuals' struggle to establish a sense of who they are and who others perceive them to be and had a significant impact on the understanding of adolescent social and emotional development at that time (Gross 1997). Ten years later, and drawing on Erikson's approach, Marcia described adolescence as a period of *'identity crisis'* when an individual makes choices about who they want to be (Gross 1997). To illustrate his point, Marcia proposed four identity states of identity foreclosure, identity moratorium, identity diffusion and identity achieved (Gross 1997). From this perspective, adolescence was seen as a period of transition that involved exploration and experimentation to develop a

concept of self and position within a social group.

However, a major criticism of these theories is that they assume progress is linear and failure to successfully navigate each stage results in anti-social behaviour. Furthermore, the theories are deterministic in the way they assume adolescence is a universal experience, sequential and based on shared norms that promote specific patterns of collective behaviour. Consequently, some researchers have challenged those assumptions because for many adolescents, the transition from childhood to adulthood is relatively smooth and trouble free (Sarigianides, Lewis and Petrone 2015, Brown 2004 and Arnett 1999). In the time that has elapsed since Erikson published his theory, empirical research has raised awareness of how different areas of life interact and affect one another, definitions of the timing and meaning of adolescence have changed and the expectations of young people have shifted (Lerner and Steinberg 2004). However, it can still be a difficult time for some adolescents, as they are positioned between childhood and adulthood, dependence and independence, while trying to establish an identity that is not solely defined by family ties, but is increasingly mediated by digital technologies (boyd 2014).

While no two individuals develop in the same way, for many the age of fourteen years is the period when the 'self' becomes more differentiated and there is potential for inner conflict about who that person is (Smetana, Campione-Barr and Metzger 2006). Researchers have sub-divided the period for adolescence as early adolescence, describing those aged ten to thirteen years, middle adolescence, covering fourteen to seventeen year olds and late adolescence, covering those aged from eighteen to twenty-five years (Harter 2012 and Smetana, Campione-Barr and Metzger 2006). These categories are useful to researchers, educationalists, providers of health and social care and other interested groups, for several reasons. Firstly, the categories acknowledge that the biological, psychological, cultural and social changes that an individual experiences vary in relation to age. Therefore the categories provide a universal structure that allows interested groups to formulate policy, develop research programmes and provide support that is targeted to the physical, intellectual, emotional and social needs and abilities of individuals. Secondly, the categories provide a frame of reference against which new research can be compared and new knowledge used to make informed changes. Thirdly, for professionals working in education or health and social care settings, the categories provide the basis for specialist training so that services can be specifically targeted to provide maximum benefit for adolescents. The psychosocial perspective of the categories offers a holistic definition of each stage of adolescence that is particularly useful to professionals who are working to improve both the cognitive and social

strands of development. Finally, the categories are a useful tool for planning research projects, curricula and learning support and provided the appropriate definition for this research, which is middle adolescence. The middle adolescent age range was selected for this research because individuals frequently experience difficulties related to relationships, self-esteem and more recently, social media experiences.

Tajfel and Turner (1979) argued that to construct an identity, adolescents must not only establish a sense of their inner self, they must also establish a social and cultural definition of self. This happens through the decision-making processes involved in deciding which groups to identify with, as groups provide an important source of pride and self-esteem and members are motivated to have positive feelings towards their group. This is often done in complex social contexts, such as schools, families and more recently, social media environments (Tajfel and Turner (1979) . More recently, research has shown that social media offers adolescents opportunities to become members of multiple communities with a distinct set of relationships, social behaviours and norms (Abiala and Hernwall 2013). It could be argued that the way adolescents communicate and share information within their social groups is changing and social media is an integral part of their lives.

Social media refers to the sites and services that emerged during the early part of the twenty first century, including social network sites, video sharing sites, blogging, email and instant messaging. The mainstreaming of Internet access and the popularity of social network sites (SNS) such as Facebook, MySpace and Twitter meant being online had become an integral part of daily life for many people and especially for adolescents. While the core adolescent activities of chatting and socializing, engaging in self-expression, maintaining privacy, sharing ideas and opinions in groups are still at the centre of contemporary adolescent culture, social media has changed the landscape in terms of how and where they happen (boyd 2014). This thesis presents a case study that explores the use of social media by adolescent girls aged fourteen to sixteen years and its influence on their identity and sense of belonging in groups. The following sections of this introductory chapter explain the rationale and context for the study and concludes with an overview of the thesis chapters.

1.2 The rationale for the study

It has always been my belief that education has a crucial role to play in preparing young people for life after school. However, it is not just about students gaining qualifications in preparation for employment, it is also about helping them to develop the skills they need to

take them into the next stage of their lives and beyond. This implies that teachers need to understand the nuances and realities of adolescents' lives, and be able to provide support as and when they need it. Teaching today is often overshadowed by a political agenda that measures learning by results, rather than one that celebrates the process of learning. When national policies focus on the end result of the education process, it is very difficult to accommodate individual student needs and respond to cultural change. The current institutionalised view of how education should happen holds that teachers are people with the special skills and resources that are needed to make learning happen. The effect of this view places just one kind of learning at the foreground and means that learning which cannot be 'taught and measured' is not addressed. As a teacher of a subject I found it very difficult to adapt to this narrow view of what learning is and how it should be guided. For example, in the case study school, a three-stage lesson plan was imposed by the schools' leadership team as the key to successful learning and being graded as an outstanding teacher. Lessons had to begin with an identified 'starter activity' that would ensure the students focused on achieving the objectives of the lesson so they could end by contributing to a plenary session. They had to be delivered to a class who were arranged in the same school wide seating pattern that positioned students according to their level of progress. High achieving pupils, middle achieving pupils and low achieving pupils had to be identified by a coloured dot on the register. Many of the problems that some students had to negotiate as they struggled to come to terms with their identity as individuals and within the wider social context that included their friends and family were being ignored. Furthermore, it seemed that the ethos of the school was being directed solely towards academic achievement at a time when the cultural impact of social media on adolescents was gaining momentum.

Against this backdrop, the motivation for this research came from concerns for the well-being of some of those students as they negotiated the challenges of adolescence in a social environment. Despite a lack of personal interest in engaging socially with new technologies, their rapid rise in popularity among adolescents led me to believe they had an inherent understanding of how it all worked. It seemed reasonable to assume that they understood the technology they had grown up with because they appeared to be skilled and comfortable with its use. However, over time it became apparent that this was not always the case and some students had very negative experiences that they struggled to cope with. Typically, girls were affected by feedback on social media posts, by their perceived level of popularity within a group, or by the effects of the communications that were not conducted face to face. These experiences frequently resulted in arguments between individuals and friendship groups.

Some disagreements were long-running and overlapped both their home and school lives. It was particularly noticeable that friendship groups were being affected by the affordances of social media, and that some individuals found it difficult to understand the consequences and implications of their actions and those of others. The causes of arguments and broken friendships were the same as they had always been, but through the affordances of social media, communications were around long after those of a verbal argument had been forgotten and could be seen by a much greater audience than a traditional playground upset. It was noticeable how over time, social media permeated the classroom in both positive and negative ways. For example, YouTube could be a positive learning resource when managed successfully, and students were also keen to engage with it. In contrast, the social activities associated with Facebook, such as feedback comments and ratings on friend's lists could be very negative. Some girls found it difficult to separate their attention from their online activities and focus their attention on formal learning. This often impacted on the classroom environment, their learning and the progress of their peers. It was also apparent that social media impacted on how some girls perceived themselves as members of social groups and pursuing those activities was deemed by peers to be more important than academic work, and by some adults as risky behavior.

It was apparent from incidents reported by the pastoral staff that social media was a key factor in many of the problems of the mid-adolescent age group, which prompted the leadership team to ban the use of mobile phones in the classroom. However, their use at break-times was not so closely monitored, providing opportunities for communication between individuals and social groups and the problems continued. Although the school has guidelines for the use of digital technologies by staff and protocols on e-safety to protect students and staff, there is not a policy for developing digital literacy. By following the current trend in education to focus on examination results and league table positions, the school was missing an important opportunity to help the students to broaden their perceptions of how technology could be used support academic achievement as well as social status and in ways that would not compromise their future aspirations. Consequently, I felt a sense of responsibility to explore how adolescents understood their place in their social world because it was apparent from my work as a mentor that social media was a key factor in many of the problems of the mid-adolescent age group.

This area of research is important because adolescents are among the most prolific users of social media and it is changing the way they communicate with their peers, raising questions about its effect on their development (Smetana, Campione-Barrand Metzger 2006). As in

previous generations, adolescents are still driven by a need to find their place in society, but through social media they are doing so in a very public way. An important challenge for educators, policy makers, parents and carers is to understand how we can enhance the opportunities of online communication for adolescents and empower them to manage the risks associated with social media engagement. To ensure they complete that task successfully, it is important that educators, policy makers, parents and carers are aware of how identity and belonging can be explained in a digital age.

1.3 The context of the study

During the early nineteen nineties the growth of Internet distribution and access to online services led to a rapid rise in the use of social media. For example, the number of Internet users in late 1995 was no more than sixteen million but by 2012 that figure had risen to 2.3 billion Internet users worldwide (Internetworldstats 2012). In a relatively short time, social media has become an integral part of the lives of young people, most of them having grown up with computers, the Internet and no conception of life without mobile phones and text messaging (boyd 2014). The proliferation of social media over the last decade has been tracked by researchers interested in the social and cultural implications, by educationalists interested in the impact on learning and by marketing agencies interested in securing a share of the market. However, following trends in the use of social media has been difficult because individuals change allegiance depending on what is popular within their social groups and new products frequently appear on the market. As a result, social media statistics also change frequently and they differ in relation to the source of information. Sources often focus on adult use but where there are clearly defined age-groups, the data indicates there is a universal pattern to adolescent engagement with social media as the same sites are being used, but there are differences across countries. For example, the social network site Facebook is blocked from use in China, but an online survey conducted in France among eight thousand, three hundred and sixty two participants showed the site is used by eighty-five percent of fifteen to twenty-four year olds and seventy one percent of thirteen to seventeen year old adolescents in America (Lenhart 2015).

In the United Kingdom, the Office for National Statistics publish regular data on social media use, that includes young adults aged sixteen to twenty-four years. Similarly, analysis of social media use is reported regularly by the industry watchdog Ofcom who publish a quarterly report on the United Kingdom media landscape that is generally considered to be reliable. The Ofcom data for 2015 was gathered from a sample of nine thousand eight hundred and

seventeen respondents and shows ninety three per cent of sixteen to twenty-four year olds have at least one social media profile. The data shows a wider use of social media such as Twitter (forty per cent), WhatsApp (thirty-seven per cent), YouTube (thirty-two per cent), Instagram (thirty-five per cent), Snapchat (twenty-six per cent), Tumblr (eight per cent) and Vine (four per cent) (Office for National Statistics 2015). Among adolescents aged twelve to fifteen years, Facebook and Snapchat are widely used with nearly a quarter (twenty-four per cent) of the audience reporting that they use it more than ten times a day. The data shows social media use across the range of age groups that form adolescence is wide ranging, reflecting the universality of social media use and differences between countries. The trends are valuable to educationalists, policy makers and parents who strive to ensure when adolescents engage with social media they have a positive and safe experience. However, it was evident from the data that the study of social media is a moving target for anyone engaged in research as new technologies develop rapidly and adolescent engagement follows the trends. Nevertheless, the data was of use to this work because it clearly indicated social media use has become an important part of adolescent life and that warranted further investigation.

The extensive use of social media by adolescents and growing concerns about its impact has led some researchers to adopt an integrative model in order to understand both the appeal and the risks involved in online communication (Valkenburg and Peter 2011). Adolescents traditionally learn how much information to reveal about themselves through social interactions and from the responses of others around them, such as non-verbal cues and spoken language. However, through social media, there are opportunities for adolescents to experiment with self presentation and with the amount of information they disclose about themselves. In addition, the anonymity offered by social media can help adolescents who are shy or self-conscious to feel more confident about making connections with others or to obtain advice.While part of the appeal of social media is the accessibility it gives adolescents to find, create and distribute information with an audience of their choice, some individuals have negative experiences, thus highlighting a need to investigate both the appeal and risks involved in social media use and how they impact on the lives of adolescents (Valkenburg and Peter 2011).

Clearly, social media has a positive impact on adolescent lives because it allows them to explore aspects of their identity that can lead to them achieving psychosocial autonomy. However, one aspect of social media use that was widely covered in both the popular press and by researchers related to the personal safety of adolescents. Berson and Berson (2006)

used the phrase 'digital dossier' to describe digital information that one person can collect about other people. In doing so, they raised awareness of unauthorised biographies of individuals who were unaware of the dangers and possible ramifications of the identities they constructed online. In the United Kingdom, concerns about the well-being of social media users led to The Byron Review (2008), which was an independent study commissioned by the Government to establish what kind of safeguards needed to be implemented so that adolescents could engage with digital technologies safely. The review recommendations led to the formation of the United Kingdom Council on Child Internet Safety (UKCCIS) in 2010 which was charged with the task of formulating interventions designed to keep adolescents safe online. As both a researcher and a member of the UKCCIS board of directors, Sonia Livingstone (2008) raised awareness of how adolescents struggled with aspects of social media use, including achieving desired levels of privacy at the same time as developing internet literacy and integrating the opportunities presented by social media into their lives. Livingstone's research was significant in raising awareness of activities she termed 'risky behaviours', that arose from adolescents' limited Internet literacy and poorly designed site settings which put them at risk because they failed to make it clear who could see their information. Consequently, her findings were very influential in the development of the UKCCIS guidelines on Internet safety that are widely used in schools through classroom practice and targeted training for teachers. They also highlighted a 'digital divide' between in-school and out-of-school media use that challenged educational agendas by questioning how new media forms could be integrated into learning experiences and how their impact could be monitored and assessed (Buckingham 2007). These studies and the guidelines they initiated were important at a macro level in terms of raising awareness of the dangers of social media use, improving safety among users and embracing technology in education.

EU Kids Online (Livingstone, Haddon and Gorzig 2012) is a multinational research network that is funded by the EC Better Internet for Kids programme. That programme stems from the EC Digital Single Market Strategy, which recognises that children have needs and vulnerabilities on the Internet and aim to make it a place where children access knowledge, communicate, develop their skills and improve their job prospects and employability. Since 2006, the EU Kids Online project has studied online opportunities and risks for children (defined as nine to sixteen year olds) with the aim of increasing knowledge of online opportunities, risks and safety. Interestingly, the results from this longitudinal study show an interdependence between those opportunities and risks, in that the more children use the Internet, the wider the range of activities they become involved in and the more they are exposed to risks online (Livingstone, Haddon and Gorzig, 2012). The linked project, Net

Children Go Mobile (Livingstone, Haddon, Vincent, Mascheroni and Olafsson 2014) reported new findings specific to the United Kingdom about children's online access, opportunities, risks and parental mediation. In addition, it compares the data with the seven countries who took part in the European 2013 survey by Net Children Go Mobile with findings from the United Kingdom 2010 survey by EU Kids Online. Multiple methods were employed to enhance understanding of children's and parents' experience of the Internet that included surveys and qualitative interviews to explore children's online access, opportunities, risks and parental mediation with a focus on risk and safety considerations. The findings were compared to those from the seven countries who took part in the European 2013-14 survey by Net Children Go Mobile and UK data from the twenty-five European countries involved in the 2010 survey by EU Kids Online (see Footnote 1). An important strength of this work is the complexity of the data, which allowed the researchers to examine the online activities of children from within a country and to compare activities across participating countries.

Consequently, from this rich source of information there has been widespread response from governments, industry, child welfare organisations, parents and those involved in education to find ways of regulating, redesigning and managing the digital environment to maximise opportunities and minimise harm to children. However, this represents a significant challenge, as both the technologies and the preferences of users are subject to continual change. From eight key areas of research, covering online access, use and activities, skills, communication practices, risk and harm, over-dependence, mediation and mobile internet in schools, this key study shows mobile and personalised media (smartphone, laptop, tablet, games console) has expanded access and use offering children opportunities to communicate 'anywhere, anytime'(Livingstone, Haddon, Vincent, Mascheroni and Olafsson 2014).

Despite these very clear messages, in recent times the focus of education policy has moved towards one that places more value on standardised testing and comparative benchmarking (Sefton- Green 2013). This implies a narrow understanding of learning where the social context is missing. In 2010, the government published a policy paper outlining their plans for the education of young people that clearly showed their focus was on preparing them for further education and work. The paper was called Positive for Youth (Positive for Youth: a new approach to cross-government policy for young people ages 13 – 19, 2013) and claimed

Footnote 1: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark. Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, UK.

to bring together for the first time, policies for young people aged thirteen to nineteen, relating to education, youth services, health, crime and housing. The vision statement claimed it was the responsibility of all parts of society to support young people to develop a strong sense of belonging and realise their potential. The role of teachers, (named specifically as a group, rather than 'schools') appeared in sixth place on a list of eleven groups, and the focus of their contribution was identified as one of encouraging young people to aspire and attain. Funding that totalled eight hundred and fifty thousand pounds was provided for the British Youth Council between 2011 and 2013 to set up a national scrutiny group to advise government ministers and local authorities on the impact of policies on young people, to make sure young people were represented in the national media and to sustain the United Kingdom Youth Parliament. Throughout the document, the rhetoric presented a generalised view of what young people needed and offered opportunities for participation for only a small number of young people, who would be presenting their views to politicians and representatives of the national media and to local authorities and business the world. Although this indicates many educators and policy makers are aware of the impact of new technologies on adolescent development, their understanding is based on research conducted at a macro-level. This raises questions about the value of the work in terms of whether their agenda is a true reflection of the issues adolescents across the country are experiencing on a day to day basis. In contrast, my research interests are focused at the micro-level of the impact of those broad concepts and on the problems that affect the day to day teaching and learning of a small, seaside community. Within that community, adolescents are at a key stage in their formal education and it is important to understand the changes and transitions they experience as they move between their institutional and everyday lives. As part of their everyday experiences, many students are living at the intersection between online and offline environments and it is important for educators and policy makers to try to understand what that entails so that we can provide learning experiences that challenge and support their development (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith and Zickuhr 2010). With adolescent use of social media steadily increasing it is incumbent upon educators, parents and policy makers to understand its use and significance in the lives of adolescents (Facer 2013).

1.4 Aims and research questions

This study aimed to examine how mid-adolescent girls used social media, the impact of social media on identity and belonging and to improve understanding of the issues that they have to negotiate at this critical time in their development. Therefore, it was important to establish what social media girls were using, how they were using it and how their

engagement with social media influenced their identity and a sense of belonging in groups. So, by problematising the notion that social media was an important part of life for mid-adolescent girls, three research questions emerged:

1. What social media were mid-adolescent girls using?
2. How were they using social media?
3. How did social media influence identity and belonging in groups?

1.5 An overview of the thesis chapters

This introductory chapter has presented the background and rationale for the stud. Chapter 2 explores the literature that informed the research aims and questions. Section 2.2 outlines the research strategy, section 2.3 examines the role of technology in society and the emergence of digital cultures and section 2.4 focuses on the influence of technology on adolescent identity and belonging in social groups. The final section of chapter 2 explores how adolescent identity can be explained in a digital age and section 2.6 has the research aims and questions.

In Chapter 3, the methodology is explained. Section 3.1 explains and justifies the research design influences, section 3.2 explains the choice of case study methodology, section 3.3 explains the selection of the case, 3.4 discusses issues about validity, reliability and transferability of data, section 3.5 explains how the sample was selected, data collection is explained in section 3.6 and this is further sub-divided for clarity, section 3.7 covers data analysis and is also sub-divided for clarity. Section 3.8 explains the ethical issues related to the study. Chapter 3 concludes with a summary in section 3.9.

Chapter 4 discusses the case findings and in section 4.2 there are pen portraits of the respondents. Section 4.3 covers the analysis of data from semi-structured interviews, section 4.4 has analysis of questionnaire data and section 4.5 has analysis of time-use diary data. There is a summary of the findings in section 4.6. Section 4.7 concludes this chapter with an analysis of the data from the perspective of Goffman's (1959) concept of dramaturgy.

Chapter 5 moves on to the discussion and is arranged in sub-sections that relate to the research questions.

The thesis concludes with Chapter 6, where there are reflections on the work, limitations of the study and recommendations.

Chapter 2: The Literature Review

2.1 Introduction to the chapter

Throughout my career in education, I have supported young people aged fourteen to sixteen years, as they formed and re-formed friendships, developed a sense of identity and established norms within their social groups. My training as a teacher in the nineteen seventies had provided me with an understanding that the aim of adolescence was to achieve identity at a personal level and within social groups. However, the rapid rise in popularity of social media and its use by adolescents brought an added dimension to the process of their development that was unfamiliar to me. By engaging with SNS such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter my students were managing the impressions that others formed of them through communication practices and social activities that were very different to any prior decade of my career. Consequently, I became interested in learning more about the role of technology in society, what technologies adolescents were using and its influence on their lives. The structure for the literature review was determined by those key issues, and based around three literature research questions:

1. What is the role of technology in society?
2. What influence does technology have on adolescent identity and belonging in social groups?
3. How can adolescent identity and belonging be explained in a digital age?

2.2 The literature search strategy

The starting point was a print based approach to accessing materials available in the university library. Literature was sourced by typing the key words social media, identity and adolescent development into the library database. The results revealed that historically, the development of identity during adolescence was well documented and led to the choice of a definition of the key words *'identity'* and *'adolescence'* in the context of this research. The word adolescence was chosen rather than the phrase young people, to narrow the age range and reflect the experiences and perspectives of the students I worked with. As research on social media is wide ranging, the beginning of the literature search involved finding a reliable definition of the phrase for the context of my research interests. At this early stage in the work, the Collins English Dictionary (2014) definition was useful *(websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking)* because

it referred to participation in social networking, reflecting the issues the research aimed to investigate. Next, the search was extended to the 'what and how' of social media use in the day-to-day lives of adolescents. Educational journals available through JSTOR allowed a search of academic data bases. Key studies were obtained from a range of academic journals by typing the key words *'social media and use by adolescents'* into Athens, then the results were sorted by reading the abstracts and checking the references. As the literature was explored, a basic set of criteria was applied that focused my attention on frequently cited names, key words (adolescence, social media, digital technologies, identity) and dates. Other linked concepts were discovered as the literature review continued, such as the research methods that were used, ethics and theoretical perspectives that offered explanations of social media use. To make sense of the ideas in the literature, the various concepts were recorded as summary notes on A5 cards, then grouped and re-grouped until three key strands that related to my initial questions emerged:

1. the role of technology in society and the emergence of digital cultures
2. the influence of social media on identity and belonging in social groups
3. historically the development of identity during adolescence was well documented and researchers were keen to establish new understandings in relation to the role of social media

The literature review was collated following the themes that had emerged from the search and begins with Section 2.3 which explores the role of technology in society and the emergence of digital cultures. Section 2.4 examines how adolescents engage with social media and its influence on identity and belonging in social groups. Next, Section 2.5 examines how adolescent identity and engagement with social media is explained in relation to a theoretical framework based on Goffman's concept of dramaturgy, and finally, Section 2.6 concludes the literature review with the research aims and questions.

2.3 The role of technology in society and the emergence of digital cultures

Technology has played a familiar role in all aspects of society, such as education, healthcare, business, entertainment and communication for many years. However, one of the most important technological developments of the last twenty years has been the way the Internet has changed how we communicate with each other, gather information and spend our leisure time. The Internet is not a new technology, as its predecessor, the Arpanet was first used in the United States of America in 1969, but its privatisation and release from government

control nearly thirty years later resulted in the system as it is today. The development of wireless communication extended both the availability and range of services that have resulted in a communication of networks that ensure the production, distribution and use of digitised information is accessible worldwide and in formats that are continually being developed. Digital culture is the term that describes how technology and the Internet impact on the way we interact and communicate (Dutton, Blank and Groselj 2013).

Understanding the role of technology in society and the impact of the Internet and wireless communication on our culture has led to wide ranging interest. For example, in the United Kingdom, the Oxford Internet Surveys (OxIS) are an authoritative source of information about Internet access, its use and the attitudes and beliefs of users (Dutton, Blank and Groselj 2013). OxIS are based at Oxford University's Oxford Internet Institute, and provide the United Kingdom's contribution to The World Internet Project (WIP), a major international collaborative project that tracks the social, political and economic impact of the Internet and other technologies (Dutton, Blank and Groselj 2013). Since it began in nineteen ninety nine, the WIP has been committed to sharing the results of its work with government policy makers, business communities, journalists, parents, teachers and other interested groups to document how people engage with digital technologies, the role of technology in society and the emergence of digital cultures. Key research findings on the social effects of the Internet have also been provided by the World Internet Survey, conducted by the Centre for the Digital Future at the University of Southern California, the British Computer Society, the Virtual Society Project by the Economic and Social Science Research Council and the Pew American Life Project by the Pew Institute.

Research by OxIS focuses on the social shaping and implications of Internet use and provides data on digital and social inclusion and exclusion, regulation and governance of the Internet, privacy, trust and risk concerns and how individuals use the Internet, including networking, content creation, entertainment and learning (Dutton, Blank and Groselj 2013). Key findings from their research show seventy-eight per cent of the UK population aged fourteen years and over use the Internet and most users can be grouped into five clusters, or cultures based on their responses. The five cultures have distinctive user profiles that describe people as e-mersives, techno-pragmatists, cyber-savvy, cyber-moderates and adigitals. Typically, e-mersives use the Internet as part of their everyday life and work and use it as a tool to keep in touch with people, to make life easier and to save time. Techno-pragmatists feel they are in control of their Internet use, and use it to enhance the efficiency of their day-to-day life and work. In contrast, cyber-savvy users have mixed views about the Internet and describe

themselves as happy being online to be part of a community, but frustrated by the time it consumes and wary of issues relating to privacy. The fourth culture of users are named cyber-moderates because they seem to be moderate in both their positive and negative feelings about the Internet, while the last group, adigitals, view the Internet as being out of their control and difficult to use. (A more detailed description of these cultures can be seen in Appendix1). The five clusters are interesting in the way they describe the profiles of users, but they also imply that there are differences in the way individuals respond to digital technology and how that response defines them and their identity. To understand the role of technology in society it is useful to view technology in terms of a material culture, produced from ideas, values, interests and knowledge of individuals and groups (Dutton, Blank and Groselj 2013). For example, the development of the motor car from a strange device that moved without the power of a horse has revolutionized how we transport our food, get to work or go on holiday along with many other benefits and drawbacks. Therefore, to assess the role of digital technologies, it is useful to examine both its affordances and its impact on social structure. The work of OxIS and other organisations has had a significant impact on our understanding of the role of technology in society. They indicate there is a global network society constructed around personal and organizational networks that are communicated via the Internet. Individuals who use digital technologies have been described as adapting to the affordances of new technologies that reflect wider changes in society (Dutton, Blank and Groselj 2013). Following that theme, Castells (2014) argues society is changing towards a culture of autonomy brought about by three main factors. Firstly, the introduction of the World Wide Web that is characterized by a global community of users. Secondly, institutional change in the management of the Internet which allowed global use and thirdly, changes in social behaviour focused towards individuation. An important dimension of these factors is the process of individuation that has evolved from changes in society related to the way people work, how they communicate and family structure. A dominant cultural trend in society has become the search for autonomy and this has led to a networked sociability that is afforded by digital technologies such as social media (Castells 2014). Research on social media frequently focuses on SNS and a commonly accepted definition was proposed by boyd and Ellison (2008), who suggest they are

> *"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."*

(boyd and Ellison 2008 page 210)

SNS are created by users based on specific criteria of grouping such as similar interests, hobbies, chatting, media and entertainment or projects. Individuals build networks to be with others they want to be with and may use the sites several times a day, so they are always connected. This has changed our culture because people share experiences, they can access sites at any time of the day or night, produce content and share it with others, some but not all of whom may be known to them. An important feature of SNS is the degree of choice that individuals have over the level of involvement they want to invest, referred to as a culture of autonomy (Castells 2014). A useful way of considering how technology enables individuals to achieve autonomy is to consider it as a process of 'co-production', between the potential capabilities of the technologies, and the way in which they are perceived and taken up in a social context (Facer 2013). For example, the capacity for personal communication of a mobile phone could be appropriated in some settings as a way of managing and controlling an individual, or as a means of facilitating independence by giving them access to support when necessary or as a way of building relationships through increased two-way communication. At the same time, the functionality that is built into the phone could shape the way it is used by different cultures in different settings. Therefore, how we perceive the use of the technology in existing social settings, combined with the new capabilities it offers, shape what the technology means to users. This process is co-production and is apparent in relation to digital technologies, many of which are designed to be personalised, customised and fit into our lives (Facer 2013).

New technologies such as social network sites, video-sharing sites, on-line games and mobile phones have become permanent fixtures of adolescent culture. Although individuals still face the same challenges as their predecessors, they are doing so at a time when communication and opportunities for self-expression and friendship are very different. This is shown in the timeline of launch dates for SNS compiled by boyd and Ellison (2008). They set out a detailed and historical account of how SNS had developed that clearly illustrates how those opportunities have developed and are constantly changing (see Appendix 2 for more information about their timeline). Two important early research studies from the same period also indicated how technology was helping adolescents to communicate with their peers. Subrahmanyam, Smahel and Greenfield (2006) identified connectedness between offline and online lives as a key feature in the attraction of social media engagement for adolescents and Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe (2007) showed the influence of Facebook in the maintenance of existing offline relationships. These studies were important to this work because they helped to explain the role of technology in society and why SNS had become embedded in

the lives of adolescents. Their focus on understanding how offline and online lives were merging and the role of Facebook as a popular SNS involved in that process resonated with more general concerns about the changing nature of the ways in which we communicate and the implications for development during adolescence. Changes in society, such as relationships, identity, social justice and knowledge that were emerging from the intersection of social and technological change implied young people needed support to develop the technical and research skills that would enable them to participate in a digital society and achieve autonomy (Facer 2013).

It could be argued there are three key factors that frame the support that young people need. Firstly, they need support to help them to gain an understanding of how technology influences our perceptions of the world. Secondly, young people need to be made aware of the economic and cultural contexts that shape how mass media is produced. Thirdly, they need to know about the motives and goals that shape the media they consume (Jenkins, Clinton, Purushotma, Robison and Weigel 2006). These skills are necessary because,

> *"The social production of meaning is more than individual interpretation multiplied; it represents a qualitative difference in the ways we make sense of cultural experience, and in that sense, it represents a profound change in how we understand literacy. In such a world, youth need skills for working within social networks, for pooling knowledge within a collective intelligence, for negotiating across cultural differences that shape the governing assumptions in different communities, and for reconciling conflicting bits of data to form a coherent picture of the world around them."*

(Jenkins, Clinton, Purushotma, Robison and Weigel 2006, page 20)

Jenkins et al (2006) identified the skills that were needed by reviewing the literature on new media literacies and informal learning. He aimed to challenge those who have responsibility for teaching young people to think more systematically and creatively about how they could build the skills into the content they are teaching. The skills refer to eleven areas that include play, performance, simulation, appropriation, multitasking, distributed cognition, collective intelligence, judgement transmedia navigation, networking and negotiation (more detailed definitions of these terms can be found in Appendix 3). Jenkins, Clinton, Purushotma, Robison and Weigel (2006) made a significant contribution to the body of knowledge that exists in relation to how schools can adapt their curricula to accommodate new media literacies by giving clear explanations of each skill, followed by practical ideas on how to incorporate them into teaching activities. This was an important response to a common assumption that children and young people knew more about new media environments than

most teachers and parents and learnt what they needed to know through their peers (Selwyn 2009). Three key flaws with that assumption have been identified as the participation gap, the transparency problem and the ethics challenge. The participatory gap refers to inequalities in access to new technologies that limit opportunities for participation among young people. The transparency problem refers to the limitations of some young people to evaluate the features of the technologies they use. The ethics challenge recognises the need to encourage young people to become more reflective about the choices they make as participants and communicators and the impact they have on others. The focus should not be on individual accomplishment, but on the emergence of a cultural context that supports widespread participation in the production and distribution of media (Jenkins et al 2006).

This raises questions about the role of technology in relation to education and the nature of learning because there are differences between traditional literacy skills (such as reading and writing) and those skills needed to be an effective participant in the digital age. However, education has been dominated for the last two decades by a political vision of a global knowledge economy fuelled by international competition and sustained by digital networks (Selwyn and Facer 2014). This approach defines the role of education as serving the economy and is based on the drive to equate the economic success of the country with social and technical change. The relationship between education, technology and social change has been described in terms of a 'myth', that sees technological change in the twenty-first century as resulting in increased competition between individuals and nations. Therefore, the role of education is to equip individuals and nations for that competition by developing 'twenty-first century skills' that will allow them to take a place in the new market (Facer 2013). According to Facer (2013), there are three key issues with this view of the future and the way it is used to justify the decisions that are made about education. Firstly, it presents a predetermined view of the future that everyone must adapt to and from this perspective it is not a world that can be shaped by individuals, organisations or social forces. Secondly, it is a narrow view of the role of technology because it sees change as relating solely to economic identity. Thirdly, it presumes the primary function of education is to prepare young people for work. While it is reasonable to want to prepare young people to generate a living income for themselves in the future, we should question whether that is all that education should be concerned with or that it is the primary function of education to prepare young people for work. An alternative would be to view education in terms of nurturing and developing the individual by supporting them to become independent, to know and understand their history and culture and to acquire the literacy skills they need to participate in a digital culture.

In educational contexts, literacy usually refers to the communication of meaning through written representation but this needs to be reassessed to reflect the widening role of technology in society (Merchant 2007). To achieve this, digital literacy could be defined as the study of written or symbolic representation that is mediated by new technology. Written forms of communication play a central role in screen based forms of communication, such as instant messaging and blogs, which are conducted predominantly through writing. However, there is also a need for users to understand related symbolic systems, such as those for rating, sharing, commenting and saving information on SNS. There are a number characteristics of digital literacy that children and young people need to understand in addition to the traditional skills of reading and writing. Mapping the changing landscape of communication that has moved from the symbolic representation of writing and the literacies of the page to the literacies of the screen can inform this process. It is imperative to address the curriculum issues raised by digital literacy to understand how educators can support children and young people to develop fluency in the wider context of digital communication (Merchant 2007). To do this, it is important to have a clear understanding of the phrase *digital literacy*, but it is problematic. Mapping the terrain of digital literacy is easier with a clear definition of the concept and Merchant (2007) works from a perspective that focuses on written communication mediated by a digital code to examine the materiality of digital literacy and the importance of criticality. Materiality refers to the features of digital text that has an impact on the relationship the producer has with the technology. This is an interesting concept because it infers that writing on screen requires little effort and in a sense, creates a space between the writer and the content. The physical action of writing on paper with a pen, forming shapes that are characteristic of the individual creates a very different relationship between writer and reader. However, digital literacy distinguishes between asynchronous and synchronous communication and that can be helpful in identifying the social affordances of the technology and the characteristics of interactions. Examples of asynchronous communication are email and blogs and a key feature is that they do not depend on co-presence. In contrast, synchronous communication such as instant messaging does require co-presence. Here users employ a range of new literacy skills including the use of hyperlinks, abbreviations and non-alphabetic keyboard symbols which are transmitted by very rapid typing, and are motivated by a drive to maintain pace in a conversational flow of synchronous interaction, regardless of the language they are conducted in. Key features are spontaneity and informality, but it is not enough simply to learn how to use these features. Adolescents also need to be critically aware of how meaning is constructed, the power, responsibilities and ethical considerations that come into play in communicative settings

(Merchant 2007). It could be argued that it is the part of the function of educational institutions to provide adolescents with opportunities for interpreting the constructed nature of popular culture and to help them to develop the skills that will enable them to critique the digital media they encounter.

Merchant (2007) argues for a common entitlement with respect to critical digital literacy that could be achieved through providing access to up-to-date new technologies that build on everyday practices, including those out of school. Furthermore, education should support and develop the skills, knowledge and dispositions needed for the effective use of digital media, including opportunities for critical digital literacy practice, to explore and experiment with one's own digital space, to critique and resist dominant or dominating discourses in digital domains. Through making these opportunities available, Merchant (2007) argues

> *"Building a flexible and intelligent educational response to digital literacy then becomes important both from the point of view of valuing children's everyday digital experience and in terms of preparing them for the future."*

> (Merchant 2007 page 127)

An important reference in the quote relates to the view that education should address the technical need for a curriculum that facilitates the development of digital literacy and at the same time, acknowledges the social experiences that also involve engagement with digital technology. However, Jenkins, Clinton, Purushotma, Robison and Weigel (2006) claimed schools were slow to react to the emergence of digital literacies, a participatory culture and informal learning communities. They called for curricula that promoted new media literacies which referred to cultural competencies and social skills that young people needed in a digital age. This kind of participatory culture would change the focus of literacy, to one that includes social skills developed through collaboration and networking as well as the more traditional literacy skills of reading, writing, research and critical analysis that have been taught in schools. A socio-cultural perspective distinguishes learning from the process of schooling. Although schools and schooling are the dominant educational institutions that define much of what constitutes and frames learning, how learning works in schools is not the be all and end all. This was demonstrated by Erstad and Sefton-Green (2013) who used the phrase *learning lives* to describe two concepts that are central to their thinking. Firstly, from a socio-cultural position learning needs to be understood in terms of a matrix of transactions that include experiences, social groupings, and the voluntary and involuntary contexts that make up life experiences. Secondly, learning seen from a "whole life" perspective explains how we construct our learner identities in relation to what we know and can do, our interpersonal

interactions, and developing sense of ourselves. The phrase "learning lives" comes from studies that address key challenges to the ways in which learning is embedded in our lives and considers the relationships between theories of identity and learning, the meaning of learning for learners and the nature of learning research in the current climate. Interesting questions emerge about how learners understand the meaning of learning, whether they view learning in the same way as educators and if not, how it is different, and the consequences or implications of those differences. This concurs with Facer's (2013) criticisms of the focus of education policy on measurable outcomes that contrast with views of learning as a part of a wide range of social processes. It could also explain the lack of interest adolescents show in formal education that does not relate to their worlds. Their worlds revolve around what is happening now, not what might be happening in the future if they do not achieve what teachers and others perceive to be essential skills. The differences between the focus of research in education over the last forty years illustrates the issues that need to be addressed (Facer 2013). Firstly, research was carried out in the context of a public debate that claimed education was as concerned with the whole person as it was with the curriculum. Secondly, research was written from a pedagogic perspective as a way of understanding what young people brought with them to the school. This is turn had an impact on the curriculum and how it was orientated to account for broader aspects of life, such as ethnicity and gender. More recently, Sefton-Green (2013) has argued the 'gaze of education' has moved away from exploring the texture and meaning of young peoples' social worlds toward a more tightly focused concern with learning within the school. From this perspective, the politics of educational research are more concerned with standardised testing and comparative benchmarking all of which imply a narrow understanding of learning. Consequently, the question of what 'learning' means comes into focus. Learning is about the way people select, reject, contrast and build upon experiences. In this way, learning is the process of interpretation, as people explore new experiences and reflect on past ones, and the meanings they have attributed to them (Sefton-Green 2013). Instead of paying attention to learning experiences in isolation, we need to focus on how learners contextualise and reflect on experiences and pay attention to the resources they use to achieve this. Therefore, research needs to focus on how individuals frame their experiences over time, and the types of understanding involved, e.g. the language and values that relate to those experiences which gives the framework for analysis (Sefton-Green 2013). These issues are addressed in the next section, which examines the influence of technology on adolescent identity and belonging in social groups.

