Intimacy in the Age of Social Media

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own, except where work which has formed part of jointly-authored publications has been included. The contribution of the candidate and the other authors to this work has been explicitly indicated below. The candidate confirms that appropriate credit has been given within the thesis where reference has been made to the work of others. Part of chapter 3 includes parts of the literature review published in the proceedings of two conferences: *The 1st SSI (Society for Socio-Informatics) International Workshop for Young Researchers: Adoption of Social Networking* (Miguel, 2012), and *McLuhan Galaxy Conference: Understanding Media, Today* (Miguel & Medina, 2011).

As stipulated in the University of Leeds Research Student Handbook, paragraph 7.4.6., hardcopies of these two publications have been included for examination.

Acknowledgements

Abstract

The development of digital technologies fosters specific forms of socialization, such as those afforded by social media platforms. Personal relationships in these platforms are dominated by dynamics that include trust, reputation and visibility. As a result, real identities are increasingly represented online in mainstream social media (e.g., Facebook), thus, relocating pre-established relationships (family, friends, work colleagues) into the social media environment. However, other social media platforms allow meeting new people online, where issues around authenticity, social stigma, and safety concerns arise. Therefore, there is a lot to investigate about new types of social interactions generated through social media, in order to better comprehend intimacy practices in contemporary society.

In particular, this study focuses on (mediated) intimacy practices among adults (25-49) through three different platforms (namely Badoo, CouchSurfing and Facebook) to analyse how users create and maintain intimate relationships through social media. The project aims to bring together a critical analysis of the politics of social media with users' perspectives by employing a multi-method research design, which combines interviews, participant observation, and the analysis of platforms architecture and user profiles.

The main aims of the thesis are to explore the characteristics of intimacy practices on social media, and to question if intimacy online exists in spite of the publicity afforded in these platforms. For doing so, this research examines the extent participants expose their intimacy through social media, as well as the strategies that they use to manage their privacy online. The research gathers user's perspectives of what constitutes intimate information (visual and textual) and how they negotiate its publication on social media. It explores the relationship between the architecture and politics of social media platforms, and the emergent intimacy practices that take place within them. This study also investigates whether participants consider that personal relationships originated via social media are shallower than relationships created in other environments, safety, authenticity and social stigma concerns, as well as the extent patriarchal gender roles are reproduced online.

Table of Contents

List of Images

Chapter 1
Introduction

1.1. Aims and research questions

The main aim of the research is to investigate how social media interaction affects intimacy. Another theoretical aim is to explore the concept of intimacy in contemporary society, and to evaluate whether public intimacy through social media can still be called intimacy. Other secondary objectives will be to describe intimacy practices and privacy strategies in the context of social media interaction; to analyze which kind of intimate information participants disclose in their profiles; to examine the role of social media platforms in the creation, development and maintenance of personal relationships; to understand why people use social media for being intimate; and to identify if there are gender differences related to intimacy practices through social media.

This research aims to contribute to understanding of how people build intimacy and manage privacy on social media interaction with a focus on adults (25-49 years old). The project attempts to engage with the general questions about intimacy and relationships that social media brings to academic and political debates. A further objective is to question if intimacy online exists at all or if it is transformed in the process of mediated public exposure. In order to do this, the concepts of privacy and intimacy need to be discussed in the context of social media; I focus on the concepts of intimacy and privacy as understood by their users.

In particular, I investigate the intimate experiences of social media users in different contexts by using a cross-platform approach. I map and compare the different kinds of intimacy practices that participants experience through three social media platforms of different genres: Badoo (dating/hookup platform), CouchSurfing (hospitality exchange/meetup platform) and Facebook (generalist platform), although I also discuss other dating/hook-up platforms, such as Meetic, AdultFriendFinder or AdoptaUnTio (AdoptAGuy), in a few occasions. Given that these platforms facilitate offline interaction, I explore personal interactions both online and offline.

CouchSurfing and Badoo provide interactions between strangers and Facebook is mainly used to connect with known others. This is useful to map the diverse intimate interactions facilitated by social media platforms that can take place within both new and existing relationships.

Therefore, the two main questions that the doctoral research seeks to answer are:

1. How is intimacy among adults negotiated through social media communication practices?
2. To what extent can public intimacy in social media still be called intimacy?

Sub-questions:

a) What kind of intimate information do users disclose through their profiles?

b) What are the motivations to join social media platforms where the interaction is mainly among strangers, such as CouchSurfing and Badoo?

c) What is the relationship between the architecture of social media platforms and the emergent intimacy practices that take place within them?

d) In what range and types of social media intimacy practices do individuals engage?

e) To what extent do people experience the same level of intimacy online as offline?

f) What, if any, gender differences exist in engagement in social media intimacy practices?

g) What kinds of strategies do people use to manage their privacy online?

In order to explore and analyse the intimacy practices in these social media platforms I conducted qualitative research both online and offline using a cross-platform approach. The analysis and comparison of data gathered through participant observation, interviews and user profiles provide empirical examples of intimacy practices (both online and offline) facilitated by the use of social media and the strategies that people use to manage their privacy when interacting online. The methodology is detailed in chapter 4. In the next section, I provide the rationale for the research.

1.2. Rationale

Intimacy is a concept that seems to be valued more and more in contemporary society, as Deborah Chambers (2006) explains: "The economic, cultural and political destabilisation of traditional community values coincide with the ascendance of

intimacy, privacy and the project of the self" (2006, p. 14). Some scholars (e.g., Maffesoli, 1990; Touraine & Khosrokhavar, 2002; Bauman, 2003) suggest that in individualistic Western societies people tend to feel lost, as their lives are no longer primarily organized around traditional social structures, such as religion or community. Michel Maffesoli (1990) argues that people miss that feeling of belonging and that is the reason why they join what he labels urban tribes, based on elective sociality. As Alain Touraine and Farhad Khosrokhavar (2002) put it, in an individualistic society, giving meaning to one's life implies a much harder task than when the sense of self has already been given by the major producers of meaning frameworks, such as tradition or religion. The loss of community support can make people feel disappointed about the uncertainty of the future. Eva Illouz (2008) coins the term *homo sentimentalis* (2008, p. 1) to suggest that the individual is immersed in a continuous self-realization path and concerned with the optimal management of emotions. In this view, people focus on emotional self-fulfilment, give priority to the private realm and reduce personal investment in public sphere (abandonment of the political and ideological).

On the other hand, in this so-called *hyperindividualistic* society (Vidal, 1992), Zygmunt Bauman (2003) identifies the tensions between the desire for freedom and the need for social bonds, of living "together, and apart" (2003, p. xiii). In his book *Liquid Love,* Bauman (2003) suggests that people change tight bonds for networks, and quality for quantity in an ever ending mobile and transient life path, where settling down becomes a hard task: "while relationships cease to be trustworthy and are unlikely to last, you are inclined to swap partnerships for networks" (2003, p. xiii). Following this debate, Lee Rainie and Barry Wellman (2012) argue that *networked individualism* (2012, p. 3) is the new social operating system, where individuals participate in different networks, which creates a different social structure where people are geographically dispersed, in opposition to traditional local communities. In this context, Chambers (2013) suggests that social media platforms fit neatly into this constant self-updating process, insofar as they allow self-expression, but they also facilitate the negotiation of different kinds of relationships. This opens up important questions about the role of social media platforms in negotiating intimacy in everyday life, which I explore in this thesis.

Increasingly, the extensive use of social media, according to Misuko Ito et al. (2009), is fostering the habit of individuals defining themselves by what they can show and what others can see. There is a current debate around how social media affect the notions of privacy and intimacy. The traditional belief that the development of intimacy requires privacy (e.g., Gerstein, 1984; Turkle, 2011) is questioned by the new intimacy practices online. Some authors consider that intimacy through social media ceases to be intimacy and becomes something else (e.g., Sibilia, 2008; Turkle, 2011; Madianou & Miller, 2013), or it is illusory (e.g., Van Manen, 2010; Taddicken & Jers, 2011). Mirca Madianou and Daniel Miller (2013) note that by using social media to negotiate intimacy a new phenomenon is created:

> The fact that exposure takes place through the media makes the experience an altogether different phenomenon (of different scale, affective resonance and consequences) which is what is meant by mediatized exposure and mediatized emotions which in turn shape the social experience of the medium itself (2013, p. 174).

Other scholars (e.g., boyd, 2008; Papacharissi & Gibson, 2011; Van Dijck, 2013a) highlight that the broadcasting afforded by social media services largely augments the scope of the information published online, and these platforms are actually designed to foster self-disclosure. As Zizzi Papacharissi and Paige Gibson (2011) point out:

> SNSs cultivate practices that prompt users to be more public with their information by default. While it is possible for users to edit these settings, the code that belies the structure of the network makes it easier to share than to hide information (2011, p. 77).

Nicholas John (2013b) analyses how social media platforms, such as Facebook, are modifying the traditional concept of sharing, insofar within, he suggests, the sharing of emotions is the constitutive activity of the Web 2.0. Likewise, José Van Dijck (2013a) observes that individuals' ways of sharing information within social media has profoundly changed by affirming that the shift with social media is the increasing publicity of information previously defined as private, and this is advanced by social media platforms' architecture.