2.4 The influence of technology on adolescent identity and belonging in social groups

Identity forms over time from the interaction between the individual and their social environment (Steinberg and Morris 2001). Research that explores the influence of technology on adolescent identity has examined its impact at an individual and at a social level. Socio-cultural researchers have proposed that the social environment provides the context for individuals to develop the cultural norms and values that are an important part of their identity. Technology has become a central feature of this process by offering new contexts for social interaction and self-presentation through the affordances of social media. Research that relates specifically to these two areas was selected to gain an understanding of the issues that had been investigated and the methods that were employed. Consequently, there are two sections to this part of the literature review and the first section examines the influence of technology at an individual level. The second section examines how technology influences an individuals' sense of belonging in social groups as they learn about maintaining relationships, group boundaries, social norms and values and how to deal with social isolation and rejection.

2.4.1 The influence of technology on identity at an individual level

In online settings such as SNS, blogs and chat rooms the visual identity cues of gender, race and age that traditionally guide our communication with others are hidden so there are opportunities for individuals to manage the impressions others form of them. Social media is characterised by technical features that enable individuals to explore those opportunities. From a focus group study of twenty-three students aged eighteen to twenty-three, Manago, Graham, Greenfield and Salimkhan (2008) explored how the SNS MySpace provided new opportunities for identity construction. Following the Vygotskian concept that proposed the tools of a culture, such as telephones or television were essential for development, Manago et al (2008) described SNS in terms of new cultural tools that had the potential to transform the construction of personal identities (see Footnote 2). The construction of a profile offered an almost infinite number of ways for self-presentation and allowed users to express themselves in ways that would have been limited by their offline lives. Manago, et al (2008) concluded that through selective self-presentation, users could choose which aspects of their identity they wanted to promote and share with others. Although these findings are supported by other studies, the choices individuals make have been shown to vary with age.

Footnote 2: Manago et al (2008) argued adolescents were using SNS as tools to interact with their peers and the rapid rise in popularity of sites such as Myspace and Facebook indicated that use of social media was becoming part of their culture.

Research has shown young adolescents emphasised physical features and provided a lot of information about themselves, compared to those who were older and focused more on promoting their connections with others. For some younger adolescents, their level of disclosure impacted negatively on their social media experiences (Livingstone 2008 and Subrahmanyam and Greenfield 2008). Understanding asynchronicity is an important factor of social media engagement because the opportunities to change and reflect on the information a person shares can determine whether their experiences are positive or otherwise. This concurs with a study that found adolescents used SNS such as Facebook and Myspace to publish selected photographs of themselves they thought would generate positive responses from friends (boyd 2007). The selection process enhanced their self-confidence as they focused on physical features they deemed to be their best, and feedback in the form of messages left on walls and listings as close friends on profiles had an impact on self-esteem. Creating a profile can be beneficial in the way it reminds users of important times in their lives, of positive things that have happened to them and that boosts feelings of self-worth. On the other hand, users comparing themselves with the profiles of other users were found to experience lowered self-esteem (Ellison and boyd 2013). This was consistent with social comparison theory's premise that the agreed social attractiveness of others has an impact on how an individual perceives their own level of attractiveness (Ellison 2013).

These studies were important because they showed how adolescents were learning to use the affordances of social media to manage the way they presented themselves. In drawing together the main themes of these studies, it is clear the influence of technology is evident in the way adolescents learn the two important skills of self-presentation and self-disclosure. From a different perspective, the influence of technology on identity at an individual level has been examined in relation to personality traits and three key studies illustrate this point. The first study, by Orchard, Fullwood, Galbraith and Morris (2014) employed a 'uses and gratifications' framework to investigate whether personality dictates social media preferences. This followed an earlier review of the literature that had suggested personality traits were linked to social media preferences, with introverts preferring computer-mediated communication that allowed them to remain anonymous, whereas extraverts preferred environments with a high offline saliency, such as SNS (Orchard and Fullwood 2010). An opportunity sample gained from advertising in a university department in the United Kingdom, yielded data from two hundred and forty-four participants aged sixteen to forty-eight years old. Analysis of the data involved using the EPQ-R short scale measured extraversion, neuroticism and psychoticism against their use of SNS. Facebook and MySpace

were identified as preferred sites, but individual differences did not appear to determine their choice or frequency of use. However, at the time of the study, the two SNS were the most widely used in the United Kingdom, which prompted Orchard, Fullwood, Galbraith and Morris (2014) to cite sociotropy as a significant factor. Sociotropic individuals are concerned with how others view their behaviour and will follow trends to improve their social standing. They are very sociable and so enjoy the opportunities to exchange information and were shown in this study to follow ritualistic patterns such as checking statuses at the same time of day. In doing so, users keep up to date with current news and gossip and control anxiety levels stemming from a feeling of "missing out." The motivation behind the choice of SNS was linked to personality traits, with extraverts described as showing a need to extend their social network in comparison to introverts, who were found to be uncomfortable with the amount of information on a profile. The data showed high psychoticism scorers were found to be motivated to use SNS because the features of online activity such as reduced authority and invisibility allowed them to feel uninhibited, manifested in higher levels of self-disclosure. Orchard, Fullwood, Galbraith and Morris (2014) pointed to the importance of individual differences as areas that merited further investigation. This claim was supported by the second key study, where a self-report method was employed to gather data from one hundred and eighty four under-graduate students who gained extra course credits for taking part in an online survey that explored their Facebook use and self-ratings of a personality test (Seidman 2013). The Five Factor Model (also referred to as the Big Five) was used to explain personality and the Big Five traits are openness, conscientiousness, agreeableness, extraversion and neurotocism. The model posits that Facebook use is motivated by the need for self-presentation and the need to belong. Research also showed the need to belong was fulfilled through communicating with others and self-presentation is achieved through posting photographs, profile information and wall content (Seidman 2013). This research implies personality traits are linked to engagement with social media, particularly to Facebook use by showing agreeable individuals appear to be more motivated by the need to belong than self-presentational needs. Neurotic individuals on the other hand, appear to be more motivated by self-presentational needs. The findings of the studies by Orchard, Fullwood, Galbraith and Morris (2014) and Seidman (2013) indicate there is a relationship between personality and engagement with Facebook. In the third key study, interview data gathered from girls aged thirteen to eighteen years at a school in Bermuda showed Facebook use promoted identity development processes and its unique features shaped adolescents' experiences in different ways Davis (2012). The respondents described how a sense of belonging within peer groups was critical. An important process in fostering a sense of

belonging is self-disclosure and as this study shows, they found that easier to do online (Davis 2012).

More than fifteen years earlier, in her book *Life on the Screen*, Sherry Turkle (1995) expressed concerns about the lack of face to face communication, especially among adolescents, as having a potential negative impact on society. More recently, she has reflected on the way technology has become an integral part of life for adolescents and suggests they may need guidance and support as they navigate their changing roles and transition to adulthood (Turkle 2011). Her concerns reflected those of Berson and Berson (2006) who had called for a better awareness of what adolescents were doing online so that they could be protected from creating digital identities that could hinder their future progress.

Responding to similar concerns that the growing influence of technology signalled a breakdown in society, Lenhart and Maddon (2007) showed adolescents exercised agency over their actions, and were cognisant of the opportunities afforded by social media, by being selective both in their choices of SNS and the ways they used them. Data from a telephone survey of participants aged between twelve and seventeen years, conducted by the Pew Internet and American Life Project, indicated that most adolescents were taking steps to protect themselves from risks of online engagement (Lenhart and Maddon 2007). In contrast to the fears expressed by Berson and Berson (2006), it appeared from this work that adolescents managed their personal information by keeping some details confined to their network of trusted friends, while at the same time taking part in the exciting process of creating profile content and making new friends. This concurs with research in the United Kingdom, where participants aged between thirteen and sixteen years old were shown to be balancing both the risks and the affordances of technology to manage the way they represented themselves online (Livingstone 2008). However, the study also indicated the ways in which that happened varied with age and gender, implying there was variation in the way male and female adolescents were using technologies and that age was also a significant factor (Livingstone 2008). This observation was also recognized by Hagittai (2007) who gathered data using a survey method among college students with a mean age of eighteen years, and found females were more likely to use social media than their male counterparts and that context of use and experience of the medium were also related to how much time was spent. Those from homes with access to technology were more likely to engage in its use and people often used services to connect to those in their existing networks, rather than to seek out new friends. A strength of the study was that she chose to use a paper survey, rather than one that could be conducted online, as she wanted to ensure her respondents were not

disadvantaged by a lack of access to the survey. These studies indicate adolescents have knowledge about how the technology works and have the skills to manage and control the way they present themselves in their online worlds. Through selecting and presenting aspects of themselves to gain positive responses from others, adolescents have been shown to be using social media as tools in the construction of their identities. In addition, technology has also had an impact on the language of identity as adolescents constructed a 'profile', made it 'public' or 'private', 'messaged' their 'top friends' on their 'wall' and 'added' or 'blocked' others to their network (Livingstone 2008). Taking these factors into account, it could be argued that through social media it was possible for adolescents to construct a chosen identity, whereas for earlier generations, identity was ascribed by other features, such as gender or social status and harder to change. One salient feature of identities constructed on SNS is popularity. Studies have shown that among adolescents, indicators of popularity are the number of friends an individual has, the number of posts others placed on their profile wall and the number of photographs that are tagged (Scott 2014).

Ito, Horst, Bittanti, boyd, Herr-Stephenson, Lange, Pascoe and Robinson (2008) conducted a three-year ethnographic study of how young people were engaging with new technologies, called The Digital Youth Project, that was based in America and funded by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. At the time, the work was unique because it brought together a research team who employed a range of methods over a long period of time, which gave their work an important depth of understanding. In addition, the team members had varying interests in technology which gave the research breadth and attracted interest from a wider field. Twenty-three case studies were conducted by twenty-eight researchers and collaborators who wanted to gain an understanding of how young people were engaging with social media and how that was changing culture and knowledge. Data gathering methods included questionnaires, surveys, semi-structured interviews, diary studies and content analysis of media sites and profiles. The results showed that while the technology was new, the activities it was being used for were surprisingly traditional as they included conversations about the days' events, exchanging views about music, fashion and film. danah boyd was an influential member of the team who used qualitative and ethnographic data collected between 2003 and 2012 and interview data gathered between 2007 and 2010 to show social media enables young people to create a place where they can communicate with others, without having to transport themselves anywhere or rely on others to take them. Social media has enabled them to participate in and help create what she calls *networked publics*, a phrase that had first been identified as one of the genres of participation described

by boyd and others working on the Digital Youth Project (Ito et al 2008). In her book, *It's Complicated: the social lives of networked teens*, boyd (2014) documents how and why social media has become central to the lives of so many American teenagers. She challenges the anxieties that many adults have about teenage engagement with social media by providing a critical insight into the networked lives of young people, which she argues is at the heart of contemporary culture. This insight is intended to reassure parents, educators and policy makers that the spaces young people use may change but the challenges they face are the same. To illustrate her point boyd (2014) refers to the core activities of adolescence as chatting and socialising, engaging in self-expression, grappling with privacy and sharing media and information. Social media has changed the way that happens because the search for autonomy is being expressed in *networked publics.* Although the word *public* is used in everyday language, such as a space where people can gather freely, when applied to social media, the meaning is different. In relation to social media, publics

"are groups that have been constructed around shared identities and social practices"

(boyd 2014 page 9)

This implies there is an audience because as a space, the networked publics that exist through social media allow people to gather and connect, hang out and joke around with each other. As social constructs, networked publics enable individuals to feel a sense of identity and belonging to a group which fulfils an important part of their adolescent development. In this way, networked publics that are formed through the affordances of technology serve the same function for contemporary adolescents as the public space of a park did for previous generations.

The concept of affordance was originally defined by Gibson, a psychologist who studied visual perception (McGrenere and Ho 2000). Gibson challenged theories that studied perception in terms of processing visual sensory information and argued we perceive the environment through its affordances and the possibilities for action it provides (McGrenere and Ho 2000). Affordance is a contested concept and from this viewpoint, the affordances of an environment are what it offers the individual and they are invariant. This means they do not change because they are always there to be perceived, even if the individual is no longer interested (Bucher and Helmond 2017). Gibson's concept of affordance was adapted by Donald Norman, who explored the cognitive aspects of behaviour and the way people

interact with objects in their environments (Bucher and Helmond 2017). Norman was interested in the design and use of everyday objects, and in his book *"The Design of Everyday Things"*(1998) he states

> *"the term affordances refers to the perceived and actual properties of the thing, primarily those fundamental properties that determine just how the thing could possibly be used."*

(Norman 1998 page 9)

Norman believed affordances resulted from the mental interpretations people made of objects and are based on past experiences and knowledge. In this way, Norman's ideas differ from those of Gibson who claimed the existence of affordances was independent of experience and culture (McGrenere and Ho 2000). Norman stressed the importance of affordances as being perceived properties that determine the usability of an object. In this way, an important difference between affordances as understood by Gibson and Norman is apparent. Gibson was primarily interested in how we perceive the environment, whereas Norman was specifically interested in designing objects within an environment so that their use could be perceived easily (McGrenere and Ho 2000). However, it is also important to note that affordances are not universal because of the social factors that influence them, including age, gender and culture (Bucher and Helmond 2017).

Affordance has played an important role in social media research as a way of understanding communicative practices and the social interactions that social media afford. boyd (2014) draws on the concept that was popularized by Norman within the Human Computer Interaction (HCI) community to argue the affordances of social media can be understood as the properties that characterise social media and make it possible for certain types of practices to happen. From this standpoint, boyd (2014) identified four affordances of social media that relate to how individuals perceive, share and interact with content, which are

1. persistence – referring to the durability of online expressions and content
2. visibility – meaning the potential audience who can bear witness to actions
3. spreadability – referring to the ease with which content can be shared
4. searchability – meaning the ability to find content

These four properties of affordances are important to this research because they relate to the

issues the respondents were experiencing and provide a framework that could support them to develop a deeper understanding of how social media works.

Although boyd (2014) based her work on data from American teenagers, she claimed the social media affordances are universal because persistence, visibility, spreadability and searchability are issues that have the potential to impact on the experiences of any user. While affordances are not always negative, they can create challenges for young people to negotiate, depending on the context of their use. Being unaware that content is persistent could have significant implications for users of social media any where in the world, who are not always aware of how the technology works. For example, content can be asynchronous in that a message can be sent but not read or responded to immediately, but as messages do not expire, those using social media need to be aware that their content is on record, potentially forever. Through social media, people can share content with a range of audiences which makes the visibility unlimited. Most systems require users to limit the visibility of shared content but this requires understanding and effort. Social media is designed to encourage people to share their content and with the click of a few buttons, the material is spreadable and to an unlimited audience, potentially on a world-wide scale. Through search engines it is often easy to find people's communications. However, it is also easy to remove contextual cues and manipulate information in new ways. The ease with which this happens is both powerful and problematic, especially for adolescents who may have limited experience of using technologies and of social relationships. Although research illustrated adolescents were enthusiastic about using technology it also showed how it complicated their social worlds in new ways.

2.4.2 The influence of technology on belonging in social groups

How we see ourselves in our roles and in the larger social environments we inhabit can impact on how we behave, what we believe and who we affiliate with (Ellison 2013). It is important for an adolescent to be part of a group or multiple groups because membership brings five key benefits:

1. opportunities to socialise with peers
2. feeling a sense of belonging
3. creating and reinforcing groups and their boundaries
4. learning how to deal with social isolation and rejection
5. learning about social norms and values

Opportunities to socialise with peers was shown in early research by Subrahmanyam, Smahel and Greenfield (2006), who argued the Internet was influential as a social context for adolescent identity development. Their research focused on the extent to which adolescents used social media to construct identity through peer interaction. Using data gathered from a large sample of chat-room conversations. Subrahmanyam et al (2006) claimed the anonymity of the chat room had a positive impact on the quality of the data. However, it could be argued that monitored chat rooms could have provided a false sense of security, as younger participants provided a lot of information compared to those who were older. In a later study, Subrahmanyam, Reich, Waechter and Espinoza (2008) focused on two popular SNS to explore how networks of online friends related to those offline. The results were important because they revealed how participants were using MySpace and Facebook to co-construct their online environments, which implied the respondents' networks of online and offline friends were connected. The extent of connectedness was a significant factor in this research because it illustrated how the respondents created a sense of identity and belonging by using the sites to merge people from their offline worlds with their online worlds (Subrahmanyam et al 2008). Participation with social media was also shown to have an impact on an individuals' sense of belonging because SNS were where their friends were hanging out and they would be bored if they were not involved (boyd 2007). Extending this observation to explain how important it was to be included in a group through SNS, boyd (2007) drew from Goffman's (1959) description of 'performances' to describe how individuals consciously select and manage the information they present to an audience. By managing their identity and other's impression of them online, adolescents use the space of a SNS as a place to show who you are and who you are connected to (boyd 2007).

Relationships with peers and the social contexts in which those relationships are experienced play a central role in the formation of an individuals' identity. Through interactions with peers, they explore and develop shared norms about their appearance, fashion, music and culture that makes them different from their parents (Lenhart and Maddon 2007). Though parents may still provide a role model, peers have an increasing prominence in adolescents' lives, as they spend more time together, share activities and aspects of language. The sense of belonging that results from this validates an adolescents' sense of identity. The positive benefits of technology were found in the results of a study conducted in the Netherlands, where females reported using instant messaging to keep in touch with peers from their offline lives, to make plans and to reinforce existing friendships (Valkenburg and Peter 2007).

From a different perspective, technology has been shown to be influential because it provides options for being part of friendship-driven and interest-driven groups (Ito, Horst, Bittanti, boyd, Herr-Stephenson, Lange, Pascoe and Robinson 2008). Through social media there are opportunities for adolescents to move between groups and explore new ways of self-presentation, learn new skills, find support and information about issues that concern them and develop and maintain relationships. Consequently, adolescent engagement with technology has been related to the concept of *genres of participation,* and by using the terms *hanging out, messing around and geeking out* the researchers described how everyday engagement with social media influenced their sense of belonging in social groups and corresponded to different social and learning situations (Ito et al 2008). While adolescents were hanging out with friends, they shared and developed their taste in music, film and fashion, their knowledge and opinions of the world around them. Ito et al (2008) used the term "hypersocial" to define how adolescents use specific social media as tokens of identity, taste and style to develop a sense of self in relation to their peers. SNS such as MySpace, Facebook and instant messaging enabled adolescents to construct social norms in a networked public culture that was a clear indication of how appealing social media was in their lives. However, for some adolescents this was done at a cost because the lessons about social life, the successes, the ability to deal with social isolation and rejection were played out in a very public way. On the other hand, messing around referred to the interest driven activities of adolescents who wanted to learn about the workings of the technology. Messing around also referred to those who were self-directed, enjoyed experimentation and exploration. For these adolescents, engagement with social media required little personal investment and there were fewer consequences related to failure. Data from more than five thousand hours of online observations of use among eight hundred college students, showed they were in constant contact with their friends through texting, instant messaging, mobile phones and Internet connections (Ito et al 2008). However, the data was gathered from participants in the United States of America, many of whom were college students so the findings cannot be generalised to explain practices elsewhere. Nevertheless, the data was significant because it provided a paradigm for understanding the learning and experiences of social media use from the perspective of the users. The authors of the study stressed how it is also crucial to listen and learn from adolescent experiences of growing up in a world of social media and this point was significant in the way it resonated with my concerns about the students I taught. Clearly, adolescents are growing up in a cultural setting in which many of their experiences and opportunities will be shaped by their engagement with social media (boyd 2014). Hanging out, messing around and geeking out are three genres of participation

that could inform our understanding of the complexities of that process as they describe the social practices and learning dynamics that are involved.

Social media has been found to have an influence on friendship formation and maintenance because it allows users to connect with each other very easily through mobile devices, SNS and instant messaging. From a study that analysed how Swedish 'tweens' (defined as young people aged ten to fourteen years) wrote their online identities, feedback from friends was deemed to be an important source of both inspiration and critique for girls (Abiala and Hernwall 2013). Girls shared experiences were used to build a frame of reference that helped them as a group to form and express a common identity that included acceptable use of social media within the group. This was referred to as folklore, and was a description also used in earlier studies (Hagittai 2007, Subrahmanyam and Greenfield 2008, Strano 2008) to describe features of the everyday lives of the participants and indicated recognition from peers was vital and negotiated in both online and offline environments.

As adolescents learned how to interpret the popularity hierarchies and social categories that shaped their lives, there seemed to be an overlap between their online and offline worlds. For example, communications that began online continued offline and scenarios that took place at school were reproduced in digital settings long after the school day ended. Therefore, adolescents were not simply online or offline, they were increasingly mediated and social media was being used in ways that impacted on individuals' social identity. These included the development and maintenance of friendships, observing the activities of others, and maintaining links with family when distance separated them. In addition, not all individuals were equally integrated into peer networks and some had to deal with issues of rejection and exclusion, whereas others made a conscious decision not to get too involved with social media. From in-depth interviews with eighteen college students Steinfield, Ellison and Lampe (2008) concluded that Facebook use directly impacted on the successful formation of relationships. This is supported by Lenhart (2015), who quotes the average teen Facebook user has thirty friends. Those with more than six hundred are more frequent users of the site, have profiles on a wide range of other platforms, are more likely to be friends with teachers and with people they have not met in person. The data also highlighted how social media had reconfigured many adolescent communities, where online participation was essential to being included in a group (Madden, Lenhart, Duggan, Cortesi and Gasser 2013). However, anyone who has experience of working with adolescents knows that while belonging to a group is important, there are often difficult situations to negotiate.

Following this theme, Marwick and boyd (2014) developed the concept of 'drama' to understand how users of social media dealt with the impact of conflict and aggression in their relationships. From interview data collected between 2006 – 2011 in the United States of America as part of an ethnographic study of teenage social media use, their research identified five key components of drama. It was gendered because it applied to girls' online and offline conflict, it was both social and interpersonal in nature because it is about relationships, it is reciprocal and is performed so involves an audience. Drama was shown to impact on the development of identity in several ways. For example, it involved the moral evaluation of other people's behaviour because those involved often acted strategically to appeal to their audience and it often moved beyond the original individuals in the drama to others who had little involvement in the original situation. Social media was shown to play a crucial role in the construction of drama, often compounded interpersonal conflict and facilitated opportunities for participation among very distributed networked audiences, including adding comments and status updates that further reinforced behaviour patterns. Further support for this understanding of drama was obtained from a very different experimental approach. Case study and participant observation data was gathered by a researcher who worked in schools with a team who were investigating bullying and called for a more constructionist approach to understanding social relational aggression (Allen 2014). This involved selecting a method that enabled the researcher to access detailed descriptions of the experiences and emotions of the two participants in the study in order to understand how they constructed meaning from events going on around them. Emergent themes in the data added to the body of knowledge on drama in two ways. One was an idea that was termed "stirring the pot" (Allen 2014) and refers to the way individuals engage in behaviours that prolong, resurrect and reignite incidents of drama. The other indicated an additional feature of drama may be group rumination which is characterised by prolonging negative thoughts, self-disclosure, closeness and empathetic distress among girls who describe themselves as very best friends. As educators are responsible for developing policies, procedures and punishments for bullying it is imperative that they understand the way adolescents define bullying and drama, as this research highlights important differences and implies there may be misunderstandings between adolescents, parents, carers and teachers.

From these two very different perspectives, one based on detailed descriptions of experiences from a single case study and the other on data from one hundred and sixty-six semi-structured interviews, Marwick and boyd (2014) and Allen (2014) concurred that while drama among adolescent girls is not new, the involvement of audiences in environments like Facebook

indicates how technology has influenced the way groups operate. Social media increases the visibility of adolescent conflict, heightening public awareness and prompting public anxieties about bullying. These were important studies in relation to the developmental implications of social media on identity because they drew attention to the distress that was caused by conflict and aggression enacted online, and showed how behaviour could attract a much wider audience than a conventional situation would have done. Furthermore, drama also illustrated how the incorporation of digital technologies into all aspects of teenage life supported the argument of a merged online/offline identity, such as that proposed by Miller (2013). This represented a significant change to the way the influence of technology had been perceived. Early research had made distinctions between online and offline identities but the pervasive nature of technology was shown through later studies that described identities of individuals and groups as being networked.

Miller (2013) used a meta-analysis approach to conduct a wide-ranging review of the literature on online/offline identity that was commissioned as part of a government Foresight Project. His viewpoint was influenced by twentieth century theorists who examined identity as a constantly re-worked personal narrative and others who argued multiple identities equated with differentiated roles, and were framed by context, an example being a woman who was simultaneously mother, partner, housewife and worker (Miller 2013). Within that framework, social media allowed people to explore new forms of identity, change or secure multiple identities very easily and enabled people with unusual interests to network online and find virtual 'communities' based on a single shared identity. Miller (2013) contended that a generic concept of online identity was problematic, suggesting a need to move away from simplistic arguments based on a dualism between online and offline identity to an appreciation that people who engaged with a mix of communication and identity platforms maintained more than one online and offline identity because being online was integral to everyday communication and self-presentation.

Accepting that technology is a feature of everyday life for adolescents, it could be argued there is a need to review the way we understand literacy. Traditional views of literacy as a transferable skill and where educators, usually teachers, were perceived as custodians of knowledge have been challenged (Davies 2012). Research has shown text messaging is used by adolescents to enhance and maintain their existing relationships and the language used is conventionalised for the audience. On this micro level, if an individual's literacy level is not very sophisticated, their ability to successfully navigate social media, such as interpreting messages online could have a negative impact on their lives in several ways. For example, the

wrong response to a message could inflame a situation between friends or the internalisation of what others were writing could lead to misunderstandings and affect friendships offline, with the additional potential to have a negative impact on self-esteem and mental health. Therefore, an individual's level of literacy could have a direct impact on their ability to manage their online and offline worlds.

2.5 How can adolescent identity and belonging be explained in a digital age?

Identity is an ambiguous term because on the one hand it is something that is unique to each of us, but on the other it implies a relationship with a social group. This is reflected in the way it is explained by disciplines including psychology and sociology. Central to the symbolic interactionist perspective is the idea that individuals allocate meaning to the world around them through their interactions with others. It follows that the concept of identity is the product of those social interactions where individuals

> *"interpret each others's gestures and act on the basis of the meaning yielded by the interpretation."*

(Blumer, 1986 page 66)

Following this definition, researchers have studied how people categorise or label themselves and others, how they identify themselves as members of groups, how they maintain a sense of group belonging and how they discriminate against outsiders (Buckingham 2008). These processes operate on two levels, the individual and the social. For example, as individuals define their identity they also need approval from a group. Therefore, identity could be explained as a social process, accomplished through interactions with others. An example of this approach is explained in Erving Goffman's influential book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959). His work reflected the symbolic interactionist perspective because he explored patterns of communication and interpretation between individuals and suggested that society and the roles that individuals portray are created out of social interactions. A key element of this approach is focused around the notion that social interaction is mediated by symbols, such as language which enable individuals to interpret each other's actions. Goffman (1959) used these ideas in field work to examine the day to day social interactions of local people living in the Shetland Islands to understand behaviour in public places and the rules that governed how individuals manged face-to-face interactions with others. A key feature of his theory argued social interactions are carefully managed and performed as individuals attempt to control or guide the impression that others form of them by using

verbal communication, physical gestures and signs. In this way, individuals construct and reconstruct their presentations partly in response to the reaction they get from others and partly in response to the perceived social rules for behaviour, which vary in different settings.

Goffman (1959) used the metaphor of a theatrical performance as a framework to describe strategies people use to present themselves to others and to control others' impressions of them so that they will be seen in a positive light. Although some academics question whether Goffman's work represents a purely interactionist standpoint (Carter and Fuller 2016), the concept of dramaturgy was used to explain the creation and maintenance of common understandings of reality by people working individually and collectively to present a shared and unified image of that reality (Kivisto and Pittman 2011). A key issue in understanding Goffman's dramaturgical analysis of social interaction is his claim that the individual should be thought of in relation to a social group, rather than as an autonomous being (Kivisto and Pittman 2011). Therefore, to understand human behavior, the fundamental unit of social analysis should not be the individual, but what Goffman (1959) refers to as the *team*. Teams are responsible for the creation of perceptions of reality in social settings and analysis of the complex systems of interactions they use in the construction of reality is referred to as dramaturgical social theory. Furthermore, Goffman (1959) likens the way teams cooperate to construct reality to the presentation of a play. A crucial element is the *role*, which refers to the image a single actor wants to convey to the world, or *audience* (Kivisto and Pittman 2011). Understanding within the team is helped by *a script,* which is a conversational format played out in a physical environment Goffman (1959) refers to as *the stage* and *costumes* help to signify roles and help others to form impressions. The stage can establish a context for social interaction and is powerful when it allows one team to convince another to adopt the preferred understanding of reality. Interactions are described as *performances* and they create a specific impression referred to as a *face*, which can vary and represents the successful staging of an identity. Goffman (1959) was particularly interested in how different types of setting shaped performances. He delineated *front* and *back stage* regions for interactions, describing the front stage as the space where the performance was public and seen by many and the back stage was where access was more controlled and limited (Goffman 1959). Ideas about staging are useful in explaining SNS activity, especially through Facebook and Twitter. Seen from this perspective, Goffman's (1959) ideas can be used to how SNS are spaces where individuals can control the way they present themselves and how identities can be made and remade.

Although Goffman's (1959) perspective on social interaction and self-presentation was time sensitive and described face-to-face encounters, more recently there has been interest in applying his ideas to mediated contexts. In theorising the impact of social media on adolescent identity and belonging in a group, Goffman's (1959) work on self-presentation has been used to understand both the intentional and unintentional identity cues that are shared between individuals. This was shown in a study by Davies (2012), who used the components of Goffman's theory to explore how social media was impacting on individuals' sense of self and belonging in social groups. The concept of face and performances was employed to describe how individuals using Facebook engage in activities to maintain the impression they want to give others. Davies (2012) gathered data from twenty-five teenagers in the United Kingdom through interviews and from their Facebook 'walls' to understand how they represented themselves and enacted friendship online. She then used Goffman's dramaturgical framework to describe the social acts they were involved in and adopted the phrase 'Facework' to describe how individuals consciously acted in ways that allowed them to maintain a positive face. This showed how Goffman's framework could be used to explain self-presentation through engagement with social media as individuals construct a shared and unified understanding of their reality.

However, self-presentations are not singular acts but form part of groups or *teams* that have mutually agreed norms and values (boyd 2014). This feature has been linked to mediated contexts in the way identity can be described as a social process that changes depending on the situation. By looking at others' profiles, adolescents get a sense of what types of presentations are appropriate and they use the cues to construct their own profile. SNS such as MySpace require individuals to identify lists of 'friends' which provides a group structure that could also be described as an 'audience' (boyd 2007). Friends could refer to peers, family members, people from hobby groups or gaming sites, someone perceived as being popular or someone it is difficult to refuse. As a result, an individual performs to 'friends' that could be a very mixed group of people, including groups with no clear distinction between them. boyd (2007) referred to the existence of these groups as 'collapsed contexts' because the value of the group was judged by the number of friends and the individual differences between members was no longer apparent.

Further evidence of the contemporaneity of Goffman's (1959) work was shown in a study that found participants were managing impressions that others formed of them in the contexts of blogging and SecondLife (Bullingham and Vasconcelos 2013). A key finding from their case study data was that the ten participants edited aspects of their identity and the

researchers argued this reflected the concept of 'front stage', where individuals deliberately project a chosen identity to an audience (Goffman 1959). The findings allowed the researchers to conclude dramaturgy was useful for understanding identity through the ways individuals interact with others and the cues they use to present themselves online. Goffman (1959) also used ideas of dramaturgy to show how scripts formed the patterns that structured talk and interaction, despite the appearance of improvisation. Murthy (2012) extended this argument by making connections with the self-affirmation affordances of Twitter to show how dramaturgy can be used to understand mediated communications. Twitter is popular because it offers ways for individuals to perform presentations of their idealised selves therefore analysis of social interactions as dramaturgical performances can be applied to individuals' interactions online through their use of SNS (Murthy 2012). By interpreting SNS as online stages, users become actors who present a carefully selected face to an audience. The stage has two regions, with the front stage as the profile page, which displays personal information about the actor to an unlimited audience and the back-stage region which is more controlled, and the actor could control who has access to information. Using these descriptions, Goffman's (1959) analyses of social behaviour and interaction could be specifically applied to understanding the problems and challenges of adolescents' sense of identity and belonging.

2.6 A summary of the key points from the literature review

The literature review has shown how users engaged with social media, their preferences and the consequences of their actions, particularly with SNS, raising issues about the methods employed, for example, viewing data on posts, ethical issues related to gathering data from chat rooms and how data is interpreted. Gross (2004) drew attention to the need for research that showed the subjective aspects of adolescent engagement with social media that were difficult to capture in the fixed response measures that were typical of quantitative data gathering methods that investigated access and user preferences. Similarly, Livingstone (2008) argued for research that was child-centred and combined a qualitative and quantitative approach to gathering data. The Digital Youth Project (Ito, Horst, Bittanti, boyd, Herr-Stephenson, Lange, Pascoe and Robinson 2008) was an influential study because it showed adolescents were in constant contact with their friends through texting, instant messaging, mobile phones and Internet connections. Similarly, the Pew Research Centre has made substantial contributions to the body of knowledge on social media use but not all the data they gather includes the adolescent age-group, making it difficult to generalise some of their findings to other populations. Data was gathered from teenagers through telephone

conversations that were monitored by parents, raising questions about validity. There are ethical issues relating to confidentiality about parents monitoring their children's contributions to research, as the process could impede the quality of the data or compromise the parent/child relationship. In contrast, Abiala and Hernwell (2013) asked participants to write a story about their use of online web communities. An important feature of their work was the emphasis they placed on the individual participant in providing information about their experiences. This approach reflects important themes in their work in relation to understanding the challenges adolescents negotiate in relation to constructing identity. Orchard, Fullwood, Galbraith and Morris (2014) employed a 'uses and gratifications' framework to argue users were goal directed and engaged with social media to satisfy individual psychological and sociological needs. Orchard et al (ibid) contended research needed to be multi-faceted in the way it examined engagement with social media by including both social and psychological factors.

From meta-analysis, Miller (2013) concluded early research had four shortcomings:

1. it failed to ground the online evidence with knowledge about the offline context of the population used
2. generalisations were made from data that was often obtained from US college students who gained course credits for taking part
3. a unified concept of identity was constructed from data from a variety of social media platforms, which varied a lot themselves
4. it focused on only a single media platform or a single aspect of identity but the wide range of media that is available makes understanding the selection and combination chosen by users important.

2.6.1 The research aims and questions

The literature review has shown how technology has been integrated into the lives of young people in ways that are transforming their culture and knowledge acquisition. However, it is also important to understand how these dynamics operate on a day to day basis and at that level, there was a gap in the knowledge relating to the stories that mid-adolescent girls could tell about their day to day experiences of living a life online. My area of interest was focused on mid-adolescent girls' engagement with social media and its impact on identity and belonging. Therefore, it was deemed important to establish what social media the girls were using, how they were using it and how it influenced identity and belonging. So, by

problematising the notion that social media was an important part of life for mid-adolescent girls, the focus of this research was established and three research questions emerged:

1. What social media were mid-adolescent girls using?
2. How were they using social media?
3. How did social media influence identity and belonging in groups?

Implicit within the third question was a need to understand two further issues. Firstly, the research needed to understand the positive and negative issues girls were dealing with as they constructed their sense of identity and belonging through social media. Secondly, the research needed to explain the influence of technology on mid- adolescent girls' sense of identity and belonging from a theoretical perspective.

The aim of the study was to contribute to the overall knowledge base about the lived experiences of mid-adolescent girls using social media and there were two objectives of the research. The first was to consider how, within the framework of a state secondary school, educators, parents and carers could support them at a critical time in their development. The second was to make recommendations of practical use to those responsible for the care and wellbeing of students within the context of the school. Chapter 3 explains the methodological approach that was employed in order to achieve those aims.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction to the chapter

This chapter will set out the methodological approach, including design decisions, ethics, data collection and analysis methods that enabled me to investigate the topic systematically, thus enabling the respondents to tell their stories.

3.1.1 Research design influences

Teenagers are among the most prolific users of social media and studies show young people spend a considerable portion of their daily life interacting through a range of SNS (Office for National Statistics 2015, Internetworldstats 2012 and Ito, Horst, Bittanti, boyd, Herr-Stephenson, Lange, Pascoe and Robinson 2008). Research that focused on the effects of social media on identity and belonging in social groups was influential in the design choices that were made for this work (Orchard, Fullwood, Galbraith and Morris 2014, Abiala and Hernwell 2013, Ellison, 2013, Manago, Graham, Greenfield and Salimkhan 2008, Subrahmanyam, Reich, Waechter and Espinoza 2008, boyd 2007, Lenhart and Maddon 2007 and Valkenburg and Peter 2007). The aim of this research was to explore the influence of social media on the lives of mid-adolescent girls as they developed a sense of identity and belonging in their social groups. The focus of the research was not on social media itself, but on its influence on perceptions of identity and belonging.

3.1.2 Philosophical approach

The philosophical approach that was selected for this thesis was based on my teaching and mentoring experiences and new knowledge gained from the literature review. From my teaching and mentoring experiences, I understood the broad aim of adolescence was to gain an understanding of who you are based on being accepted by the groups you want to belong to, based on their culture, values, norms and expectations. From the literature review, that understanding was extended to understanding interaction among individuals was based on mutually understood symbols. Individuals developed a sense of themselves as they learn to see themselves the way they believe others see them. Individuals evaluate their own conduct by comparing themselves with others (Lindsey 2010). Adolescent identity develops through the dimensions of the family, school and the need to belong to social groups knowledge is

constructed by individuals in social groups who build a shared understanding of the world around them (Harter 2012).

To understand human behavior, some researchers focus on social structure, patterns and trends in society and explain behavior on a macro level, while others with an interest in the minutiae of individual experience and everyday life are described as using a micro perspective (Lindsey 2010). Three perspectives have been used by sociologists to explain behavior at a macro- level or micro-level (Lindsey 2010). They are:

1. functionalism – which focuses on the macro-level of how society is structured to maintain stability, rather than the micro-level of everyday life
2. conflict theory - which operated at a macro level of analysis to focus on how conflicts arise when there are inequalities in resources, and how status contributed to social differences
3. symbolic interactionism - which examined social interactions at a micro level of analysis.

A functionalist perspective was not suitable for this work because the research was interested in the impact of social media on identity development on individuals, rather than on the wider issues of how new technologies were influencing cultural change on a macro-level. Similarly, conflict theory was not applicable because the focus was not on social media as a resource that led to power or status among groups at a macro-level. However, based on the outline above, symbolic interactionism resonates with this research because it is a micro-level perspective that examines how the meaning we derive from and attribute to the world around us is produced by everyday social interaction. The research questions aimed to examine the influence of social media on girls' sense of identity and belonging, which would require any data that was gathered to show the constructed meanings that they attributed to social media, their identity and their sense of belonging to a group or groups. Employing a symbolic interactionist framework for the research would contextualize the work as a study carried out at a micro-level with the aim of understanding specific interactions in a chosen sample of participants.

Historically, symbolic interactionism emerged during the mid-twentieth century and sought to address how society is created and maintained through the repeated interaction of individuals. Dominant thinking at the time examined how society was structured and how stability was maintained by employing a 'top down' approach that examined the impact of

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macro-level institutions and social structures (Carter and Fuller 2016). Symbolic interactionism offered an alternative viewpoint because it aimed to understand society from the 'bottom up' at a micro-level by exploring the way individuals create and maintain society through their everyday interactions.

The perspective was influenced by the work of George Herbert Mead, who theorised about the relationship between the self and society. There are five key issues from his work. They are the self, the act, social interaction, objects and joint action (Blumer 1966). Mead posits that human beings have a self, which he described as a process of self-interaction, that allows them to develop ideas of who they are, what they want to be, to interact with others, to judge, to analyse and evaluate what is going on around them (Blumer 1966). This view of the nature of human society differed from other dominant perspectives in that Mead stressed the importance of how individuals interpret the world around them rather than merely taking action in response to circumstances around and claimed this was possible because humans possessed a self. The second key issue, the act refers to processes that help individuals to interpret the world around them. In this way, action is seen as behaviour that is constructed by the actor, who has developed an idea of self, and then in order to act, has to identify what they want, establish a goal, plan their actions, note and interpret the actions of others, assess situations and reflect on them (Blumer 1966). The third key issue relates to how the way that individuals responded directly to one another's gestures or actions. Mead's theory differed from psychological and sociological theories of behaviour in the way it explains human interactions. While psychological theories centred on emotions and personality and sociological focused on cultural perceptions, values and norms, Mead argued human interaction is a shaping process where individuals build their understanding of their worlds by interpreting the actions of others. The fourth key issue relates to objects, which Mead described as social products, that are formed and can be transformed as individuals interact with it. Although Mead's work was comprehensive in the way it explained human behaviour, his writing was developed into a theory with specific methodological concepts. This was achieved by three key theorists, Herbert Blumer, who was working at the University of Chicago, Manford Kuhn at the University of Iowa and Sheldon Stryker at the University of Indiana (Carter and Fuller 2016).

Herbert Blumer, who led a group of sociologists known as the Chicago School, coined the term *'symbolic interactionism'* from Mead's concept of social action (Carter and Fuller 2016). Blumer's theoretical orientation towards symbolic interactionism has three key points which are

1. individuals act towards things based on the meanings that objects have for them
2. the meaning of things is derived from social interactions
3. meanings are constantly being modified through interpretative processes during interactions with others

(Blumer 1986 page 66).

Central to symbolic interactionist thought is the idea that individuals use language and symbols to communicate with others, hence the term *symbolic interaction*. There are two central assumptions that define this perspective. The first assumption is that meaning is important and the second is that individuals must have a sense of self in order to create meaning (Lindsey 2010). Meaning occurs through interactions with others, is based on experience and is an interpretative process. To act appropriately, an individual has to successfully interpret the behaviours that are required for a given situation, such as a family gathering, attending a sporting event or meeting friends. Furthermore, there is a common definition of each event that is accepted by those taking part and although this leads to stability within groups, changes can be negotiated, and new objects or ideas can be assimilated (Carter and Fuller 2016).

Manford Kuhn influenced a school of thought in symbolic interactionism known as the Iowa School, named after the university in America, where he taught. Kuhn asserted that Mead's theoretical perspectives could be scientifically tested by using quantitative research methods and developed the "Twenty Statements Test" as a way of gathering data about how an individual developed an understanding of their identity from the social interactions they took part in (Carter and Fuller 2016). Sheldon Stryker was associated with Indiana School, a group of sociologists, who like Kuhn believed that symbolic interactionist ideas could be tested using quantitative methods. However, Stryker expanded Mead's ideas of role-taking, arguing that social roles are the result of patterns of relationships and the expectations individuals have of them varies across situations and within the context of social change (Stryker and Burke 2000). Stryker interpreted Mead's principles as a framework for understanding social interactions and proposed modifications that meant his ideas became referred to as structural symbolic interactionism (Stryker 2008). A key element of structural symbolic interactionism posits that individuals identify themselves and others in the context of social structures that they use to form perceptions of how others see them. Over time those perceptions become internalised ideas of the self and the emphasis on the impact of social structures on how roles

are played reflects the way Stryker links micro and macro sociological theories. An important difference between the work of Blumer, Kuhn and Stryker is the methodological approaches they support. Blumer and his followers of the Chicago School wanted to understand human interaction, rather than predict and measure it in the Iowa and Indiana School traditions (Potts 2015).

Symbolic interactionist research has been criticized for being unscientific and too focused on a micro-level of enquiry but those working within the discipline have made major contributions in a wide range of fields that includes self and identity theory, social constructionism, the sociology of emotions and policy relevant research (Fine 1993). The relationship between the self and political ideology was researched by Brooks in 1969 and found that self views correlated with right-wing or left-wing ideologies (Carter and Fuller 2016). In 1956, Glaser showed how criminal behavior could be understood using a symbolic interactionist approach and in 1957, Stryker applied symbolic interactionist ideas to understand role taking and why family members have differing levels of commitment to their families (Carter and Fuller 2016). These studies showed how symbolic interaction theory could be used to understand many aspects of everyday life and more recent research is wide-ranging. For example, with a focus on culture, Ukasoanya (2014) used symbolic interactionism as a framework to understand how immigrant students adapted to their new environments and made decisions about what aspects of their own culture to retain in order to succeed on their courses. Symbolic interactionism contends the individual as a creator and constructor who continually interacts with the world and the contemporary relevance of symbolic interactionism clearly relates to the technological changes going on in society that require individuals to understand and use them, such as social media (Potts 2015).

However, Blumer's theoretical orientation towards symbolic interactionism has three key elements relate most closely to the aims of this study. Firstly, individuals act towards things based on the meanings that objects have for them, secondly, the meaning of things is derived from social interactions and thirdly, meanings are modified through interactions with others (Blumer 1986). The interactive processes that are fundamental to this study reflect the symbolic interactionists notion that society is socially constructed through human interpretation as individuals act according to their understanding of the meaning of their own world, namely how they use social media. Symbolic interactionism addresses how society is created and maintained through repeated interactions among individuals (Carter and Fuller 2016). Based on that definition, there are three interactive processes that are fundamental to this study. The first interactive process relates to what social media mid-adolescent girls are

using. When mid-adolescent girls engage with social media, communication involves the creation of shared significant symbols and they learn the meaning of those symbols by observing how others behave or react. The symbols are important because they are the basis of social life and they enable effective communication. The second interactive process relates to how they are using social media. Interactions are forms of social behaviour made up of communications to which others react, such as posting pictures of themselves or of an event. The way the interactions are interpreted influences the next step in the communication process as they could encourage further exchanges, or they could limit any other interaction. The third interactive process relates to the impact of their actions on their sense of identity and belonging. Symbolic interactionists contend that the concepts used to categorize people emerge through a socially constructed process (Lindsey 2010). This infers that people interact according to their perception of a social encounter, and how they think others who are also part of the interaction understand that event. Each person's definition of the situation influences that of others, and so reality is made up or constructed from what the members of a group agree reality to be. Through this dynamic process, individuals continually modify their behaviour, cultural norms provide the basis for this and individuals use their own definitions of appropriate behaviour to develop a sense of self. Many of the students I taught and mentored struggled to interpret the consequences of their communications online and many had negative experiences as a result. There were frequent arguments between groups that blurred the lines between their lives in school and at home, and they often grew to involve more than just the original communicators. The resulting distress interrupted their academic learning and impacted on the dynamics of the classroom. In this way, it could be argued that individuals construct their identity through social interactions, an idea that was developed further by Goffman (1959).

3.1.3 Theoretical framework

Although symbolic interactionists share the belief that humans use shared symbols to construct their ideas of reality, there are divisions within this perspective (Turner 2011). The main division is related to those who emphasise structure in studying human behaviour and those who emphasise process. Manford Kuhn and the Iowa School symbolic interactionists were interested in the structure of human interaction, and used quantitative research methods to study self-concept. In contrast, Blumer, and the Chicago School symbolic interactionists were interested in using qualitative methods to study the process of reality construction in social settings (Turner 2011). A third variation is Erving Goffman's dramaturgical

perspective on social life and it is this variation that is useful to this research. Goffman (1959) used the metaphor of a theatrical performance as a framework to describe strategies people use to present themselves to others and to control others' impressions of them so that they will be seen in a positive light. This concept and symbolic interactionist themes of symbols and shared meaning that feature prominently in his writing can be used in this thesis to understand the research question that asked how the respondents used social media to create and maintain common understandings of reality. In particular, Goffman's (1959) concept of how individuals manage and control the way others perceive them, relates to the way mid-adolescent girls use social media to present selected ideas of themselves to others. A key issue in understanding Goffman's dramaturgical analysis of social interaction is his claim that the individual should be thought of in relation to a social group, rather than as an autonomous being. In Goffman's (1959) framework, the fundamental unit of social analysis is not the individual, but what he refers to as the team, defined as

> *"A team is a grouping, but it is a grouping not in relation to a social structure or social organisation but rather in relation to an interaction or series of interactions in which the relevant definition of the situation is maintained."*

(Goffman, 1959 page 108)

Analysis of the complex systems of interactions that teams use in the construction of reality is what he refers to as dramaturgical social theory. Goffman (1959) conceptualised a 'front stage' and a 'back stage' where identity presentation and interpersonal interaction takes place and this provides a framework for investigating the first and second research questions that seek to understand how mid-adolescent girls use and interact through social media. Key concepts from Goffman's (1959) framework that are those of managing self-presentation in order to gain approval from an audience. The impact those interactions have on an individuals' identity and sense of belonging in groups is also of interest to this thesis through research question three. One of the issues that provided the motivation for this thesis centred around some of the difficulties I had observed among the mid-adolescent girls I taught. Many of those girls suffered distress related to negative social media experiences that were often referred to as bullying by parents and school staff. However, the term 'bullying' was often disputed by the girls, who maintained there were differences between what they understood as bullying and what happened on social media. Marwick and boyd (2014) make a very clear distinction between 'bullying' and 'drama'. From extensive research among adolescents aged thirteen to nineteen years old in America, Marwick and boyd (2014) found their participants described bullying as involving a perpetrator and a victim, whereas interactions that caused

them distress using social media stemmed from gossip and rumours. The participants in Marwick and boyd's (2014) research used the word 'drama' to describe interpersonal conflict in a way that resonated with the stories I had heard from the mid-adolescent girls I mentored. Boyd (2014) defined drama as

> *"performative, interpersonal conflict that takes place in front of an active, engaged audience, often on social media."*

> (boyd 2014, page 138)

By describing certain behaviours as drama, no-one is a target or abuser, the person at the centre of the drama is able to respond either online, offline or through both, which allows them to feel a sense of power, even though they may be distressed. From a symbolic interactionist standpoint, the individual continually interacts with the world and the contemporary relevance of this perspective relates to technological changes in society and how individuals understand and use them (Potts 2015). Blumer, and the Chicago School of symbolic interactionists were interested in using qualitative methods to study the process of reality construction in social settings (Turner 2011). This approach was also apparent in research by Marwick and boyd (2014), who gathered data from interviews and together, these sources influenced the research design, which is explained in the next section.

3.1.4 Research design

A researcher brings to the choice of a research design, assumptions about knowledge the strategies of inquiry related to those assumptions dir the procedures in a research design (Creswell 2005). This locates social research as essentially concerned with exploring and understanding the phenomena that are involved in social, cultural and psychological processes (Bryman 2006). Supporting this concept, Yin (2009) and Hamilton (2011) highlighted three conditions that influence the choice of research design as the type of research questions posed, the extent of control the researcher has over events and the research focus (e.g. a contemporary event, as opposed to historical events). These points were influential in determining the overall strategy of inquiry for this research.

The research questions aimed to find out how mid-adolscent girls were using social media and its influence on their identity and sense of belonging in social groups. As the research questions were intended to describe and explain a contemporary phenomenon, the extent of control on the part of the researcher was limited. Quantitative research methods aim to

establish cause and effect between variables, allow the researcher control over events and generate numerical data that can be transformed into statistics that show defined variables. This research aimed to gain an understanding of the lived experiences of the respondents, so the information offered would not be under my control. Therefore, an experimental research method would not have been suitable as the aim was not to establish a cause and effect relationship between a set of variables. In contrast, qualitative methods are used to gain insights into a problem or to gain an understanding of the lived experiences of a population. The qualitative approach aims to understand social phenomena as they occur naturally, and is warranted when the nature of the research questions requires exploration (Denzin and Lincoln 2003 and Stake 1995). Therefore, qualitative research questions are often preceded by the words *how* or *what* so that the researcher can gain an in-depth understanding of what is going on in relation to the study (Yin 2009). In addition, qualitative methods have the advantage of acknowledging the researcher's role as an active participant in the study, such as those studies where the researcher was both the data gatherer and interpreter of the findings (Creswell 2009). For this work, the research questions were both descriptive and explanatory in nature because they sought to describe which social media sites were being used, how they were used and their influence on identity and belonging. Consequently, a purely quantitative or qualitative research design would not have allowed the research to fully address the research questions. Mixed methods research has been defined as an approach that combines both qualitative and quantitative methods in a single study (Teddlie and Tashakkori 2009). It involves the collection, analysis and integration of both qualitative and quantitative data in such a way that the value of the different approaches, such as the trends and stories of personal experiences, contribute to understanding a research problem more effectively than one form of data collection could do on its own (Creswell 2015). There are several aspects of this type of research that need to be considered, including whether the different types of data should be collected simultaneously or sequentially, whether qualitative or quantitative data has priority in the analysis and reporting of the data and the function of the integration process (Bryman 2006). The decision-making process for this research was guided by the three questions in Table 1 below, where the answers have been shown in red.

Table 1: Decision Tree for Mixed Methods Design Criteria for Timing, Weighting and Mixing. (Based on Creswell and Plano Clark 2011)
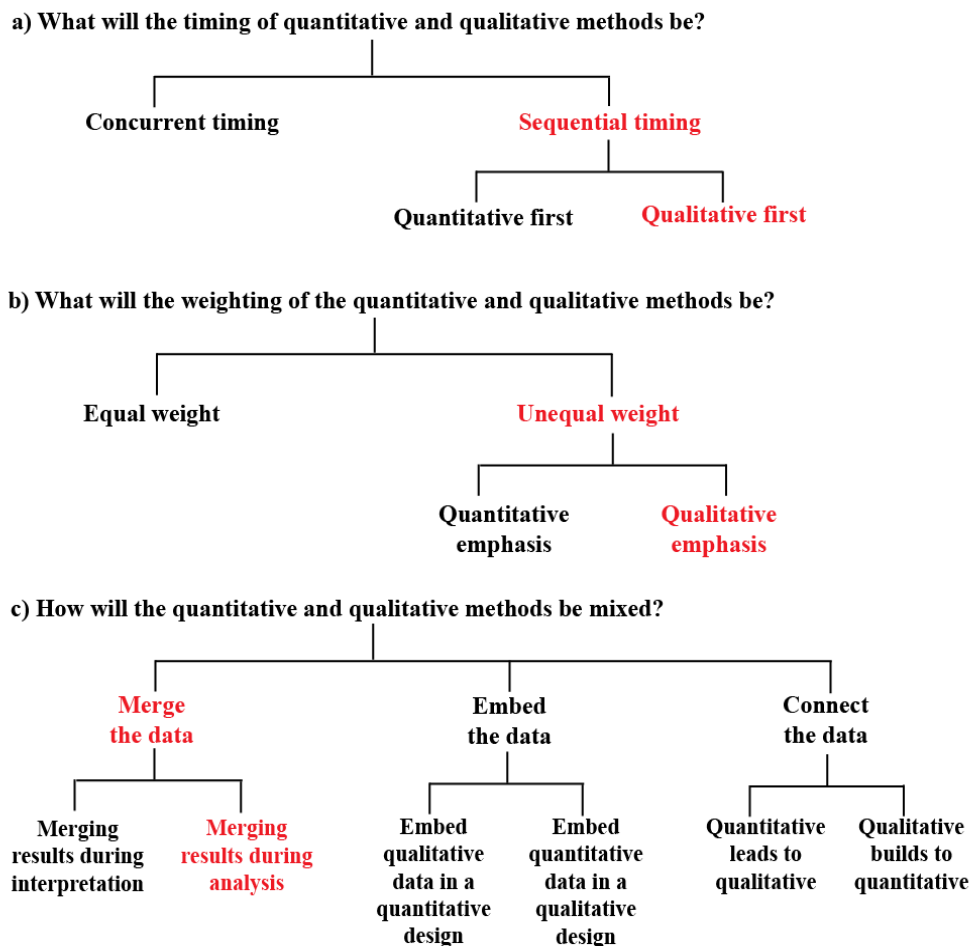
The table was helpful because the three questions that form its structure require researchers to make decisions about the design of their work that will secure a successful outcome to their work. Following the questions in Table 1 in relation to this work, decisions were made about the timing of data collection, whether the emphasis would be on qualitative or quantitative methods and how the data would be mixed. The timing of the quantitative and qualitative methods was sequential, with the questionnaire and time-use diary data being collected first, followed by data from semi-structured interviews. The weighting of the methods placed emphasis on qualitative data because the focus of the research was on gaining an insight into the influence of social media on the lives of the respondents, as they negotiated identity and a sense of belonging in groups. The data from the qualitative and quantitative methods was merged during analysis to form final conclusions.

3.2 Case study methodology

Case study research was chosen because there was a story to tell about the experiences of mid-adolescent girls living a life on and offline and the impact of social media on their identity and sense of belonging in groups. The research aimed to investigate mid-adolescent girls' use of social media and its' influence on identity and belonging. Therefore, case study research would enable me to investigate the contemporary issue of adolescent use of social media and build a rich picture of the respondents' lives, through purposive sampling, semi-structured interviews and thematic data analysis procedures. However, there are differing views in relation to what a case study is. One of the most prominent case study researchers was Robert K. Yin (2009), who wrote extensively about the techniques for organising and conducting research successfully. Of relevance to this study, was his assertion that case study methodology is the preferred research strategy when 'how' and 'why' questions are being explored, because it is considered suitable for investigating contemporary phenomenon situated in a real-life context where the researcher has little control over events (Yin 2009). Similarly, Hamilton (2011) argued case study focused on a bounded unit that was examined, observed, described and analysed to capture key components of the 'case'. For example, the case could be a person, a group or an organisation and continuing this theme, Stake (1995) referred to this kind of case study as 'holistic', meaning it captured the essentials of what constituted the person or organisation. With a more specific reference to education, Stake (1995) offered of an alternative form of case study, as an instrumental or delimited case study, which aimed to place the focus on an issue, a problem or dilemma within the case. In this way, the case still existed as a bounded unit but instead of trying to give a broad and inclusive picture of events, the research process was shaped by the aspect of the case that was of interest. Using the examples of Yin (2009), Hamilton (2011) and Stake (1995) as a guide, this case study was focused on the contemporary issue of the use of social media and its influence on identity and belonging among a group of adolescent girls in one secondary school. Hamilton (2011) described an important advantage of case study data as contributing to the body of knowledge of individual, group, or social phenomenon by allowing research to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events, such as that shown in small group behavior. These factors were reflected in this research, as it was a single case study, based on a small group of adolescent girls aged fourteen to sixteen years that examined the proposition that social media impacted on their perceptions of identity and belonging and this was a contemporary problem that needed to be addressed. Research should be mindful of both objective experiences and subjective perspectives and to support this belief a research

method that allowed the use of both quantitative and qualitative research methods for data collection was essential. However, within academic circles there has been a long-running debate about the value of qualitative data and its contribution to social science. For example, Troyna (1994) points out,

> *"there is a view which is already entrenched and circulating widely in the populist circles ... that qualitative research is subjective, value-laden and, therefore, unscientific and invalid, in contrast to quantitative research, which meets the criteria of being objective, value-free, scientific and therefore valid."*

(Troyna 1994 page 9)

As Troyna (1994) points out, there was a view that qualitative research had limited value because it does not establish cause and effect relationships. The underlying issue was the difficulty of generalising data from qualitative research because sample sizes are often small and not always representative of the wider population. However, educational institutions exist in complex social contexts, and individuals are a heterogeneous group with different attributes, abilities, aims, values and perspectives. Therefore, research that addressed these complexities was needed because they could not be explained through statistics alone, but needed qualitative analysis to identify and gain an understanding of the day-to-day lived experiences of young people. Although cognisant of the vast body of knowledge that exists about new technologies, I faced perplexing issues on a day-to-day basis and wanted to learn more about the problems that were pertinent to my students. Thomas (2011) argues that cases can be selected because they are the focus of interest and case study methodology is appropriate when a researcher is facing an issue that is perplexing. Furthermore, Thomas (2011) argues case study research is often developed from having some knowledge of a situation but being curious to know more. Similarly, Goodson and Sikes (2001) noted,

> *"As a general rule, case study research is more likely to appeal to the incurably curious who are interested in, and fascinated by, the minutiae of others' lives, and particularly in how people make sense of their experiences and of the world around them."*

(Goodson and Sikes 2001 page 20)

Reflecting their point, my curiosity was focused on finding out about how adolescent girls made sense of their social media experiences and why it was so important. Therefore, case study was the appropriate medium to employ. Education is dynamic by nature, and requires a research methodology that is process orientated, adaptable to changing circumstances and inherently flexible, qualities that made case study an appropriate choice for the research.

Through the lens of the theoretical framework described in section 3.1.3, case study was considered the 'best fit' for this work because it was investigating the contemporary phenomenon of social media use and its impact on identity, and the 'how' and 'why' research questions were designed to provide data that would add to my understanding of the lived experiences of those in the chosen population. In addition, case study was appropriate because it allows mixed methods of data collection and this was considered an important advantage in relation to this work as employing range of data gathering techniques would improve the validity of the work. A further advantage of this micro-level of analysis was the way it related to very specific interactions between individuals, such as those that involved social media use to form friendships, define behavioural norms and explore new interests. However, the narrow focus of research done from this perspective has been criticised for lacking objectivity and scientific rigour (Anderson and Arsenault, 1998 and Stake 1995). In relation to those issues, Stake (1995) argued that the design of all research required conceptual organisation based around hypotheses, with case studies only used at the exploratory stages of research, 'to pave the way' for experimental methods that allowed the researcher to test propositions and establish cause and effect. However, a counter argument provided by Yin (2009), described Stake's (1995) hierarchical view of doing research as flawed, stating more positively that case studies offered flexibility and could be designed to meet the demands of the research perspective. Regardless of whether they focused on a single subject or a small sample, case study provided an excellent means of understanding complex phenomena through mixed methods of data collection. Lastly, Greig and Taylor (1999) also influenced the research design decisions through this quote,

> *"There are times, however, when small scale research is appropriate and indeed where it is both desirable and valuable: for example, where a localized problem is identified or where a previous study has poor external validity but the profession recognizes that the findings may be applicable to their own practice."*

(Greig and Taylor 1999 page 7)

Although this study was small scale and addressed a localised problem it had the potential to arouse interest in other areas of education because the effects of social media were not a problem confined to just the case study school.

3.3 The case selection

This case study aimed to investigate how social media use impacted on identity and belonging in a sample of students from a single school, thus giving a micro-sociological

perspective of how their perceived social reality was constructed. The aim was not to uncover generalised behaviours, but to investigate the contemporary problem of the impact of social media on the identity and sense of belonging of a small group of respondents. It is a single case study of a group of thirteen female secondary school students aged fourteen to sixteen years at a state secondary school in the South West of England. The school is a foundation secondary school located in a coastal town where there are currently one thousand four hundred and ninety students aged eleven to sixteen years old. Bordered by a motorway, which acts as a boundary between the school and the rest of the county, the coastal location of the town makes it a popular location for holidaymakers and retired people. Just over a quarter of the students at the school are eligible for the pupil premium, which is additional government funding provided to give extra support to those students known to be eligible for free school meals and to children who are looked after. The proportion of disabled students and those with special educational needs supported through school action plans is just above the national average. Approximately one in four students joining the school are entitled to the Year Seven catch-up funding, which is for those who did not achieve the expected levels in reading and mathematics at the end of primary school. Some Year Ten students with specific emotional, social and behavioural needs study vocational courses at the local college or attend local work placements once a week. Feedback obtained from mentor sessions with those students shows they enjoy the experience and make good progress.

3.4 Validity, reliability and transferability of data

Yin (2009) argued validity had three forms he described as external, construct and internal. External validity related to the generalisability of the data, construct validity described the methods of data collection that were employed, while internal validity referred to the integrity of the design and the trustworthiness of a study, shown through the data analysis. Therefore, several measures were put in place to address those concerns. To ensure the validity of the research, protocols were employed to ensure the data was handled without bias in three ways. Firstly, pseudonyms were used to identify respondents, secondly key points from the interview data were chosen and thirdly, de-briefing respondents as the data was analysed.

Mixed methods of data collection were employed to strengthen construct validity by enabling comparisons to be made between findings from qualitative and quantitative data sources. This process of triangulation involved analysis of data from semi-structured interviews,

questionnaires and time-use diaries. Although scientific research aims to be objective, this method of data collection meant the work was subjective because it aimed to gather information from the perspective of those who experienced using social media. Flanagan (2012) identified an additional element she described as interpretative validity, meaning the extent to which data interpretations and conclusions were considered to reflect the respondents' reality. To support her claim, she suggested four ways in which this was achieved, including:

1. contextual completeness – shown in the richness of the descriptions given
2. reporting style – the extent to which a qualitative report was perceived to be genuine
3. coherence – the extent to which the data and analysis worked together in a rational order
4. chain of evidence – the extent to which analyses could be traced back through the record

In relation to this research, the points above were validated in four ways. Firstly, to achieve contextual completeness the interviews with the respondents were recorded so that their data could be referenced at any time, thus ensuring important details were included in the analysis. The choice of semi-structured interviews allowed the respondents to talk freely and in detail about their experiences, which added richness to the descriptions they provided. Secondly, by asking the respondents to check the interpretation of their contributions during data analysis, the reporting style was checked and the interpretative validity of the work was further enhanced. Thirdly, I led an action research group at the school where the research was carried out and validity in our research projects was a regular discussion point with the group. This ensured members reflected on their practice, thus ensuring a level of coherence in the work. Finally, a fourth level of validation was achieved through a chain of evidence that included keeping a research journal, regular tutorial meetings with supervisors, the peer review process at a University of the West of England Conference and meetings with other doctoral students These processes ensured the validity of the work was checked regularly at each stage. However, the methods employed by the study had the potential to lead to bias in the way the data was analysed and two key issues arising from being the sole investigator had to be addressed. The first issue related to the researcher/ teacher dual role and how the relationship between the interviewer and interviewee could cause problems because personal attributes, such as socio-economic status, age and cultural background had the potential to affect the re-presentation of the data (Kvale and Brinkman 2009 and Yin 2009). This had relevance to this work because a relationship of trust was needed with the respondents, but a

professional distance had to be maintained at the same time. Furthermore, I was not an avid user of social media and a lack of knowledge of the complexities of their affordances could have led to some important details in the data being ignored. The second issue involved taking steps to ensure an unbiased account of the data was produced.

It was well documented in the literature that the process of analysis could be influenced by the researcher's perceptions and experiences and the term reflexivity was used to describe the extent to which the process of research reflected a researcher's values and thoughts (Flanagan 2012, Kvale and Brinkman 2009, Yin 2009 and Finlay 2002). To enhance the scientific nature of this work, subjective bias was acknowledged as part of the research itself, rather than trying to minimize or remove it. This was achieved by spending time reflecting on my role as co-constructor in the relationship between the respondents and their data through recording thoughts and observations in field notes as the work progressed.

In the context of this work, reliability was defined as the procedures that were put in place to minimize errors and bias, in order make the study replicable. Yin (2009) defines validity as being the extent to which research findings can be generalised beyond the research setting. However, as this research employed a single case study design, with a small sample of respondents the research findings could not be generalised to a wider population. Therefore, a broader definition that evaluated the extent to which a research finding was 'true' or represented the 'reality' of the situation was considered more appropriate for this research (Hamilton 2011). This would be achieved through mixed methods, with qualitative data being the primary source and quantitative data being used to check and strengthen the validity of the findings, thereby enabling a more robust picture of the case to be built. The result would be a detailed insight into respondents lived experiences within the context of the research because the different components of data collection would be both reliant on and supportive of each other.

3.5 The sample

Developing the research questions subsequently allowed me to set the criteria for the choice of sample. Sampling takes many forms, such as random, stratified, opportunity and systematic. In a random sample, everyone in an entire population has an equal chance of being selected, the advantage being it reduces bias, but for this research it was not appropriate because the aims identified a specific age and gender group. Systematic sampling was disregarded for similar reasons, in that this method of selection follows a regulated pattern,

such as choosing every third person from a list, and I required a sample that was more specific to the case. Stratified sampling is typically used when specific variables such as IQ are being tested and although the method would allow me to generalise the findings, this research had not been developed based on a list of testable features. For this research, the sample needed to be purposive, meaning it was concerned with specific experiences so the respondents were selected because they meet the criteria and homogeneous meaning everyone in the sample would have had a common experience. The sample was purposive rather than random because the focus was on females within a defined age group and the strategy for selecting respondents was based on choosing people who would be appropriate to the study (Flanagan 2012). The chosen research population was adolescent girls aged fourteen to sixteen years from a state secondary school in the South West of England because this represented the age group that had raised concerns about the influence of social media on their lives and the group was accessible to the research. A volunteer, or self-selected sampling method was employed by asking for volunteers and this yielded a sample group of sixteen respondents. Three volunteers later withdrew their interest and the final sample totalled thirteen respondents. This method was chosen because it was possible to access a range of respondents who were all in the targeted age group. However, while this was an advantage in terms of making the task of obtaining respondents easier, it could also have led to bias in the sample because they were already interested in the research and keen to take part.

3.5.1 Gaining permission to carry out the research

The Headteacher of the case study school was consulted at the research proposal stage of the work and agreement was given at that time for the school to be used as the context for the work. A subsequent meeting was arranged with the Headteacher to discuss the research aims and questions, procedures and ethics. Permission was given to proceed and the Headteacher asked to be kept up to date with the results of the research as it progressed. Following that meeting, a copy of the letter requesting parental permission for respondents to take part in the research was checked by the Headteacher and signed by him (See Appendix 4). The member of the leadership team with pastoral responsibility for the respondents was also consulted about the research process before any data gathering began. A request was also made from that member of staff to be briefed about the results of the research.

3.6 Data collection

Data collection methods had to be sufficiently robust to achieve two aims. Firstly, a method was required that would ensure the respondents were able to contribute to the body of knowledge on social media use. The respondents were not familiar with the research process so a flexible approach to data gathering was needed to ensure they were comfortable with the process. Secondly, a method was needed that would indicate the data was valid. The nature of the research problem required that the type of questions that were asked gave respondents opportunities to share their thoughts, opinions and experiences. Therefore, a qualitative method for data collection was the most appropriate choice to secure that information. However, it was also necessary to incorporate ways of checking the validity of the data and this was achieved through a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. The purpose of this form of data collection was to use both methods in combination, to understand the problem, where qualitative data would be the dominant source of information. The use of a mixed methods approach was considered an advantage because the variation in the data collection would improve the validity of the work. This decision was taken because the methods complement each other in the way that quantitative data illustrates how frequently behaviours occur and qualitative data allows for an interpretation of their effects (Cresswell 2005). Qualitative data was collected from semi-structured interviews where the aim was to establish the impact of social media use on identity and belonging. In addition, questions four, five and six of the questionnaire also obtained qualitative data because they asked the respondents about their perceptions of the effects of their social media choices. Quantitative data was gathered from a questionnaire that was given to a pilot group and then the research respondents. Additional quantitative data from time-use diaries was collected from the research respondents. The intention was to address the first two research questions by establishing how often respondents used social media, their choice of platforms and the number of hours they engaged in social media activity each week. Therefore, by using mixed methods of data collection it was possible to check for anomalies in the data that would have impacted on later analysis. Next, in Section 3.6.1 a timeline describes the data gathering process and in section 3.6.2 the qualitative data gathering process is explained.

3.6.1 Timeline of data collection

A time line of the data collection process was compiled to illustrate the stages that were completed and is shown below in Table 2. The stages are not sequential, as some tasks overlapped. For example, discussions with the research and development group were going

on in the same week as preparations to arrange a location for the questionnaire work, and reflection of the data collection process was on-going.

Table 2: Chart showing a Timeline of the Data Collection Process.

Stages of data collection	Timescale	Action
Preparation of pilot study materials	One week	Preparation of pilot study questionnaire sheets including writing questions, deciding on questionnaire layout and printing.
Checking and evaluating pilot study materials	One x one hour meeting with each group	Discuss questions with Research and Development Group (see Footnote 3 on page 62) and Ed.D supervisor.
Preparation for pilot study data gathering	Two hours	Arrange location and request support from mentors to secure respondents for pilot study.
Preparation for pilot study data gathering	One hour	De-brief meeting with mentors to pass on details of pilot study; location, time, date.
Pilot study data gathering	One hour	Carry out pilot study of questionnaire.
Data analysis of pilot study questionnaire	Three hours	Analysis of the data obtained from the pilot study questionnaire.
Reflection of the pilot study	Three hours	Review questionnaire process. Reflect on processes by considering quality and consistency from the data obtained, both at a personal level and with peers,
Preparation for thesis research questionnaire data gathering	One hour	Arrange location and timing for questionnaire data gathering from research participants.

Respondent questionnaire data gathering	One hour	Carry out respondent questionnaire.
Data analysis of the respondent questionnaire	Three hours	Analysis of the data obtained from respondent questionnaire.
Checking and evaluating materials	Three hours	Review questionnaire process, reflect on processes, quality, consistency from the data obtained.
Reflection of the respondent questionnaire process	One hour with each.	Discuss data gathering procedure with Research and Development Group and Ed.D supervisor.
Preparation of materials	Ten hours	Preparation of materials for de-brief meeting information including writing an information booklet, preparing parental consent forms, printing.
Checking and evaluating	One hour	Share materials with Research and Development Group to check suitability.
Consult Head-teacher about materials	One hour	Check the information booklet and parental consent form.
Consultation with respondents	One hour	De-brief meeting with respondent group to give out information booklet, parental consent forms and discuss interview procedures.
Preparation for respondent interviews	Five hours	Preparation for interviews including interview questions, room booking, securing recording machine, trial run to checkk it works, co-ordinating interview schedule with students and their teachers.
Reflection of the respondent questionnaire	One hour each	Discuss interview procedure with Research and Development Group and Ed.D supervisor.

Respondent interview data gathering	Up to one hour each	Carry out interviews.

3.6.2 Semi-structured interview data

The qualitative data gathering method chosen for this research was a semi-structured interview, because the purpose was to gather descriptions of the life-world of the respondents and to see the research topic from their perspective (Cassell and Symon 2004). Whilst reviewing the literature on interview methodology, I was influenced by the work of Terkel (1975), who was widely credited for his ability to draw information from respondents through an unstructured approach to interviewing and the resulting 'story' allowed respondents to express their thoughts and feelings. However, the aim of this work was to gather knowledge of experiences, opinions and emotions and so a structured interview technique was considered unsuitable for this work. The respondents could be intimidated by structured questions because they were unfamiliar with the research interview process and ultimately, that could impact on their willingness to talk about their experiences. A semi-structured interview technique was employed because the open-ended questions allowed me the flexibility needed to follow the respondents' conversations and encourage further comments, so for example, phrases such as *"What did you do?"* or *"What happened next?"* could be used as and when appropriate (Creswell 2009, Goodson and Sikes 2001 and Hollway and Jefferson 2001). In addition, events perceived to be influential by me may not have had the same significance to the respondents. If there had been too tight a schedule or structure, there was a danger that important information may have been lost or given disproportionate emphasis.

3.6.3 Interview de-brief meeting

Prior to interviewing respondents, the researcher explained the nature of the work in a de-brief meeting held at the location that had been chosen for the questionnaire exercise to maintain continuity for the respondents. A leaflet outlining the research was provided for the

respondents and their parents/carers (See Appendices 5 and 6). A letter requesting parental permission for respondents to take part in interviews was distributed and no interviews took place until permission letters were returned. Participants were asked whether they wanted to be interviewed individually or in groups and all expressed a preference for the group option. A total of six interview groups were formed, one group of three respondents and five groups of two respondents.

3.6.4 Method for conducting the semi-structured interviews

The interviews were conducted in a quiet, discreet location where respondents could comfortably sit. A question prompt sheet was used to ensure all interviews followed the same format (See Appendix 7). The interviews were recorded using a hand-held digital recording machine, chosen because it was small, unobtrusive and was kept in a locked desk drawer in school when not in use during the day and taken home at night. A full record of all material and peripheral activity was kept, for example interviews were recorded and fully transcribed and the researcher recorded thoughts and observations both as the data was being gathered, and immediately after each interview in field notes and on a question prompt sheet. The following five protocols were employed during the data gathering process:

1. all respondents were referred to by a pseudonym to ensure anonymity
2. data from the recorded interviews was stored in a lockable filing cabinet at the researcher's home address
3. to ensure confidentiality, data analysis was completed at the researcher's home address
4. transcription notes were coded to maintain confidentiality
5. at the beginning and the end of each interview, respondents were reminded of their right to withdraw from the procedure at any time

3.6.5 Questionnaire and time-use diary data

Stake (1995) contends researchers use questions as a way of drawing attention to problems and concerns and describes two types of questions that help to achieve the task. Firstly, information questions (e.g. what social media platforms do you use?) are designed to provide statistical data and secondly, evaluative questions (e.g. which is your favourite platform and why?) that are designed to provide data about opinions, emotions and attitudes. Following this classification, a questionnaire was developed using a combination of both information

and evaluative questions (See Appendix 8). Questions 1-3 were information questions and questions 4-6 were evaluative in nature. The number of questions was deliberately limited to six so that the questionnaire appeared on a single page and the number of words per question was kept to a minimum for ease of reading. It was believed that the respondents would find a single page preferable to multiple pages, as it was not the intention to make the questionnaire look intimidating or seem like a classroom exercise. The space indicated for answers was kept small to suggest to the respondent that they did not need to write a lot. The page was designed to look simple, and this was achieved with the choice of Arial as font because that was the standard used in teaching materials across the school, and following that protocol, only titles appeared in bold type. The questionnaire did not have a space for respondents to add their name but they were told they could add their name if they wished.

Question 1 aimed to establish whether there were similarities or differences in the preferred social media choices of the respondents. Similarities in choice would enhance the validation of the qualitative data because it would be an indicator of consistency across the sample. Examples were added in brackets as a way of ensuring the responses were focused on social media sites, rather than games.

Question 2 asked which sites were used the most by respondents as a way of establishing patterns in social media use among the respondents.

Question 3 asked the respondents to indicate in a category box, the average amount of time they spent on social media during a week to understand how important such activity was in the respondents lives. A decision was made to add a selection of times in to support the respondents in making their decision. From my experience of conducting mentoring exercises in a classroom setting where similar questions were asked I knew students typically found it difficult to assess their own activities. However, it could be argued that by framing the question in this way, the respondents were guided towards either over-estimating or under-estimating their activity time. There was also the possibility that the time frames selected would be out of line with the actual practices of the respondents. Considering these issues, the fifth option was added, giving the respondents the option to add their own estimate.