It is established that technology is not neutral but that it cultivates particular kinds of interactions (e.g., Papacharissi, 2009; Gillespie, 2010; Van Dijck, 2013a, 2013b): the design of technology facilitates some actions and complicates others. For example, through public by default settings configuration, social media platforms make exposure easier than privacy. Following Stephen Graham (2004), Christine Hine, (2015) highlights the importance of criticizing social media platforms' design and making their infrastructures visible in order to understand how they exercise power over users: "the sociotechnical power that become invisible when we accept such technologies as a taken-for-granted part of everyday life"(2014, p. 48). In addition, Hine (2015), building on Susan Star (2002), considers it useful to study the connection between socio-technical features and lived experiences to explore how users appropriate the use of technology in their everyday lives. As Natalia Rybas and Radhika Gajjala (2007) observe, users are not just "rule followers", but they make different choices and are creative in their relationships with technology.

Social media platforms are effective tools of communication and self-promotion (Utz & Krämer, 2009). This is achieved through heavily edited biographical information, countless pictures, and the publicity of numerous "friend" relationships, which imply popularity. Most popular social media platforms encourage sharing because they involve disclosure of personal information to foster interaction with other users (Joinson et al., 2011), but they also promote sharing to gather users' data for profit (e.g., Van Dijck, 2013a; Kennedy, 2013). In this context, Ippolita and Tiziana Mancinelli (2013) analyse how Facebook claims that their service is free and that they will never charge for the service in order to hide their actual commodification of users: "If you cannot see the price, you are the commodity" (2013, p. 161). Hence, a double logic of empowerment and commodification is identified in social media interaction, as observed by Sam Hinton and Larissa Hjorth (2013). Stine Lomborg and Antja Bechmann (2014) acknowledge that in order to understand this double social media logic, it is necessary to combine users' and industry perspectives, as they put it: "to elicit deep analysis of how user productivity and behavioural patterns may add value chain of online business models while at the same time offering significant personal reward and pleasure for the users" (2014, p. 4).

In recent years, there has been much research (e.g., Livingstone, 2008, 2013; Palfrey & Grasser, 2008; boyd, 2010b, 2014; Ito et al., 2009; Mendelson & Papacharissi, 2010) about young people's Internet use. In relation to privacy behaviours online, according to Ito and colleagues (2009b), "there is a growing public discourse (both hopeful and fearful) declaring that young people's use of digital media and communication technologies defines a generational identity distinct from that of their elders" (2009b, p. 2). Similarly, Clive Thompson (2008), Max Van Manen (2010), and Nathan Jurgenson and PJ Rey (2012) suggest that young people are developing a different attitude about privacy; they are aware of surveillance, but do not want to miss the opportunity to show off. Thompson (2008) argues that youths' attitude toward their privacy "is simultaneously vigilant and laissez-faire. They curate their online personas as carefully as possible, knowing that everyone is watching" (2008, p. 7). Yet, Ito et al. (2009) found that social media provide a new realm for intimacy practices: "a venue that renders these practices simultaneously more public and more private" (2009, p. 2). Sherry Turkle (2011) adds to this recognition of some of the tensions inherent in intimacy and privacy practices in social media by asserting that some teenagers are gratified by a certain public exposure because they feel it is a validation, not a violation, of their privacy. As Bauman (2007) points out:

> It would be a grave mistake to suppose that the urge towards a public display of the "inner self" and the willingness to satisfy that urge are manifestations of a unique, purely generational, age related urge/addiction of teenagers, keen as they naturally tend to be to get a foothold in the "network" (2007, p. 3).

Despite such strong assertions about the character of intimacy and privacy in social media, empirical research into adults' intimacy and privacy experiences and practices remains limited. In fact, the conclusions from the abundant research about young people's social media practices are not often compared with research about adults. Mary Madden (2012) conducted a report about online privacy management with different age groups for the Pew Research Center in the US. The report shows that in the US adult and teenage social media users make virtually identical choices about privacy settings in social media. This suggests that there is not a privacy generation gap as some have claimed (e.g., Van Manen, 2010; Turkle, 2011; Jurgenson & Rey, 2012). Madden (2012) found a gender gap in relation to privacy protection, where

women protected their privacy more than men. Thus, it is important to observe gender differences related to privacy and intimacy practices through social media.

As stated above, most of the research about intimacy practices and privacy online have been focused on teenagers' or college students' use of social media (e.g., boyd, 2010b, 2014; Ito et al., 2011; Turkle, 2011), particularly in mainstream social media platforms such as Facebook or MySpace. As a result, these studies were carried out mostly about intimacy practices within existing relationships. Some studies conducted by Nancy Baym (2009, 2010) about digital media use within interpersonal relationships, by Stine Lomborg (2013) and Marco Pedroni and colleagues (2014) on self-disclosure via social media, and by Alex Lambert (2013) about intimacy on Facebook, are a few examples of research about intimacy practices facilitated by social media among adults. There is still a lot to investigate about the types of personal interactions generated through social media. It is important to explore the workings of intimacy practices fostered by the use of these new technologies in order to help define characteristics of contemporary society. In addition, Baym (2011) argues, there is a need for more studies of adults, and their broad use of different kinds of social media (also social media platforms where people have contact with strangers), in order to fully comprehend the relationships between social media, privacy and intimacy practices:

> We need comparative work that examines SNSs in varied national and topical contexts, work on users other than college students and adolescents, and analysis of how people organize their social experience across multiple sites and how they integrate these sites into the whole of their interpersonal encounters (2011, p. 399).

For doing this, it is important to pay attention to the social practices fostered by social media, both online and offline, across multiple platforms, for different nationalities and cultures. This study has been conducted in the UK and Spain. Although it would have been interesting to examine cultural differences in relation to intimacy practices through social media, the fact is that half of the participants were expats, therefore I cannot claim that this is a comparative study between British and Spanish culture. However, I can hypothesize that people who move to other countries tend to use social

media to find new friends and partners more often than people who remain in the same location. In order to understand how online sociality has evolved, Van Dijck (2013a) suggests looking at different social media platforms "as if they were *microsystems*" because each design and architecture cultivate a different style of connectedness, but altogether conform a unique ecosystem: "All platforms combined constitute what I call the *ecosystem of connective media*, a system that nourishes and, in turn, is nourished by social and cultural norms that simultaneously evolve in our everyday world" (2013a, p. 21). Following Van Dijck (2013a) I examine three different social media platforms: Badoo, CouchSurfing, and Facebook in order to map this new social media ecosystem.

Drawing on Baym (2010), I acknowledge two interactive forces which shape the way people communicate through social media: (1) social media platforms that have particular affordances and politics which allow certain kinds of interactions; and (2) actual practices of use, as people appropriate these platforms in different ways to negotiate diverse types of personal relationships in everyday life. In recent studies, scholars have examined the conditions of production of social media (e.g., Couldry, 2012; Van Dijck, 2013a; Fuchs, 2014). There are also studies that explore what people *do* with this technology (e.g., Bakardjieva, 2005; Baym, 2010; boyd, 2014). In order to fully comprehend the social media platforms that form part of the current digital media ecology, it is necessary to study not only users' practices and the content they produce, but also socio-technical features and business models (e.g., Van Dijck, 2009; Lomborg & Bechmann, 2014; Stanfill, 2014). As Van Dijck (2009) puts it: "Theories from cultural theory, empirical sociology, political economy and technology design need to be integrated to yield a nuanced model for assessing user agency" (2009, p. 55). As Nick Couldry (2012) observes, it is important to analyse what people do through media interaction: "Media research must analyse media as practice, as an open-ended set of things people do in the world" (2012, p. 30). However, continues Couldry (2012), media research that does not acknowledge political economy is incomplete. For this reason, I analyse social media platforms' politics and business models, which are tied to the affordances and services that they provide, and hence to the intimacy practices that emerge from their use.

The two social media platforms where I mainly focus my attention were Badoo and CouchSurfing. In order to contextualise the analysis, I provide some background information about these social media platforms in this chapter.

1.3. Badoo and CouchSurfing: An overview

The increasing mobility of people in the context of a globalized world facilitates meeting and interacting with strangers more than ever before. Paula Bialski (2012) points out that these meetings with strangers can also be coordinated through different kinds of SNSs (social networking sites), such as hospitality exchange networks, dating sites and so on. CouchSurfing is a social media platform whose main objective is to connect travellers with locals for hospitality exchange, and its users also organise regular social meetings in major cities. On the other hand, Badoo is a social media platform used to meet new people and interact with them on a one-to-one basis through the chat feature, although it is also possible to rate other users' pictures and comment on them. Badoo is mainly used for hook-up and dating practices. CouchSurfing and Badoo facilitate encounters online and offline, and they are only for adults. On both social media platforms users disclose personal information such as personality, interests, and the kind of people they like, usually accompanied by a number of pictures. Thus, as Amparo Lasén and Edgar Gómez-Cruz (2009) point out, individuals display their intimacy online through narratives and self-portraits to be scrutinized by different publics, while trying to keep the audience interested in order to increase opportunities for encounters online, offline, or both. Below, I report a brief outline of the short history of CouchSurfing and Badoo and describe the characteristics of both sites. This is followed by a discussion of some of the studies that have been conducted using these sites as case studies.