Question 4 asked why respondents used social media because data in the form of opinions could be used to validate the qualitative data. The focus of the question was on the word 'why' because I was interested in the concept that social media played a part in the construction of identity and a sense of belonging.

Questions 5 and 6 were designed to extend the data further by asking respondents to differentiate between the effects of social media use. Therefore question 5 the asked respondents about the advantages of social networking and question 6 asked about the disadvantages. This was done to find out if there were clearly identifiable opinions on this issue, whether the benefits outweighed the disadvantages or vice versa. The research aimed to investigate the influence of social media on identity and belonging. Therefore, attention was focused on gathering data about how social media activity influenced identity and how this impacted on the respondents lived experiences.

At the bottom of the questionnaire page the respondents were offered an opportunity to discuss the questionnaire by providing details of where I could be contacted and when. It was important to raise awareness of the respondents' ethical rights in relation to offering them further information about the research and to be available to support them, so they could make their own choice about when to contact me if they needed to.

3.6.6 Questionnaire pilot study

Permission to carry out a pilot study with year ten students was obtained from the Head-teacher and the Head of Year. The pilot study was conducted with a group of twenty female respondents from the case study school, who carried out a trial run of the questionnaire only. This was intended to ensure the questions were easy to understand, to make sure the process did not take too long to complete and that it was fit for purpose in the sense that the questions were in the right order and generated the kind of data that was anticipated, meaning numbers, words and sentences where applicable. A tally chart was used to record the questionnaire data and the pilot study also allowed me to test its suitability (See Appendix 9). The pilot study also tested the feasibility of the selected location in terms of whether it provided the quiet, discreet space that was deemed appropriate for the nature of the work. In addition, the methods of analysis that would be applied to the data could be tested and if necessary amendments could be made in advance of the main data gathering procedure. The pilot study respondents were offered the opportunity to discuss the research, access further information about the questionnaire or time to discuss any other matters arising from their part in the work. Their data gathering activity was planned to take place at the start of the school day and the respondents would go to lessons straight after completing the questionnaire, so it was considered important to provide opportunities for support or additional discussion if they required it.

3.6.6.1 Pilot study procedure

The pilot study respondents were female members of two mentor groups. During a pastoral staff meeting of six mentors at the case study school, a request was made for volunteers to take part in a questionnaire pilot study. Two mentors offered assistance after consulting their classes and the remaining four mentors declined. Two of the mentors who declined said they could not trust their groups to respond in a suitable manner, one mentor wanted the time to complete other activities and the fourth mentor who declined did not offer a reason.

Three days before the pilot study was carried out, mentors were de-briefed during a short breaktime meeting about the details the location and procedure. The next day, the pilot study respondents were given details of the time and place of the data gathering exercise via their mentors. On the morning of the questionnaire activity the pilot study respondents were met at the location and de-briefed before the activity started, about the purpose of a pilot study, their right to withdraw and confidentiality, including how their data would be used and how to contact me if they wanted more information about the research. A printed questionnaire sheet was distributed to each pilot study respondent. No time restrictions were applied but they were asked not to talk to anyone while completing the task. Respondents placed their completed sheet in a tray on a table in the room. When all questionnaires were completed, the pilot study respondents were thanked for their time, given an opportunity to ask questions about the procedure and were then free to leave the research location.

3.6.7 Method and resources needed to collect questionnaire and time-use diary data

The resources needed to complete these two tasks were printed questionnaire (See Appendix 8), pens to complete the questionnaire, printed time-use diary sheets (See Appendix 10), a quiet, discreet location where respondents could comfortably sit to complete their questionnaire and a collection box for completed diary returns in an easily accessible and discreet location.

The interview respondents completed the questionnaire after the pilot study procedure indicated it was fit for purpose. They were also asked to complete a diary of the time they spent using social media and to briefly describe their activities. This was achieved by handing out prepared time-use diary sheets (See Appendix 10) with the questionnaire, for the respondents to complete at home. Both were completed independently by the respondents before the interviews took place and returned to a labelled box with a lid in an office, so that they did not have to have any face-to-face contact with me if that was their preferred choice.

Extra copies were printed in case a respondent made a mistake and wanted to complete the process again.

3.6.7.1 Procedure for questionnaire activity

Two days before the questionnaire data was collected, the mentors of the case study respondents were de-briefed to provide the case study respondents with the time and location details for the questionnaire activity. The following day, case study respondents were given the details of the time and place of the data gathering exercise by their mentors. The questionnaire activity was carried out next day. The respondents were met at the location and de-briefed before the activity started about their right to withdraw and confidentiality. A printed questionnaire and a diary sheet were distributed to each respondent. No time restrictions were applied but respondents were instructed not to talk to anyone while completing the task. Respondents were informed they could write their name on the questionnaire sheet if they wanted to but it was not a requirement of the activity. Respondents placed their completed sheet in a box with a lid on a table in the room. When all questionnaires were completed, the respondents were thanked for their time, given an opportunity to ask questions about the procedure and asked to collect a time-use diary sheet to be completed in their own time, away from school. The respondents were then free to leave the research location.

3.6.7.2 Procedure for time-use diary activity

The time-use diary sheets were given out at the beginning of the questionnaire activity session and the respondents took them away with a request for the sheet to be completed at home over the course of the following week. The respondents were asked to return the completed sheets when they attended their interviews.

3.7 Data analysis

Analysis of the data generated by the procedures outlined above was conducted in three stages. Stage one involved analysing recorded data and field notes (See Appendix11 for recording sheet) from the semi-structured interviews, stage two involved questionnaire and time-use diary data analysis and stage three involved applying the theoretical approach to data analysis.

3.7.1 Stage 1: Interview data analysis

The data collected from the semi-structured interviews was in the form of words and descriptions that described the respondents' comments to the research questions. Therefore, a method of analysis for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns in the data was needed. Thematic analysis involves the search for and identification of common threads in data from the what, why and how style of questions that are associated with case study. The data revealed issues that were found in all or most responses within the data set so initial decisions related to what counts as a 'theme' in the data set and how they would be identified. It is important to clarify whether analysis was intended to provide a rich description of the entire data set, one theme or a group of themes and the level at which they will be identified (Braun and Clark 2006). From the research questions, the aim of this study was to gain an understanding of the influence of social media on the lives of the mid-adolescent respondents, rather than provide a description of their social media activities. Therefore thematic analysis needed to illuminate the socio-cultural contexts and structural conditions that inform the data from the respondents. Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases of thematic analysis (shown in Table 3 below) provided a flexible structure to guide the data analysis.

Table 3: Phases of Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006).

	Phase of analysis	Activity
1	Familiarizing with the data	Transcribing, reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2	Generating initial codes	Coding interesting features of the data and collating relevant data into each code.
3	Searching for themes	Collating the codes into potential themes and gathering data relevant to each theme.
4	Reviewing the themes	Checking the themes in the work relation to the coded extracts and the entire data set. Generating a thematic map of analysis.

| 5 | Defining and naming the themes | On-going analysis to refine the specifics of each theme and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme. |
| 6 | Producing the report | Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature producing a scholarly report of the analysis. |

As the researcher who conducted the semi-structured interviews, I had some prior knowledge of the material and had noted interesting comments and themes in my notes. The interviews were recorded so as I listened to them those notes were reviewed and others were added that were related to recurring words and phrases from the respondents and points that linked to material from the literature review. Interview transcription was completed by listening to small sections of the recordings at a time and typing the data into a Word document. Although transcribing the verbal data into a written form was time consuming for me, it was preferable to assigning the task elsewhere, as it enhanced my understanding of the data set. After listening to the recordings and transcribing the data an initial list of ideas about what was interesting across the data set and that information guided the next phase of analysis. A colour code was assigned manually to words, phrases and sentences within the transcripts that linked to the research questions. This process followed phases 1 – 2 on Table 3 shown above (Phases of Thematic Analysis Braun and Clarke 2006). Samples from this procedure are shown below in Figures 1 and 2.

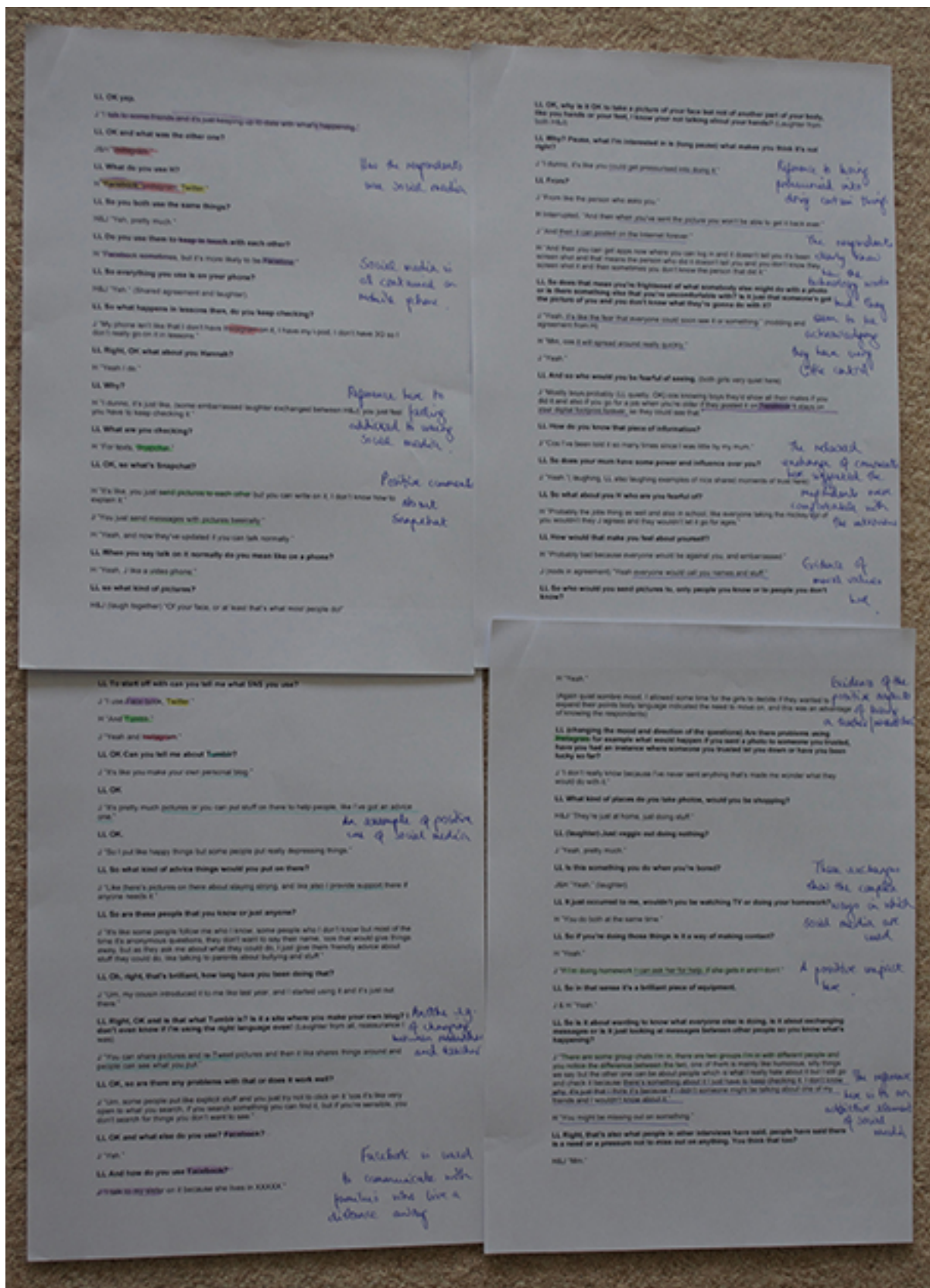# Figure 1: Example of manual colour-coding process.

Figure 2: Example of notes that show how themes and sub-themes were developed.

The highlighted codes were then reviewed and those with similar meanings were grouped together. Sub-themes were eventually identified from this process as it revealed patterns that allowed me to cluster them together by connecting ideas and meanings across the interviews, following phases 3 to 5 of Braun and Clarke's (2006) strategy for analysis. These were initially done manually, by colour coding sections of printed transcripts. Six sub-themes were identified because they featured across all data sets and indicated an emergent pattern that also related to the research questions. The sub-themes were then arranged by connecting ideas and meanings and three major themes were generated that depicted the influence of technology on mid-adolescents as they developed their identity and a sense of belonging in social groups. The first theme focused on how the respondents used SNS to present themselves and communicate with others. Only those SNS that were named by all respondents were coded. The second theme was related to individual identity with issues surrounding self-concept, parents and privacy. The third theme was related to the influence of technology on the social and cultural issues of belonging to a group. At this stage, quotes that were representative of these themes were inserted into a framework for each group of participants (see Appendix 12 for an example). The number of quotes on each theme were reduced and only a selection were included to represent the themes that were generated. Phase 6 of Braun and Clarke's (2006) strategy for analysis echoed Sikes (2005), who argued that writing about research findings should aim to create a sense of feel and place for the reader and to convince them that the researcher has 'been there' and through reading, they could have been there as well. Although her reference was to narrative writing and telling a story, it was also about re-presentation and this was a key phrase because it referred to the re-telling of stories that have been told, such as those from interview data. By selecting extracts of the data, analysis aimed to provide a concise, non-repetitive and interesting account of the respondents' experiences.

3.7.2 Stage 2: Questionnaire and time-use diary data analysis

Analysis of quantitative data requires a systematic approach that transforms the raw data into a form that can be measured and shown in a visual display. Data from questions 1 to 3 and the time-use diary activity were first analysed by arranging the responses into tally charts (see Appendix 13) which reduced the amount of data into a spreadsheet. Calculations that measures of central tendency where calculating a mean, median or mode score can provide an overview of activity. Consequently, the mean was calculated on the data that showed the amount of time respondents spend on social media to show if it was similar or different to

that referenced in studies cited in the literature review. However, data showing the most popular platforms used by the respondents required a different form of analysis to indicate not only which social media sites were being used, but also the most frequently visited sites. Graphs such as bar and line or pie charts display data in a visual form that is easy to read so for data indicating which social media sites were used a bar chart was selected because the purpose of the analysis was to indicate which sites were the most popular and the bars on the chart indicated frequency of use.

3.7.3 Stage 3: Theoretical approach to data analysis

In the final stage of data analysis, Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical concepts have been used to interpret how social media impacts on adolescent girls' sense of identity and belonging in groups. Goffman (1959) used the metaphor of a theatrical performance as a framework to describe strategies people use to present themselves to others and to control others' impressions of them so that they will be seen in a positive light. Social media plays a key role in the way mid-adolescents construct their identity and sense of belonging in groups, while trying to maintain family relationships and achieve academic success at the same time. The technology pervades teaching and work environments, social media appeals to all age groups and is constantly evolving. Therefore, the concept of dramaturgy can be used to explain the creation and maintenance of common understandings of reality by mid-adolescents working individually and collectively to present a shared and unified image of that reality. A key issue in understanding Goffman's dramaturgical analysis of social interaction is his claim that the individual should be thought of in relation to a social group, rather than as an autonomous being. In Goffman's (1959) framework, the fundamental unit of social analysis is not the individual, but what he refers to as the team. Analysis of the complex systems of interactions that teams use in the construction of reality is what he refers to as dramaturgical social theory. These concepts have been used to interpret the data from this study and are shown in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3: Goffman's (1959) framework used to analyse the data from this study.
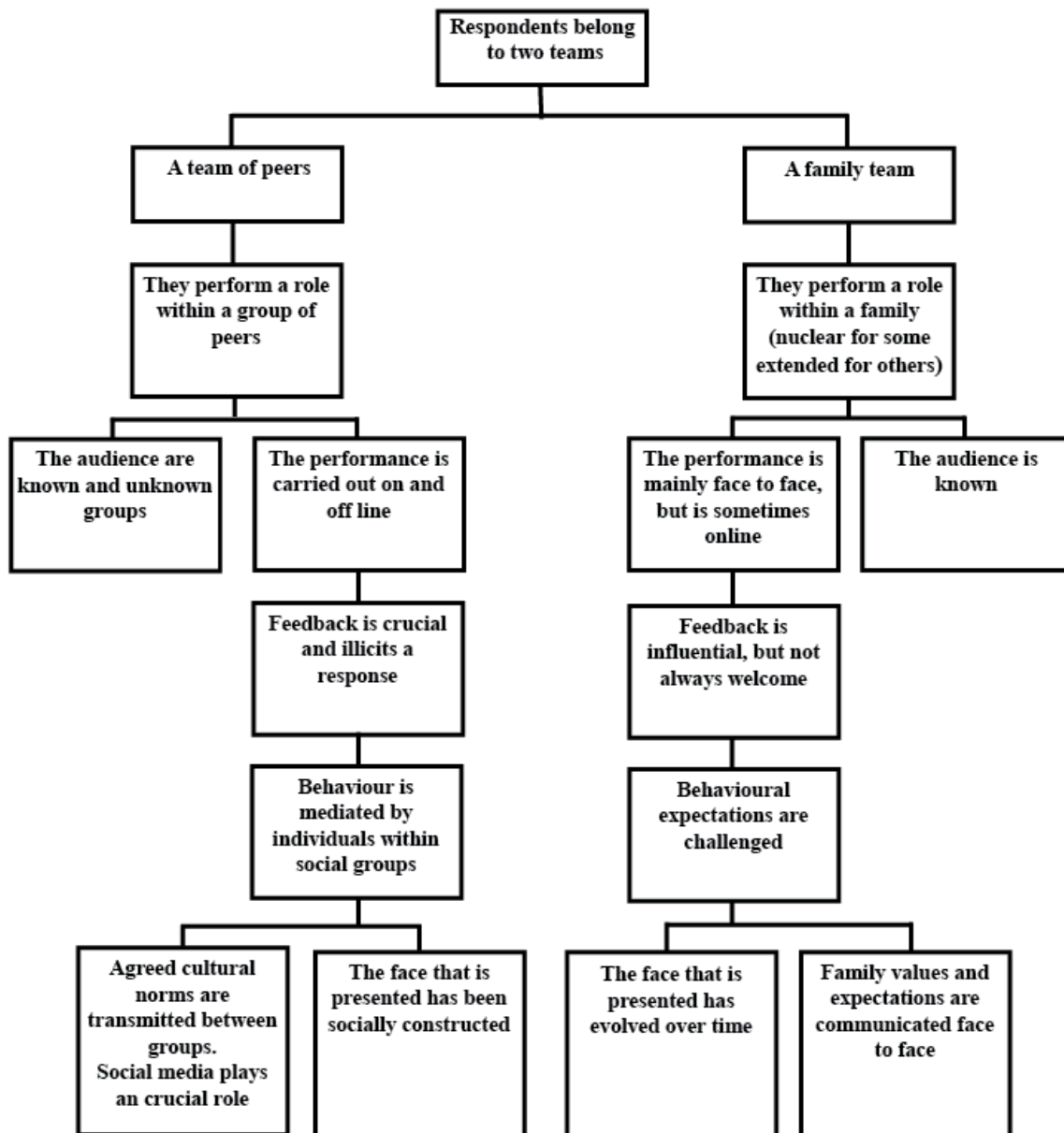
Taking these factors into account, Goffman's (1959) framework was used to explain the data from this study. Goffman (1959), likens the way teams cooperate in order to construct reality to the presentation of a play. A crucial element is the role, which refers to the image a single actor wants to convey to an audience. Understanding within the team is helped by a script, which is a conversational format played out in a physical environment that Goffman (1959) refers to as the stage. Interactions are described as performances and they create a specific impression that Goffman (1959) referred to as a face, which can vary and represents the successful staging of an identity. He delineated front and back stage regions for interactions,

describing the front stage as the space where the performance was public, and the back stage was where access was more controlled and limited.

3.8 Ethical considerations

So far, this chapter has outlined the choice of method, issues relating to validity and reliability and the analytic structure that was used to make sense of the data. As the research aimed to investigate the lived experiences of girls aged fourteen - sixteen years the final section will address ethical issues of doing research with children and young people.

3.8.1 Doing research with children

> *"Children are not mere recipients of their environment, but they influence what goes on within their worlds and are active in making the environment what it is."*

(Greig and Taylor 1999 page 160)

The quote above was very pertinent to this work because it related to how the respondents behaved as social actors in their worlds to gain a better understanding of their lived experiences. This was important because the quote illuminates the issue of context within research, and how it could be useful to understand the respondents behaviour if they were viewed as part of a social system. The change from the familiar school setting the respondents knew well to the setting where research was being carried out was successfully addressed because all respondents agreed the location where they were taught was the most discreet and the one where they felt most comfortable.

Another issue to consider was whether the work was relevant to the respondents and to education. Gregory (2003) argued this demanded considerable intellectual rigour, and that came from the work being rooted in a serious engagement with the 'canons of research', which was interpreted as a reference to ethical guidelines such as those of the British Education Research Association (BERA). Following this advice, the ethical guidelines followed throughout the research process were based on those specified by BERA (2011) and were explained in language that was more accessible to the respondents, in a leaflet that was written for this research (see Appendices 5 and 6). The leaflet outlined how the research would be done, how the data would be used and the right to withdraw. Obtaining informed consent from the respondents and their parents/carers was done by letter (See Appendix 4) and again verbally at the start of each meeting with respondents. This was a key issue

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because it addressed the morally important issues of autonomy, self-determination and privacy, and treating individuals as ends in themselves, rather than as the means to an end. During data gathering respondents were asked to share their thoughts, feelings and attitudes, knowing these were private to those individuals. Exploring that part of their lives could only be justified with their informed consent.

3.8.2 Ethical challenges

The Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research published by the British Educational Research Association (BERA) (2011) informed the procedures that were developed for data gathering, analysis and thesis writing. The guidelines were followed in relation to gaining informed consent from the respondents and their parents, confidentiality, anonimity and the right to withdraw. However, the focus of the research was on adolescent use of social media and there was the potential for the respondents to disclose sensitive information. Support under those circumstances would be achieved by following the school policy on student disclosure and by ensuring respondents were treated with respect and dignity through those protocols.

Managing my role as a teacher and a researcher presented specific ethical challenges. The BERA (2011) guidelines alert researchers to issues relating to the extent to which a dual role as a teacher and a researcher impacts on students and colleagues. The guidelines were followed to gain consent as a teacher to conduct the research as a doctoral student within the school. A face to face meeting with the Headteacher enabled us to discuss issues that would ensure he was informed of the reasons for the research, the procedures that would be used and how the findings would be portrayed. Article three of the BERA (2011) guidelines states

> *"The underpinning aim of the guidelines is to enable educational researchers to weigh up all aspects of the process of conducting educational research within any given context (from student research projects to large-scale funded projects) and to reach an ethically acceptable position in which their actions are considered justifiable and sound."*

(BERA (2011) page 4)

Establishing those details was important so that the Headteacher could field questions from other staff, students or parents and his support was important in enabling me to plan and carry out the research. During that meeting, the Headteacher expressed a desire to create a research group among other members of staff and I was invited to lead that team. Consequently, the school benefitted from the results of a variety of research projects, other colleagues gained from the opportunity to do research and we worked as a team, using the guidelines from

BERA (2011) to monitor and support our work. Details of the research group projects were regularly reported during staff meetings and colleagues were made aware that they were welcome to take part if they wished.

In the early stages of the research gaining informed consent from the respondents and their parents was considered a challenge because no members of the teaching staff had previously done this type of work before. BERA (2011) guidelines consider it the norm for researchers to obtain voluntary informed consent as this ensures respondents understand why they have been asked to participate in research and how the data they provide will be used. A booklet was prepared to explain issues such as informed consent and the right of the respondents to withdraw from the research at any point (see Appendix 6). Parental permission slips were returned promptly and some had added positive feedback in the form of notes that indicated the booklet had been successful in explaining the aim of the research. Several parents described being proud of the fact that their daughters had the opportunity to take part in research, indicating that they supported not only this work, but the incentive shown by the school to address wider issues relating to student health and well-being.

Another challenge to overcome related to managing the change in roles between the students who became respondents, and myself, as a teacher who had become a researcher. This was an issue that required careful negotiation as I tried to introduce our different roles and create a distance between myself and the respondents (Sikes 2009 and Sikes and Goodson 2003). This challenge was facilitated through de-brief meetings where we discussed issues about the research process. The respondents were told about the background to the research and the discussions that followed enabled us to explore our different roles (i.e. of teacher/researcher and student/research respondent). The de-brief meetings presented an opportunity for the respondents to observe each other as participants in a research study, rather than as friends and students in a lesson, and me as a researcher conducting a study in the school we were all familiar with. In addition, the respondents were given a choice of research venues around the school campus and they all agreed a classroom was one where they felt they would be most comfortable.

In order to manage my role as a teacher and a researcher I had to reflect on how the two roles might impact on the research (Witcher 2010). As a teacher, I was a member of the same group as the respondents because we all worked in the same school environment and together, we were part of the school population. In addition, I had been a member of staff for several years prior to beginning my research so had knowledge of the aims and values of the

school in a way that would not have been available to a researcher who was an 'outsider' to the school. Consequently, one role was advantageous to the other because as a teacher, I had 'insider knowledge' that would be benefit the research (Witcher 2010).

Managing my role as a researcher was achieved in four ways. Firstly, working with the teachers who were doing research projects in the school, provided opportunities to discuss our interests as researchers, rather than teachers. Secondly, the permission letter that was sent to parents and to the students who became respondents was written as a researcher, not a teacher. Thirdly, during regular meetings with the Headteacher to inform him of the progress of the research group, my role was as a researcher, not a subject teacher. Finally, as a researcher my focus was on gaining a doctoral qualification for reasons that were not associated with the school and the time I allocated to studying was separate from the time allocated to my role as a teacher and as a researcher.

Research has shown that conducting studies as an 'insider' allows easier access to respondents and data collection can be less time-consuming. In addition, the familiarity and rapport that an insider researcher has with an institution and its members enhances the level of understanding that exists between them (Mercer 2007). In contrast, Shah (2004) takes a different perspective after investigating the interactional issues between researchers and respondents in cross-cultural studies. Although the focus of Shah's commentary is on cross-cultural interviewing by 'insider' researchers, she argues it is crucial that every researcher should be aware of the context and limitations of their work (Shah 2004).

The context of this research meant there was a risk that during the process of data gathering, respondents would disclose sensitive information and I needed to ensure that if that happened, they were protected from harm and treated with respect and dignity. In addition, it was also important to ensure the data was handled confidentially and that annonimity was maintained following the procedures laid down in the BERA (2011) guidelines. Caylin and Teja referred to having friends who are underage consumers of alcohol. However, the respondents did not mention names and the details were part of a conversation that moved on to other issues. In another interview, Hannah and Jess commented on people they knew who posted pictures of themselves smoking, and Bec, Maisie and Clare gave definitions of 'populars' that included getting drunk every weekend. While the tone and the calm manner with which the comments were made suggested who was drinking alcohol and using drugs was common knowledge among the respondents, their disclosures created an ethical dilemma for me as researcher. The respondents disclosed details of activities that could be classified

by me as a researcher as 'sensitive' and therefore requiring further attention but they did so in a way that that indicated they knew the data was controversial but they were not in danger. Under these circumstances, the BERA (2011) guidelines about protecting respondents from harm provided a linear procedure which seemed inappropriate for this situation. Floyd and Arthur (2012) drew on their expereinces of conducting studies in institutions where they worked and described the ethical and moral dilemmas that 'insider' researchers deal with by using the terms external and internal ethical engagement. External ethical engagement refers to the traditional ethical issues that are required to conduct research (gaining informed consent, ensuring confidentiality, offering the right to withdraw, protecting respondents from harm and ensuring anonimity). Internal ethical engagement refers to the ethical issues that arise 'in the field' (Floyd and Arthur 2012). For example, insider researchers are not able to control what is disclosed and cannot 'unhear' what they have been told and as a consequence, a number of problems can emerge. Insider researchers may be trusted with very personal information which could become problematic at a later date if they have to continue working with the respondents (Floyd and Arthur 2012). With regard to the data from the respondents in this research, my professional duty as a teacher resulted in the decision to discuss the details with the Headteacher. He explained that he had heard similar stories because he had been briefed by a number of sources about out of school activities among some of the student population and it was agreed that no further action was needed. Leat, Reid and Lofthouse (2015) call for school leaders to view teachers in a broader context than as the deliverers of a curriculum, and contend that a supportive environment for teacher research is important because teachers as individuals are not just one person but many and they are constantly evolving. The support of the Headteacher on this occasion helped to ease the internal conflict of being a teacher and a researcher.

On a different topic, Meg told the story of how she did something she later regretted because of the impact it had on her family and the distress she suffered as the details of her actions were spread through Facebook. While she told the story, she remained calm, made eye contact with me throughout and moved on to different topic afterwards. At the end of the interview I thanked Meg for sharing her story and asked if there was anything I could do to support her. She replied that she had moved on from that time, and relationships with her family were improving slightly. Meg also reassured me that she knew she could trust some members of staff to support her and would contact me if she needed any help. We discussed the data she had shared but she refused my offer to withdraw the details, saying she hoped it would help others to understand some of the risks of using social media. Ethical guidelines

are an essential element of the design and procedure of a research project because they provide a stringent and linear framework that ensures good practice. However, this episode illustrates that they do not always cover the interpersonal interactions that occur between the respondent and researcher as the research develops (Daley 2012).

However, data from Maisie reflects the limitations of this research and was reported to the schools' member of staff with responsibility as Designated Safeguarding Lead because of the distress she and her friends showed during the interview. The interview with Maisie, Bec and Clare started in a light-hearted way but as Maisie disclosed some information about herself, the mood changed considerably, they stopped making eye contact with each other and two respondents cried. This issue was different to those described above because there was a direct reference to how Maisie felt about coming to school now. The other interviews had reported sensitive issues but they did so without the level of distress that was shown by Maisie, Bec and Clare. In other interviews, respondents were reporting details of their experiences, but Maisie was describing how she felt and the impact that had on her from day to day. In that instance, I repeated my earlier statement that if anyone disclosed information that I felt indicated they were at risk, I had to pass it on to the Designated Safeguarding Lead because the school has a very clear protocol that staff must follow. The respondents agreed, and I contacted the member of staff immediately. The respondents wanted to talk to someone about the issue that had led to Maisie's disclosure as soon as possible and arrangements were made for them to stay with me until the Designated Safeguarding Lead could meet them. Within half an hour the respondents were seen by that person and I left the room. However, when that meeting finished, the Designated Safeguarding Lead contacted me to explain Maisie, Bec and Clare wanted me to use the interview material because they wanted the negative impact of Facebook to be highlighted so that others' might avoid the hurt they had experienced. During a later debrief meeting, Bec, Maisie, Clare and I reviewed my transcript notes and the paragraph that is included in section 4.3.3.2 of Chapter 4 of this thesis was added with their consent.

The decisions that were made in response to the disclosure by Bec, Maisie and Clare were informed by the school policy in relation to keeping children safe in school. The policy is regularly highlighted during in-service training sessions for all staff and follows statutory safeguarding guidance published by the Department for Education. In addition, preparations for this research were initially informed by the Department for Education document Working Together to Safeguard Children: A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children, published in March 2013, which had been referenced by the schools

Designated Safeguarding Lead as a document that all professionals working with children should consult. Of particular relevance to this research was the inference throughout the document that the needs of the child is paramonut in any situation. A later document, Part One of the Department for Education document entitled Keeping Children Safe in Education: Statutory guidance for schools and colleges September 2016 was also consulted as drafts of this thesis were written and served to res-assure me that the decisions I had taken at the time of data gathering were correct. The document stresses that everyone who comes into contact with children has a role to play in identifying possible concerns and taking prompt action. An essential part of the planning for this research was framing the erthical guidelines that would ensure the rerspondents were cared for adequatly. However, Daly (2012) argues ethical guidelines do not equip a researcher to effectively deal with the dilemmas that arise when you are sitting opposite a respondent. In a face to face setting, researchers have a responsibility to make assessments about the best course of action to take for that person. Daly (2012) recognises that researchers need to make ongoing decisions because from her experience of case study research that involved interviewing young people, ethical dilemmas arise. Day (2012) argues you cannot prepare solutions to all of the issues that may arise, but the most ethical response is to care for the respondents by ensuring you do as much as you can to protect them and the stories they have shared. When the Designated Safeguarding Lead contacted me to explain the respondents wanted me to use their interview material because they wanted the negative impact of Facebook to be highlighted so that others might avoid the hurt they had experienced, I felt the actions I had taken were fit for purpose.

3.8.3 Ethics and data analysis

To ensure the privacy of the respondents, pseudonyms were used during all stages of analysis and report writing and during discussions with the research group. As the interview data was transcribed the accuracy of the account of the information was checked with the respondents. This was done to secure their agreement on the way it had been interpreted and they were re-assured that if necessary, amendments that were directed by them would be made. This was done because the cultural norms and expectations of the respondents as students were different to mine as a researcher (Ball, Maguire and Macrae 2000). Gregory (2003) questioned how researchers distinguished between those facets of the research that were covered by the consent given, and those which the respondents provided because the research moving in a different direction. To counteract this, Gregory (2003) suggested a 'process driven' model of consent that meant seeking to continually review/renew the 'mandate' of the

research. This advice was heeded by collaborating with the respondents at all stages of the research process. For example, at the beginning of each data gathering exercise, the respondents were reminded of the ethical guidelines that were put in place to protect them from harm and ensure the research process was a positive experience for all involved. In addition they were shown the analysis of the data and the conclusions were shared and discussed with them, to ensure the research process felt like it was being conducted with the respondents, rather than on them. In return, the respondents engaged positively with the research and this led me to believe the research was a collaborative process that was relevant to them and to education.

3.9 Chapter summary

This chapter has explained the choice of methods, issues relating to validity and reliability and the analytic structure that was used to interpret the data. Ethical issues of doing research with children and young people and those related to data analysis have also been discussed. Next, chapter 4 describes how focus group work was used to explore the issues that were of concern for some of the students I taught, to assess the level of interest in engaging with research and to scure a respondent sample.

Chapter 4: Case findings

4.1 Introduction to the chapter

The rationale for this research came from a desire to raise awareness of the difficulties that some girls experienced in relation to using social media to negotiate a life on and offline. Many of their difficulties were focused on how they were perceived by others and interactions with friends and family as they constructed their identities and a sense of belonging in social groups. To address this complex process a mixed methods approach to data collection was employed with the dominant source being qualitative data. Following the pen portraits in Section 4.2, Section 4.3 shows analysis of data from semi-structured interviews, section 4.4 covers the results and analysis of data from questionnaires, section 4.5 has the results and analysis of data from time-use diaries and section 4.6 has a summary of the findings from the mixed methods of data collection. Section 4.7 examines how adolescent identity and belonging can be explained in a digital age. The chapter concludes with section 4.8, which examines how adolescent identity and belonging can be explained in a digital age by using Goffman's (1959) concept of dramaturgy.

4.2 Pen portraits of the girls in the sample

The rationale for this research came from a desire to raise awareness of the difficulties that some girls experienced in relation to negotiating a life on and offline. Many of their difficulties were focused on how they were perceived by others and interactions with friends and family as they constructed their identities and a sense of belonging in social groups. Social media was a key element in that process and my initial assumptions that young people knew how to engage with new technologies was shown over time to be very wrong. My role as mentor gave me an insight into the many difficulties that my students were experiencing as they conducted their lives on and offline. Although they were very enthusiastic to engage with social media they frequently experienced problems caused by a lack of awareness of the implications of their actions. My teacher/researcher role was unique in that the girls were known to me as both students and respondents' and key information about the respondents was not recorded by the methods chosen. Therefore, pen portraits have been provided to enhance the respondents' identity and contextualise their relationships with each other. The content of each portrait is based on my observations of the girls in the classroom, during mentor time and during focus group sessions. The pen portraits have been included as part of the qualitative data because there are strands of information in them that match other data

sources, such as references to family, peer relationships and aspirations. The respondents chose to take part in the research process in friendship groups of two and three so the pen portraits have been written about each of those groups to maintain continuity.

4.2.1. Caylin and Teja

Since they met on the first day of term in year seven, Caylin and Teja have been very close friends. They meet at the beginning and end of the day, at break and lunchtimes and sit together in the subjects they both opted for. They are conscientious students, eager to please by conforming to rules and support each other both academically and socially. They like structure in their learning and clearly defined goals. They have a small circle of close friends and rarely associate with others.

Teja lives with both biological parents and her siblings. She is very reserved, quietly spoken, and the youngest of three girls who have been raised following traditional Indian family values in the sense that she respects her parent's expectations of her. In the family home, Hindu is the first language and Teja always attends parent meetings at school to translate for her mother, although her father speaks very good English. Teja has experienced considerable dissonance in relation to accepting her families' choice of career path and their right to choose a husband for her when the time comes. She has expressed feelings of wanting to 'be a good girl' in the eyes of her family but also of wanting some of the freedoms of her non-Indian peers. She adheres to school rules on uniform, never wears make-up or jewelry and wears her very long hair in a single plait. Sometimes, Teja is tired because she observes the periods of fasting dictated by her religion. She is a quick learner, a good listener and has considerable empathy for others. She prefers working individually or in very small groups and is extremely reluctant to speak in front of a group or on behalf of others. Teja is expected to gain A* - C grades in all subjects and would like to go to university to study to be a nurse. However, her parents would like her to study law or a business course.

Caylin also lives with both biological parents and has an older sibling. She is also rather reserved but more willing than Teja to take part in shared activities and to try to engage with her peers. Caylin's paternal and maternal grandparents are Chinese and live in this country but the first language of Caylin and her parents is English. While there are fewer restrictions on Caylin than there are on Teja, Caylin has also been brought up by very strict parents and often makes comments that reflect the code of practice she has been brought up with. Her older sister is at university and the expectation is that Caylin will follow the same route, although she has freedom of choice on her chosen subject. She always adheres to school rules

on uniform and does not wear makeup. She has a practical approach to material items such as clothing and appears comfortable with the boundaries and expectations set by her parents. Caylin is expected to gain A* - B grades in all subjects and would like to go to university to study law or medicine as she knows her parents approve and support her choice of course.

Both girls have family members living in different parts of the world and use social media to keep in touch with them and to follow the activities of their peers.

4.2.2. Bec, Maisie and Clare

These three girls are a very close group of friends and have known each other since primary school. Despite their closeness, they have had many dramatic, often long-lasting disagreements involving peers in other social groups. Arguments usually include social media, they are enacted both in and out of school, can include individuals from other schools and parents. The disagreements have an impact like throwing a pebble in a pool in the sense that the ripples they cause affect many others. The girls' lack the ability to separate their social lives from academic study and so their progress is affected. If these girls are unhappy in a lesson, the quality of learning for others is affected. The girls' behaviour is watched by younger members of the school population who observe their peers, in both online and offline contexts and make judgments about norm behavior.

Maisie is the youngest of three children, her parents are divorced and all three children live with mum. She likes wearing fashionable clothes, going to parties and having a good time. Maisie is prone to dramatic mood swings and can be a difficult person to be friends with. She would like to go to university to study to be a teacher but admits she lacks the commitment needed for academic work, although she could achieve the required A* - C grades needed for college if she was prepared to give up some of her social life.

Bec has a younger brother and both live with their biological parents. Bec is quieter than her three friends and has suffered periods of anxiety. During these episodes, Maisie and Clare have tried to support their friend but Bec has found it difficult to accept their help. She has missed several weeks of schooling and her academic work has declined as a result. Bec takes little interest in her appearance, does not express many opinions but maintains contact with Maisie and Clare out of school through social media. Bec is expected to achieve five GCSE passes at grade C or below and has no clear ambitions for the future.

Clare is the youngest in a family of three children who live with their biological parents. She

has a small group of friends who can be volatile and there have been many arguments that have involved social media, both in and out of school. Despite the many unpleasant episodes, Clare's friendship with Bec and Maisie has remained constant. Clare likes fashionable clothes and enjoys spending time socialising with friends. She has ambitions to go to university but finds it hard to focus on academic study when her friends are out enjoying themselves. She is expected to gain at least five A* - C grades at GCSE level.

4.2.3. Jo and Zara

Jo and Zara have been friends since early childhood but since they began secondary school they have formed other friendship groups. However, they remain in frequent contact with each other, both in and out of school, and social media features largely in that process.

Jo lives with both biological parents and an older sibling. She speaks confidently about her ambitions to become a lawyer and enjoys challenging discussions with staff, when she will argue until others give in to her point of view. Jo has a wide circle of friends but is not particularly close to any of them, preferring to spend time with her long-term boyfriend. She is a talented student who excels at mathematics and science and is expected to gain A* - B grades in all subjects.

Zara is the oldest child of two children in a single parent family. Her parents separated when her younger brother was a toddler. She is very close to her mum and talks openly about the very acrimonious divorce of her parents. Zara's father moved to England as a child with his family from Eastern Europe and Zara is expected to follow the strict family traditions. This involves spending time with family members she no longer feels very close to and she does not like leaving her mum to attend family gatherings. Her mother has a new partner and Zara finds it difficult to accept another person has a place in her life. Zara would like to go to university but often lacks confidence in her ability and finds examinations very stressful.

4.2.4. Jess and Hannah

Jess and Hannah differ from the other respondents in that their friendship is much newer because the two girls became friends at the start of year ten, after choosing their option subjects and being placed together in a class seating arrangement.

Jess is the middle child in a single parent family and does not have contact with her father. She is out-going, can be loud and likes to meet friends out of school but her mum is strict about who she meets, where she goes and how long she stays out. Jess likes fashionable

clothes and makeup, but does not have the budget to buy the items that would allow her to keep up with her peers and sometimes finds it difficult to accept her circumstances. She is a talented student who is expected to achieve at least five A* - C grades at GCSE level and she would like to go to university.

Hannah lives with both biological parents. She is the youngest child in her family and there is a considerable age gap between her and her older siblings. She has nieces and nephews who visit regularly and Hannah talks about them with considerable pride and affection. Hannah has suffered many episodes of anxiety because she was born with a slight facial abnormality and this has affected her self-confidence considerably. She has a small group of close friends and is often the 'agony aunt' they turn to for support. Hannah is bright and quick to learn new skills but unlike Jess, she is quiet and reluctant to express thoughts and feelings in a group situation where there are several people or some she does not know very well. She is expected to gain at least five GCSE passes at grades A* - C.

4.2.5. Meg and Ellie

Meg and Ellie have been friends since they were at primary school and describe their relationship as very close because they have supported each other during many difficult family times. They spend a lot of time together in school and contact each other after school and at weekends. Their behaviour can be challenging as they frequently question rules about uniform, hairstyles and makeup. They share very clear ideas about what constitutes fairness for them and find it difficult to accept others may not share their views. Meg is always the one who voices the opinions and Ellie will always agree

Meg lives with both biological parents and is a middle child. In school her behaviour can be challenging as she frequently questions rules about uniform, hairstyles and makeup. She is a loud, bubbly person who speaks her mind and this can lead to problems with peer relationships. Meg likes to have the latest fashions, enjoys socialising and has a wide circle of friends both on and offline, some of whom attend other local schools. She struggles academically and has low aspirations for a future career, describing her ambitions vaguely as wanting to work with children. When challenged with new tasks or about her future hopes, she becomes defensive and sometimes angry.

In contrast, Ellie is the oldest of two children and they live with both biological parents. She is popular with her peers but shy and prefers to be on the edge of a group of friends. She is interested in fashion and all the things her peers like but she rarely expresses opinions or

questions their actions. For Ellie, social media offers opportunities to keep up with the gossip and activities of her peers, without having to take an active role herself. Although she is expected to achieve at least five GCSE passes at grades B – D, Ellie has low aspirations and has no clear plans for a future career.

4.2.6. Sarah and Lucy

Sarah and Lucy have been friends since they were at primary school. However, they chose different GCSE option subjects and do not spend time together in lessons but keep in touch at break and lunchtimes, after school through social media and meet at weekends.

Sarah is the oldest of two children and she has step-siblings who are also younger than her. She has experienced a lot of unhappiness at school because she has been bullied but she shows considerable resilience in the way she tries to support others. Sarah is expected to help with the daily routine at home because her mother works fulltime and often does preparatory work at home so relies on her daughter for support. She has very little contact with her father and that can be a source of distress for her. She knows her mother checks her messages in case she tries to contact him. Sarah is very shy and nervous around her peers. She struggles to achieve target grades with some subjects and is expected to gain five GCSE passes at grade C or below. She has ambitions to follow a career in music but would be happy to compromise with a place at the local college to study animal care.

Lucy is a confident young lady with a very clear idea of what she wants in life. She always wears make-up, carries the latest fashionable bag, enjoys going to concerts and has a wide circle of friends. Lucy is an only child but has two stepsiblings who she rarely mentions. Her parents are divorced and she lives for part of the week with each. Both parents are re-married and live less than fifteen miles apart and Lucy has friends in both locations. She enjoys sport and takes an active role in both rugby and horse riding. Lucy does not enjoy school very much and has no ambitions to go to college or university, preferring to get a job and earn money. She is expected to gain five A – C grades at GCSE level.

The pen portraits were included here to provide a rich description of the respondents by detailing their family backgrounds, personal characteristics and academic abilities. Their details link to information that appears in the interview data, through references to family, friends and issues related to social media use. The next section explains the themes and sub-

themes that were identified in the data from semi-strucured interviews with the respondents.

4.3 Analysis of data from semi-structured interviews

The procedures that were designed for the semi-structured interviews generated data that indicated there were consistent themes in the comments gathered from all of the respondents.

4.3.1 Introduction: looking for themes in the data

Three main themes arose from the semi-structured interview data analysis. The first theme focused on data that explained how the respondents used SNS as a tool to manage how they present themselves and communicate with others. The second theme identified in the data was related to individual identity while the third theme was related to issues that show the influence of technology on the social and cultural issues of belonging to a group. A further six sub-themes relating to the positive and negative aspects of using SNS, self-concept, issues with parents, privacy, norm behaviour and peer pressure were identified. The themes and sub-themes are described in Table 4 below. The research questions are also indicated because they formed the framework for data analysis of the semi-structured interviews. This ensured there was coherence, which was referenced in Section 3.1.4 on page 51 of this thesis as meaning the extent to which the data and analysis worked together in a rational order.

Table 4: Table to show Themes, Sub-themes and Definitions.

Theme	Description
4.3.2 Social media as a tool	This theme relates to the way respondents' select a range of social media and allocate SNS for specific purposes.
4.3.2.1 Range of social media used	This sub-theme includes references made across the data set about the respondents' choice of social media. The data relates to research question 1.
4.3.2.2 Frequently used words and phrases	This sub-theme identifies the words and short phrases that were used by all respondents. They are populars, nerds, geeks, likes, arguments, pressure, parents, keeping in touch, being thin and being pretty. The data relates to research questions 2 and 3.
4.3.2.3. How Facebook, Twitter, text messaging, Instagram and Snapchat are used	This sub-theme describes how the affordances of these platforms are used by individuals for different activities. The data relates to research question 2.
4.3.3 The influence of SNS on identity	This theme relates to the influence of social media on identity at an individual level.
4.3.3.1. Self-concept	This sub-theme relates to the use of profiles for self-presentation.
4.3.3.2. Self-esteem	This sub-theme explains how positive and negative experiences of using SNS have an impact on the development of self-esteem. The data relates to research question 3.
4.3.3.3. Parents	This sub-theme explains how social media impacts on relationships with parents. The data relates to research questions 2 & 3.
4.3.3.4. Privacy	This sub-theme explains how social media impacts on privacy in relationships with parents, peers and strangers. The data relates to research questions 2 & 3.
4.3.4 The influence of SNS on belonging in a group	This theme relates to the influence of social media on identity at a group level.
4.3.4.1. Norm behavior	This sub-theme includes descriptions of social groups as populars, geeks and nerds, how behavior is monitored through SNS, pressures to conform to behavioural types. The data relates to research question 3.
4.3.4.2. Peer pressure	This sub-theme explains how peer pressure is related to SNS use through specific platforms such as Facebook, the impact of SNS on individuals' sense of belonging in a group. The data relates to research questions 1 & 3.

The results of the semi-structured interview data are presented next, under titles that relate to each theme and its associated sub-themes. Selected quotes were chosen from the interviews to represent the similarities and differences in the experiences of the respondents. The number of quotes signifying the same thing have been reduced to prevent repetition and add coherence to the thesis.

4.3.2 Social media as a tool

The first sub-theme relates to the range of social media the respondents' chose to use. While the core activities of adolescence such as chatting and socializing, engaging in self-expression are still the same, social media has changed the way that happens. This section shows how the respondents use a range of social media to chat, socialise and present themselves in ways that facilitate their development as individuals and promote a sense of belonging in groups.

4.3.2.1 The range of social media used by the respondents

It was clear from the way that the respondents talked about their lives that they enjoyed using social media and particularly, a range of SNS. In relation to research question one, the affordances of SNS gave opportunities for the respondents to make choices for their own individual needs and to affiliate with others. Data analysis indicated their choices were wide ranging and the choice of some platforms was consistent across all interview groups, with Facebook and Twitter being the most popular among this group of respondents. This implied the respondents exercised agency over their actions, and were cognisant of the opportunities afforded by social media, by being selective both in their choices of SNS and the ways they used them. Following that theme, an interesting difference in the data showed the respondents named eleven SNS during the interviews, whereas their data from the questionnaires identified eight. One respondent referred to Vine, Stork and Messenger on one occasion during the interviews. The references were made by Meg and Ellie in data that described how they used SNS but were not mentioned again. However, throughout the data set, Facebook and Twitter were the most frequently referenced SNS in the data from all respondents. The next sub-theme relates to how the respondents used different platforms for different activities and the quotes also illustrate the range of platforms they used.

4.3.2.2 Words and phrases frequently used by the respondents

Throughout the interviews, there were words, descriptions and short phrases that all participants used when they described individuals in social groups. The words used were populars, nerds, geeks, likes, arguments, pressure, parents and the phrases keeping in touch, being thin and being pretty. The data relates to research questions two and three because the descriptions given by the respondents highlights the influence of social media in their lives. The quotes below illustrate how that happens. In the first quote, Clare described the differences between SNS.

Clare *"We used to use Beebo, there was no pressure on Beebo 'cos it was like chat along and now it's different 'cos Facebook's like hate and for arguments you don't want to say to someones' face 'cos you're too coward. I don't put anything on Facebook anymore 'cos you just don't really know who's gonna talk about you."*

Clare's description shows that SNS such as Facebook influence the way she constructs meaning in relation to the use of social media and how that choice impacts on the response of others. Frequent references to social groups, and in particular, to 'populars' suggested that individuals compared themselves to others in the process of making decisions about who they wanted to be associated with. Bec's description in the quote below, is about the 'populars'.

Bec *"They go to all the parties, they know everyone, they get drunk every weekend and they have all their pictures, with hundreds of likes. That's how its rated now, you have all your likes 'cos it's all about people liking you really, people thinking you're pretty. It's the way they act. Some of them do things 'cos they get pressure from their friends to do stuff and you think I would never do that in a million years"*

In contrast, nerds were described as loud, non-conformist and attention seeking. The third group, known as geeks were described as weird people who were academically bright, as Jade explained.

Jade *"It's very pressurised if you're in a lesson with them. The nerdy people are bad but the geeks, the geeks are just kinda weird, 'cos they don't talk to anybody. Even if you try to speak to them, they just ignore you. I get good grades and I guess I'm fairly clever but I'll help other people, I don't mind. But they won't even help anyone, like in maths or science. It's like*

in a lesson if there's only one or two people you know, it's horrible and if you don't like someone in that room and they don't like you back and there's only one person with you it's really intimidating."

The quote from Lucy raises an interesting issue that eludes to the complexity of finding a place in the social landscape. Clearly it is not simply a case of being accepted by a group because as Lucy's words infer, there is also conflict between groups.

Lucy *"I know loads of girls who want to look like a model and that stems from social media, yeah, 'cos if you're not thin and pretty the weird people call you names and stuff. There are two groups I'm in on Facebook with different people and you notice the difference between the two, one of them is mainly like humorous, silly things we say. The other one can be about people which is what I really hate about it but I still go and check it because there's something about it I just have to keep checking it, I don't know why, it's just that I think it's because if I didn't someone might be talking about one of my friends and I wouldn't know about it."*

The data in the quotes illustrates how the respondents were using SNS as tools to communicate, maintain friendships and position themselves in relation to others. Understanding between individuals and across groups comes from knowing how each SNS works within their social groups and from the language that is used to describe those groups.

4.3.2.3 How the respondents used SNS

This second sub-theme builds on the data in the first by showing how the respondents used different platforms like tools because each was linked to different activities. Facebook and Twitter and to a lesser extent Snapchat were the most frequently mentioned SNS and it was clear from the descriptions that each was used for different purposes. The first quotes have been selected from the interview with Meg and Ellie who were very keen to explain their SNS selection criteria.

Meg *"Facebook and Messenger are for keeping in touch with friends, some of my close friends are on holiday at the moment, but if I have any problems I can speak to them. Tumblr and Vine are just for posting funny things, see what other people are doing around the world, it's just a bit of fun. Facetime and Skype are to keep in touch with friends."*

Ellie *"Facetime and Skype is to keep in touch with my family and friends that I haven't seen for a while. Facebook, Instagram and Twitter I use sometimes as well. I don't like Stork but I use it to look at other people's profiles to see what they're are doing."*

These quotes highlight a difference between the interview and questionnaire data because Vine, Messenger and Stork were not listed. However, the questionnaires were completed before the interviews by respondents who were unfamiliar with research procedures and in that context, anomalies in the data could be expected. The respondents were not asked to explain the differences in their responses because they may have felt intimidated. During the interviews, all respondents said they used SNS to chat with friends and to see what was happening among friendship groups. Question five showed similar findings to the interview data with ten respondents citing the best thing about SNS as being the opportunity to keep in touch with family who were not local. Despite the consistency in these responses, during the interviews, Jo and Zara described a different set of criteria that some individuals use in their choice of platform. Quotes from their interview have been selected because they show their understanding of how platforms work, and this adds more depth to the data than that found in the questionnaire.

Zara *"Facebook is to get as many likes as you can, whereas Twitter is to put your thoughts out there. On Facebook you want attention, if you don't want attention you use Twitter. On Facebook, you can comment, you can say anything you like, but on Twitter no-one judges people because it's not there so long. You get more interaction on Facebook because people get involved in arguments but on Twitter no one really bothers. Facebook is much more petty. People put things on Facebook without thinking and it's so hard not to make comments."*

Jo *"People use Facebook to get others to follow them, it makes them feel superior if they've got more likes than anybody else and most of the time they don't even know who they are. Stuff on Facebook stays there for ages, but with Twitter it's not there so long so you use it in different ways."*

Zara and Jo's reference to 'likes' on Facebook relates to a feature of SNS that extends the concept of 'friends' as people who are known, to a much larger mass of people. Rather than friendship circles representing a group of people who interact face-to-face and share common experiences, on SNS, a friendship group becomes more of an audience observing a

performance. Through an online performance, the user has an almost infinite number of ways to experiment with self-presentation by altering their physical appearance, clothes, humour or taste in music, as Maisie explained.

Maisie *"On Facebook you can be anything you want, you don't even have your actual name, it's just random and no-one knows who you actually are. You can change anything about yourself that you don't like or you can be like somebody famous. Or you just follow people and see what they post and there's like topical pictures and quotes and you can let people get quite a lot of information about who you say you are or you can get information about them."*

For Zara, Jo and Maisie, using SNS as a tool to construct a profile appealed to them because they could choose which aspects of their identity they wanted to promote and share with others. Clearly, they were using the opportunities afforded by social media for self-presentation. In contrast, Teja and Caylin described very different reasons for using the same SNS. For these two respondents, interacting with a known group of friends and family was more important. They explained how they enjoyed using Facebook to contact friends and family at any time of day and without cost restrictions.

Teja *"I got Facebook to speak to my family abroad because I don't get to speak to them on the phone that much, and it's free so you know you can easily talk to them. When I had exams I had to revise but when they were finished I was straight back on Facebook to see what was happening in their lives. I've got family everywhere, Canada, Bangladesh, I used to have an uncle in Japan, all parts of the UK, London, Birmingham, Brighton, we don't see them everyday that's why it's nice to have them on Facebook."*

There is a sense of belonging in Teja's words as she implies she uses Facebook to reinforce the family values that are important to her. This resonates with the details in her pen portrait, which shows how cultural norms have influenced her identity and sense of belonging to a family group.

Caylin *"A lot of my family live in Ireland, so with Facebook I get the chance to speak to them so we're not like complete strangers. I like to talk to people but I don't use it a lot. I guess it's quite good for arranging things and sending group messages. It's OK to find out what people are doing but not everyone's on Facebook at the same time, but if you text*

someone you can get quite a quick response. It's OK for about five minutes but if there isn't anything going on, it just gets boring for me."

Caylin's comments reflect the data she provided in the questionnaire about how little time she spent on social media because she found it boring. Data from the questionnaire supports these comments as six respondents said they used SNS to chat with family, especially if they did not live locally. The wide-ranging affordances of social media is illustrated further in the next two quotes. Hannah and Sarah used Facebook to talk to friends and keep up to date with what was happening but they also used Tumblr and Snapchat. As Sarah described a specific use of Tumblr, and Hannah explained her preference for Snapchat, they provided an insight into how SNS are used as tools by this mid-adolescent group to experiment with aspects of their identity that might be inhibited in their offline worlds. Sarah's pen portrait described her as a shy girl but through Tumblr she was able to use her skills to support others.

Sarah *"I use Facebook, Twitter mostly, and Tumblr. With Tumblr you make your own personal blog. It's pretty much pictures or you can put stuff on there to help people, like I've got an advice one about staying strong, and I provide support if anyone needs it. It's like some people follow me who I know, but most of the time it's anonymous questions about what they could do about bullying and boys. I just give them friendly advice about stuff they could do, like talking to parents."*

The anonymity offered by social media helped Sarah who was shy and self-conscious to feel more confident about making connections with others and provide advice. It was clear from the interview she felt she had a role that was valued and field notes made after the interview recorded how she spoke in a more confident manner about activities that allowed her to feel in control.

Hannah *"I use Facebook sometimes, but it's more likely to be Snapchat, 'cos you just send pictures to each other and you can write on it. You've got to take them at the moment, if you've taken one in the past you can't use it, you have to use one you've taken now. There's a time limit, up to 10 seconds and it tells you if someone takes a screen shot of it. If they've done that it stays on their phone unless they delete it. They can mess around with it and you don't know."*

The consistency between the respondents' choices of SNS and descriptions of how each was employed for specific purposes implied these were features of the culture of social media use among the sample population. Furthermore, it reflected how the respondents were actively using SNS as tools in the construction of their identities, and a key feature was gaining an understanding of what each platform was used for within a social group. The dominance of Facebook as a preferred SNS is shown in these quotes and was also a noticeable feature in the questionnaire data, with all respondents listing the platform in their response. However, the differences between users was also interesting and eluded to a link between personality and the affordances of social media, and particularly Facebook. This was an unexpected feature of the data and so traits such as openness, conscientiousness, extraversion and introversion that had been noticed during the interviews, were briefly recorded in field notes and checked as the data was transcribed. Later, the notes were useful in the compilation of the pen portraits, and the description of Sarah is a point in case. Her shyness would have inhibited her from offering support to others in an offline situation, but through social media, she was able to benefit from the anonymity it offered. An important feature of SNS apparent in the data was the degree of choice that individuals had over the level of involvement they wanted to invest. How they perceived the use of social media in social settings, combined with the capabilities it offered, shaped what it meant to them. Sarah's perception of how Tumblr could be used was different to her peers but she achieved personal autonomy and provided help for others by considering the level of investment she was prepared to offer and matching her skills to that social context.

4.3.3 The influence of SNS on respondents' identity

This theme explores the influence of social media on identity at an individual level. Four sub-themes related to self-concept, self-esteem, issues with parents and privacy were identified. The data relates to research question three which asked how social media influenced identity and belonging in groups. The semi-structured nature of the interview process allowed the respondents to determine the content of the data they shared which resulted in each interview having a slightly different emphasis. The common theme in the quotes is about being liked but they illustrate different aspects of that need on identity in relation to self-concept.

4.3.3.1. Self-concept: how the respondents used SNS for self-presentation

This sub-theme refers to interview data that showed how the respondents used social media profiles for self-presentation. It includes details of how profiles were constructed and an interesting feature that emerged from the data was how the respondents compared themselves to others, implying social comparison was evident in most descriptions. In her pen portrait, Maisie was described as a girl who enjoyed wearing fashionable clothes, going to parties and having a good time. She was also enthusiastic about using social media and the questionnaire data showed she spent more time than any of the other respondents on SNS. Maisie reported spending a total of fifty three hours a week on SNS which was more than twenty hours longer than the next highest figure, reported by Clare. However, the following quote implies that SNS have both positive and negative effects on an individual's self-concept.

Maisie *"On Tumblr you can be anything you want, you don't even have to have your actual name, it's just random and no-one knows who you actually are and you just follow people and see what they post about you. It's good when someone posts something nice about the way you look or your hair or makeup. If they post horrible things it isn't so nice then. It makes me cry sometimes 'cos I just feel fat and ugly. It like brings you down a lot and the pictures make everyone want to lose weight."*

Maisie's pen portrait describes how mood swings can make her a difficult person to be friends with and the quote implies some of her problems could be related to her SNS activity. The accessibility of social media allows mid-adolescents to interact with an audience of their choice, and being able to edit the content makes it possible to control the details that users' disclose about themselves. However, as Maisie showed, not all SNS users are able to mediate their activities to achieve a positive outcome and her contribution to the data shows how some mid-adolescents struggle with aspects of social media use. The data shows mid-adolescent girls are dealing with personal issues on a day to day basis within the social context of a school environment and suggests that the effects of feedback from friends is an important source of both inspiration and critique for girls. From this evidence the need to understand the influence of social media on the day to day lives of mid-adolescents becomes clear. The following two quotes have been selected from the interview with Meg and Ellie because they add further details of the importance of feedback from friends in relation to self-concept.

Meg *"On my phone I take stacks of photos to get the perfect one, because you want the popular group to think it's a nice photo. So you take quite a lot and then choose your favourite one and hope it gets lots of likes. I would never wear something that would show my bum. I just think if I wear clothes that show my skin or my body, the populars will judge me. ln school in lessons that I have with them they make me feel a bit shyer than I normally am, but in my friends' group, I can just be myself. I can wear a hoodie or something, no make-up, what-ever I want."*

Ellie *"On Snapchat I've got just everyday photos. It's not so much pressure because it's not about getting as many likes as you can., But with Facebook the populars might speak to you or act differently towards you if they like your photo. The populars are a bit stuck up and they'll be bitchy so I change my photos to something I think makes me more like them"*

The quotes showed how the respondents used their experiences to build a frame of reference via social media that helped them to form a common identity within a group. It was apparent that positive feedback and recognition from peers was vital to the respondents and negotiated in both on and offline environments. However, while users could control how they presented themselves, they could not exert the same influence on responses from others and that impacted on their self-concept. There was also evidence that some respondents were a little more aware of e-safety measures as the next two quotes from sarah and Lucy show.

Sarah *"My profile has my birthday on it and a picture and then some statuses I write but I've got this thing on my profile where if someone writes something I don't like I don't have to post it to my time line so no-one else can see it. So, I think that's a really good idea otherwise you could get really embarrassing pictures say if you went to parties and other people were just being idiots around you and took pictures and then you had them posted over your time line people could see them, but if you could hide them that's better."*

Lucy *"Some people have done pictures doing sports and edit their pictures loads but mines just a photo of myself. I want mine as I am, I don't really see the point of changing but I know loads of girls who want to look like a model. They try to make themselves look older and more mature with like nudity and stuff and then that's when all the name calling starts."*

Meg and Ellie and Sarah and Lucy showed how mid-adolescents learn about how much

information to reveal about themselves from the responses of others around them. Through engagement with social media, they had control over the way they presented themselves and the amount of information they disclosed. This inferred that creating a profile was beneficial in the way it promoted feelings of self-worth. Although some respondents formed ideas about their own attractiveness by comparing themselves with others, Hannah showed a different line of thought.

Hannah *"It doesn't matter what everyone looks like, it's more important that we get on. The populars have to have perfect hair and makeup, but I don't understand that really."*

Hannah was the only respondent who implied she valued reliable friends more than how other people perceived her level of popularity to be. Her comments stood out among others in this respect, because the data from other respondents frequently referenced the need to be considered pretty and thin.

4.3.3.2. Self-esteem: how positive and negative experiences of using SNS have an impact on the development of self-esteem

This sub-theme explores how the positive and negative experiences of using social media impacted on the development of self-esteem and the data relates to research question three. Quotes by Meg and Ellie were selected because their description of how they constructed a profile so that they would be liked by others was a clear indication of how their self-esteem was dependant on being accepted in a social group. In addition, the data revealed elements of a shared language that allowed the respondents to make sense of their social worlds. The same names and categories were used by all respondents in all interviews, suggesting they had been constructed through agreement amongst themselves. The category names are 'populars', 'nerds' and 'geeks' which together with descriptions of behavioural patterns are referred to in the quotes throughout the remainder of this section. The respondents explained how they wanted to be closer to the 'populars' than to 'nerds' or 'geeks' and by expressing a preference for membership of one group over another, they implied that being liked by the girls in the 'populars' group was important.

Ellie *"It's like conformity where you want to be with the populars but you don't 'cos you want to be with your own group but if you look a certain way on your profile, the populars might speak to you or act differently towards you. People say our group is like a popular*

group, but it's not the actual popular group. We're a bit more down to earth, we're the middle populars."

Meg *"Yeah, they don't care how people see them, but we care how people see us. I think it's about self-respect so I put photos on my profile that I think will make them like me but that's all. I would say that some of the populars don't necessarily do bad things like smoke weed, but they go to parties and get drunk and then post photos and stuff but I wouldn't want to waste my life on drugs and alcohol at this age, I want to get my education and my job sorted."*

Meg and Ellie implied the concepts used to categorise people emerged through a socially constructed process. Their comments described their understanding of how people interact based on their perception of a social encounter, which in this case, referred to populars going to parties. Ellie's reference to conformity was interesting because it showed how she was using knowledge gained elsewhere to understand the events going on around her. Her definition of the situation influenced Meg, and so reality was constructed from what the girls agreed it to be. It seemed to be a dynamic process, where individuals continually modified their behaviour to be accepted in a group. It could be argued that agreed cultural norms provided the basis for understanding as Meg and Ellie used their shared definitions of appropriate behaviour to develop a sense of self. It was also interesting to note how the girls were prepared to manage the way they presented themselves to be liked, but not accepted by the 'popular' group. In the next two quotes, Jess and Hannah demonstrated their understanding of the cultural norms that gave them a concept of self that determined how they used social media.

Jess *"I would never send pictures to anyone I don't know. Some people really misuse it 'cos they do sexting and stuff and take pictures of themselves. Some of them ask you for pictures and not just of your face. I wouldn't do that 'cos it's like the fear that everyone could see it and it will spread around really quickly."*

Hannah *"It would be mostly boys, 'cos knowing boys they'd show all their mates and if you go for a job when you're older if they posted it on Facebook it stays on your digital footprint forever, so they could see that. In school, everyone would be taking the mickey out of you. Everyone would be against you in school, and you'd be so embarrassed everyone would call you names and stuff and they wouldn't let it go for ages."*

There was consistency in the data here that suggested these respondents were concerned with how others viewed their behaviour and would follow trends to improve their social standing. However, other respondents did not have such positive experiences to share. Data from the questionnaires featured seven comments from respondents who described social media as addictive and a further four comments referred to seeing feedback on SNS that was upsetting. The data came from question six and included comments that people used SNS to say things that they would not have the courage to say face to face. One respondent went as far as to say everything on SNS was fake and cowardly. This implied some respondents had suffered from experiences that negatively impacted on their self-esteem and the quotes from Clare and Bec were selected because they resonated with those from the questionnaire data.

Clare *"I use Facebook, even though it's a major source of stress. I hate goin' on it but I still go on it all the time, I dunno why. You just go on it, even though you don't want to, but then you see somethin' you don't want to see, and then you get upset but it's just nice knowin' what's goin' on. You can't get away from it."*

Bec *"You daren't not look. If there's someone's face on screen you have a look and you think this is really stressin' me out now. There's some stuff that upset me and if I hadn't looked on Facebook, it wouldn't have happened but it's hard not to. You come into school and you feel really on edge because you know they're watching you all the time, it's like all us popular people and all the individual people and it's not gonna change."*

An interesting feature was the use of 'I' and 'you' in Clare and Bec's dialogue, because it implied that by not using their own names they were talking about 'someone else'. Field notes made at the time of the interview recorded how the mood between the respondents had changed from a point earlier when they were more light-hearted about disclosing their experiences. During the exchanges in the quotes above, Bec, Maisie and Clare sat very still, they made little eye-contact with each other and they spoke very quietly. When Maisie spoke she seemed to conclude the feelings of her friends as they all nodded in agreement to her comments, shown in the quote below.

Maisie *"All these people see something and they put a comment and start an argument and it's nothing to do with them, they don't need to get involved. It starts in school among different groups and you just end up hating each other. Someone's bound to take offence at one comment at least and they'll think it's aimed at them, whether it is or not cos there's*

loads of arguments and stuff and someone'll kick off. Like someone will cause an argument or something will happen and then stuff that's happened in the past will get brought up. It's about textin', I have noticed it's normally conjoined to that then they have the evidence as well, it's always Facebook. I used to enjoy school, now it's like I come here and think, oh god what's gonna happen today."

The interview with Bec, Maisie and Clare ended soon after this comment.

4.3.3.3. Parents: how social media impacts on relationships with parents

Although social media has had a substantial impact on mid-adolescent lives, the interviews indicated that for some respondents, parents and families still play a crucial role in the development of identity. This first became apparent in the data from question five of the questionnaire, which asked what the best thing was about social networking. Ten respondents said it was easy to keep in touch with family and four respondents said keeping in touch with family around the world through social media. However, the interview data showed it can still be a difficult time for some individuals, as they are positioned between childhood and adulthood, dependence and independence, while trying to establish an identity that is not solely defined by family ties but is increasingly mediated by social media. The next three quotes from the interviews with Teja, Caylin and Jo are similar in the way they share a focus on protecting their parents from worrying about things they thought they did not understand.

Teja *"My parents know most of my friends, they trust my friends 'cos they've met them on birthdays and stuff but they don't know the other side of what they're like, they don't know what's going on. There are some things that I tell my mum, and then some things that I just don't, like things that happen at school, bad things that happen. If I've fallen out with someone, I just keep it to myself, I just tell my friends. My mum would just worry, then my dad would just worry."*

During the interviews it was touching to hear how the respondents wanted to protect their parents from the distress that they were experiencing.

Caylin *"It's like you don't really talk to your parents very much as you get older, I talk to my mum about some things, you just don't want them to get involved because you feel bad telling tales on friends, there's nothing they can do. You're kinda better off just keeping it to yourself*

really. I don't really talk to my dad about much anyway, it's more like my mum or my sister, especially my sister. When we were younger we used to argue all the time, but as we've gotten older, we've kind of gotten closer, just from stuff that's happened in our family. I would talk to her more than anyone else because she can understand it more, because she's nearer my age and she understands the stuff that goes on, like on Facebook and all that."

Jo *"When people say who is your hero, it's my mum, I'd do anything for my parents, they help me with whatever I want, friends come and go but you'll always have the same family. If I've got problems it's just not something I want to tell them, I sort it out with my friends. You don't want to tell them it's not their generation 'cos fair enough a lot of older people have Facebook and stuff, but it's what we've been brought up with."*

The quotes implied the respondents had strong relationships with their families. However, the transition from childhood to adulthood was not so smooth and trouble free for other respondents. Zara's comments below illustrated how parents often struggled to understand their daughters' activities or wanted to check what they were doing.

Zara *"I think me and my mum have so much trust because of what we went through, so from an early age I've always been there for her but since my step dad came into the family I'm not as close to her anymore but I still love her to bits. My mum won't let me not have her on Facebook, she says she'll de-activate my Facebook otherwise so that's why I use Twitter a lot now. Every time I can see she's on Facebook I can see her looking up and down. I have nothing to hide so I don't mind but if I'm in a bad mood I use Twitter otherwise she'd want to know why I was in a bad mood."*

The strong ties that are described by these respondents emanate from close-knit families but it was evident from the data that social media had changed some parent/child relationships. While Jo and Zara wanted to protect their parents, other respondents highlighted the difficulties of managing parents who wanted to control their use of social media. The quote above from Zara showed how parents and their children had to develop new ways of building trust and understanding in their relationships and this was also very apparent in the way that Meg told her story,

Meg *"My dad doesn't understand what it is to be my age. Dad's kind of out of a different world, he has his own little world in his head. We had an argument over a joke on Facebook.*

There was something on there that was really gross and he wanted me to see it 'cos he thought it was really funny. You had to share to be able to see it, but if you shared it people knew you'd watched it. My dad didn't understand I didn't want everyone to know I'd watched it."

Field notes made at the time of this interview recorded the good humour Meg used to describe her experience, and she and Ellie went on to share other stories of how parents embarrassed them, such as posting pictures of the girls as babies on Facebook. Nevertheless, the distress for Meg was significant because she understood that social media activity was visible to a wide audience in a way that her father had yet to recognise. There was a sense of the tables being turned in relation to the media warnings that many adolescents were unaware of their digital footprint. Meg's father was clearly unaware of the ramifications to the online activities he invited his daughter to share whereas, Meg's concerns resonated with the concept of an audience who were watching and judging her behaviour.

4.3.3.4. Privacy: how social media impacts on privacy

This sub-theme was identified from data that implied social media impacts on the privacy of users. The data relates to research questions two and three. In response to being asked to comment on how the respondents maintain an acceptable level of privacy, Jade and Sarah gave similar responses about their Facebook profiles.

Jade *"Mine's very locked down. If you're a friend you can look on my profile, people can still add me but it doesn't mean I add them back, so if I get a request and I don't know them I just click no 'cos I don't want that risk of anything happening."*

Sarah *"Mine has my birthday on it and a picture and then some statuses I write but I've got this thing on my profile where if someone writes something I don't like I don't have to post it to my time line so no-one else can see it. So, I think that's a really good idea otherwise you could get embarrassing pictures, say if you went to parties and other people were just being idiots around you and took pictures of it all, and then you had them posted over your time line people could see them, but if you could hide then that's better."*

However, not all respondents were as happy with the level of control they managed to achieve. The next quote is from Meg and it has been selected because it highlights some of the difficulties related to maintaining privacy that mid-adolescent girls negotiate on the

journey to becoming an adult. Megs' pen portrait describes how she challenges boundaries and would be more likely than some of the other respondents to take risks.

Meg *"I told one of my friends one of my secrets and then she told everyone on Facebook. Pretty much everybody knew and I had a hard time with people calling me a slut and stuff. I get bad looks from people and now everyone knows me for this one thing and it's not nice and made me loose trust in her and slightly hate her. We're still friends 'cos she's one of the populars but I just keep thinking she told people and it's due to Facebook."*

The data shows how Meg's actions were based on her interpretation of the norms of her world as she built her identity and thought she was just having fun. As she described the difficulties of trying to live up to the expectations of her family while also trying to assert her independence, the source of her distress seemed twofold. The quote below is the next part of the story Meg told.

Meg *"Now my parents know about the problem. It got too big. I had to tell them. I told my mum, she told my dad and he didn't speak to me for about a month, neither did my nan or my brothers. It was hard for my family, the hardest thing ever. I didn't want to face my mum. My mum was still speaking to me but I didn't want to face her, I couldn't tell her. I had to get my sister to tell her, and my brother just screamed at me. It's hard to keep friends because my mum has banned some people from the house so I go out to see them and it's really difficult. I have quite a bit of technology and I did buy some of it myself but it was with money from my parents and my grandparents and in a way, I blame them because it was their money but then they don't like how I use it!"*

On the one hand, she was angry that something she thought she had done in private was now common knowledge and on the other, the reaction from her family was far more negative than she had expected. The resulting dissonance between Meg and her family was a clear indication of the conflict that could arise between young people who are leading a life on and offline, and adults who are using the same technology, but in different ways. Extending this idea, in the next quote Ellie described how she felt in relation to the dualism imposed by her father, who wanted to protect his own privacy, but did not respect that of his daughter.

Ellie *"My parents look over my phone and I'm like don't do that, it's private. My dad doesn't let anyone else look at his phone but he thinks he can look at mine. I don't have anything to*

hide, it's not secret, but it's mine, it's what I want to keep on it and it's how I want to keep it. I think telling your parents stuff is hard because they will be disappointed. So that makes you distance yourself. So, I just don't tell anyone anything. Not even friends, I keep it all inside or I put it on tweets and if my mates question me I just say oh it's nothing, so I deal with my emotions by tweeting."

Other interviews also revealed issues of trust and privacy between parents and their children. Sarah and Lucy were cautious in their social media activities because they knew that any information they disclosed could easily be misconstrued. The data implied a difficult issue that parents and their children had to negotiate was the perceived level of control exerted by one over the other. It is understandable that parents respond to stories about cyberbullying and the dangers of social media use, but conversely, the concerns were not necessarily perceived in the same way by their children. The next quotes from Sarah and Lucy illustrate this point.

Sarah *"My mum knows all my passwords so she goes on and checks and it's invading my privacy. I'll tell my mum some things but I'll tell my friends more. Weeks ago, she came into school after she'd looked on my Facebook page and saw I was talking to my friends and stuff and then she went and told the school that I needed sorting out. I didn't like that. I didn't even know she'd been on my Facebook page. I tried to tell her to trust me and it just made the situation a lot worse. So, I just kinda left it. If I ever decided to go on it to talk to my dad I know she'd go on and check it to see what I'm saying. But I feel that's the place where I can like talk to people and trust them but if my mum's looking in on the conversations, there might be stuff I don't want her to know about or stuff I'm not confident telling her about and she's going behind my back. If I want to tell her something, I'll tell her in my own time, whereas she's rushing to conclusions about stuff."*

When Lucy was asked if she had experienced similar problems, she replied

Lucy *"No they don't check. I'm friends with them on Facebook. My mum doesn't really care about it. My dad is a bit protective but not a lot."*

4.3.4 How the respondents describe the influence of SNS on belonging in a group

This theme of the analysis relates to the influence of social media on identity at a group level. SNS such as Facebook allow users the flexibility to gather information about others in a

social group they currently belong to or in a group they aspire to be part of. In this way, online and offline relationships become blended. The interview data implied that the use of SNS, cultural norms and values questioned the theories of identity as an ascribed status. The data showed it was the respondents who were making the choices and the rules in a constantly changing landscape. Furthermore, the interview data implied parents had limited influence on the development of the norms and values that were being transmitted between individuals and social groups, with significant power being exerted by peers.