1.3.1. Badoo: Meet new friends or date!

As stated on its "About" section (Badoo, 2015a), Badoo was launched in 2006 by a small international group of young, forward thinking programmers and it is owned by the Russian entrepreneur Andrey Andreev. It is managed from London but the company is registered in Cyprus. Badoo is a social media platform where users look for interaction with strangers primarily for looking for hook-ups or dates, although on its homepage the company claims that: "Badoo is great for chatting, making friends, sharing interests, and even dating!" Badoo (ibid.) asserts to be the largest social

network for meeting new people locally in the world, with more than 290 million users, located mainly in Brazil, France, Italy, Spain, and Poland (Alexa, 2015a). On Badoo there is a searcher where users choose to see the profiles of the users who are in the platform to "Make new friends", "Chat", or "Date". Then, users may choose to see the profiles of "Guys", "Girls", or both, the age range, and the location. Badoo allows users to contact people who live in different locations (through a searcher) or people nearby (if the GPS feature is activated). There are advanced search options where users can add three other filters that correspond to the fields that compose the profile, which include education, eye colour, weight, or height, among others. Badoo users interact one-to-one, mainly through chat, but it is also possible to leave comments in pictures. Interaction on Badoo is often synchronous but can be asynchronous because people can leave messages written in a chat system to people who are not connected at the same time. The basic service is free, although there are also premium paid options, which I address extensively in chapter 7. Badoo also owns the mobile app Blendr, very similar to Grindr (a gay hook-up mobile app). Blendr currently also has a website. The database of both services has merged into one and users can access both platforms with the same username and password, although most users appear to be unaware of this.

Despitehaving more than 290 million users (Badoo, 2015a), there are few academic studies that analyse interaction through Badoo. Fabio Giglietto (2008) conducted a comparative study of Facebook and Badoo in Italy, where Badoo was very popular at the time. Giglietto polled 1,600 people by telephone and a random sample of 226 Facebook and Badoo users. Observing the results of the survey, Giglietto concluded that Badoo users mainly use the site to make new friends, and that they lack a clear understanding of the invisible audience and underestimate the exposure of their online published content. Giglietto also pointed out the need to do more comparative studies in other countries. Unlike Giglietto, I use a qualitative approach to social media user experiences, which is further described in chapter 4.

On the other hand, María Martínez-Lirola (2012), who conducted a study focused on linguistic analysis of online communication through the chat function in Spain, states that the two main objectives of Badoo are meeting people who have similar interests or finding a partner. Martínez-Lirola (ibid.) describes Badoo as a hybrid between

closed social networks like Facebook and dating sites like Match.com. In her analysis of the online conversation through participant observation, where Martínez-Lirola talked to 150 male Badoo users, she found that on Badoo men take the initiative in conversations and relationships, reproducing the traditional patterns of starting relationships. I will discuss this topic in chapter 8.3. *"Men are the hunters": Reproducing patriarchal gender roles online*. The study conducted by Amparo Lasén and Antonio García (2015) about the use of sexy selfies includes Badoo as one of its case studies. Interestingly, these two last studies are both focused on the male perception of Badoo interaction: the first through text, and the second through selfies.

1.3.2. CouchSurfing: Strangers in the Net exchanging couches

In January 2004, Casey Fenton (along with other co-founders) launched CouchSurfing, a social media platform with a system that enables a user to identify and find someone to provide sleeping space in his or her home for free (O'Regan, 2009). CouchSurfing worked as a charity and was run mainly by volunteers until 2011, when it received $7 million from venture capitalists and became a corporation. These days CouchSurfing even has a Facebook app and many of its users have shown their disapproval of the commercial turn that the platform has taken (Feldman, 2012). The owners are now designing a new business model in order to monetize the traffic of the site. CouchSurfing counts more than 12 million users (CouchSurfing, 2015a). Most users are located in the USA, India, Italy, Germany, and France (Alexa.com, 2015b), and they live mainly in big cosmopolitan cities. CouchSurfing consists of a group of strangers who can see each other's profiles, and make requests to stay at someone else's house or join groups to ask for information, meet up and share hobbies and interests. There is a main group in most big cities. A weekly meeting and other kind of events and nights out are organized through this group. There are also many different groups in every city organized around different topics (cinema, sports, wine tasting, language exchange, etc.) designed for members to be able to meet up with like-minded people (Miguel & Medina, 2011).

Devan Rosen et al. (2011), in their study about community building on CouchSurfing, found that its users struggle against many common social norms by welcoming strangers into their homes. On CouchSurfing, Bialski (2012) argues, not only do users reveal personal information such as telephone numbers and addresses with their

potential guests, they also share their private space with them. Bialski has conducted extensive research about intimacy and trust among strangers through CouchSurfing in the context of mobility and hospitality exchange. Bialski (2012) concludes that through CouchSurfing users may find moments of closeness and intimacy but, at the same time, there are uncomfortable situations that the users may face: "Awkwardness is another common product of these meetings, often reflecting the power relationship between host and guest" (2012, p. 252). Another interesting study was conducted by Katherine Peterson and Ketie Siek (2009) about information disclosure and awareness of disclosure implications on CouchSurfing, with the aim of highlighting the lack of privacy that users have on the site and the potential risks. I will expand the discussion about the challenges and opportunities to create intimate relationships through CouchSurfing in chapter 8. On the other hand, Chun-Yueng Teng et al. (2009) examined online reputation systems, using CouchSurfing as one case study. They assert that the way of rating other users should not be so public because when users do not have a good experience with another *couchsurfer[1]* they usually do not leave a bad reference in order to avoid receiving a bad reference in return. Thus, the reputation system is not very useful because it only reflects good experiences. I examine these topics more in depth in chapter 7. In the next section, I present an overall summary of the contents of each chapter.

1.4. Thesis outline

So far in this chapter I have introduced my objectives and research questions, explained the justification of the study, and given an overview of my case studies. Hereafter, I summarize the content of the rest of the dissertation. Chapters 2 and 3 contain the literature review; chapters 5, 6, 7, and 8 are based on empirical data; and chapter 9 is the conclusions.

The objective of chapter 2 is to understand how social media platforms shape the way people communicate. The literature review is centered on the culture of participation and the workings of Web 2.0 technology, with a special focus on the political economy of these sites. I first give a historical account of network culture. Then, I move on to

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[1] CouchSurfing user.

discuss the issue of mediation, particularly in the context of social media interaction within personal relationships. In the following sections, I examine the way that platforms' architecture and politics shape the way people communicate and develop personal relationships. I analyse the role of social media companies who encourage users to share personal information to connect with others, but at the same time, mine this data for profit. I explore how these companies have mobilized the concept of sharing to promote user disclosure of intimate information. Following Hinton and Hjorth's (2013) notion that social media both control and empower users, I argue that social media platforms operate under "a double logic of empowerment and commodification". In this sense, social media platforms are tools that provide a great means of communication, but at the same time they may be used to control users. In particular, I discuss the issue of commodification from two perspectives: the commodification of personal relationships by social media services through their business models (e.g., customized advertising, charging an access fee) and the self-commodification of users to promote themselves in the network.

In chapter 3, I present the conceptual framework to approach the study of intimacy through social media, which includes the following concepts: intimacy, privacy, self-disclosure and self-presentation, trust, safety and gender. The aim of this chapter is to provide a theoretical framework to discuss the way people negotiate new and existing relationships through social media, and how the notion of intimacy is affected by social media interaction. The publicity afforded by social media platforms is a transversal topic, which is addressed through different sections of the chapter. I explore how privacy is increasingly becoming a socio-technical matter; nevertheless, I argue, it is not reduced to a selection of a series of parameters, but is much more sophisticated. I explain how users can manage their social privacy through the selection of private features to communicate, friending behaviours, control over their disclosures, or by adjusting privacy settings, but they cannot control institutional privacy (e.g., data mining by social media companies). I identify self-disclosure and self-(re)presentation as a necessary part for developing intimate relationships online. When the interaction is among strangers, issues about authenticity of the information facilitated by other users may arise, which may inhibit the development of intimacy and make users fear for their safety. I will discuss these issues, especially in relation

to gender, together with other debates around double sexual standards often reproduced online.

The methodology is introduced in chapter 4, which is grounded on an ethnographic approach and informed by feminist theory. In this chapter, I first explain the design of the study, which is cross-platform (based mainly on three case studies: Badoo, CouchSurfing and Facebook) and multi-sited (UK and Spain). Later, I expose my methods, where I discuss recruiting participants, data collection techniques, and data analysis. The sample is based on convenience sampling, and it is composed of 30 participants aged 25-49 years old identified as users of Badoo or CouchSurfing located in Leeds (UK) and Barcelona (Spain). I collected the data through participant observation, in-depth interviews and user profiles. The data was analysed through thematic analysis by triangulating the data gathered through different means. Throughout the chapter, I explain the ethical issues that I faced at every stage of the research, although I also include a section on ethics to address the overall ethical considerations that I took into account before conducting the study. In addition, I discuss the limitations of the research project.

In chapter 5, I explore the transformation of privacy and intimacy in the context of social media interaction. In particular, I focus on how intimacy can be conceptualized outside the traditional public/private dichotomy, exploring the concept of intimacy in public. Social media platforms allow publishing any type of information, including intimate information, very easily. In addition, the co-creation of identity by our contacts causes a loss of control over the construction of one's online identity. For instance, participants often expressed concern about photos they appeared in being published by their contacts. Users are becoming more aware of the publicity allowed by these networks and attempt to protect their privacy and curate their online presentation carefully. In my study, few participants exposed intimate details online; in fact, most considered this practice annoying and anti-normative. It seems that after an initial period of adaptation to the use of social media technology, where there was a tendency to overexposure, participants have learned to manage their disclosures in order to curate their self-(re)presentation.