4.3.4.1. Norm behavior: how behavior is monitored through SNS

Thematic analysis showed that across the data set the respondents used the same names and descriptions to describe individuals in their social groups and to define the behavioural patterns associated with them in the same ways. Therefore, the data relates to research question three because respondents' descriptions of social groups as 'populars', 'geeks' and 'nerds' indicated how social media was used to reinforce both social group boundaries and cultural norms. The data suggested this was a process of interpretation, shown in the meanings they attributed to the groups and how behaviours were prtrayed and monitored through social media. Individuals could share or just observe posts from social events, meaning the process and the content of the responses reinforced agreed norms and a sense of belonging to a group. It was noticeable that for each group, the respondents described features of appearance and social behaviour in the same ways, indicating there were agreed definitions and norms. The data also inferred there was a clearly defined hierarchy with the most powerful 'populars' at the top and the 'nerds' and 'geeks' at the bottom of their social worlds. The definition of the popular group was described by Bec, Maisie and Clare.

Maisie *"They go to all the parties, they know everyone."*

Bec *"They get drunk every weekend."*

Clare *"They have pictures on their profiles with hundreds of likes. Everyone rates them for being pretty and thin. No-one who is a size fourteen can be a popular."*

Maisie *"That's how it's rated now. It's all about people liking you really, people thinking you're pretty."*

Clare *"Yeah, it's very pressurised, that's why I don't like coming to school."*

All respondents indicated one salient feature of identities constructed on SNS was popularity. This was directly related to presenting yourself in a way that others perceive as being pretty and as the quote above shows, being thin. In the next two quotes, Jo and Zara described both the complexity of the definitions they used to categorise both themselves and the perceived hierarchical dominance of one group over another. When the respondents were asked how they knew who was in which group they both replied at the same time, with the same answer, *"likes on Facebook".* Reference to this SNS appeared repeatedly in all interviews and Sarah and Lucy gave their views on how they construct their social reality based on appearance.

Zara *"It's likes on Facebook. There's populars and weird people, like geeks and nerds. It's all stereotypical, not all populars are sluts and bitches or unpopulars are weird, it's just the popular lot are prettier so they get more attention. It's the way they act, like on non-school uniform days, the sluts wear something that really stands out, something that shows too much and they know they'll get judged for it, but they do it anyway. Even the populars are split into two groups, there's top populars and just ordinary populars."*

Jo *"Everyone does it by likes on Facebook 'cos that shows everyone thinks you're pretty. The popular lot are judged by how pretty they are, how thin they are. Nerds are loud and if you say something to them they'll answer back, they're not frightened of anyone. They try to be different. One kid wears big glasses and his hair is shaved in one place and he knows he stands out. Geeks are the smart lot and they think they're better than everybody else but they're not popular. I remember I asked one of them for help once and they look at you in a way that says I know I'm smart but I'm not helping you why are you asking for help? I'm smart but I would help somebody else if they were stuck."*

Jess and Hannah added an additional dimension to the information on social groups that related to the link between hierarchical position and reputation, and showed how risky behaviour was associated with group identity. The respondents explained how specific behaviours indicated an individual's status within a group and set patterns for others to emulate. Furthermore, those behaviours were being celebrated and judged through social media and provided an opportunity for individuals to observe the activities of others with no cost to themselves, to make decisions about their own actions. The statuses posted by the 'populars' and others were freely available for anyone to access and therefore allowed the

respondents to make their own judgements about the types of behaviour they wanted to engage in. In this way, standards of behaviour they agreed were acceptable within their social group and boundaries they all felt comfortable with were subsequently constructed, as Jess and Hannah explained.

Jess *"You've got the popular people who are really sporty and athletic. The popular people speak to you, but some you just don't want to know, the ones who smoke and do drugs. They think they're cool for doing it, they don't really care, they'll take the risk of doing it. I'd never hang around with them."*

The tone in Jess's voice implied knowing who was talking drugs and smoking was common knowledge, and when asked to explain how they knew, without hesitation Hannah explained the link with SNS, described in the quote below.

Hannah *"Cos they post pictures of them smoking on the internet and Snapchat and write statuses. Also, they'll post comments like I've bought a new grinder and stuff like that. If you're with them they expect you to do the same. I don't hang around with them from this school, but I have other friends from rugby and most of them do it"*

These comments show how the accessibility of social media offers a level of freedom that the respondents found both liberating and challenging. Data from question six of the questionnaire supported the interview findings that implied social norms and values were being constructed and challenged as respondents made decisions about socially acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. When asked to comment on how they learned the rules of communication on SNS Sarah, Lucy and Teja gave clear descriptions, as shown below.

Sarah *"People argue and call each other names and stuff and forget about the consequences but some people don't put it in a way that gets them into trouble, they'll put it in a way that makes it look like a fair comment. They'll try and make it look sarcastic so it looks civil, it's looks like it's not really intended to offend you. Sometimes the police get involved 'cos some people get really nasty. Those people deserve what they get. Sometimes they do it for attention but they need to be told that's not right."*

Lucy *"If someone says something really harsh you'll say something back because they really deserve it. It's their fault if it escalates into a big argument. But it's still the person who*

commented who gets in trouble which I think is unfair. You just know if you post stuff on Facebook about somebody else, like saying what they've done, people will comment on it. If you put up statuses it should be what you'd feel comfortable with everyone else knowing. Then you ask yourself is it worth getting involved in stuff."

Teja *"If it's aimed at you then maybe you should do something about it, but you can't just jump in on other peoples' conversations or arguments. If it's like a friend, I'd say make one comment then stop and don't carry on or text them or something so they know you're there but not have everyone else ganging up on you."*

The content of the quotes above also relates to the next sub-section, which explores how the respondents explained the impact of peer pressure on their lives.

4.3.4.2. Peer pressure and individuals' sense of belonging in a group

This sub-theme was identified from data that suggested peer pressure was influential among the respondents. Some described how social media played an important role in self-presentation and there was pressure to follow the key players to be accepted. This was evident in the way Meg described how she liked wearing fashionable clothes but was aware that certain styles would lead to criticism that would be played out over social media.

Ellie *"The top populars post pictures and wear older clothes, so they can get in to clubs. They wear sluttish clothes. The short shorts and crop tops."*

Meg *"I wear those clothes!"*

Ellie *"Yeah but yours are not falling out!"*

Meg *"I have a few crop tops but I don't show myself off, and definitely not my legs. I protect myself more. I've seen photos of some of them who wear incredibly short shorts, where you see most of their bum and I wouldn't dare wear them."*

Ellie *"I think it's about self-respect."*

Meg *"Or probably more due to my weight, because the populars think I'm overweight."*

This data indicates how social group membership was determined by appearance and actions. An interesting feature of the data was that it showed how the language was universal in the sense that it was used and understood by all respondents. Furthermore, it was easily transmitted to other groups, as some respondents had described how SNS allowed individuals to be passive observers. For example, Ellie described how she did not use Stork herself, but liked to look at other peoples' profiles. The data suggests individuals tracked the behaviours of others as a way of positioning both themselves and others on the social landscape. In addition, language played a crucial role in the way individuals monitored behaviour on social media because names such as 'populars' and structural concepts such as 'profiles' reinforced boundaries of identity, and enabled an understanding of what was accepted behaviour and what was not in an identified group. Although the pressure to conform in online settings was clearly apparent, offline close friendship was shown to strengthen an individual's resolve not to get involved with behaviours they did not approve of. This was shown in the relationship between Caylin and Teja because their friendship was developed before they became involved with social media. They resisted pressure from peers because the norms of their relationship had already been established before they began using social media.

Caylin *"Some of our friends' drink, and some of the things they do, we don't want to be around, but then it kinda restricts who you can hang around with and what you can do. They invite us on Facebook when they are goin' out or havin' parties and stuff but we don't want to go. So, if we want to go to the beach we can't go the same time as they go 'cos they're gonna expect us to do the same as them. They go drinking and smoking, so I don't go 'cos my parents would kill me."*

Teja *"Yeah and mine."*

Caylin *"They're friends, but we just don't agree with what they're doing, but then, we're not going to convince them to do anything different. We just stick together."*

Teja *"Together, yeah, we've tried saying, look what you're doing, we don't like it, because they noticed we didn't want to go out with them, but they go out with year 11's that have left as well, but we don't know them that well, we don't talk to them that much."*

When they first started using social media, Caylin and Teja explained they were in year seven and followed the trend that was prevalent among their peers at the time. The two friends

described how they used to use Bebo and MSN but then changed to Facebook so that they were the same as everyone else.

Caylin *"Bebo was all the rage back then but like no one has it any more, I used to be on MSN but I don't have any contacts on there any more 'cos no one really goes on that now, there's no one to talk to."*

Teja *"Like with the whole Bebo thing, I had Bebo first and then it got round everyone was using Facebook, everyone was saying you should get Facebook, it's really good, so then I was like OK I'll try, so then I managed to get Facebook and then there was nothing going on Bebo."*

When asked about who influenced their choice of social media, Caylin and Teja were unanimous in identifying the impact of pressure from peers because of the importance of maintaining a place in a group.

Caylin *"I think friends are a big part of it, it's like if you don't fall in line you get left behind, if you don't do something everyone else is doin', if everyone else is doin' something and you don't do it, you're not gonna be involved in things, so if you're not on Facebook it looks like you don't care about events that happen, or things that's goin' on."*

Teja *"Yeah, I think it's mainly friends, because we see them all the time. Like we're in school with them, we hang out at break and lunch, sometimes we meet after school, we just get talking, we don't want to feel like we're left out, what they're talking about, you know."*

Caylin *"It's always horrible if you join a conversation and you don't know what they're talking about, you want to know, you don't want to be left out of the circle, 'cos like something always happens on Facebook so you have to get the gossip."*

Teja *"Yeah, you've got to keep up with the gossip miss!"*

Bec, Maisie and Clare talked about the pressure to have as many friends as possible on Facebook because that was a way of showing everyone how popular you were. Their comments showed the importance of belonging to a group but Jade questioned whether it should be the way they were perceived by others. Similar comments were made by other

respondents and this implied identity was socially constructed but there was also an element of personal morality as well and this was a difficult issue to negotiate for some respondents. The quotes below were in response to questions about the differences between friendship on and offline. Clare, Bec and Maisie offered very personal accounts of what a friend is that implied their definitions were based on offline friendships.

Clare *"A friend is someone that understands you, that doesn't get irritated with you, especially when girls are in a mood, someone who can deal with that, someone you can have a good laugh with. I have lots of friends on Facebook that I don't talk to in person, I guess I know them but I'm not like friends with them."*

Bec *"Like a friend can just look at you and they know just what you mean. They understand your expression, they can just look at you and straight away they, like know something in your face. I have lots of people in my year who I know but I don't talk to them on Facebook."*

Maisie *"A friend is someone you can tell like everything to and trust them not to let you down. It's like with me I have loads of friends on Facebook but I don't talk to them much. I just like having lots of them 'cos it makes me look good."*

In contrast, Jade and Zara defined friendship in terms of online relationships.

Jade *"People on Facebook are just there for people to follow them, it makes them feel superior if they've got more likes. It's like on Facebook you've got loads of followers but do you really know all of them, what's the point? I've got my Facebook page but it's just like all my friends and I know them and I can see what they've been doing but I'm not really fussed by it."*

Zara *"Like on Facebook you get keyboard worriers and they'll put lots of comments just to stir things up and it's not necessary 'cos they say things you would not say in person to someone. They humiliate people as well. It used to be for likes but now you're judged for everything you do, like photos you have to be careful what you're doin' because people judge you on your photos, you have to be careful."*

Jade *"It's like there's so much exposure 'cos people can put you on Facebook and you have to decide whether you want people as friends, fair enough you don't want just five friends on*

Facebook but sometimes that's what you want because there's so much stuff goin' on, like is it really needed, in person you would never say stuff. You're just hidin' behind a computer because you can."

In response to this comment Jade and Zara were asked if they thought that people say things because they're not communicating face to face. Their answers are in the quotes below offer an insight into the pressures that the respondents were having to learn to negotiate.
Jade *"Yep. It's too easy to say stuff without thinking it through."*

Zara *"Yeah but nowadays people know that so they say it to their faces instead 'cos people say oh yeah I can see you put it on Facebook but have you got the nerve to say it to my face? Then it gets into like a massive fight but sometimes you can accept like random friends and you end up talking to them and you can become really close, and it also keeps you in touch with people you don't see. It's not really bad all the time, just when people use it for the wrong reasons which is most people our age but it's just the way teenagers are. You can't stop them, there's no point in trying. Like at events big decisions are made on there all the time, like tomorrow there's an event and it was put on Facebook and it doesn't matter who goes you just go, it's not restricted."*

When asked a question about friends, Caylin and Teja added a different dimension as they described how they felt under pressure to have as many Facebook friends as possible.

Caylin *"When I first made a Facebook page, I was in year seven, it was like I felt, I wouldn't say embarrassed, but I just didn't think I had many friends on my Facebook account and I just wanted to fill it up a bit. Cos like everyone else has a thousand friends or something, and I was there with like my fifty- odd friends."*

Teja *"I've always had a lot less than other people as well, it's not like I go out to add people, they kinda add you and then you talk to them. It almost feels like rude to not accept them because it's not like you don't know them."*

Caylin *"Well you do know them, you've probably spoken to them like at least once, but you're just not proper friends, I don't know it's like a pressure for people to have a certain amount of friends on their account, otherwise you're a bit sad."*

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Once again, it was apparent in the interview that it was important to the respondents to be seen to be doing the same as everyone else, even if their personal thoughts were slightly different. It was important to Caylin and Teja to show they had friends online but their friendship offline was important in reinforcing their personal views about Facebook friends.

4.3.5 Summary of the findings from the semi-structured interview data

In this section, the findings from the interviews were presented to provide an insight into the experiences of mid-adolescent girls' engagement with social media. By drawing on excerpts from the group interviews, questionnaire and diary data, an account of the experiences of thirteen mid-adolescent girls aged between fourteen and sixteen years was portrayed. The findings were presented under the titles that were given to the main themes identified by using a thematic analysis framework. Three central influences were identified that impacted on the experiences of the respondents, namely social media is used as a tool, it influences identity on both an individual level and at a group level. Sub-themes in the data were related to social media choice, how SNS were used, self-concept, self-esteem, parents, privacy, norm behavior and peer pressure. Where appropriate, the similarities and differences between the respondents were highlighted.

4.4 Results and analysis of data from questionnaires

The research questions aimed to establish:

1. What social media were mid-adolescent girls using?
2. How were they using social media?
3. How did social media influence identity and belonging in groups?

Therefore, two types of questions were designed for the questionnaire in order to address the research aims. Firstly, information questions were designed to provide numerical data and secondly, evaluative questions that were designed to provide data about opinions, emotions and attitudes related to social media use. The first stage of data analysis involved recording the responses in tally charts (See Appendix 13). Next, visual data displays were prepared, the results were analysed and presented under sub-titles that link the findings to the research questions. The respondents volunteered to add their names to the questionnaire sheets, so where that detail adds to the understanding of the data it has been included in visual data displays.

4.4.1 Questionnaire data that relates to research questions one and two

Question 1 was informative in style and aimed to establish what social media the respondents were using. The respondents were asked to give details of social networking sites they used and the sites they named were collated. Data from this question relates to research question one because a total of eight sites were named and all respondents recorded using several of them. The data was nominal and the most convenient method of displaying it was in a bar chart because it allowed the categories in the data to be compared, i.e. the range of social network sites named and the number of respondents who used them. The categories were arranged so that the bars were graded sequentially from the largest to smallest category to maximise the visual representation and ease interpretation, as shown in Figure 4 below.

Figure 4: Chart showing the range of SNS used by the respondents.
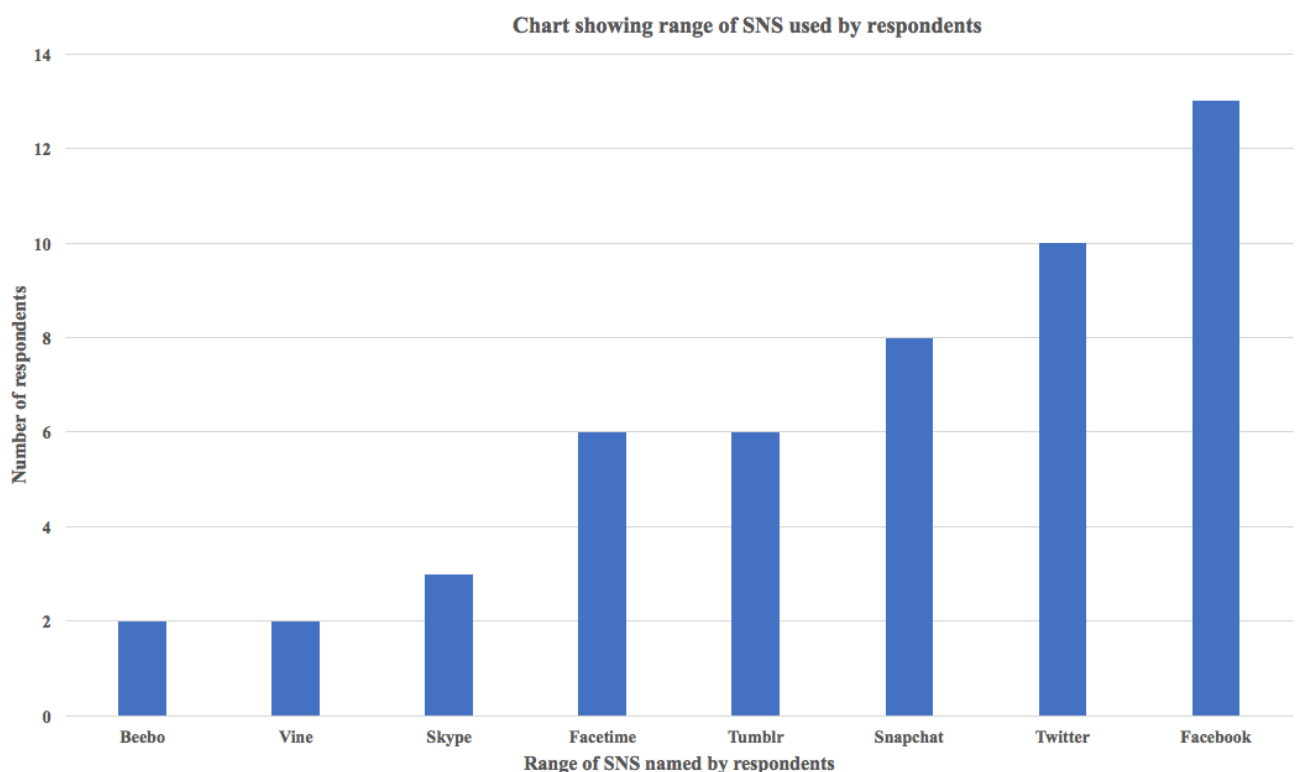
As the chart clearly shows, Facebook was identified as the most commonly used site, with Twitter and Snapchat also proving popular with this population sample. Bebo and Vine are shown to be least the popular SNS with this group of mid-adolescent girls. The data from this question supports comments in the interview data, where Facetime and Twitter were

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mentioned by all respondents. Beebo and Vine were described by one respondent as being no longer fashionable.

Question 2 was also informative in style and asked respondents about the SNS they used most frequently. Data from this question also relates to research question two which aimed to explore how the respondents were using social media by showing which SNS the respondents favoured. The results were recorded on a tally chart as shown in Appendix 13 and presented in a bar chart, shown in Figure 5 below.

Figure 5: Chart to show the respondents' preferred choice of SNS.
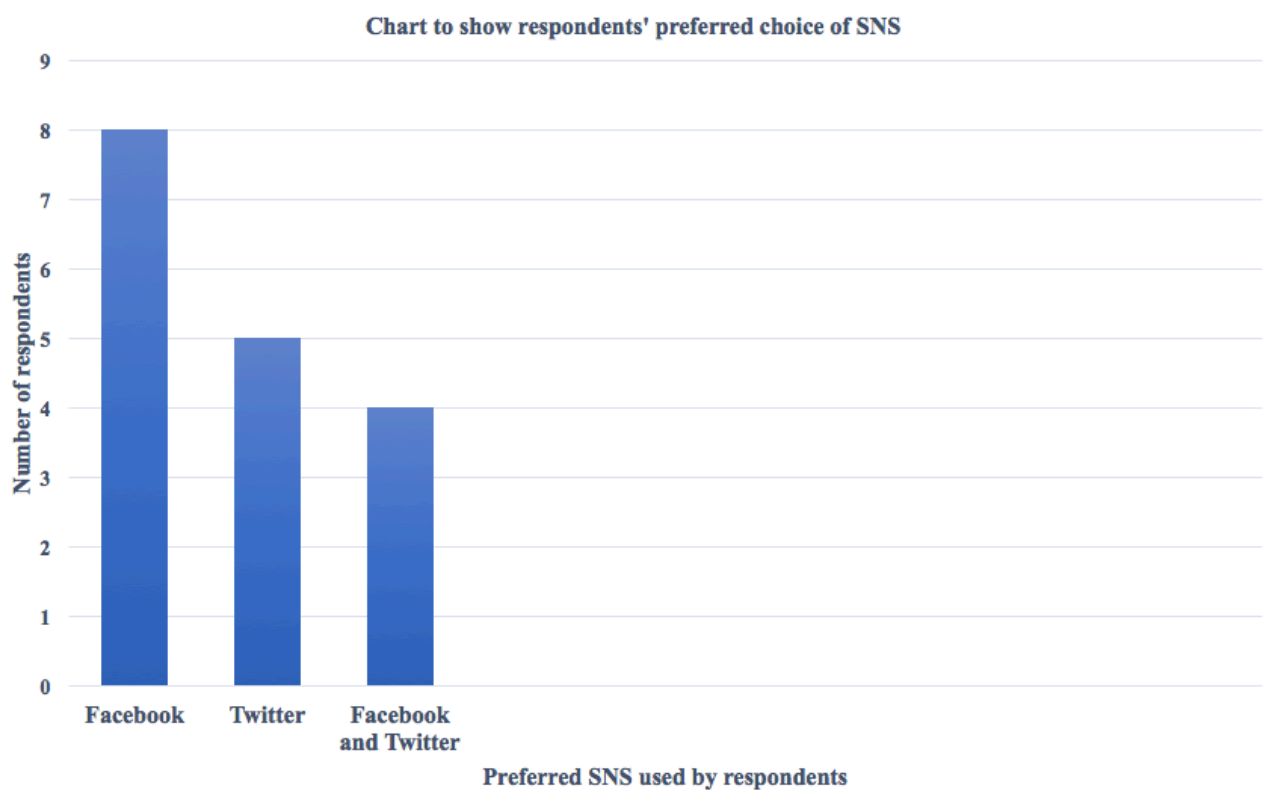
The data shows that Facebook and Twitter were the most commonly used sites by all respondents and concurs with the data from question 1. Interview data also supports the result of this question, as all respondents referred to issues related to Facebook use. However, it was interesting to note that four participants expressed a preference for both Facebook and Twitter in response to this question by adding extra comments on their questionnaire sheet. Prior to the questionnaire activity, the respondents were informed that they could add their names to the sheet but it was not a requirement. Data analysis showed all respondents

voluntarily added their forenames names. The names were subsequently added to the chart in Question 3 because it helps to contextualise the interview data.

Question 3 was the last in the informative style and asked respondents to estimate the amount of time they spent on social network sites during a week. The question generated interval data as hours so make the data easy to read, it was put into a bar chart, shown below in Figure 6.

Figure 6: Chart to show the estimated number of hours the respondents spent on SNS in a week.
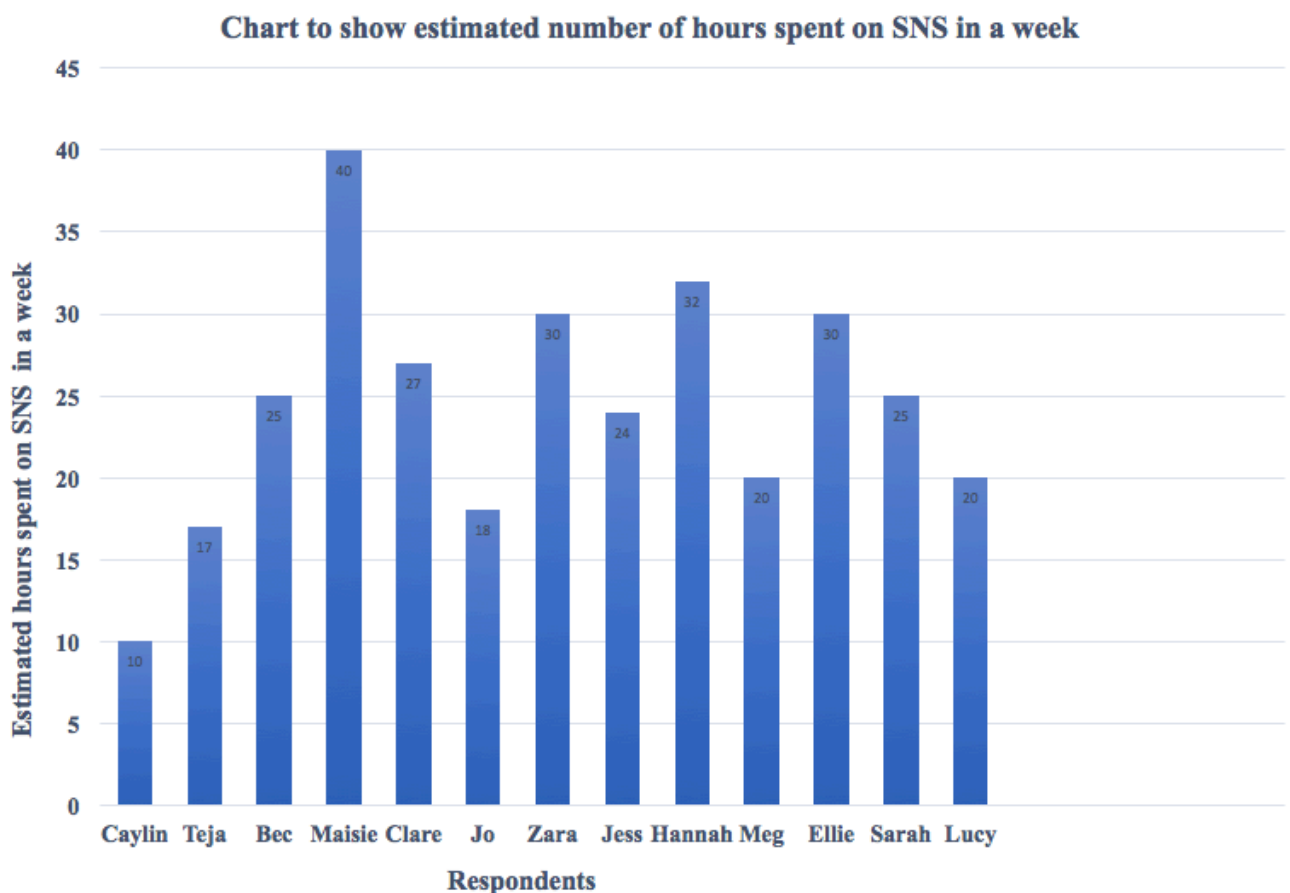
The estimates vary in total by thirty hours from the lowest, at ten hours, to the highest at forty hours. Only one respondent estimated they spent less than fifteen hours on SNS and two respondents estimated they spent more than thirty hours. One respondent estimated spending ten hours a week on SNS and this was the lowest value. Two out of thirteen respondents estimated they spent more than fifteen hours and two respondents gave an estimate of twenty

hours a week. One respondent estimated their time spent on SNS totalled twenty-four hours and two respondents estimated they spent twenty-five hours a week. One respondent made an estimate of twenty-seven hours and two other respondents estimated they spent thirty hours a week engaging with SNS.

4.4.2 Questionnaire data that relates to research question three

Question 4 asked why the respondents used social networking sites and so the data from this question relates to research question three, which aimed to establish the influence of social media on identity and belonging. Some respondents made more than one comment and the data showed

- 13 respondents said to chat with friends to see what is happening
- 6 respondents said to chat with family, especially if they did not live locally
- 6 respondents said to check what celebrities are doing
- 5 respondents said it fills time
- 2 respondents said to get away from real life

The data from this question relates to that found in the interviews but only for the first two points. Chatting with friends and keeping in touch with family were frequemtly referenced during the interviews but none of the respondents made comments about celebrities, filling time or using SNS as a means of escaping from real life.

Question 5 asked what the respondents thought the best thing was about social networking and again, some respondents made more than one response. The data shows

- 10 respondents said it was easy to keep in touch especially with family who were not local
- 10 respondents said sharing photos
- 4 respondents said keeping in touch with family around the world
- 3 respondents said parents can not see what you are doing

Question 6 aimed to balance question five by finding out what the worst thing about social networking was and in common with other questions, some respondents made more than one response. The data showed

- 8 respondents said cyber-bullying
- 7 respondents described social media as addictive

- 6 respondents said bitching and it was easy to hurt people's feelings
- 4 respondents said seeing things you did not want to see
- 4 respondents said people said things they wouldn't say face to face
- 2 respondents said things easily get out of hand
- 1 respondent said everything is fake and cowardly
- 1 respondent said getting hacked
- 1 respondent said sarcasm does not transfer well

4.4.3 Conclusions from analysis of data from questionnaires

Questions one and two were successful in identifying both the number of social network sites used and the most popular for this sample population. Analysis of question three generated respondents' estimated number of hours spent on SNS that varied significantly, with a difference of thirty hours between the highest and lowest estimation. Data from question four was significant in that all respondents identified chatting with friends and checking to see what was happening among their social groups as reasons for using SNS. Other reasons included contacting family, following celebrity news and filling time. Two respondents reported usng SNS to escape from everyday life but did not elaborate on the point. Question five indicated the two key advantages to engaging with SNS were that it was easy to keep in touch especially with family and sharing photos. Data from question six showed that cyberbullying was a concern for eight respondents while others cited hurting people's feelings, the addictive nature of SNS, seeing unpleasant things and not being able to control what happens between users.

4.5 Results and analysis of data from time-use diaries

Respondents were asked to record the number of hours they spent using social media in a time-use diary over the course of one week, including a weekend on a prepared record sheet (See Appendix 10 for an example of the time-use diary sheet that was provided for this purpose).

4.5.1 Time-use diary data

The responses were recorded in a tally chart and then nominal data was displayed as a bar chart, shown below in Figure 7.

Figure 7: Chart to show the number of hours respondents spent on SNS sites in one week obtained from time-use diary data.
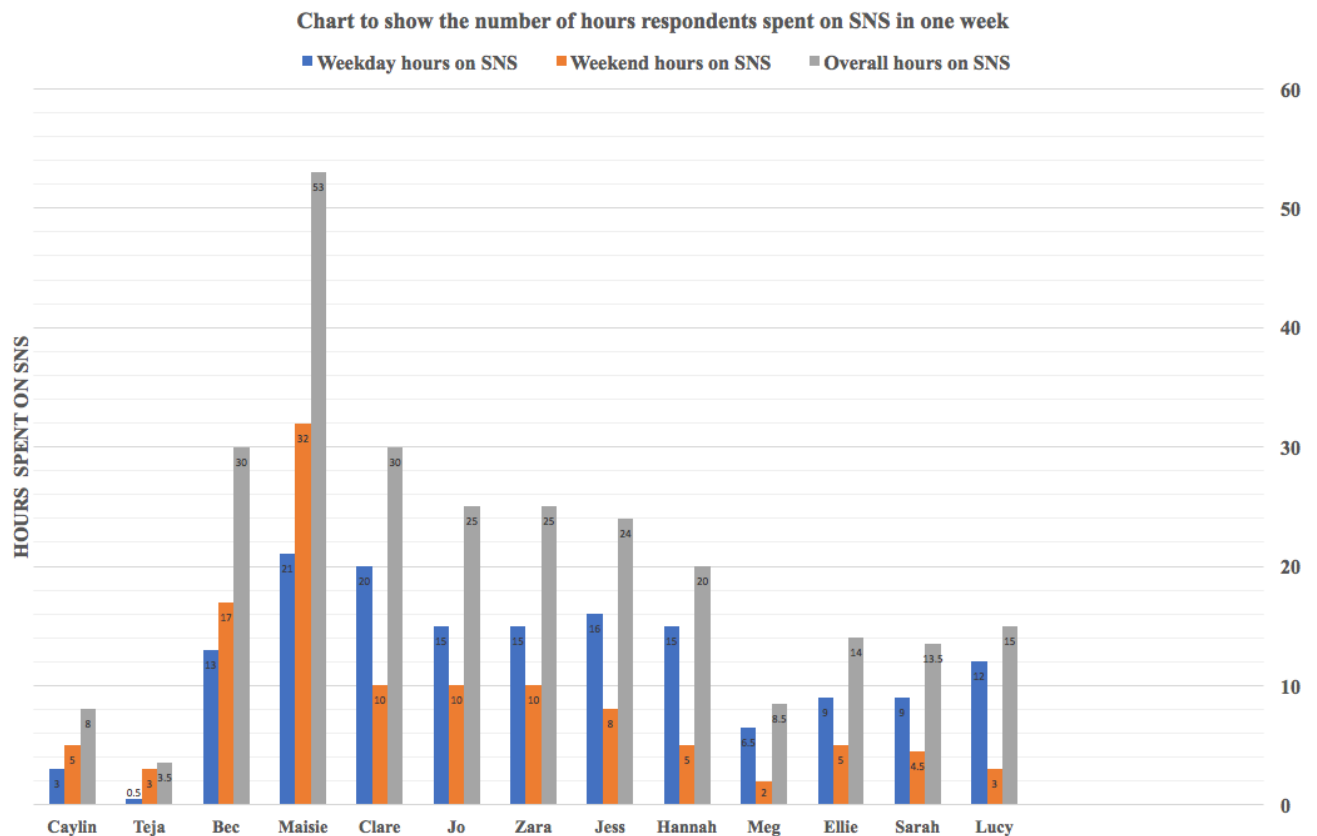
The data was arranged in interview groups so that findings from this data display could be used effectively with data from the interviews and questionnaires. Bec, Maisie and Clare are shown to be the most avid users of SNS, and Caylin and Teja reported the lowest number of hours spent. This supports the interview data because these respondents described how they became bored with SNS after a limited period of time.

Next the data was analysed by calculating the range, median and mode. The range was calculated to show the variation in the amount of time respondents estimated they spend on SNS. The mean was calculated to show the average number of hours that respondents spent and the mode was the time that appeared the most. The workings for these calculations is

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shown in Appendix 14. The range was thirteen hours, the mode value was six hours and the mean value was two hours and sixty-two minutes.

4.5.2 Conclusions from analysis of data from time-use diaries

The data showed a useful difference in the number of hours the respondents spent on social media on weekdays compared to weekends. For both weekends and weekdays, the range between respondents showing how much time they spent on SNS was large. The data was gathered as part of the process of validating the findings of the interview content, which it did successfully. However, this method of data collection had limited value in relation to the aims of the research because it showed only the time spent by the respondents in one week and some returned time-use diaries were incomplete. Furthermore, some respondents reported that they found this activity difficult because it was a paper based task. If the data had been requested in a digital format, the respondents may have been more willing to engage with the activity. Despite the limitations of this tool, a key point illustrated very clearly in the time-use diary data was the amount of time some respondents were spending on social media, indicating how important it was in their lives.

4.6 Summary of findings from mixed methods data collection

Case study research based on multiple methods of data collection was successful because the data answered the research questions by showing how the respondents in the sample used social media, what they were using and the influence their actions had on their identity and sense of belonging in groups. The mixed methods generated data also showed consistency in the information being provided by the respondents. Therefore seven key issues were identified that informed recommendations and themes for further research. The issues are shown below, but are not in order of priority:

1. being liked by the popular group was very important to the respondents
2. the respondents used a range of social media and understood the affordances of each
3. social media was important for communicating with friends and family
4. the respondents used social media to reinforce socially constructed understandings of group behaviour and norms
5. some respondents were struggling to cope with the negative effects of social media use

6. some respondents felt unable to communicate with their families about issues that caused them concern arising from social media use

7. online and offline worlds were merged and there was an effect on classroom environments and student learning

The data analysis process represents a series of stages, they culminate in the final stage, where the findings are interpreted on the basis of the theoretical approach by making links with Goffman's (1959) concept of dramaturgy. This is explained next, in section 4.7.

4.7 How can adolescent identity and belonging be explained in a digital age?

Implicit within the third research question was a need to understand two key issues. Firstly, the research needed to understand the positive and negative issues the respondents were dealing with as they constructed their sense of identity and belonging through social media. The data presented above has shown both the range of issues that the respondents were experiencing and their influence on their lives. Secondly, the research needed to explain the influence of technology on mid- adolescent girls' sense of identity and belonging from a theoretical perspective. When the key findings based on the themes and sub-themes used for thematic analysis were augmented with the theoretical approach of the research process, the importance of the data in the form of words and descriptions was highlighted. The respondents frequently referred to both the group they called the 'populars' and to being 'liked'. Furthermore, the data from this study has described how the respondents use social media in the construction of their identities by selecting photographs for SNS profiles. As members of social groups, individuals reinforce the agreed norms of behaviour through posting details and photographs of their activities. These are mediated in three important ways. First, through the reactions of members within groups shown through comments on walls. Secondly, individuals who are not group members can access information as observers and mediate the actions of others in offline settings, such as school. Thirdly, the reaction of parents was shown to be a powerful mediating force for some respondents who valued the social and cultural norms that they had been raised to follow.

The process of data gathering and analysis led to a reflection of how the knowledge and understanding that motivated the study had broadened considerably in the light of this experience. As a result, with a deeper understanding of how the respondents engaged with social media the basis for developing an explanation of the influence of social media from the theoretical perspective of dramaturgy formed the final stage of analysis. This was based on

Goffman's (1959) metaphor of a theatrical performance that he used as a framework to describe strategies people use to present themselves to others and to control others' impressions of them so that they will be seen in a positive light. For the respondents in this study, the impressions that others formed of them were evident in the data they provided. Prior to gathering data for this study, my understanding of the influence of family, belonging to a social group and school success placed equal emphasis on each. However, data from the respondents indicated this was not the case. The data implied that identity was constructed around belonging to a social group and that for these mid-adolescent girls, at the time of this study, that factor was more important than family ties and school. Prior to this study, the extent of the interplay between my students, their families and the school were issues I was aware of at a superficial level. The consistency in the data from the respondents led me to realise that there is more interplay between these elements for my students than I realised. Furthermore, the influence of social media was far greater than expected because it plays a key role in the way mid-adolescents construct their identity and sense of belonging in groups, while trying to maintain family relationships and achieve academic success at the same time. The data from this study implies that social media is the common factor, as technology pervades teaching and work environments, social media appeals to all age groups and is constantly evolving. Consequently, dramaturgy can be used to explain how the respondents worked individually and collectively to present a shared and unified image of reality. An important aspect of Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical analysis of social interaction is his claim that the individual should be thought of in relation to a social group, or what he refers to as the team. As the respondents from this study described how they selected photographs for their Facebook profile pages, the procedures they followed resonated with Goffmans' (1959) framework. The quotes selected below were first used in section 4.3.3.1 to describe how the respondents used SNS for self presentation. By applying the concept of dramaturgy, the quotes provide a deeper level of understanding about the complex systems of interactions that are involved in the construction of identity and belonging in social groups. For example, in the quote below from Meg, her description of how she selects the photographs she will use for her profile highlight how she makes carefully considered decisions about what to wear, knowing she has two different audiences to she is playing to.

Meg *"On my phone I take stacks of photos to get the perfect one, because you want the popular group to think it's a nice photo. So you take quite a lot and then choose your favourite one and hope it gets lots of likes. I would never wear something that would show my bum. I just think if I wear clothes that show my skin or my body, the populars will judge me.*

ln school in lessons that I have with them they make me feel a bit shyer than I normally am, but in my friends' group, I can just be myself. I can wear a hoodie or something, no make-up, what-ever I want."

Interpreting Meg's explanation through a dramaturgical lens, it is evident she is managing the impressions others form of her by presenting a photograph that she thinks will be positively received by the the 'popular' group. In dramaturgical terms, the selected photograph is part of the costume or the visual information that conveys the message of your performance. Another example would be the use of emogies, that some respondents referred to using. Goffman's (1959) view of identity as a performance is apparent as Meg in her role as actor, takes a lot of photographs (backstage work), before selecting the best one for her profile (the front stage area). Meg's behaviour is intended to impress the 'popular' group, (the audience) which includes people she knows, and anyone else who wants to look at her profile. The performance involves interaction with others (feedback in the form of likes, which are part of the script) and Meg shows how she manages her performance (her profile page) by wearing clothes, in online and offline settings that would gain approval from the 'popular' group. The significance of managing a performance is also apparent in the next quote, from Ellie.

Ellie *"On Snapchat I've got just everyday photos. It's not so much pressure because it's not about getting as many likes as you can. But with Facebook the populars might speak to you or act differently towards you if they like your photo. The populars are a bit stuck up and they'll be bitchy so I change my photos to something I think makes me more like them."*

The importance of getting the right photograph implies that front stage behaviour is composed of patterns, or norms that have been agreed by actors and are mediated by audiences. In addition, Ellie and Meg illustrate that as social contexts for identity to develop, SNS are prone to institutionalised expectations for behaviour and they conform to the expectations they perceive to exist. Ellie and Meg's front stage performance conforms to the group norms through their choice of photographs but an interesting feature is Meg's back stage performance, where she is not observed by an audience and can be anyone she wants to be. This implies that actors have different identities and it is clear from Meg and Ellie that they understand how to manage their performances on SNS to gain maximum benefit from them. However, the quote below from Sarah shows that actors control their performances in different ways.

Sarah *"My profile has my birthday on it and a picture and then some statuses I write but I've got this thing on my profile where if someone writes something I don't like I don't have to post it to my time line so no-one else can see it. So, I think that's a really good idea otherwise you could get really embarrassing pictures say if you went to parties and other people were just being idiots around you and took pictures and then you had them posted over your time line people could see them, but if you could hide them that's better."*

Rather than managing her front stage performance through a selected photograph, Sarah utilised her knowledge of how social media is structured to control the script by blocking details of interactions she did not want the audience to see. Ideas about staging are useful in explaining SNS activity, especially through Facebook and Twitter. Seen from this perspective, Goffman's (1959) ideas can be used to show how SNS are spaces where individuals can control the way they present themselves and how identities can be made and remade. The social interactions he described as performances create a specific impression referred to as a *face*. The face can vary and represents the successful staging of an identity, so for the respondents, gaining lots of likes indicates your performance has been successful and you are accepted by the group.

Throughout the interviews the respondents made references to social groups as 'populars, geeks and nerds'. Consistency across the data set was apparent in the descriptions of each group. The descriptions of groups as 'populars', 'geeks' and 'nerds' could be interpreted through Goffman's (1959) concept of teams. Understanding within the team is helped by *a script,* which is a conversational format that helps to signify roles and help others to form impressions. In addition, it allows one team to convince another to adopt their preferred understanding of reality. The quotes below show how the respondents categorised their peers and the part of the process that involved a script used words and phrases that were the same across the data set. The quotes from Ellie, Bec, Maisie, Clare, Zara and Jo illustrate the common descriptions of 'populars'.

Ellie *"The top populars post pictures and wear older clothes, so they can get in to clubs. They wear sluttish clothes. The short shorts and crop tops."*

Maisie *"They go to all the parties, they know everyone."*

Bec *"They get drunk every weekend."*

Clare *"They have pictures on their profiles with hundreds of likes. Everyone rates them for being pretty and thin. No-one who is a size fourteen can be a popular."*

Bec, Maisie and Clare gave short and precise definitions and during the interviews, they nodded in agreement as each spoke. Zara and Jo provided more detail, as shown in the quotes below.

Zara *"There's populars and weird people, like geeks and nerds. It's all stereotypical, not all populars are sluts and bitches or unpopulars are weird, it's just the popular lot are prettier so they get more attention. It's the way they act, like on non-school uniform days, the sluts wear something that really stands out, something that shows too much and they know they'll get judged for it but they do it anyway. Even the populars are split into two groups, there's top populars and just ordinary populars."*

Jo *"The popular lot are judged by how pretty they are, how thin they are. Nerds are loud and if you say something to them they'll answer back, they're not frightened of anyone. They try to be different. One kid wears big glasses and his hair is shaved in one place and he knows he stands out. Geeks are the smart lot and they think they're better than everybody else but they're not popular. I remember I asked one of them for help once and they look at you in a way that says I know I'm smart but I'm not helping you why are you asking for help. I'm smart but I would help somebody else if they were stuck."*

The depth of understanding and acceptance of life as it has been constructed stands out in these descriptions. Throughout the interviews, the respondents spoke in terms of a clearly defined structure that determined who they were as individuals, how they should behave, what they should wear and their position on the landscape through a shared language.

4.8 Chapter summary: how adolescent identity and belonging can be explained in a digital age by using Goffman's (1959) concept of dramaturgy

The data from the respondents implies that identity was constructed and managed against a social background where social interactions were made meaningful by categorising people in ways that everyone accepted. So in that sense, identity was a social construction that emerged from interactions between individuals as actors performing on a stage. A successful performance required a face that was deemed appropriate by the audience, preferably one that met the criteria to be popular. SNS provide a stage for the performance, with back stage

regions where profile pages are constructed in ways that manage the impressions that others form of an actor. The front stage region is the profile page and feedback in the form of likes or comments impacts on the self esteem of the actor, in ways that allow them to understand who they are and what other people perceive them to be.

In the next chapter, existing literature and theoretical concepts will be drawn on to discuss these findings in relation to the research questions.

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Introduction to the chapter

In this chapter, the findings from the study are discussed in relation to the overall aim of the work, which was to gain an insight into the lived experiences of mid-adolescent girls using social media. The discussion will examine the findings in relation to the research questions, which asked:

1. What social media were mid-adolescent girls using?
2. How were they using social media?
3. How did social media influence identity and belonging?

The study has contributed to the knowledge base about mid-adolescent girls' use of social media by providing valuable and unique insights into their experiences. The methodological approach of case study provided the opportunity to examine the research questions within the familiar context of a school, where the respondents were required to meet academic targets while managing both their online and offline worlds. Therefore, the findings can be utilised within the framework of the school, by informing best practice and enabling educators, parents and carers to provide localised support. However, as this study identified a range of issues relating to lived experiences within a case bounded by time, geography and the age and gender of the respondents, there are no studies that are exactly comparable that can be used to inform or align the data within the field of mid-adolescent social media use. However, there is research that explores a range of issues related to adolescent engagement with social media and these will be drawn on to make links to the data from this study.

5.2 Key findings

Following a mixed methods approach to gather data and thematic analysis of the respondents contributions, this study showed as a group of mid-adolescent girls, their experiences of social media was varied. Through a range of themes and sub-themes the data analysis showed three key findings. Firstly, the respondents enjoyed using social media and used several SNS, spending several hours a week engaged in communicating with friends and family. Secondly, the respondents used social media for self-presentation and thirdly, engagement with social media influenced their identity and sense of belonging. The study shows how the respondents experienced a range of positive and negative effects when using social media. However, the findings implied that some respondents needed additional support from

educators, parents and carers, in addition to the government policies that are designed to ensure Internet safety on a national and international level. The themes and sub-themes from the data analysis that align with the literature have been considered and are presented next, in the context of the research questions that explored engagement with social media by mid-adolescent girls.

5.2.1 What social media were mid-adolescent girls using?

Data from the qualitative and quantitative methods that were employed showed the mid-adolescent girls in this study were using a wide of SNS. The study successfully answered this research question through the first sub-theme that was identified during data analysis because it related to the range of social media the respondents' chose to use. This study concurs with research by boyd (2014), who observed that while the core activities of adolescence such as chatting and socialising, engaging in self-expression are the same for this generation as they were for those in the past, social media has changed the way that happens. Research indicated adolescents have knowledge about how social media works and have the skills to manage and control the way they present themselves in their online worlds (Manago, Graham, Greenfield and Salimkhan (2008), Lenhart and Maddon (2007). It was clear from the way that the respondents in this study talked about their lives that they enjoyed using a range of SNS and had knowledge about the affordances they gave. This included making choices both for their own individual needs and to affiliate with others. During the interviews, the respondents described how they used a wide range of SNS and their choices were found to be consistent across all interview groups. This resonates with research by Lenhart and Maddon (2007) who showed adolescents exercised agency over their actions, and were cognisant of the opportunities afforded by social media, by being selective both in their choices of SNS and the ways they used them. The mixed methods approach was successful in identifying both the number and the most popular SNS that were used by the respondents. The data from the interviews was supported by the questionnaire data and from the two sources, a clear understanding of the social media the respondents were using was gained. A total of ten SNS were identified and Facebook and Twitter were the most frequently used. This concurs with a trend that was identified by research (Ito, Baumer, Bittanti, boyd, Cody, Herr-Stephenson, Horst, Lange, Martinex, Pascoe, Perkel, Robinson, Sims and Tripps (2010) and the Pew Internet and American Life Project (2006). Quantitative data from this study clearly shows Facebook was the most commonly used site, with Twitter and Snapchat also proving popular with this population sample. This was also reflected in the interview data, as all respondents

mentioned using these two sites. Bebo and Vine appear to be less popular and this concurs with interview data from respondents who described how their platform preferences were related to what their peers were using. Data from this study showed all respondents voluntarily added their names to their questionnaire sheet. While this could imply the instructions were ambiguous, the addition of the names added to the validity of the data because they were repeated during interviews that specifically stated how each SNS was used. This data also reflects how time sensitive research on social media can be, as in the time between researching a topic and writing a report, trends could change and the data looks out of date. The data from this study showed all respondents had at least one social media profile and this concurred with data from the Office for National Statistics for 2015 that showed ninety-three per cent of sixteen to twenty-four year olds had at least one social media profile. In addition, the data resonates with studies which showed the popularity of Facebook among this age-group (Ito et al 2008, Subrahmanyam, Riech, Waechter, and Espinoza (2008), Subrahmanyam and Greenfield (2008) and Subrahmanyam, Smahel, and Greenfield (2006)). The data also showed a wider use of social media among sixteen to twenty-four year olds such as Twitter (forty per cent), Snapchat (twenty-six per cent), Tumblr (eight per cent) and Vine (four per cent) (Office for National Statistics 2015). The percentages of use found in the data for this study also follow that pattern.

5.2.2 How were mid-adolescent girls using social media?

The literature review showed how technology was being integrated into the lives of young people in ways that were transforming culture and knowledge (Castells 2014), Erstad and Sefton-Green (2013), Sefton-Green (2013), Facer (2013) and Buckingham (2008, 2007). To gain an understanding of how that happened, a mixed methods approach proved to be successful. Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the qualitative data gathering method to provide opportunities for the respondents to speak freely about their experiences. The data suggests that they were comfortable in doing that because the respondents shared a lot of information, some of which was very personal and offered freely. Quantitative data gathering methods supported the interviews and provided a way of checking the validity of the data set. Information questions provided numerical data and secondly, evaluative questions that were designed to provide data about opinions, emotions and attitudes related to social media use proved to be successful (Stake 1995). When combined with the data obtained from interviews, these types of questions added to a rich description of many facets of mid-adolescents' social media use and its influence on identity and belonging. Following the

questionnaire activity, the respondents had stayed in the room for a few minutes and there were some interesting exchanges between them about one of the questions. As the respondents chatted, they compared the amount of time they spent on SNS in a week in a humorous way. However, it was apparent that the question had made them reflect on this issue. Analysis of question three showed there was a difference of thirty hours between the highest and lowest estimation. The data showed that twelve out of thirteen respondents estimated they spent more than fifteen hours a week engaged with social media. This concurs with data from the Office for National Statistics (2015) that showed mid-adolescents were using SNS more than ten times a day, as such frequent use would result in a considerable amount of time being spent on the sites. Data in question six described SNS as addictive and this, combined with data in question three informed the conclusion that some respondents recognised it was difficult to control the time they spent on various sites. Similarly, reference was made in interview data to the need to constantly check statuses and messages, even in lessons, when the behaviour could have resulted in disciplinary action. These practices resonate with research that indicated sociotropic individuals follow ritualistic patterns such as checking statuses regularly and are fearful of "missing out" on news and gossip (Orchard, Fullwood, Galbraith and Morris 2014).

The data from the third sub-theme that was developed for analysis illustrated how the respondents used different platforms like tools, for different activities. This study showed Facebook, Twitter and Snapchat were the most frequently mentioned SNS among the respondents and it was clear from the descriptions that each was used for different purposes. The data showed that in this study, SNS were used for self-presentation, to keep in touch with family and friends and to provide peer support. This concurs with the claim by Manago, Graham, Greenfield and Salimkhan (2008), who described SNS in terms of new cultural tools that had the potential to transform the construction of personal identities. The second sub-theme provided more details of how that happens, as it related to how the respondents used different platforms for different activities.

Research has shown that using SNS to construct a profile appealed to users because through selective self-presentation, they can choose which aspects of their identity they want to promote and share with others (Manago, Graham, Greenfield and Salimkhan 2008). The findings from this study support those claims but also provides evidence of contrasting uses of social media. Interacting with a known group of friends, keeping in touch with family and providing peer support was clearly important to some respondents who described very

different reasons for using the same SNS. Their choices of SNS and descriptions of how each was employed for specific purposes implied this was an important feature of the culture of social media use among the sample population. Furthermore, it reflected how the respondents were actively using SNS as tools in the construction of their identities, and a key feature for this adolescent group was gaining an understanding of what each platform was used for within a social group. Some respondents had described their early adolescent experiences with SNS as much more positive compared to their experiences as mid-adolescents, suggesting the change in their experiences was directly linked to their choice of SNS and that age was a feature in determining how SNS were used. This resonates with research by Lenhart and Maddon (2007), who found adolescents exercised agency over their actions, later referred to as representing a culture of autonomy by Castells (2014). Furthermore, the dominance of Facebook as a preferred SNS among the respondents was clearly indicated in all the data sources and often related to negative experiences. boyd (2014) defined four key affordances of social media as persistence, meaning the durability of online expressions and content, visibility which referred to the potential audience who can bear witness, spreadability as the ease with which content can be shared and searchability which referred to the ability to find content. Using boyd's (2014) definitions, the interview data implied that some mid-adolescent girls were able to maximise the effects of persistence and spreadability to cause distress to others. Understanding the concept of visibility as defined in these terms enables some users of SNS to engage in practices that they would be more cautious of in a face to face situation. Some respondents made reference to this by implicating Facebook as a SNS that is used in that way.

Marwick and boyd (2014) used the term 'drama' to understand the impact of conflict and aggression on adolescents using social media and the respondents who referred to arguments that went on over a period of time and past incidents that were re-visited resonates with that concept. An additional dimension from Allen (2014) through the use of the term *"stirring the pot"* offers an understanding of how behaviours that prolong, resurrect or ignite incidents of drama concurs with data from this study and illustrates the power of individuals who are cognisant of the persistence and searchability of social media. Miller (2013) highlighted how online and offline lives and identities were were becoming increasingly merged and the concepts of drama, stirring the pot and the affordances of social media support that claim.

There was also evidence to suggest that the personality of the respondents had an impact on how they used SNS. An unexpected feature of the semi-structured interviews was the way the

respondents use of SNS was aligned with their personalities. Personality traits such as openness, conscientiousness, agreeableness, extraversion and neurotocism were shown to be linked with Facebook use because that SNS allowed users' opportunities for self-presentation and satisfied the need to belong to a group (Orchard, Fullwood, Galbraith and Morris 2014 and Seidman 2013). The differences between the respondents in this study was also noticeable in the way they described their experiences and resonated with research that showed a relationship between personality and the affordances of many SNS, and particularly Facebook. The description in the pen portrait description of one of the respondents is a point in case. For one of the respondents, her shyness would have inhibited her from offering support to others in an offline situation, but through social media, she was able to benefit from the anonymity it offered. The data from this study implies that an important feature of SNS is the degree of choice that individuals have over the level of involvement they want to invest, referred to as a culture of autonomy (Castells 2014). Together with that choice, it is important to understand how users perceive they can use technology in social settings, because combined with the capabilities it offers, it determines what the technology means to them, a process described as co-production (Facer 2013). This was evident in this study as one respondent illustrated how her perception of how Tumblr could be used was different to her peers. The difference was a positive experience because she achieved personal autonomy and provided help for others by considering the level of investment she was prepared to offer and matching her skills to the social context.

5.2.3 How did social media influence identity and belonging?

The influence of social media on identity and belonging was apparent in the way the respondents engaged in self-presentation through selecting photographs for profiles. This activity resulted in positive and negative experiences that had an impact on their self-esteem. Social media was also shown to have an influence on relationships with friends and with parents, and often resulted in issues with privacy. The influence of SNS on belonging in a group was shown through norm behaviour related to how behaviour was monitored through SNS. This study showed how peer pressure had an influence on the respondents' identity and sense of belonging in a group

The findings in this study added to the body of knowledge on self-presentation in the way they described how they developed their own profiles and evaluated those of others. Research shows the accessibility of social media allows mid-adolescents to interact with an audience of their choice, and being able to edit the content makes it possible to control the details

users disclose about themselves (Valkenburg and Peter 2011). However, as this research showed, not all SNS users are able to mediate their activities to achieve a positive outcome. Research by Berson and Berson (2006) found that young people do not seem to be aware of the potential future audience of their social media activitiy and this study supports that concern. Although some respondents described the measures they took to protect themselves from harm online, others seemed unaware of the ramifications of their actions. Research that raised awareness of how mid-adolescents struggled with aspects of social media use were very influential in the development of the guidelines on Internet safety that are widely used in schools (Livingstone 2008, The Byron Review 2008, the United Kingdom Council on Child Internet Safety (UKCCIS) in 2010, Livingstone, Haddon and Gorzig, 2012, and the linked project, Net Children Go Mobile Livingstone, Haddon, Vincent, Mascheroni and Olafsson 2014). Nevertheless, as the data from this research implies, support is also needed on a one to one level, in addition to national policy guidelines. Research has shown how young people who write their online identities are affected by feedback from friends as this is an important source of both inspiration and critique for girls (Abiala and Hernwall 2013). This study shows some mid-adolescent girls are dealing with personal issues on a day to day basis in the social context of a school environment and the effects of feedback from friends is critical in determining the progress they make.

Research has shown girls used their experiences to build a frame of reference via social media that helped them to form a common identity as a group. This has been referred to as folklore, and indicated recognition from peers was vital and negotiated through on and offline environments (Hagittai 2007, Subrahmanyam and Greenfield 2008, Strano 2008). Data from this study resonates with that research because it showed how mid-adolescents learn how much information to reveal about themselves from the responses of others around them. Through engagement with social media, the respondents indicated they had control over the way they presented themselves and the amount of information they felt comfortable about disclosing. The data in this study shows some respondents would only select photographs to go on their profiles they thought would gain approval from the social group they called the 'populars'. The data suggests that creating a profile can be beneficial in the way it promotes feelings of self-worth. Research from the perspective of social comparison theory found that the social attractiveness of others has an impact on how an individual perceives their own level of attractiveness (Ellison 2013). Following that theme, this study showed that when some respondents compared themselves with the profiles of other users, the result was damaging to their self-concept. Respondents described the characteristics of members of

social groups that implied the group that most mid-adolescent girls aspired to be members of were the 'populars'. Therefore, the data resonates with research findings that argue social media provides valuable opportunities for users to construct their identity because the norms and expected behaviours are clearly transmitted between groups. Furthermore, it could be argued that through social media adolescents could construct a chosen identity, whereas in the past, identity was ascribed by other features, such as gender or social status and therefore much harder to change. However, the data from this study drew attention to the pressure of being able to construct an identity online, in a way that implied it did not seem to be as free as researchers suggested. The data showed there were a lot of pressures on respondents to conform to the stereotypical 'popular' girl. This concurs with research by Livingstone (2008) and Subrahmanyam and Greenfield (2008) who found that the levels of disclosure of personal information among adoldescents had a negative impact on their social media experiences. The respondents described the pressures of creating a profile that would lead to positive feedback that resonated with research studies that indicated the importance of recognition from peers (Abial and Hernwell 2013, Lenhart 2015, Davis 2012, Steinberg 2008 and Strano 2008).

Research by Davis (2012) found that among a group of participants aged thirteen to eighteen years Facebook use was associated with identity development but the unique features of the platform shaped their experiences in different ways. Data from this study resonates with those findings and implies that the positive and negative experiences associated with using SNS had an impact on the development of self-esteem. The respondents provided data that showed how their experiences had an impact on their self-esteem in several ways. For the respondent who described using Tumblr to provide online peer support the experience was positive. However, the data shows the concepts respondents used to categorise people emerged from a socially constructed process. The respondent who described reactions to her telling a friend a secret illustrates this point. Members of a group decide on behaviours that are acceptable within their circle and respond in ways that can be damaging to self-esteem for those who behave in different ways. One respondent's reference to conformity was interesting because it showed how she was using knowledge gained elsewhere to understand the events that were going on around her. Furthermore, her definition of the situation influenced other respondents, and so the data implies that reality was made up or constructed from what the girls agreed it to be, reflecting the concept of co-construction (Subrahmanyam, Riech, Waechter and Espinoza 2008). The data implied this was a dynamic process, where individuals continually modified their behaviour to maintain a place within the group. This

concurs with research by Orchard, Fullwood, Galbraith and Morris (2014) who showed sociotropic individuals were concerned with how others viewed their behaviour and would follow trends to improve their social standing.

Relationships with parents were referred to by all respondents within the context of the influence of social media. Although social media has had a substantial impact on mid-adolescent lives, the interviews indicated that for the respondents, their parents and families still played a crucial role in the development of identity. This first became apparent in the data from question five of the questionnaire, which asked what the best thing was about social networking and ten respondents said it was easy to keep in touch with family who were not local and four respondents said keeping in touch with family around the world. However, research suggests it can still be a difficult time for some individuals, as they are positioned between childhood and adulthood, dependence and independence, while trying to establish an identity that is not solely defined by family ties, but is increasingly mediated by digital technologies (Lerner and Steinberg 2004). Some interview data concurred with research that illustrated the transition from childhood to adulthood could be relatively smooth and trouble free (Sarigianides, Lewis and Petrone 2015), as two respondents described how they had strong relationships with their families. However, the influence of social media was also apparent as parents often struggled to understand their daughters' activities or wanted to check what they were doing.

Data from this study revealed how strong ties emanated among close-knit families through SNS use but elsewhere, research shows how social media use has changed those relationships. Social media has been shown to give mid-adolescents opportunities to seek membership to social groups of their choice (Ahn 2012). While some respondents seemed protective towards their parents, other highlighted the difficulties of dealing with those who wanted to control their use of social media. These findings concurred with research that traced the impact of the rise in the adoption of social media on the relationship between some parents and their children (Abiala and Hernwell 2013). The respondents in this study showed how parents and their children had to develop new ways of building trust and understanding in their relationships. Some respondents found this process challenging, and they described the conflict that could arise between them as they conducted a life on and offline, and their parents who are using the same technology but in different ways (Abiala and Hernwell 2013). There was a sense of the tables being turned in relation to researchers who had warned that many adolescents were unaware of an 'unauthorized digital biography' of them that tracked

their activities (Berson and Berson 2006) and parents who were clearly unaware of the ramifications of their online activities. It was interesting to note how the respondents described others as friends on social media sites, but not friends they wanted to spend too much time with because they did not want to do the things they were doing e.g. drinking and smoking. The respondents expressed concerns that if they went out with friends and returned home smelling of smoke their parents would be angry. This showed the influence of parental attitudes, expectations and passing on of social norms. Some respondents described their relationships with their parents as close but they felt they had reached an age where they needed to create a distance between them. In this study, the respondents indicated siblings were a preferred option because they were closer in age and had a better understanding of their problems. This study contributes to the body of knowledge on issues of privacy and social media use, in the way the respondents described trust between their peers and with parents. Data from some respondents shows they were cautious in their social media activities with their peers because they knew that any information they disclosed was easily misconstrued, an issue that was identified in other studies (Subrahmanyam, Smahel and Greenfield 2006). Respondent interviews also revealed issues of trust and privacy between parents and their children. The data implied that a difficult issue for parents and their children to negotiate was the perceived level of control exerted by one over the other. Research shows parents respond to media stories about cyberbullying and the dangers of social media use, but conversely, the same concerns were not necessarily perceived in the same ways by their children (boyd 2014).

Research by Ito, Horst, Bittanti, boyd, Herr-Stephenson, Lange, Pascoe, and Robinson (2008) showed the influence of SNS on belonging in a group through genres of participation and how norm behavior was monitored through SNS use. Analysis of data from this study showed that across the data set the respondents used social media predominantly for friendship. The same names and descriptions described individuals in their social groups and to define the behavioural patterns associated with them in the same ways. The data relates to research question three which asked how social media influenced identity and belonging in groups because respondents' descriptions of social groups as 'populars, geeks and nerds' indicated how agreed behaviours identified social groups and cultural norms. This concurs with theorists who argue learning is not just about measurable outcomes, it is about the way people select, reject, contrast and build upon experiences to make sense of the world around them and their place in that world (Facer 2013). For mid-adolescents, identity is about learning which social group best fits their concept of self and is a process of interpretation, as

they explore new opportunities, such as those afforded by social media, reflect on those from the past, and the meanings they have attributed to them (Sefton-Green 2013). This study shows an important part of the process was how behaviour was monitored through SNS. As respondents described how they could see each others' posts from social events, and the responses they elicited both agreed norms and a sense of belonging were reinforced. The data from this study resonates with research findings that argue social media provides valuable opportunities for users to construct their identity because the norms and expected behaviours are clearly transmitted between groups. Furthermore, it could be argued that through social media adolescents could construct a chosen identity, whereas in the past, identity was ascribed by other features, such as gender or social status and therefore much harder to change. This concurs with research that shows how technology has had an impact on the language of identity as adolescents constructed a 'profile', made it 'public' or 'private', 'messaged' their 'top friends' on their 'wall' and 'added' or 'blocked' others to their network (Livingstone 2008). However, data from this study implies the respondents were more focused on prettiness and being thin.

There were clear indications in the data of the worries and anxieties the respondents faced. As their comments were focused around their personal behaviour and that of their social groups, the data implies that social norms and values were being constructed and challenged as respondents made decisions about acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. There was agreement among respondents that bullying, bitchiness, exposure to undesirable content and using social media to express emotion that would not be easy in a face-to-face situation, while common practice, was unacceptable. Respondents in this study described the pressures of having to have lots of Facebook friends and how that could lead to pressure to conform and to feel part of a group. Some respondents illustrated this by explaining how they had 'friends' that they did not know face to face, but they did not want others to think they could not attract followers through their profile. This concurs with research by Lenhart (2015) who found that that the average number of friends on Facebook is thirty, among the mid-adolescent age group. Through their comments, it became apparent that there are social pressures that can start at an early age, despite the limitations on the age at which individuals are legally allowed to have an account on SNS. The respondents also described how the fashion for certain SNS changes and the respondents felt they were are in danger of getting left behind if they did not follow the trends set by peers.

Data from this study indicated a key advantage to social networking was communicating with friends and family. For a small number of respondents, social media was used to keep in touch with family who were not local and for sharing photographs with them. In the light of this data, it could be argued that social media has a noticeable impact on identity because the respondents were using the technology to maintain contact with family members who had a defined role and arguably, some level of influence over the respondent. This was illustrated by respondents who described how family and cultural values were strengthened through Facebook contact. Furthermore, their reflections on the importance of social network media for sharing photographs illustrated how identity was a shared social construction, with clearly defined indicators of acceptable practice within a group. However, the data showed that the main advantage of social media for all respondents in this study was to keep in touch with friends, especially after school. All respondents made references to going online to chat with others in a group, or to keep up to date with what was going on by reading posts. The data implied there was considerable pressure on the respondents to be liked by their peers. Furthermore, being liked was visible for all to see in the responses others made to the way individuals presented themselves on profiles. From the respondents' descriptions of their social groups, it was clear that there was agreement among individuals that spread beyond the respondent group, about behavioural norms. Therefore, data from this study usefully adds to the body of knowledge about identity in social groups and how SNS, especially Facebook are used to transmit agreed patterns of behaviour. There is also evidence to suggest that friends play a mediating role in relation to aspects of mid-adolescents' social media use. Specifically, the negative reaction of peers to those individuals who engage in behaviours outside the accepted norm are a powerful influence.

5.2.4 How can adolescent identity and belonging be explained in a digital age?

The theoretical framework for this study was Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical theory and was selected because it offered a way of understanding interactions between individuals as a performance. It was interesting to note that throughout the interviews, the respondents used the same words, descriptions and short phrases to describe individuals and their social groups. The words used were 'populars', 'nerds', 'geeks', 'likes', 'arguments', 'pressure', 'parents' and the phrases 'keeping in touch', 'being thin' and 'being pretty'. These descriptions were significant to this study and formed the second sub-theme for analysis but they differed to those reported by other studies that eluded to the language of social media and influence in their lives (Livingstone 2008). However, the data from this study concurs

with one salient feature of identities that are constructed on SNS, namely popularity. Research has shown that indicators of popularity among mid-adolescent girls relate to the number of friends an individual has, the number of posts others placed on their profile wall and the number of photographs that are tagged (Scott 2014). Although it was not the intention of this study to gather quantitative data about numbers of posts on profile walls or tagged photographs, the interview data indicated the importance of popularity from a different perspective. The findings of this study resonate with descriptions of how mid-adolescents construct an understanding of their social worlds through the language they share and their cultural experiences. The cultural experiences of engagement with social media were apparent in the way the respondents used a shared language for descriptions of group identity and behavioural norms. Jenkins, Clinton, Purushotma, Robison and Weigel (2006) described the social production of meaning in terms of understanding a phenomenon on the many levels at which it operated. Although their reference was to a broader concept of digital literacy the overarching concept that describes the need for unified understanding could also be used to explain the consistency in the words and phrases shown in this study. The data illustrates this point because the respondents were very different characters but they all used shared descriptions of groups and behaviours that helped them to build their individual identities.

When the key findings based on the themes and sub-themes used for thematic analysis were augmented with the conceptual framework developed at the beginning of the research process, the importance of the data in the form of words and descriptions became apparent. At the beginning of the study, knowledge of the influences of friends, family, school and to a certain degree, social media on mid-adolescent identity was familiar to me from my professional practice. However, after data collection and analysis, the level of the impact of social media on the lives of mid-adolescent girls' lives became clear and altered that understanding to a very considerable degree. This resulted in a revision of the conceptual framework and the changes highlight the interaction between the early concepts that guided the research design process and later themes and sub-themes that were used to analyse the data. The sub-themes that were identified have implications for providing a framework of support for mid-adolescent girls using social media. The overlap in the centre of the diagram provided the basis for developing an explanation of the influence of social media from the theoretical perspective of dramaturgy.

Research showed how people categorise or label themselves and others, how they identify themselves as members of groups, and how they maintain a sense of group belonging and

(Buckingham 2008). Data in this study concurs with those findings in the way that the respondents described how they constructed their identity but also need approval from a group. Therefore, identity for the respondents could be explained as a social process, accomplished through interactions with others. The data implies that the respondents were interacting according to their perception of social encounters, and how they thought others who are also part of the interaction understood that event. Each respondents definition of the situation influenced that of others, and so reality was made up or constructed from what the members of a group agreed reality to be. Through this dynamic process, the respondents used their own definitions of appropriate behaviour to develop a sense of self. Their sense of self, or self-concept developed through social interaction and enabled them to achieve a sense of identity and belonging to a social group.

In this way, it could be argued that Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical analysis of social interaction provides the theoretical perspective from which to explain the respondents behaviour. The data from this study resonates with his claim that the individual should be thought of in relation to a social group, rather than as an autonomous being (Kivisto and Pittman 2011). The data also supports his claim that to understand human behaviour, the fundamental unit of social analysis should not be the individual, but what he referred to as the team. The respondents showed how teams created perceptions of reality in social settings, with their consistent descriptions of 'populars', 'geeks' and 'nerds'. Thematic analysis of the complex systems of interactions that the respondents used in the construction of reality concurs with Goffman's (1959) concept of dramaturgical social theory. An important element of his concept was the role, which referred to the image a single actor wanted to convey to the world, or audience (Kivisto and Pittman 2011). Research by Bullingham and Vasconcelos (2013) found participants were managing impressions that others formed of them in the contexts of blogging and SecondLife. A key finding from their case study data was that the ten participants edited aspects of their identity and the researchers argued this reflected Goffman's concept of 'front stage', where individuals deliberately project a chosen identity to an audience. The findings allowed the researchers to conclude Goffman's framework is useful for understanding identity through the ways individuals interact with others and the cues they use to present themselves online. Similarly, the respondents in this study gave very detailed descriptions of how they selected their profile photographs in order to find favour with their audience, who were the 'popular' group.

Understanding among the respondents was helped by their agreed descriptions of what the

perfect photograph had to show, which resonates with Goffman's (1959) idea of a script, which was presented on the stage of a SNS. The costumes that Goffman (1959) referred to were shown in the settings for the phtographs, the hair, the clothes and the makeup that the respondents used to promote themselves as being pretty. By managing the way the respondents presented themselves, they managed the impressions others formed of them. By interpreting the SNS profile as the stage it became apparent that social media created a context for social interaction and was a powerful way for one team to convince another to adopt the preferred understanding of reality. Goffman (1959) described interactions as performances that created a specific impression referred to as a face, which could vary and represented the successful staging of an identity. The respondents who described how they contolled their face in order to be accepted by one group, but also enjoyed being able to present another face to another group, relates to Goffman's (1959) concept. The respondents descriptions of the different groups they identified with further illustrates how the front stage was the space where the performance was public and seen by many and the back stage was where access was more controlled and limited (Goffman 1959). Ideas about staging are useful in explaining SNS activity, especially through Facebook and Twitter. Seen from this perspective, Goffman's ideas have been used to how SNS are spaces where individuals can control the way they present themselves and how identities can be made and remade. Goffman (1959) also used ideas of dramaturgy to show how scripts, that were patterns that structured talk and interaction, despite the appearance of improvisation. Murthy (2012) extended this argument by making connections with the self-affirmation affordances of Twitter. Murthy (2012) argues Goffman's interactionist work can be applied to understanding how mediated communications, such as Twitter are popular because they offer ways for individuals to perform presentations of their idealised selves. Goffman's analysis of social interactions as dramaturgical performances can be applied to individuals' interactions online through their use of SNS. By interpreting SNS as online stages, users become actors who present a carefully selected face to an audience. The stage has two regions following Goffman's framework. The front stage is the profile page which displays personal information about the actor to an unlimited audience and the back-stage region is more controlled, where the actor could control who has access to information. Using these descriptions, Goffman's (1959) analyses of social behaviour and interaction can be applied to understanding the problems and challenges of adolescents' sense of identity and belonging.

However, the core of Goffman's analysis lies in the relationship between performance and life and in that sense, the theory can be criticised as the respondents in this study did not

provide evidence of how they consciously planned their day to day lives in terms of a constant performance. This raises questions about whether Goffman's version of social life is realistic (Raffel 2013). Goffman (1959) based his concept of dramaturgy on small group interactions which were difficult to test systematically or to draw generalisations from. Nevertheless, it seems clear that Goffman's ideas continue to resonate with researchers. At the time of writing, his perspective on social interaction and self-presentation described face-to-face encounters. However, theorising the impact of social media on adolescent identity and belonging in a group, from Goffman's work on self-presentation was helpful for understanding both the identity cues that were shared between the respondents in this study. Researchers have used the components of Goffman's theory to explore how social media was impacting on individuals' sense of self and belonging in social groups. The concept of face and performances was employed by Davies (2012) to describe how individuals using Facebook engage in activities to maintain the impression they want to give others. Davies (2012) gathered data from twenty-five teenagers in the United Kingdom through interviews and from their Facebook 'walls' to understand how they represented themselves and enacted friendship online. Using a dramaturgical framework to describe the social acts they were involved in Davies (2012) adopted the phrase Facework to describe how individuals consciously acted in ways that allowed them to maintain a positive face. This showed how Goffman's (1959) framework could be used to explain self-presentation through engagement with social media as individuals construct a shared and unified understanding of their reality.

Research has shown that self-presentations are not singular acts but form part of groups or teams that have mutually agreed norms and values (boyd 2014). This feature has been linked to the mediated contexts of social media in the way identity can be described as a social process that changes depending on the situation. By looking at the profiles of others, adolescents get a sense of what types of presentations are appropriate and they use the cues to construct their own profile (boyd 2014) The data from this study concurs with boyd's (2014) findings as the respondents also described how they compared the profiles of other people to their own, implying that comparison was an important process in the construction of identity. Research that showed how SNS such as MySpace required individuals to identify lists of 'friends' provided a group structure that could also be described as an 'audience' (boyd 2007). Friends could refer to peers, family members, people from hobby groups or gaming sites. An interesting parallel to this came from a respondent in this study who felt it was rude not to accept someone as a friend, even if they were unknown and someone who was in the popular group would be difficult to refuse. As a result, when the respondents referred to

'friends' the data showed that they could mean a very mixed group of people, including groups with no clear distinction between them. boyd (2007) referred to the existence of these groups as 'collapsed contexts' because the value of the group was judged by the number of friends and the individual differences between members was no longer apparent.

5.3 Chapter summary

The study has contributed to the knowledge base about mid-adolescent girls' use of social media by providing valuable and unique insights into their experiences. The methodological approach of case study provided the opportunity to examine the research questions. Data from the qualitative and quantitative methods that were employed showed the mid-adolescent girls in this study were using a wide of SNS and had knowledge about the affordances they gave. This included making choices both for their own individual needs and to affiliate with others. The mixed methods approach was successful in identifying both the number and the most popular SNS that were used by the respondents. The data from the interviews was supported by the questionnaire data and from the two sources, a clear understanding of the social media the respondents were using was gained. A total of ten SNS were identified and Facebook and Twitter were the most frequently used.