In chapter 6, I analyse what participants considered intimate information in the context of social media interaction, which mostly revolves around sexual orientation and relationship status (whether they were in a relationship or not and with whom). Other intimate topics would be sex, alcohol, emotions and political or religious beliefs. It is interesting to note that the definition of what is intimate or not is contextual, dependent on the platform used one particular intimate information may be considered appropriate to disclose or not. For instance, sexual orientation was not often disclosed on Facebook, while it was always revealed on Badoo where it seemed appropriate in that context. I analyse how participants negotiate the disclosure of intimate information both through textual and visual means of communication.

Taking a political economy approach, in chapter 7 I examine the design and business models of Badoo, Couchsurfing and Facebook to see how they affect intimacy practices. CouchSurfing and Badoo provide reputation and verification systems to build trust among the users. This is connected to their business models because the user's identity is verified by paying a fee to CouchSurfing, and by purchasing premium services on Badoo. I analyse how participants understand these services and whether or not they use them. Also these platforms offer different privacy settings to restrict access to information by wider audiences. For example, Badoo users can create an album with "private photos" for authorized users to view, and on Facebook users can also create lists of friends to share information only with specific contacts. I explore the different privacy configurations that participants had in their different social media accounts. Despite the debates about privacy exposure through social media, there is a growing tendency to negotiate personal relationships through private features (e.g., through chat or private photos). In addition, I address the debate of the commodification of intimacy both by social media companies and users, to analyse to what extent it is considered anti-normative.

In chapter 8, I focus on the practice of meeting new people online. I examine the risks and stigma associated with this practice. In addition, I discuss how traditional gender roles are reproduced through social media interactions, especially on Badoo, despite some feminist scholars' claims in the 90s about the potential liberating effect of the Internet, where gender roles could be reversed. In the last section, I explore how people move relationships offline. I emphasize that intimate relationships created

through social media, even if temporary, are valued positively, especially in the case of friendships created through CouchSurfing.

Finally, in chapter 9, I present my conclusions. I synthesize all the empirical findings and consolidate all the important issues raised across the discussion to come with my thesis. I also address societal implications of my study, and point to future research directions.

Chapter 2
Social Media Platforms as Intimacy Mediators

2.1. Introduction

The objective of this chapter is to understand the interplay between society and social media. This literature review is focused on the culture of participation and the workings of Web 2.0 technology. In this sense, I provide a theoretical background for the subsequent empirical analysis of techno-sociality and engineered intimacy afforded by social media platforms. The main aim of my research is to analyse people's usage of social media, and in particular, people's intimacy practices. Understanding the way people appropriate technology in their everyday lives is an important step towards better understanding our social world. However, as stated in the previous chapter, when studying techno-social practices it is also necessary to explore the material, economic, and political contexts in which they are situated. Thus, in this chapter I analyse the values and history of network culture, the commercial turn of the Internet, and how social media platforms mediate communication in order to contextualise and understand the relationship between users, platforms' architecture and the emergent intimacy practices that take place within them. Following Latour's (2005) distinction between mediators and intermediaries, I assert that platforms shape the way people communicate.

I also discuss the political economy of these platforms in relation to intimacy, insofar as they facilitate the creation and development of close relationships but, at the same time, profit from these intimate relationships through data mining or charging a fee to access the service or to use premium services. Thus, I analyse the role of social media companies in this new scenario of constant connectivity, which involves, as Hinton and Hjorth (2013) observe, a double logic of empowerment and commodification. In this context, Papacharissi (2010) argues that the *networked self* (2010, p. 307) emerges from a new kind of socio-technical sociability, generated by a convergence of social, political, economic and personal dimensions. In order to contextualise the present social media landscape, in the next section I provide a historical account of network culture.

2.2. Network culture

The way we establish, maintain, modify or destroy social relations, according to Manuel Castells (2004), has changed to a new social paradigm in the late twentieth century: the network society. Castells (ibid.) points to a communication paradigm shift as a result of the advent of the Internet, the economic crisis, and different social movements such as feminism and ecologism. As Castells puts it (1996): "Networks constitute *the new social morphology* of our societies, and the diffusion of networking logic substantially modifies the operations and outcomes in processes of production, experience, power, and culture" (1996, p. 469). Likewise, Ned Rossiter (2006) observes that "the network" has been one of the most used metaphors in picturing this new social structure, based on connections of practices and information through the Net. Rossiter (2006) suggests that this metaphor implies the following associations: "fluid, ephemeral, transitory, innovative, flowing, non-linear, decentralized, value adding, creative, flexible, open, collaborative, risk-taking, reflexive, informal, individualized, intense, transformative, and so on and so forth" (2006, p. 46). In order to approach the study of network culture I start by analyzing how the Internet was first configured and how it was transformed through the years by the influences of different countercultures, economic forces, and practices. In this section, I also discuss how the use of the Internet became mainstream with the emergence of social media services.

The telegraph has been considered the precursor of the Internet. Nevertheless, rather than to facilitate personal communication, the Internet was originally developed for military purposes. The Internet was created by the US Defense department in the 1960s, as several scholars (e.g., Castells, 1997, 2001; Lister et al. 2009; Curran, 2012; Ryan, 2014) have addressed. The Defense Advance Research Projects Agency (DARPA) created a network of computers that could still transmit information to each other despite being attacked. DARPA evolved under the Advanced Research Projects Agency Network (ARPANET), a research network that also included the think tank corporation RAND, the MIT, and the National Physics Laboratory (NPL) from the UK. Later UCLA and Stanford University joined the project. As Damian Ryan (2014) notes, those academics that created the technical mechanisms to allow electronic communication also developed the protocols for interpersonal communications. Following this argument, Castells (2001) analyzes the values of the network culture using a historical perspective and argues that at least four distinct cultures have shaped

the Internet: (1) Techno-elites (academics, innovators and early adopters); (2) Hacker culture (*open source* movement); (3) Virtual communitarians (roots in the San Francisco Bay area's countercultures); and (4) Entrepreneurs (Silicon Valley).

Castells (ibid.) explains that the network culture is based on the academic tradition of sharing knowledge, reputation derived from academic excellence, peer review and openness in all findings obtained through research. Historically, the Internet was developed in academia, both by the work of teachers and students, whose values, habits and knowledge spread in the hacker culture. Pierre Lévy (2001) describes in his book *Cyberculture*, which takes a philosophical approach of his own experiences as an Internet user, the characteristics of cyberspace and the social relations that emanate from this new environment. For Lévy (ibid.), hacker culture refers to the set of values and beliefs that emerged from the networks of computer programmers interacting online to collaborate on projects of creative programming. Yet Castells (2001) argues that the specific values and social organization of hacker culture are best understood if one considers the development of the *open source* movement, where the operating system *Linux* is one of its main examples. The hacker culture shares characteristics of the techno-meritocratic culture with the academic world, but has a countercultural character that makes it different. Freedom is the supreme value of hacker culture. Freedom combined with collaboration through the practice of *gift culture*, which means that a hacker publishes their contribution to the development of software in the network with the expectation of reciprocity and recognition. In summary, hacker culture is a culture of technological creativity based on freedom, cooperation, reciprocity and informality. Based on the values of hacker culture, as Richard Barbrook (1998) observes, users collaborate altruistically within a system where there is no monetary exchange, what he labels the *hi-tech gift economy*:

> For most of its users, the Net is somewhere to work, play, love, learn and discuss with other people. Unrestricted by physical distance, they collaborate with each other without the direct mediation of money or politics. Unconcerned about copyright, they give and receive information without thought of payment. In the absence of states or markets to mediate social bonds, network communities are instead formed through the mutual obligations created by gifts of time and ideas (1998, p. 135).

In the same vein, Castells (2001) stresses that network culture is not only reduced to the values of technological innovation, but it also includes social patterns. So while hacker culture provides the technological foundations of the Internet, community culture, manifested in social forms, provides the processes and uses. Early users of computer networks created virtual communities and these communities were sources of values, patterns of behavior and social organization. Virtual communities, continues Castells (ibid.), have their roots in the counterculture movements of the 1960s, especially the hippie communes. In the 1970s, the San Francisco Bay area was the site of many virtual communities that experimented with computer-mediated communication, where projects such as the *Community Memory project* (1973) and *Homebrew Computer Club* (1975) developed. The *Community Memory project* was the first *Bulletin Board System.* Those involved in *Usenet* news networks and the *Bulletin Board System* developed and disseminated forms and network applications: messaging, mailing lists, chat channels, multiuser games and conferences. Communities of interests were created around these new communication channels. These virtual communities were characterized by free horizontal communication and the ability for anyone to express their opinions. Howard Rheingold (1993) introduced the term virtual community into the public lexicon with his book *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier*, where he gathered his experiences participating in the virtual community "The WELL". As virtual communities were expanding in size and scope, the original connection with counterculture weakened.

Later, Barry Wellman and Milena Gulia (1997) in their article *Net surfers don't ride alone: Virtual communities as communities* criticized the use of the term "virtual community" and pointed to the use of the concept "social networks" in order to picture the relationship created among Internet users through bulletin boards and forums. In opposition to traditional forms of community (the neighborhood, the family, the school), Rainie and Wellman (2012) suggest that the Internet facilitates the creation of different social networks around the individual. Rainie and Wellman (ibid.) have developed the concept of *networked individualism* (2012, p. 3), where the individual is a connectivity node who administers diverse social networks. Although Californian counterculture values influenced the configuration of the network culture, according

to Castells (2001), the hacker culture plays an essential role in building it for two reasons: the hacker culture is a breeding ground for technology through cooperation and free communication innovations; and it bridges the knowledge generated in the techno-meritocratic culture with entrepreneurship *spin-offs*[2] that spread Internet use in wider society.

At the end of the 1990s, the appearance of the World Wide Web and the convergence of these different dynamics led to the emergence of a number of Internet companies that took financial risks in the hope of profit. James Curran (2012) explains that in this period, the evangelical idea was that the Internet was fostering a "New Economy" where start-ups could compete with big corporations. The Internet was seen as a great opportunity for business as it allowed one to bypass established retail intermediaries, and enabled small producers to satisfy demands from niche markets. This market distribution has been defined as the "Long Tail", a concept popularized by Christian Anderson (2004). The hopes in the new opportunities of the Internet Economy generated great investment in Internet companies. Start-ups were mainly concentrated around Silicon Valley (California) and created what was labelled the dot.com bubble, which burst in the early 2000s. Castells (2001) argues that there was certain distrust with the commercialization of the Internet at that time. On the other hand, Curran (2012), drawing on Dave Valliere and Rein Peterson (2004), observes that these dot.com start-ups had very unrealistic business plans. Nevertheless, Christian Fuchs (2014) points to the low number of Internet users at the end of the 1990s as the main cause of the failure of most of these projects. Building on Tim O'Reilly and John Battelle (2009), Fuchs (ibid.) explains how Web 2.0 emerged after the dot.com crisis in order to create new Internet business models and ways of monetizing traffic, where the main source of value comes from the users who co-create content. Although the non-for-profit Wikipedia appeared at that time, the focus was on creating new business models around this culture of participation, which companies such as Craiglist, Google, Amazon and eBay based their profits on.

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2 S*pin-off:* A new business created by separating part of a company, or the act of creating such a business: a spin-off from something (e.g., *In Europe, most of the biggest Internet companies are spin-offs from established firms)* (Cambridge Dictionaries Online, 2015).

With the emergence of the commercial Internet, in the nineties Internet-related research began to emerge to explore the new social relations facilitated by this medium. Some of these studies were located under the umbrella of the so-called field of computer-mediated communication (CMC), defined by Charles Ess (2012a) as "studies rooted both in social science and disciplines such as sociology, and anthropology, and in humanistic disciplines, such as linguistics, literature, and media, and communication studies" (2012a, p. 276). CMC studies focused on online social interaction through MOOs[3], forums and "virtual communities" (e.g., Turkle, 1995; Wellman & Giulia, 1997; Markham, 1998; Baym, 1999). For instance, Annette Markham (1998), in her study of MOOs, observed that the Internet could be considered a place to go, a tool or a way of being. At this time, terms such as cyberspace, cyborg, and virtual/real were discussed. In particular, the figure of the cyborg, that androgynous mix between human and machine that Donna Haraway (1985) described in her famous manifesto, appeared as an aspirational metaphor to convey the increasing integration of technology in everyday life. The cyborg, half-human and half-machine, which did not have gender assigned, could help people, especially women, to escape from a gendered-ruled society. In the mid-1990s the word cyberfeminism gained popularity. Donna Haraway (1985, 1997) and Sadie Plant (1998) were the most prominent utopian cyberfeminist scholars who argued that the Internet was a tool that might liberate and empower women. As Sue Rosser (2005) observes "cyberfeminism explored the ways that information technologies and the Internet provide avenues to liberate (or oppress) women" (2005, p. 17).

From 2005 the term Web 2.0 acquired a lot of repercussion. The term Web 2.0 was first defined by O'Reilly (2005) in his article *What is Web 2.0.? Design patterns and business models for the next generation of software.* As Fuchs (2014) notes, it suddenly became a buzzword in order to talk about SNSs, wikis, video and photo sharing platforms, and other sites that allowed the user to participate in the service by creating new content and interacting with other users. Web 2.0 technology is based on social software (So-So). Fuchs (2014) defines social software as "the software that enables individuals and communities to gather, communicate, share and in some cases

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[3] MOO (Multi Object Oriented) is a type of MUD (Multi-User Dimension) program that allows people to interact simultaneously within virtual communities (Markham, 1998).

collaborate or play" (2014, p. 35). Likewise, danah boyd (2007) describes social software as a technology "that is all about letting people interact with people and data in a fluid way" (2007, p. 17). For boyd (ibid.), social software is a socio-technical communication system built upon one or more of the following premises: supporting conversational interaction between individuals or groups; supporting social feedback that allows a group to assess the contributions of others, enabling the creation of a digital reputation; and supporting social networks.

On the other hand, above all the Web 2.0 services, social network(ing) sites (SNSs) emerged as the favourite way to create and maintain personal relationships. Ryan (2010) explains that the origins of SNSs can be traced back to 1995 (Classmates), and 1997 (SixDegrees), created by Andrew Weinreich under the concept "virtual platform", a virtual environment where different people could connect through their contacts. SixDegrees began with seven of his friends and ended up having more than one million users. Nevertheless, the first successful SNSs were Friends Reunited and Friendster, which appeared in 2000 and 2002 respectively, because they allowed to users to share pictures with each other. Facebook appeared in 2004 as a University students-only network. It opened to the general public in 2006 (Facebook, 2015). From 2007, the popularity of SNSs grew rapidly and MySpace became the largest social media company. In 2008, as explained by Brittany Gentile et al. (2012), Facebook overtook MySpace in Alexa rankings and became the leader in the market. Although other social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat have appeared in recent years and reached high popularity, Facebook still remains the SNS with the largest amount of users (Alexa, 2015c). In fact, SNSs have become some of the most popular sites among users, with Facebook, YouTube and Twitter on the Top10 list of the most visited sites in the world (Alexa, 2015c). Through SNSs users interact with other users and content in different ways, as Hinton and Hjorth (2013) put it:

> Names such as Facebook, Qzone, Twitter, Habbo, Renren and Badoo boast millions of online users who use these services to build connections with other people, to stay in touch, to find support and answers to questions, to reinforce common ideas and values, to share news and other information, and to be entertained (2013, p. 32).

danah boyd and Nicole Ellison (2007) provide one of the most popular definitions of SNSs. Their definition of SNSs uses the word "network" instead than "networking" because they refer to mainstream SNSs services, such as Facebook and MySpace, where the interaction is mainly within existing relationships:

> Social network sites 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 & Ellison, 2007, p. 211).

Thus, as observed by Hinton and Hjorth (2013), networking implies the initiation of relationships among strangers. Hinton and Hjorth (ibid.) note that most SNSs include similar features such as profiles (which include (nick)name, picture(s) and biographical information), lists of connections, comments and private messaging. Hinton and Hjorth (2013) explain that some SNSs are "based around a theme", such as LinkedIn (work) or CouchSurfing (travel), while others do not have a particular theme, but they just offer a way to connect to people, such as Google+ or Facebook (2013, p. 34).

The latest buzzword is social media, which replaces the previous concept of social software. What is social about social media? Fuchs (2014), building on Ferdinand Tönnies (1988), explains that social media are "Web platforms that enable the social networking of people, bring people together and mediate feelings of virtual togetherness" (2014, p. 45). Some authors (e.g., Bargh & McKenna, 2004; Baym, 2010; Standage, 2013) have claimed that social media is not a new phenomenon, and has been around for centuries. These authors point to cavern paintings, poetry, or the telegraph as examples of traditional social media. For instance, Tom Standage (2013) compares the current social media services with old versions of "social media":

> Today, blogs are the new pamphlets. Microblogs and online social networks are the new coffeehouses. Media-sharing sites are the new commonplace books. They are all shared, social platforms that enable ideas to travel from

one person to another, rippling through networks of people connected by social bonds rather than having to squeeze through the privileged bottlenecks of broadcast media. The rebirth of social media in the Internet age represents a profound shift – and a return, in many respects, to the way things used to be (2013, p. 250).

In this section, I have analysed the origins of the values of network culture(s), which are rooted in the meritocratic academic culture where the Internet was first expanded; the hacker culture and its collaborative and free values based on the gift economy; the counterculture movements from the 1960s and 1970s in the San Francisco bay area, which revolved around communitarianism, peace, altruism, and collaboration; and the start-up culture developed in the same area (although more focused on the Silicon Valley), characterized by entrepreneurial spirit. In this context, I have addressed the commercial turn of the Web with the emergence of Web 2.0 companies, which were culturally hooked to this network culture, the move from the concept of virtual communities to social networking sites and the appearance of the latest buzzword: social media, to define the software that enables individuals and communities to gather, communicate, and share. I analyse the concept of mediation through social media in the next section, paying special attention to its role in the context of personal relationships.

2.3. Social media life

The new culture of connectivity (Van Dijck, 2013a) is embedded in our everyday lives and is transforming the way we relate to each other. This section presents a background of the current relationships between people and social media technology. Here, I analyse the increasingly invisible process of mediation due to the domestication of new media, and how the incorporation of social media in our everyday lives has blended the previous distinction between online and offline, private and public. I expand the analysis towards the ways social media technologies have been increasingly integrated in everyday practices until they became invisible. I explore the concepts of domestication of technology and mediation to explain the process of this pervasive use of social media in everyday life.