This research showed the respondents used their experiences to build a frame of reference via social media that helped them to form a common identity as a group, and the data also showed there were a lot of pressures on them to conform to the stereotypical 'popular' girl. Relationships with parents were referred to by all respondents within the context of the influence of social media, indicating that parents and families still played a crucial role in the development of their identit but needed to develop new ways of building trust and understanding in their relationships. These issues are addressed in the conclusions in the next chapter.

Chapter 6: Conclusions

6.1 Introduction to the chapter

This concluding chapter presents personal reflections on the choice of methodology and research methods, strengths and limitations of the study and thoughts on the overall research journey. To conclude this thesis, the main aim of the research will be revisited and the contribution of this doctorate study will be reported with recommendations for the school and others, in relation to supporting students and those for further research.

6.2 Reflections

My research explored the influence of social media on the identity and belonging among a group of mid-adolescent girls. It was important for me to understand this topic for two reasons. Firstly, as an experienced teacher I was aware of many of the difficulties some students faced as they sought to develop a sense of identity and belonging in their social groups. As my students negotiated a life on and offline, the consequences of some of their activities impacted on the classroom environment and I was interested in finding out why. Secondly, their problems were being overlooked by a growing emphasis on academic achievement and that did not reflect my personal views on the role of education. I wanted to be in an informed position to argue for more support for my students, as those who were struggling to cope with the influence of some social media activities were also failing to meet academic targets. In addition, I was interested in promoting research projects among my peers and felt I would be in a better position to do so if I was pursuing a formal programme of study.

6.2.1 Reflections on methodological choice

After reviewing the existing literature and drawing on the knowledge and experiences of my supervisors, case study methodology was adopted as the most suitable for my research ideas. The structure provided by Yin (2009) gave initial guidance which was useful to me as a naïve case study researcher. This method appealed to me because it provided a framework that allowed me to explore the experiences of mid-adolescent girls in the setting they were familiar with and that led to my interest in research. Furthermore, this choice of methodology provided a flexible approach that allowed me to focus on a particular case. Although there were multiple variables that I could not control, the boundaries of the case facilitated data collection from the those who could provide an understanding of the case by providing rich and significant insights into the influence of social media on their lives. Flanagan (2012)

identified interpretative validity as an important element in data analysis, meaning the extent to which data interpretations and conclusions were considered to reflect the respondents' reality. To support her claim, Flanagan (2012) suggested ways in which this could be achieved, including contextual completeness, shown in the richness of the descriptions given, reporting style, shown in the extent to which a qualitative report was perceived to be genuine, coherence, that related to the extent to which the data and analysis worked together in a rational order and a chain of evidence which referred to the extent to which analyses could be traced back through the record. During the course of data gathering for this study, those guidelines provided a clear and useful framework that enabled me to maintain the focus of the work.

6.2.2 Reflections on the research methods

The aim of the study was to contribute to the overall knowledge base about the lived experiences of mid-adolescent girls using social media and to consider how within the framework of a state secondary school, educators, parents and carers could support them at a critical time in their development. A principle objective was to employ a range of data gathering methods to add to the body of knowledge relating to the problems of living a life on and off line. Specific issues encountered during the research process related to collecting data from mixed methods and ensuring the data was interpreted and presented in a way that reflected the issues the respondents shared. Discussions with course supervisors during the early planning stages ensured two key issues that would determine the success of the research methods were addressed. The first related to the dualism of my role as a teacher and a researcher. Being a member of staff researching an issue that impacted on my teaching, supported the validity of the study because I had identified problems that were pertinent to the case and I was in a position to make informed choices about the methods that would generate the type of data needed to address the research questions. The choice of semi-structured interview as a tool was successful because it allowed the respondents to take control over the information they disclosed. The second area of discussion focused on the ethical issues of conducting research with children as respondents. Bragg (2007) contends there is a need to hear young people's views and this thought supported my determination to raise awareness of what life was like for my students remained the driving force behind the decisions I made. Support from the Headteacher, parents and the respondents who volunteered to take part in the research implied my determination was justified. The setting for the interviews provided a space to gather information that I would not otherwise have been able to access but there were challenges in the form of disruptions and distractions that

were beyond my control. One interview had to be rescheduled because I did not record the interview successfully and another was interrupted by a colleague who ignored the 'Do not disturb" sign on the door of the interview room. Collecting data from multiple sources was challenging to interpret and present in a way that ensured the respondents' voices were heard. However, adopting a creative interpretive approach informed by Stake (1995) allowed me to acknowledge my part in the research process by taking the opportunities the methods afforded to select from the data set, material that was relevant to this research. This carried a level of responsibility that was both liberating and daunting.

This study suggests that mid-adolescent girls may not always wish to record information germaine to a research project in a diary in a paper format. Although the diary was intended as a means of triangulating the data, and was successful to that end, a more productive from of communicating information may have been achieved through social media. By employing the technology that respondents are very familiar with, such as texting, the process could be perceived less as a 'school type' activity and more relevant to them.

6.2.3 Limitations of the research

Whilst the methodology provided data to answer the research questions and address the overall aim, there were some limitations. This research utilized a single case study methodology and explored a case that was located within a specific geographical area and obtained data from a selected sample of respondents from one secondary school. As such, there are no claims that the findings can be generalised to other age groups, males or to students in other parts of the country.

In addition, this case study was conducted over a limited time and the findings provide no more than a snapshot of the lives of the respondents (Thomas 2011). As such, the study is limited in the sense that it does not address the changes that take place within the lives of the respondents on a day to day basis. For example, at the time of writing this thesis, the respondents are making decisions about what they will do after finishing school and the opportunities afforded by social media are continually evolving. It is unlikely that research would obtain the same results on another occasion. Nevertheless, after the research was finished, other students continued to experience difficulties as they negotiated a life on and offline and the respondents in this study continued to seek my support.

6.2.4 Reflections on the doctorate journey

The research process was a positive one overall but time management was often problematic because there were frequent conflicts of interest between the demands of a full-time teaching role and the drive to focus on academic study. There were interruptions, diversions and adjustments that tested my personal skills of confidence and resilience. Whilst these episodes were unsettling, they also provided opportunities to reflect on the realities of my own personal goals and capabilities. During this journey, my supervision team changed because of the retirement of two of my supervisors. Fortunately, I have had the stability of my Director of Studies who has overseen my progress and guided me through some very difficult times, for which I am truly grateful.

This professional doctorate has answered the main research aim and questions and has also provided personal learning in relation to my own practice. However, during the research process and while writing this thesis, I often questioned whether it was worthwhile. The research was limited in the sense that it was a small case study bounded by geography, the age of the respondents and their gender. Elliott (2007) reflected on how educational pedagogy paid little attention to the psychological processes children are expected to employ when integrating 'bodies of knowledge' (his label for curriculum subjects) into their lived experiences. His ideas of how the teacher operates in the comfortable security of their position as 'subject expert', shielded by the status the role implies resonated with my growing frustration with the education system and the quote below was pertinent to my thoughts,

> *"Worthwhile educational change can only in the final analysis be affected through the agency of teachers working together as professional learning communities."*

(Elliott 2007 page 11)

As a researcher and a teacher, I now appreciate the importance of those communities.

6.3 Research summary and contributions

It is important to understand the how influence of social media on identity and belonging in social groups operates on a day to day basis in the lives of mid-adolescent girls. The literature review highlighted the range of social media used by adolescents and how it influences identity. A case study methodology was used to gather data from a sample of mid-adolescent teenagers in a state secondary school and the contributions of this research are summarised

below in sections 6.3.1 to 6.3.3 in relation to the research questions. Section 6.3.4 takes a broader view of the contributions the research has made to academic knowledge.

6.3.1 What social media were mid-adolescent girls using?

The data showed that social media as used by all mid-adolescent girls in the sample. In addition, the data showed that SNS were the most commonly used forms of social media. The respondents in this sample used Beebo, Vine, Skype, Facetime, Tumblr, Snapchat, Twitter and Facebook. While there were many similarities and some differences in the respondents' choices of SNS, Facebook and Twitter were used by all respondents and were the SNS that most of their conversations were based around. The amount of time that the respondents spent on social media activities varied between weekdays and weekends. The respondents spent more time at weekends on social media activities than they did during weekdays. There was also a significant variation in the number of hours each respondent reported spending on social media. Data that answers this research question, contributes to the body of knowledge on mid-adolescent social media use in two key ways. Firstly, the data concurs with other studies and statistics that indicate Facebook and Twitter are popular SNS among adolescents. Secondly, the data from this study resonates with existing knowledge that shows mid-adolescent girls invest significant amounts of time in social media activities.

6.3.2 How were they using social media?

The data showed that respondents were using social media to keep in touch with friends and family, to chat and socialize. An important element in that process was constructing a profile that would enhance their position in a group. The data shows that there are socially constructed hierarchies within groups, and the most popular group is called 'populars'. The mid-adolescent girls in this study used SNS to create a sense of belonging and to reinforce groups and their boundaries. Through that process, they had to learn how to deal with social isolation and rejection.

6.3.3 How did social media influence identity and belonging?

The data showed social media had considerable influence on identity and belonging among the respondents. This was illustrated in descriptions of events and experiences where social media played a key role. The influence of social media on identity and belonging was explained in terms of enabling the respondents to select and control the way they presented

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themselves through profiles. The data also showed the influence of social media through the stories of experiences the respondents shared. As the real and digital lives of mid-adolescents converges, the respondents in this study have shown they face many challenges, welcome new opportunities to express their identity and some will take risks. The data from this study contributes to the existing knowledge in this field through the richness of the details the respondents gave about their lives and informed the recommendations below.

6.3.4 Contributions to academic knowledge

The study has contributed to the knowledge base about mid-adolescent girls' use of social media by providing valuable and unique insights into their experiences. It was clear from the way that the respondents in this study talked about their lives that they enjoyed using a range of SNS and had knowledge about the affordances they gave. This included making choices both for their own individual needs and to affiliate with others. Furthermore, the findings have added to the body of knowledge on self-presentation in the way the respondents described how they developed their own profiles and evaluated those of others. The findings have also shown the respondents used their experiences to build a frame of reference via social media that helped them to form a common identity as a group.

However, as this research showed, not all SNS users are able to mediate their activities to achieve a positive outcome. The data showed there were a lot of pressures on the respondents to conform to the stereotypical 'popular' girl, by being thin, being judged as being pretty through the number of approving comments on profiles and by taking part in the activities the group considered the norm. These details provide valuable insights into the impact of social media use and the pressures of creating a profile that gains acceptance of an individual and how those pressures affect life in school. In this way, the research adds to the academic knowledge about mid-adolescent girls' life through social media that has value to the school in relation to how students are supported and how parents and carers can play a key role in extending that process.

As an insider researcher, I felt very priveledged to work with students who shared their stories so willingly. Their trust and enthusiasm for my research made the process easier than it may have been if I was unknown to them. The respondents wanted to raise awareness of the issues they were dealing with and limiting the sample to one school added to the sense of ownership they felt about telling their story.

An added advantage of being an insider researcher was the opportunity to share my passion for my work with a group of staff who were given the opportunity to explore their own interests. The research and development group meetings were lively events where we celebrated our successes, engaged in difficult conversations where we challenged each others ideas, shared information and generally kept each other going.

6.4 Recommendations

It is apparent from both the literature and this research that engagement with social media has both a positive and negative influence on the lives of mid-adolescents. Therefore, it is essential that educators, parents and policy makers find ways of understanding the extent of that influence so that they can provide support. The recommendations that follow were not prioritised. The purpose of this section is to outline recommendations that were aligned to the case study. The main recommendations were:

1. that the school leadership teams and school governors review the school policy on media communication use
2. that policy makers incorporate national programmes into the curriculum
3. that school teachers are given the tools to provide individual support
4. that support for parents/carers is made available through schools, communities and national programmes
5. that further research is encouraged in light of key issues identified by this study

6.4.1 A review of the school policy on media communication use by the school leadership teams

One of the issues identified in the data related to the way respondents could not ignore online communication, such as instant messaging. In a classroom situation, it is very difficult to monitor inappropriate mobile phone use. There is an unnecessary dualism for many teachers, who appreciate the addictive nature of instant messaging among their students while trying to follow school policy. In a discussion during a research and development group meeting at the case school, a teacher described how students were finding ways of discreetly texting, and some students revealed how they had sent between eight and ten text messages during a lesson. The teacher was distressed by their actions because they thought they were strict about mobile phone use and classroom discipline. The revelations by the class, further

illustrated the addictive aspect of social media that had been referenced earlier by the case study respondents. Some individuals, who appeared on task, engaged and well-behaved, were able to send messages without the teacher noticing. Of greater significance to this research, was the admission they were unable to resist the need to communicate immediately when they had received a message from someone in another lesson, knowing there could be punishment if discovered. The research findings combined with anecdotal evidence that clearly worried conscientious teaching staff warranted a recommendation here that the school reviews the policy on mobile phone use. Clearly, it was very difficult to protect individuals from inappropriate contact by their peers, therefore it is recommended that the school respond to the problem as a matter of urgency. It is also recommended that this be done through consultation with all teaching staff, in order to benefit from their in-class experiences, with pastoral care staff, in order to uncover their stories and ultimately with students, who should be the focus of both the enquiry and the actions that follow. There are precedents that could provide guidance, as some schools ban mobile phones or have policies in place to limit their use that includes storing them during timetabled hours.

6.4.2 Policy makers need to continue to develop national programmes

Following a review of children's Internet use by Tanya Byron (2008), the United Kingdom Council for Children's Internet Safety (UKCCIS) was established in order to implement her recommendations. Organizations associated with UKCCIS include government, industry, law, charities and academia and have an interest in issues concerning children's use of the Internet. Research findings provide the evidence base to estimate the scale and scope of children's Internet use and the problems they encounter. This is carried out by the UKCCIS Evidence Group. Sonia Livingstone is a key member of the Executive Board of UKCCIS and is leading this work, with a focus on preventing children and young people experiencing harm online and making the Internet a safer place. Her empirical work has examined the risks and opportunities from digital technologies over more than a decade and she advised government departments and public bodies (Livingstone and Brake 2010).

The House of Lords Select Committee on Communications published a report called Growing up with the internet (March 2017) that made recommendations to inform good practice by exploring the issues children face as they grow up with the Internet and Internet-enabled technology. The report noted the important contribution of UKCCIS by recommending their work was extended and overseen by a Children's Digital Champion who would work within the government cabinet office with a brief to ensure coordinated and

sustained action was taken to support children by those who provide internet services, schools and parents and carers.

Public awareness campaigns on several issues related to social media use have been effective in changing behavior and developing policies. In September 2014, age-appropriate lessons on e-safety were introduced across all stages of the National Curriculum for children aged five to eleven years old. However, the caveat is that they need to be of a type that is constantly hitting the consciousness of the audience. Some campaigns, while useful for a period of time, lose influence if activities only exist at certain times in the school curriculum, such as during Internet safety days or as part of a short mentor time programme. Consequently, it is recommended that the school should include the following websites in their planning as a source of materials for lessons and posters that could be displayed prominently around the campus:

1. saferinternet.org.uk
2. Child Exploitation Online Protection Centre (CEOP) and the related site thinkuknow.co.uk
3. BBC Be Smart (the newly launched on-line campaign)
4. Minded

In addition, for an awareness campaign to succeed, there must be communication between all stakeholders, including students, school staff and parents. The first step would be to understand the attitudes and practices of the user groups, but it is not about telling people what to do. Rather, it is about explaining issues and disseminating knowledge to people so that they can make their own informed decisions. To that end, these references would be a valuable source of information that could be available to parents and carers on information evenings, via the school website or could be displayed by local shops.

6.4.3 Give teachers the tools to provide individual support

The House of Lords Select Committee on Communications report (2017) also noted that digital literacy is vital to enable children to navigate the online world and should be embedded within a school curriculum alongside reading, writing and mathematics. Teachers are ideally placed to provide support for the students they teach, through their subject or as mentors. The House of Lords Select Committee on Communications report called Growing up with the Internet (2017) recommends schools should teach online responsibilities, social

norms and risks through Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) lessons. The report also states that the provision of a digital literacy programme would enable teachers to provide students with individual support, enabling them to develop the skills and knowledge they need to critically understand social media and the internet more generally. The Children's Commissioner, Anne Longfield, published Growing Up Digital: A report of the Growing Up Digital Task Force 2017 that showed how many children were struggling with their digital lives. This prompted Longfield to launch a "Digital 5 A Day' campaign later that year, which made a number of recommendations to encourage teachers, parents, carers, government and social media companies to do more to help children to learn the digital skills they need (Children's Commissioner for England 2017). The Digital 5 A Day is a framework that provides practical steps that teachers, parents and carers can follow to help children to build their understanding of the internet and the resilience they need to achieve positive experiences as users of digital technologies.

Although national programmes reach public consciousness about the issues mid-adolescents face from a life on-line, the respondents in this research identified an important shortfall when they stressed the need for there to be someone available to listen on site, at pressure points in the day, such as break and lunchtimes or after school. There is a place for displaying information about help systems but this work shows one size does not fit all. Person specific support is also needed. In common with others in the area, the school was perceived as being focused on academic results, rather than adopting a holistic approach to education but respondents in this study identified a need that was not being catered for. Therefore, it is recommended that the school make provision for support that enables students to make informed decisions about their behaviour, by helping them to recognize how the choices they made could impact on others and have long term consequences for them. Some respondents described going through phases where learning was negatively affected by their online lives. If students were supported at the point of need, their academic progress could be better, and more evenly sustained.

6.4.5 Support for parents and carers

In 2016, an online poll of parents carried out by YouGov for the PSHE Association, showed parents were more concerned about sexting than alcohol misuse or smoking by their children. From a sample of four thousand one hundred and twenty seven parents, many expressed concerns about how to control Internet use by their children and eighty seven percent of the

respondents thought schools should take a pro-active approach to educate students about the risks of social media engagement.

The data from this thesis shows that comments online exchanged between young people are often painful and some respondents showed remorse for their actions afterwards. In some situations, the respondents did not know how to repair the damage that had been done or how to get help. However, one of the most distressing aspects of the data from the respondents was the realization that some parents seemed to be unaware of the impact of a life online for their children, either because they found it difficult to communicate with them or because their children did not want to cause them distress or thought they would not understand. The Education Policy Institute is an independent evidence-based research institute that provides commentary and critiques about education policy in England. Key findings on the digital lives of children and young people in a report by Emily Frith, the Director of Mental Health indicate that while restricting access to the Internet may reduce the likelihood of young people experiencing online risk, it also reduces the opportunities for them to develop digital skills and build resilience (Frith 2017).

Parents adopt different approaches to managing their children's Internet use, from limiting the time they can spend or banning internet access or engaging in open discussions about the Internet. My mentoring experiences of helping students to recognise the importance of e-safety and the implications of their digital footprint on their adult lives alerted me to the gaps in the knowledge of many parents. Therefore it is recommended that the school appoint a person to be available to support parents and carers, by listening to their concerns, enabling and empowering them to provide or seek professional care and support for their children. In addition, support and information for parents and carers is available online. For example, mindedforfamilies.org.uk has advice and information for parents and carers that was produced from collaboration between specialists, parents and carers working together that would eliminate some of those gaps. Parent Zone offers advice for parents and carers on issues caused or amplified by the Internet.

6.5 Encouraging further research

The research identified six key issues worthy of further research, and all could be projects developed either in the case study setting or elsewhere. The key issues were to explore male use of social media, to extend the age range of social media use for both males and females, support strategies, how new developments in social media impact on identity and belonging,

ethnic differences in social media use and the impact of personality on social media experiences.

As this research purposely focused on female experiences within a limited age group there is a need to extend this to gain an understanding of the complexities of living a life on and offline for males. Further research that extended the age range could also be beneficial as there may be significant differences in the way individuals respond to social media experiences at a younger age than this research sample, and as they get older.

The data clearly identified a need for the development and implementation of strategies that would help young people to feel supported at this critical time in their development. For example, some respondents described the help and support they had received from pastoral staff at the school but it was also clear that others felt their problems were sometimes overlooked. Further research could investigate the level of need, acknowledging age and gender differences with a view to finding ways of supporting students at the time when it is needed, rather than, as currently happens, when pastoral staff have time to deal with issues. Although the school has a counsellor the fact that his diary is constantly booked implies the need for further provision, which could include peer support.

Research in this field is time sensitive, meaning that as social media advances, the impact on young lives is likely to increase in complexity as the skills required to master a range of platforms and applications are developed, and the changes are tracked. For example, in the time that elapsed from preparing the research proposal to the completion of this thesis, the school decided to supply tablets for student use in lessons and at home. Many staff welcomed this decision as a tablet could be a useful aid to learning and there was also scope for further research in relation to the implementation of their use for staff and students, maintenance, security and cost of the equipment. Further research could track the development of the use of tablets over time, and could add to the body of knowledge by showing whether there was a difference in the way males and females used the tablet. Extant knowledge suggests males are more likely to look for information, whereas girls use the technology for social based activities (Miller 2013).

Ethnic differences in social media use were not included in the aims of this research. However, the literature suggested there were some variations in social media use, but this work focused on the experiences of users, not of their preferences (Miller 2013 and Ito 2008). Further research could position ethnicity as the focus of research that examined user

experiences following issues raised in the literature, such as those by The Digital Youth Project (Ito, Horst, Bittanti, boyd, Herr-Stephenson, Lange, Pascoe, and Robinson 2008 and The Byron Review 2008) that argued use of technologies among some cultures in more aligned to seeking knowledge, compared to use by western cultures, where use is more socially defined.

Finally, during the completion of this work it was apparent that while some mid-adolescent girls got involved in activities that caused them distress other girls did not and this could be the focus of further research. Research that focused on personality and social media use could provide an answer. An advantage of engagement with social media expressed by respondents in this work, was the freedom to express themselves via profile details that they constructed and this was also evident in the work of Orchard, Fullwood, Galbraith and Morris (2014). The acknowledged appreciation of the freedom technology provided to experiment and express oneself anonymously could have been the root cause of some of the distress the respondents experienced. With a focus on personality, further research could be based around investigating links between personality type and 'risky behaviours', tapping into the observations of Orchard, Fullwood, Galbraith and Morris (2014) and Livingstone (2008).

6.6 Concluding remarks

This final chapter has provided personal reflections on specific aspects of the research journey. The choice of methodology and methods used in the study, including the strengths and limitations were embedded within the discussion. A summary of the study and the research contributions were presented, along with areas recommended for further research to build on the findings of this case study were also identified.

This case study has highlighted the influence of social media on mid-adolescent girls as they develop identity and a sense of belonging in groups. This could lead to further valuable information about their experiences and enable educators, parents and carers to provide the level of support they need. In the long term this will ensure young people gain the maximum benefit from their engagement with social media and are better equipped to deal with the issues they face.

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Appendix 1: Five Cultures of the Internet

Analysis of the 2013 OxIS survey shows that most users in Britain can be grouped into five clusters, or cultures, each comprising individuals who responded in similar ways to questions about their attitudes and beliefs about the Internet.

These five cultures are overlapping, but each has a distinctive profile. They can be defined as the:

e-Mersives: This group of users is comfortable and naturally at home in the online world and happy being online. They are pleased to use the Internet as an escape, to pass time online, and think of it as somewhere they feel they can meet people and be part of a community. They see the Internet as a technology they can control—a tool they can employ—to make their life easier, to save time, and to keep in touch with people. They are immersed in the Internet as part of their everyday life and work. They comprise only about 12% of the UK's Internet users.

Techno-pragmatists: This cluster of users stands out by the centrality they accord to using the Internet to save time and make their lives easier. Like the e-mersives, they feel in control of the Internet, employing it for instrumental reasons that enhance the efficiency of their day-to-day life and work. Unlike the e-mersives, the pragmatists do not view the Internet as an escape, nor do they often go online just for the fun of it. Theirs is a more instrumental agenda of efficiency. Pragmatists constitute about 17% of the UK's Internet users.

Cyber-savvy: A third cluster of users expressed mixed feelings and beliefs about the Internet, holding somewhat ambivalent views. On the one hand, they enjoy being online, in order to pass time, easily find information, and become part of a community in which they can escape and meet people. On the other hand, they also feel as if the Internet is, to a greater or lesser degree, taking control of their lives, because it can be frustrating, wastes time and invades their privacy. Rather than always feeling in control, they feel that they might lose control to technology, which could drain them of time and privacy. Despite their concerns, they fully exploit the Internet as a pastime, as an efficient information resource, and as a social tool. For this reason, they are in some sense street wise, or cyber- savvy, living comfortably in an Internet world but aware of the risks. They represent nearly one in five (19%) of the UK's Internet users.

Cyber-moderates: The fourth cluster of users is most clearly defined by patterns of attitudes

and beliefs that show them to be more moderate in their view of the Internet as a good place to pass the time, an efficient way to find information or shop, or a good way to maintain and enhance their social relationships. On the other hand, they are also not uniformly fearful that there is a risk that the Internet will expose them to immoral material, pose a threat to their privacy, or waste their time. They seem to be moderate in both hopes and fears, thus we have called them 'cyber-moderates'. They are the largest single cluster of Internet users in Britain, accounting for 37% of users.

Adigitals: This final group does not feel that the Internet makes them more efficient, nor do they enjoy being online simply to pass the time or escape from the real world. To members of this culture, the Internet is likely to be perceived as out of their control, potentially controlled by others. For example, they feel frustrated because the Internet is difficult to use and harbours too much 'immoral material'. Compared to the other cultures, the adigital group appears to resonate mostly with the problems generated by the Internet. They feel more excluded from a technological context that is 'not made for them'. This adigital culture fits about 14% of the UK's online population.

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Appendix 2: Timeline of launch dates of many major SNS and dates when community sites re-launched with SNS features
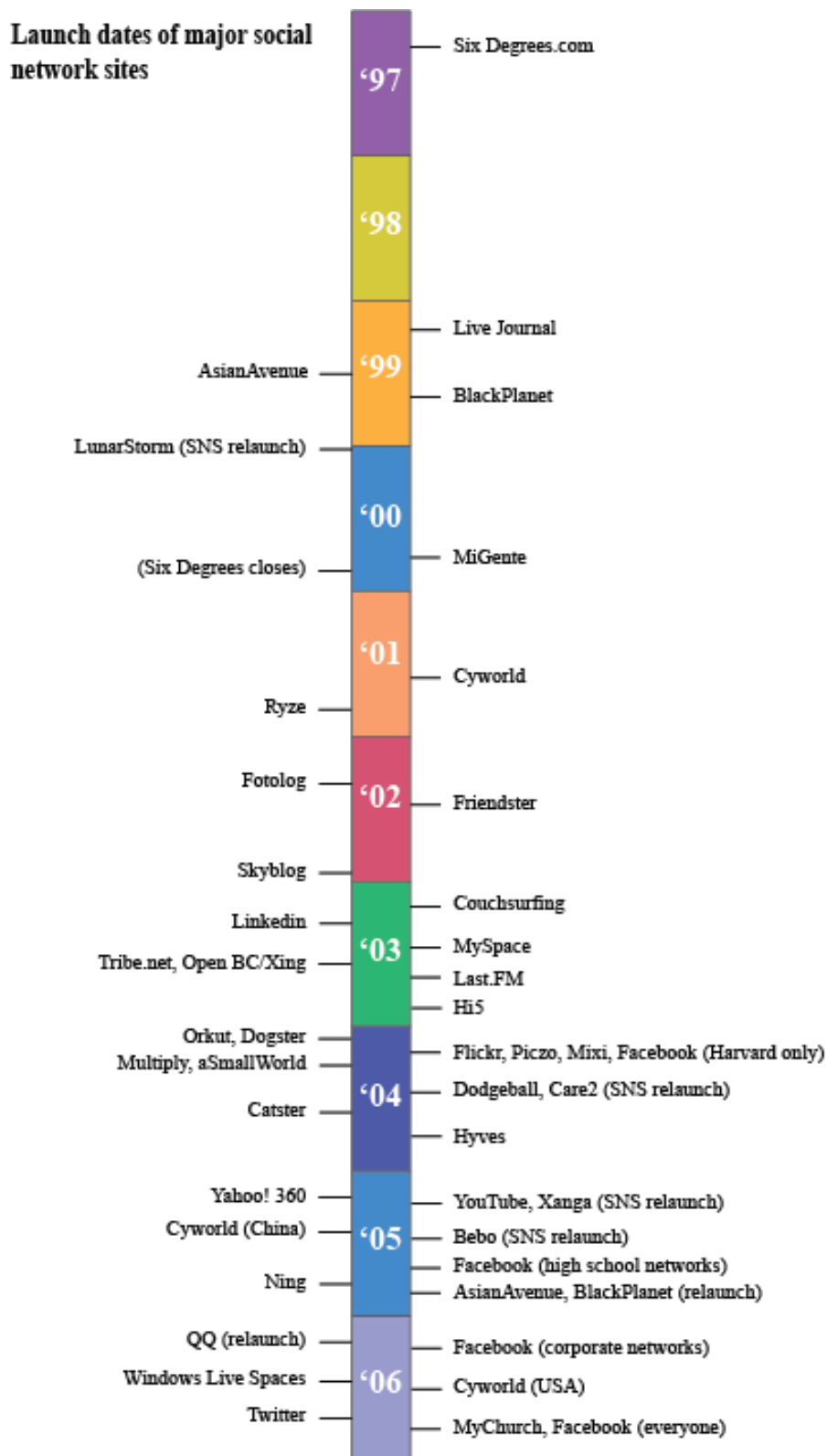
Launch dates of major social network sites

Year	Left side	Right side
'97		Six Degrees.com
'98		
'99	AsianAvenue	Live Journal, BlackPlanet
'00	LunarStorm (SNS relaunch), (Six Degrees closes)	MiGente
'01	Ryze	Cyworld
'02	Fotolog, Skyblog	Friendster
'03	Linkedin, Tribe.net, Open BC/Xing	Couchsurfing, MySpace, Last.FM, Hi5
'04	Orkut, Dogster, Multiply, aSmallWorld, Catster	Flickr, Piczo, Mixi, Facebook (Harvard only), Dodgeball, Care2 (SNS relaunch), Hyves
'05	Yahoo! 360, Cyworld (China), Ning	YouTube, Xanga (SNS relaunch), Bebo (SNS relaunch), Facebook (high school networks), AsianAvenue, BlackPlanet (relaunch)
'06	QQ (relaunch), Windows Live Spaces, Twitter	Facebook (corporate networks), Cyworld (USA), MyChurch, Facebook (everyone)

Appendix 3: New literacy skills

The new skills include:

1. **Play** — the capacity to experiment with one's surroundings as a form of problem-solving
2. **Performance** — the ability to adopt alternative identities for the purpose of improvisation and discovery
3. **Simulation** — the ability to interpret and construct dynamic models of real-world processes
4. **Appropriation** — the ability to meaningfully sample and remix media content
5. **Multitasking** — the ability to scan one's environment and shift focus as needed to salient details
6. **Distributed Cognition** — the ability to interact meaningfully with tools that expand mental capacities
7. **Collective Intelligence** — the ability to pool knowledge and compare notes with others toward a common goal
8. **Judgment** — the ability to evaluate the reliability and credibility of different information sources
9. **Transmedia Navigation** — the ability to follow the flow of stories and information across multiple modalities
10. **Networking** — the ability to search for, synthesize, and disseminate information
11. **Negotiation** — the ability to travel across diverse communities, discerning and respecting multiple perspectives, and grasping and following alternative norms.

Jenkins, H., Clinton, K., Purushotma, R., Robison, A. J. and Weigel, M (2006) *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st. Century.* The MacArthur Foundation Illinois. Available at www.digitallearning.macfound.org (Accessed 08/07/2016)

Appendix 4: Permission letter

Date

Dear (name of parent/carer),

I am a part-time student at the University of the West of England and as part of my doctoral thesis, I am currently researching the relationship between gender identity and social networking media. I have permission from the Headteacher to base my study in school. (name of student) has expressed an interest in taking part in my research, which would involve small group and individual interviews. She is aware that I will not use her name in the resulting thesis or any subsequent written or published report as a result of this research.

I would appreciate your support by signing the permission slip below and returning it in the enclosed envelope. If you require any further information or would like to discuss this project you can contact me on the above number.

Yours sincerely,

Linda Langley B.Ed. Hons., M.Ed.
Head of Social Science.

……………………………………………………………………………………………………..

Research participation consent

I give permission for (name of student) to be interviewed and understand that you will not use her name in any written or published reports as a result of this research.

		Date:	
Parent signature:			
Student signature:			

Appendix 5: Student booklet cover

Leaflet for respondents, parents and carers outlining the purpose of the research.

Appendix 6: Student booklet contents

This information leaflet is for people who are thinking of taking part in my research.

I am interested in finding out about how social network media affects your life.

It is for you to decide if you want to talk to me.

You do not have to say 'yes'.

If you do say 'yes', you do not have to do the whole interview.

We can stop when you want to, or have a break.

If you do not want to answer my questions, you can just say 'pass'.

Before you decide whether to help me, you might like to talk about the project with your parents or a friend.

I keep recordings and notes of the interview in a safe, lockable place at home.

You can ask to see the notes I make and you can ask me to take out anything you do not think is an accurate description of what you have told me.

I never leave any information about my research at school.

When I talk or write reports about my research, I always change people's names to keep their views anonymous. You can choose a name for yourself if you would like to!

I would not talk to anyone you know about what you have said, unless you talk about the risk of someone being harmed. If that happens, I would talk to you first about what could be done to help.

Appendix 7: Prompt questions for semi-structured interviews

The questions below were developed from Manago, Graham, Greenfield and Salimkan (2008).

Why do you use social media?

Which sites do you use?

What do you use them for?

What do you like about (name of identified site)?

What do you dislike?

How many friends do you have?

Do you know them all?

Do you have a list of top friends?

Do you change them?

How do you decide who is on your list of friends?

Have you experienced problems or anything that causes you distress?

What type of problems?

What do you think are the most common types of problems?

Have the problems caused issues in your real life?

How active are you on Facebook?

How often do you log on?

How long do you spend?

How would you describe your profile?

Do you think people use their profile to present themselves in a certain way?

What does the profile of someone who is 'cool' look like?

What about someone who is not 'cool'?

Do you think people present themselves in a true way or do they change things?

What do they change?

Why?

Appendix 8: Respondent questionnaire sheet

What kind of social network media do students at XXXXXX School use?

Please read the questions below and answer those you feel happy about.

1. Which social networking sites do you use? (Facebook, Twitter etc)

……

2. Which do you use the most?

……..

3. On average how long do you spend on social networking during a week?

Up to one hour   O   one to two hours O   two to three hours O

more than three hours O   if more than three hours, how long   ……………………………

4. Why do you use social networking sites?

……..
……
……
……
……
………

5. What is the best thing about social networking?

……
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………………………………………………………………………………………………

6. What is the worst thing about social networking?

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……
……
……
………………………………………………………………………………………………

Thankyou for showing an interest in helping me with my research on social networking and for taking part in this survey. If you would like to know more about my work, I will be happy to explain in more detail what I am doing with the data. You can find me in the Sixth Form block at break-time, every day of the week.
Mrs.Langley

Appendix 9: Questionnaire tally chart

Tally chart for questionnaire asking: What social network media do students at XXXXXX School use?

1. Which social networking sites do you use?

Facebook	Twitter	Skype	Tumblr	Vine	MSN	Snapchat	Beebo

2. Which do you use the most?

	Not sure: 1

3. On average how long do you spend on social networking during a week?

one hour:	one to two hours:	two to three hours:	more than three hours:

4. Why do you use social networking sites? (some respondents made more than one response)

5. What is the best thing about social networking? (some respondents made more than one response)

6. What is the worst thing about social networking? (some respondents made more than one response)

Appendix 10: Respondent time-use diary sheet

	Time spent on social media	Activities
Saturday		
Sunday		
Monday		
Tuesday		
Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday		

Appendix 11: Field note sheet used to make notes after interviews

Why do you use social media? Which sites do you use? What do you use them for? What do you like about (name of identified site)? What do you dislike?	
How many friends do you have? Do you know them all? Do you have a list of top friends? Do you change them? How do you decide who is on your list of friends?	
Have you experienced problems or anything that causes you distress? What type of problems? What do you think are the most common types of problems? Have the problems caused issues in your real life?	
How active are you on (name of identified site)? How often do you log on? How long do you spend?	
How would you describe your profile? Do you think people use their profile to present themselves in a certain way? What does the profile of someone who is 'cool' look like? What about someone who is not 'cool'? Do you think people present themselves in a true way or do they change things? What do they change? Why?	

Date and time of interview	
Respondent pseudonym	

Appendix 12: **Thematic framework**

Colour thematic analysis chart

<mark>**Social media as a tool** Range of social media used</mark>

<mark>**Social media as a tool** Facebook, Twitter, text messaging, Instagram and Snapchat</mark>
<mark>**The influence of SNS on identity** Self-concept</mark>

<mark>**The influence of SNS on identity** Self-esteem</mark>

<mark>**The influence of SNS on identity** Parents</mark>

<mark>**The influence of SNS on identity** Privacy</mark>

<mark>**The influence of SNS on belonging in a group** Peer pressure</mark>

<mark>**The influence of SNS on belonging in a group** Norm behavior</mark>

<mark>**The influence of SNS on belonging in a group** Peer pressure</mark>

Appendix 13:   Tally charts to show respondents' references to SNS made in the semi-structured interviews

Social media	Caylin	Teja	Bec	Maisie	Clare	Jo	Zara	Jess	Hannah	Meg	Ellie	Sarah	Lucy
Facebook	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Twitter			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Instagram	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓				✓
Facetime/ Skype	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Messenger										✓	✓		
Vine										✓	✓		
Bebo		✓	✓	✓	✓								
Snapchat			✓					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Texting	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Tumblr									✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Tally chart to show data in the form of frequently used words and phrases used by the respondents during the semi-structured interviews.

Words/ phrases	Caylin	Teja	Bec	Maisie	Clare	Jo	Zara	Jess	Hannah	Meg	Ellie	Sarah	Lucy
Nerd			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Geek			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Populars	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Reference to parents	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
Arguments	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Keeping in touch	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Pressure	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Appendix 14: Calculations

Question 3 asked respondents to estimate the amount of time they spent on social network sites during a week and generated interval data as hours and minutes, summarized in a frequency chart as shown in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3. Frequency chart showing estimated average time respondents spent on social network sites in one week.

Score	Frequency
1 hour	2 respondents
4 hours	2 respondents
4.5 hours	2 respondent
5.5 hours	2 respondents
6 hours	3 respondents
7 hours	3 respondents
14 hours	2 respondents

Next the data was analysed by calculating the range in order to show the variation in the amount of time respondents estimated they spend on social network sites.
Data values were 1, 4, 4.5, 5.5, 6, 7, 14
The lowest value was 1 and the highest was 14
Subtracting the lowest from the highest gave 14-1=13
The range was 13.
The most frequent time scale reported was calculated as the mode.
Data values were 1, 1, 4, 4.5, 5.5, 6, 6, 6, 7, 14, 14
The value that appeared the most was 6
The mode was 6.
Finally the mean was calculated by dividing the sum of the hours spent on social network media by the number of respondents in the sample, as shown below

$$\frac{1+4+4.5+5.5+6+7+14}{16} = \frac{42}{16} = 2.625 \text{ hours}$$

The mean value was 2.625 hours.