In recent years the extensive adoption of Internet use and the boom of social media have moved the discussion from cyberculture to everyday practices (e.g., Bakardjieva, 2005; Cohen, 2012; Pink, 2012; Hine, 2015). In the 2000s, Hine (2000) and other anthropologists (e.g., Miller & Slater, 2000; Postill, 2008) started to conduct ethnographies about the so-called "cyberculture". These and other media scholars (e.g., Lévy, 2001; Lessig, 2006) moved the discussion from the virtual/real to the online/offline dichotomy. Nowadays, the metaphors used to explain the hybridity of the digital medium have changed. For instance, Floridi (2012) suggests the term *onlife* to define the "infosphere that is neither entirely virtual nor only physical" (2012, p. 271). Concepts such as "co-presence" (Ito, 2005, p. 1; Hjorth, 2014, p. 52), "always on" (Baron, 2008, p. 10; Turkle, 2008, p. 132), "onlife" (Floridi, 2012, p. 271), "being-as-mediated" (Kember & Zylinska, 2012, p. 40), and "lifestreaming" (Marwick, 2013, p. 205) are useful concepts to understand the pervasiveness of mediated communication in our everyday life and how this ubiquitous social media interaction affects intimacy.

Social media platforms are interfaces that facilitate connectivity and promote interpersonal contact between strangers, existing relationships, individuals, and groups. These platforms allow users to communicate in public and private ways through different tools such as reference systems, walls, groups, forums, mailboxes or chats. Following Barbara Schewick (2010), who argues that platforms cannot be seen apart from the cultures in which they evolve, Van Dijck (2013b) suggests that the word connectivity implies a technological meaning: "its connotations expand into the realm of the social and the cultural" (2013b, p. 4), insomuch as social media platforms allow us to make connections with people through different features such as "chat" or "comments" on pictures. In her book *The Culture of Connectivity* Van Dijck (2013a) argues that connectivity has become a human need, as our lives are embedded in technology mediated communication. The pervasive use of smartphones, which allow us to be connected 24/7 through social media apps, has helped to create this need. In a similar vein, Ganaele Langlois (2013) highlights the power that social media platforms have achieved in recent years and explains that giving up social media is much more complicated than quitting television, because not only do we use social media for entertainment and information, we also experience our friendship, love, and social life through these platforms.

The culture of "always on" (e.g., Baron, 2008, p. 10, Turkle, 2008, p. 132) generates new dependencies on devices and services. Following Roger Silverstone and Leslie Haddon (1996), who defined domestication as the process through which new technology is integrated into everyday life, Naomi Baron (2008) points to smartphones as the main drivers of the domestication of communication technologies. Turkle (2008) observes that these devices are fostering the culture of always-on/always-on-me, where the individual feels connected anytime, anywhere. This *hyperconnected* individual has been labeled as the "tethered self" (Turkle, 2008, p. 122) or the "networked self" (Papacharissi, 2010, p. 307). Turkle (2007) points out that the closeness to our mobile phones creates the feeling that these devices are "intimate machines" (2007, p. 9). Likewise, James Miller (2014) suggests that users may feel more emotionally attached to mobile phones because of their close physicality to the device and its affordances. Miller draws on Jane Vincent (2005) who, emulating Marshall McLuhan, argued that for some people mobile devices may feel like extension of their bodies. Hjorth (2008, 2012) has developed a theory of the "caravan" to highlight how these small devices allow us to bring with us our social life everywhere we go, hence they facilitate co-presence. Hjorth (2014) argues that co-presence is a psychological state not limited by physical boundaries:

> The concept of co-presence deliberately conceives of presence as a spectrum of engagement across multiple pathways of connection —and thus goes beyond counter-productive dichotomous models of online and offline, here and there, virtual and actual (2014, p. 52).

This new media ecology is formed by different devices (desktop computers, mobile phones, and tablets), across different social and media platforms, and creates various forms of presence (Hinton & Hjorth, 2013). The convergence of mobile devices with social networking sites opens new opportunities and challenges for interpersonal communication. Kane Race (2015), in his research about the role of hook-up devices in gay culture, claims that platforms such as Grindr represent "an historically distinctive way of arranging erotic and intimate life and accessing partners, which has significant social, personal and communal impacts and potentials" (2015, p. 505).

Hine (2015) has recently developed a model to help study the integration of digital communication in our everyday practices: the "E^3 Internet framework". This framework defines three aspects of the Internet: embedded, embodied and everyday. Hine (ibid.) argues that the Internet has become embedded into our lives, interwoven in everyday experiences. First, Hine (ibid.) explains that there are many different notions of embedding within new media in different contexts, for instance, the appropriation by one particular culture of a social media platform. Mark Deuze (2012) stresses how our lives are embedded in media by saying that we live *in* media rather than *with* media. Miller (2014) also acknowledges the extensive penetration of mediated communication in our lives and suggests that people interpret media representations as being part of their reality: "Media become interwoven with everyday life to such an extent that media representations contribute fundamentally to one's conception of reality" (2014, p. 212). Likewise, building on Nezar AlSayyad (2006), who suggests that it is not useful to distinguish between the real and its representation, Therese Tierney (2013) argues that both reality and its representation have merged in the context of social media interaction.

Hine's (2015) second point is that the Internet is embodied and she highlights the importance of the material circumstances that are shaping the mediated emotional experience. In social media context, Lasén and García (2014) explain how self-portraits accomplish three functions: presentation, representation and embodiment, insofar as they "inscribe the body online and offline" (2014, p. 4). Julie Cohen (2012) observes that the body has usually been neglected in Internet studies and points out that technology does not obliterate embodiment but it modifies aspects of embodied experiences, as it is not possible to separate our bodily experience when we use communication technologies. Thus, Cohen (2012) affirms that "knowledge cannot be disentangled from embodied perception, and that embodied perception and performance belong to the centre of self-society relation" (2012, p. 38).

The third aspect of the use of the Internet identified by Hine (2015) is "everyday". One of the first scholars to study the Internet in the context of everyday interaction was Maria Bakardjieva (2005) who authored *Internet society: The Internet in everydaylLife*. Bakardjieva (ibid.) highlighted how users contributed to the shaping of technology with their own choices insofar as they integrated the Internet in their

everyday practices. The diffusion of broadband capacity and extensive use of mobile communication has resulted in social media interaction penetrating all layers of one's social life (see Castells, 2007; Livingstone, 2009; Papacharissi, 2010; Turkle, 2011; Couldry, 2012; Deuze, 2012; Kember & Zylinska, 2012; Madianou & Miller, 2013). Sander De Ridder (2013) acknowledges that because participation in social media has become an everyday practice, the power structures (both cultural and commercial) embedded in these platforms have become invisible. The market forces that social media platforms are organized around will be addressed in the next sections. In his study about mediated intimacy, De Ridder (ibid.) noted that it is important to observe how the pervasive use of new technologies affects intimacy. For example, some authors (e.g., Turkle, 2008; Miller, 2012) argue that users may feel more attached to social media platforms than to specific friends, as the platform is always available to them, and thus becomes a "metafriend". As Turkle (2008) puts it: "The site becomes a transference object, the place where friendship comes from" (2008, p. 124). Nevertheless, instead of thinking about major disruptive transformations in social practices, it is more useful to talk about the integration of new media in everyday routines. As Papacharissi (2010) observes, although several scholars have questioned whether new technologies made users more or less social, the reality is that after an initial first stage of intensive use of new media, users integrate digital technologies in their everyday practices as part of their regular social interaction.

In communication studies, concepts such as mediation and mediatization (e.g., Silverstone, 2005; Couldry, 2008; Livingstone, 2009; Kember & Zylinska, 2012; Thumim, 2012; Couldry & 2013; Madianou & Miller, 2013; Deacon & Stanyer, 2014, Lievrouw, 2014) have been used to understand the role that media play in contemporary society. Couldry (2008) highlights that the concept of mediation is more adequate to approach the study of media's social consequences at macro and micro levels, in spite of mediatization, which accounts for the political and power forces shaping a process of media influence on a large scale: "Mediation emphasizes the heterogeneity of the transformations to which media give rise across a complex and divided social space rather than a single 'media logic' that is simultaneously transforming the whole of social space at once" (2008, p. 378). Sonia Livingstone (2009) studied the etymology of both concepts in different languages and concluded that the concept of mediation is useful because it highlights the artefacts and practices

present in communication, and stresses the social context where the communication takes place. In her research about self-representation Nancy Thumim (2012) identifies three dimensions that operate in the process of mediation: institutional (e.g., social media companies), textual (through both text and images) and cultural (personal experience).

Communication is always mediated by language as Silvertone (2005) has observed. Ess (2012b), drawing on Ong's (1988) concept of "secondary orality", suggests that social media reintroduce many characteristics of traditional orality into our communicative landscapes insofar social media platforms expand both the use of the auditory and the visual. This "secondary orality" brings with it a return of the relational and the emotive, which may be the reason, Ess (2012b) argues, for the shift in Western cultures from an individual privacy towards a "group privacy" (2012b, xvii). I will discuss this and other debates in relation to how privacy is conceptualized in social media in next chapter. Following Roger Silverstone (2005), who described mediation as a dialectical process, in which the media are involved in the general circulation of symbols in social life, Madianou and Miller (2013) point out that the concept of mediation helps us understand how media affect social processes, which, at the same time, shape the way media are used. As Madianou and Miller (2013) put it: "mediation tries to capture the ways in which communications media transform social processes while being socially shaped themselves" (2013, p. 174). Couldry (2008) understands the process of mediation as the resultant of the interaction of flows of production, circulation, interpretation and recirculation.

Following Stig Hjarvard (2009), David Deacon and James Stanyer (2014) observe that the media shape the way people communicate and maintain relationships with each other. Richard Harper (2010), building on David Henkin, explains how digital technologies are bringing people together as postal mail used to in the past, allowing us to communicate in both synchronous and asynchronous ways. The shift with social media in the context of interpersonal communication is that it makes possible both one-to-one communication and one-to-many communication; what Castells (2007) has labelled mass-self communication. Castells (ibid.) highlights that technology is not the agent that produces this new form of socialization, but the force of an individualistic society that demands this kind of communication.

The mediation framework is useful to understand how the materiality of digital communications (devices and objects, e.g., social media platforms) and communication practices are mutually shaped, Leah Lievrouw (2014) suggests. She also acknowledges that social arrangements, such as patterns of relations and institutional structure, are affected and influenced by artefacts and practices through a process of reformation. Thus, the mediation framework would be comprised of three elements: (1) artefacts, (2) practices, and (3) social arrangements, which interact and shape one another. Byam (2010), building on Patrick O'Sullivan (2000), suggests that it is important to study both the process of mediation and mediated social practices from users' perspectives:

> Instead of asking what mediation does to communication, we can also ask what people do with mediated communication. People appropriate media characteristics as resources to pursue social and relational goals (2010, p. 59).

Taking a social shaping of technology approach (e.g., Castells, 1997; Wajcman, 2002; Baym, 2010; Madianou & Miller, 2013; Van Dijck, 2013a), and a domestication perspective (e.g., Bakardjieva, 2005; Hine, 2015), this research follows the academic interest of the study of the use of social media technology in the context of everyday practices. As Baym (2010) notes, the social shaping of technology perspective concurs with the domestication of technology approach insofar as they state that both technology and society are influencers in the consequences of new media. Nevertheless, the domestication of technology perspective focuses on how this interplay between society and technology is deeply embedded in everyday practices. From the domestication perspective, I take into account the mediation process in order to explore how we live our lives *through* social media, and in particular, how we experience intimacy *through* these platforms. In the next section, I analyse how social media platforms' architecture, design and politics shape the way people communicate.

2.4. Platform politics, architecture and policies

The term "platform" has emerged in recent years as a useful metaphor to define social media services. In the context of digital communication, it was first introduced by O'Reilly (2005) who proclaimed that "Web 2.0 is the network as platform" in order

to highlight the open and participatory structure of these new services that allowed people to create content and interact in an horizontal way (2005, p. 17). The term is helpful in acknowledging social media services' dual social and commercial nature. As Tarleton Gillespie (2010) puts it in his article *The Politics of Platforms*, the term "platform" helps one navigate the tensions inherent in their service: "between user-generated and commercially-produced content, between cultivating community and serving up advertising, between intervening in the delivery of content and remaining neutral" (2010, p. 348). Thus, Gillespie (2010) points out that social media services adopted the metaphor of platform because it allowed both social and commercial interaction, and could address both advertisers and users at the same time. As commented earlier, I consider that social media platforms are not neutral intermediaries of interpersonal communication. In this section I approach the politics of platforms because their design is carefully crafted to both facilitate personal interaction and to gather users' data.

From the point of view that technology is not neutral, several scholars (e.g., Papacharissi, 2009; Davis, 2010; Gillespie, 2010; Bucher, 2013; Langlois, 2013; Patelis, 2013; Van Dijck, 2013a; Lievrouw, 2014) discuss issues of power in reference to social media platform architecture and design. These authors argue that social media platforms are not neutral intermediaries, which just facilitate interpersonal communication, but rather they shape the way people communicate. Van Dijck (2013a) highlights the power implication of platforms design when she affirms that platforms are mediators *rather* than intermediaries. Likewise, Macinelli and Macinelli (2013) emphasise the role of social media platforms as mediators of users' interaction when they claim that: "The machine is a mediator" (2013, p. 161).

In contrast, Gillespie (2010) thinks of platforms as digital intermediaries, although he also acknowledges their politics of shaping users' agency. Gillespie (2010) highlights that the use of the word platform misrepresents the way social media services really shape public discourse online. In this sense, Gillespie (2010) is referring to the political dimension of the polysemic meaning of the term, which "suggests a progressive and egalitarian arrangement, promising to support those who stand upon it" (2010, p. 350) – a principle of neutrality that is not actually real. Likewise Tierney (2013), building on the architect William Mitchell (2000), who analysed how the

design of a particular architecture had a particular end in mind, points out that "all the design is political" (2013, p. 77). Van Dijck (2013a) argues that social media platforms make sociability technical, although social media companies stress the social aspect over the technical one: "Social media are inevitably automated systems that engineer and manipulate connections" (2013a, p. 12). This idea of architecture shaping social practices is not new. Langdon Winner (1980), in his essay *Do Artefacts have Politics?,* already analysed how technology and architecture features established patterns of power and inequality.

Building on Michel de Certeau (1984), Papacharissi (2010) also observes how social media architecture and their networked structure shape the way users interact: "A model of networked sociality emerges on online spaces, the architectural affordances of which inform human activity, by suggesting possibilities for interaction" (2010, p. 306). By the same token, Lievrouw (2014) points to the theory of *affordances* of communication technology, developed by Ian Hutchby (2001), as a possible model to approach the study of the power relations inherent in social media platforms' design and social insofar the affordances of a platform "create and regulate social knowledge and power" (2014, p. 49). Papacharissi (2009), who also draws on Hutchby (2001), conducted a comparative analysis of Facebook, LinkedIn and the exclusive, members-only ASmallWorld to examine how architectural features influence community building and identity. She identifies the architecture of Facebook as flexible in comparison to the architecture of LinkedIn and ASmallWorld. Papacharissi (ibid.) argues that LinkedIn and ASmallWorld lead human behaviour in a more specific way, as their architecture is more closed they offer fewer options for interaction. She highlights that although Facebook's architecture is not entirely neutral, a fluid architecture provides a variety of technological affordances that do not definitively determine users' behaviour.

As identities are increasingly performed and managed on social media, Papacharissi (2010) stresses how important it is that a social media platform's architecture allows users to control their level of privacy and publicness in their online performances. In order to try to control the access of different publics to personal information disclosed in the profile, most popular social media platforms incorporate privacy settings which range from only public/private options, to more sophisticated features, such as the

friends list in the case of Facebook. I address this topic further in the next chapter. Nevertheless, the design of all mainstream social media platforms is public by default, as several scholars have observed (e.g., boyd, 2008; Nyíri, 2009; Papacharissi, 2010; Joinson et al., 2011; John, 2013b; Van Dijck, 2013a). This means that these platforms are configured as public in the first place, and users have to apply privacy settings in order to prevent access to their profiles by the general public.

On the other hand, some scholars (e.g., Illouz, 2007; Papacharissi, 2009; Davis, 2010; Bucher, 2013; De Ridder, 2013; Langlois, 2013; Patelis, 2013; Van Dijck, 2013b) have also studied the way that social media platforms architecture affects self-presentation and social interaction. They claim that a platform's architecture is significant in shaping the way people represent themselves and communicate in social media. The first way of shaping the way people represent themselves in the network is related to the "real name policy" promoted by social media monopolies (e.g., Hogan, 2010; Patelis, 2013). In the contemporary social media landscape, as observed by Korinna Patelis (2013) in his study of social media "Terms and conditions", online identities are considered an extension of real social life. Identity play and anonymity, which were the normal means of online interaction in the 1990s, argues Patelis (ibid.), have become stigmatized, as they are understood as "fake". By the same token, Papacharissi (2009) questions how this shift from the use of pseudonyms to real names in online settings constrains the previously understood liberating aspect of online interaction:

> In spaces where validation of offline identity is a requirement for admission, how is the liberating aspect of online expression compromised as individuals enter networks with their real-life baggage, carrying with them class, gender and ethnic assumptions that characterize them in their offline existence? (2009, p. 250).

The pervasive use of "real name policy" by social media platforms has been analysed by different scholars in the context of the philosophy of radical transparency (e.g., Zhao et al., 2008; McNicol, 2013; Patelis, 2013; Van Dijck, 2013a). Nevertheless, Van Dijck (2013a) suggests, the norms of radical transparency seem to apply only to users not to social media companies. Most social media platforms require users to use

their real name, and disclose their preferences so their behavioural data can be mined, but also because authenticity fosters the creation of new relationships. I will address the workings of verification and reputations systems in order to generate trust among users systems in next chapter. Andrew McNicol (2013) highlights that although it may be true that the disclosure of an authentic self is beneficial for personal relationships, social media companies profit from this enforced authenticity.

The next step, after choosing which name to disclose, is to fill the fixed categories that social media platforms facilitate to represent the user in the network. De Ridder (2013), in his study about intimacy practices through the Belgian social media platform Netlog, where profiles provide only closed categories to describe personal characteristics, found that users felt constrained by platform architecture when representing themselves. Taina Bucher (2013), in her study of engineered sociality through Facebook, argues that social media platforms need these fixed set of standards because of their underlining algorithmic logic. Jenny Davis (2010), who analysed the design of MySpace, suggests that in this platform the open-ended "About me" section helps users to represent their identity in a freer way. On the other hand, other studies, such as Illouz's (2008) profile analysis of dating sites with open "About me" sections, reveal that users tend to recreate cultural standards and tend to disclose what they think it is expected from them, thus creating very similar and standardised self-presentations. Thus, although an open-ended "About me" section may give the impression of liberty to describe one's self, the reality is that users are mainly constrained by the social norms that operate in the site, which are even more powerful than the platform's features, as Van Dijck (2013a) also discusses.

On the other hand, social media services shape the way users relate to each other through their design. Bucher (2013) introduces the concept of *algorithmic friendship* in order to examine the ways social media platforms engineer techno-sociality: "algorithms and software have become active participants in our networked lives and information ecosystems, forming the ways in which users are made to relate to self and others" (2013, pp. 480-481). Social media platforms use algorithms to recommend content of particular users who are supposed to be more interesting to them. For example, as Van Dijck (2013a) has observed, Facebook uses the algorithms EdgeRank and GraphRank in order to filter data produced by the users and "shape

them into a meaningful stream of information for that specific user" (2013a, p. 49). Following Bucher (2012), Van Dijck (2013a) explains how EdgeRank works:

> The algorithm favors certain users over others; for instance, friends which whom a user interacts on a frequent basis or on a more "intimate" level (e.g. via the Chat function) count more than friends you contact infrequently or who merely appear on your Wall. EdgeRank provides a filter that implicitly ranks the importance of friends (2013a, p. 49).

What Van Dijck finds problematic is that users do not know how the filter works. In this sense, users lack the freedom to customize their newsfeeds as they please. It is the platform that is leading the communication process, favouring the content of some "friends" over others. Langlois (2013) also considers that the objective of social media platforms is to shape the way we interrelate to each other: "Their purpose is to tell us what we should do, what we want, how we should feel, who should be our next friend, and so on" (2013, p. 54).

Langlois (2013) argues that the real interest of social media companies is to generate meaningful experiences by connecting users to other users and relevant information, so users keep using the service and the platform keeps gathering users' data. Thus, Langlois (ibid.) suggests that these meaningful experiences are responsible for our attachment to social media services. Likewise, Robert Gehl (2013) highlights the affective dimension of social media interaction. By the same token, Bucher (2013) explains, with features such as "two friends' shared history" Facebook tries to bring to present past memories in order to "induce and simulate the emotional and intimate connections seen as a defining feature of friendship" (2013, p. 487). Another feature designed by Facebook to assist personal relationships is the "like button". Bucher (2013) suggests that as the maintenance of close relationships is time-consuming, the like button helps users to validate their friendships: "With the like button Facebook made paying attention to friends a one-click sentiment" (2013, p. 485). Conversely, as Seda Gürses and Claudia Díaz (2013) observe, social media services also hide certain activities to avoid negative feelings, for example, when users unfriend each other: "Social media providers make certain actions invisible in order to avoid

conflict, e.g., in Facebook users are not informed when their friends delete their relationship" (2013, p. 7).

Alison Hearn (2010) considers social media platforms as feeling-intermediaries and highlights that the expression of feeling in social media interaction is mined for value. According to Gehl (2013), the recording of all these feelings through social media can be considered as an "archive of affect" (2013, p. 228). Gehl (2013) conducted a study about Facebook's surveillance of users' activity and noted how social media platforms architecture is designed to gather users' behavioural data: "Facebook and other advertising-centric social media are engineered to gather refined data on the desires of their users" (2013, p. 228). Gehl here is referring to how platforms are carefully designed to gather users' data for profit, and he links the concept of quantification of this "archive of affect" with Illouz's (2007) notion of "emotional capitalism" (2007, p. 60), which I discuss further in section 2.6. Social media dynamics: Between empowerment and commodification.

Social media platforms are not entities outside the physical world; on the contrary, as observed by Tierney (2013), "they are designed by, and entangled in, physical world social practices" (2013, p. 77). The pervasive use of social media platforms in everyday life led Langlois (2013) to affirm that rather than talking about social media platforms as tools that allow sociability, we should talk about "platforms through which we live our lives" (2013, p. 125), which is in line with Deuze's (2012) observations that we live *in* media rather than *with* media. This pervasive integration of techno-sociality in our everyday lives makes social media platforms' architecture invisible. Thus, different scholars (e.g., Papacharissi, 2010; Langlois, 2013; Van Dijck, 2013b) claim that social media platforms engineer sociality in an invisible way, and therefore users lose agency over the management of their personal relationships.

So far, I have analysed the role of social media platforms' architecture and its algorithms in shaping the way people communicate within the platform. Taking the perspective that technology is not neutral, I argue that social media platforms emerge as mediators *rather* than intermediaries. I have paid special attention to how these platforms allow and engineer personal relationships. The affordances and design of the platform permit users to communicate and share content and, at the same time,

shape the way they present themselves in the network, and the way they create and maintain close relationships. Following boyd's (2010a) definition of the affordances of *networked publics* (persistency, replicability, searchability and scalability) (2010a, p. 46), Papacharissi and Gibson (2011) argue that *shareability* is the fifth affordance, in relation to how the architectural design of social media platforms urges users to share content, and how those tools become more meaningful insofar as users share more. In the next section I will expand the analysis in the way that Web 2.0 services encourage users to disclose a large amount of personal information through marketing pitches, by using the concept of "sharing" as their leading principle.

2.5. Web 2.0 and the imperative of sharing

This section explores the evolving concept of sharing in the context of social media interaction and analyses how social media platforms have shaped the way people communicate by promoting self-disclosure. Following Hinton and Hjorth (2013), I use the concept of Web 2.0 as a placeholder to discuss the political economy of social media because "Web 2.0 is a term that is fundamentally derived from the logic of capitalism, marketing and commercialisation" (2013, p. 11). Web 2.0 business models blend participatory and commercial philosophy. In the participatory culture, the connotations of equality, selflessness and giving, which connect with discourses of the philosophy of the utopian network culture from the 1980s and 1990s, are combined with the ideal mode of communication between intimates. Social media companies use the communitarian ideology from the early stages of the Internet in their slogans and communications, borrowing terminology from the Internet free-culture ideology based on values such as altruism, reciprocity and collaborative knowledge, which I addressed earlier in this chapter. Here, I discuss how Web 2.0 services are based on the imperative of sharing. I first analyse the characteristics of Web 2.0 technology. Then, I discuss the "sharing economy", which emerges from participatory culture and communitarian values, based on sharing services or goods. Later, I will explore the mobilisation of the concept of sharing, by looking at social media companies' communications and rhetorics, where they draw on the emotional connotations of the concept of sharing.

O'Reilly (2005), who coined the term Web 2.0, highlights that Web 2.0 is based on the idea of the "web as platform" which is built around "architecture of

participation" (2005, p. 17). O'Reilly (2005) has been one of the main authors who has integrated the culture of participation within business models, and defines the core competencies of Web 2.0 companies as:

> Services, not packaged software, with cost-effective scalability; control over unique, hard-to-recreate data sources that get richer as more people use them; trusting users as co-developers; harnessing collective intelligence; software above the level of a single device; lightweight user interfaces, development models, AND business models (2005, p. 37).

Nevertheless, *The Clue Train Manifesto* was the first celebratory text where Rick Levine et al. (1999) argued that the new online environment was very disruptive for business insofar as it allowed consumers to voice themselves. Some of the claims of this manifesto were related to how the Internet was changing the traditional top-down model of circulation of information in mass media to a more horizontal model, and how this phenomenon was affecting the relationship of companies with customers. This manifesto gives tips to marketers to manage the new media landscape. Instead of seeing participatory culture as a threat for companies' reputation in the sense of loss of control of the process of communication, it considers that the Internet opens new opportunities for business. Levine and colleagues (1999) wrote *The Cluetrain Manifesto* before the dot.com crisis where there was a lot of hope in the potentialities of the "New Economy", as observed earlier. An update of this manifesto has been recently published by two of its authors. Doc Searls and David Weinberger (2015) have modified the manifesto under the name of *New Clues* in order to adapt it to the current online environment. Other celebratory authors that also highlight the potentiality of Web 2.0 to foster participatory culture and its benefits for business include: Don Tapscot (2008) with *Wikinomics*; Clay Shirky (2008) with *Here comes everybody: The power of organizing without organization;* and Charles Leadbeater (2009) with *We-think: Mass innovation, not mass production.* These authors emphasize how Web 2.0 allows users to co-create content, changing the existing top-down dynamics between producers and consumers and how this new scenario affects business. As Georges Ritzer and Nathan Jurgenson (2010) note, users become *prosumers*: both producers and consumers of content. Using a critical political economy approach, José Van Dijck and David Nieborg (2009) criticize these

celebratory views of the "participatory culture" arguing that they do not take into account the commodity logic underneath Web 2.0 companies, which I discuss later in this chapter.

One of the benefits of Web 2.0, as observed earlier, is that it allows people to share and exchange ideas and goods. At the same time, this logic has been appropriated by social media companies to create their business models. John, who has conducted extensive research about the transformation of the concept of "sharing" (2013a, 2013b) notes that what was previously understood as the "gift economy" is now redefined as the "sharing economy" following the trend of the broad use of the notion of sharing. John (2013b) explains that it was Lawrence Lessig (2008) who first used the term "sharing economy" in his book *Remix*, and defines sharing economy in terms of the lack of interest in monetary gain to participate: "money, or more specifically, the ability to make it, is not a relevant factor in motivating participation" (2013b, p. 118). John (ibid.) differentiates between sharing economies of production (e.g., Wikipedia, Linux) and sharing economies of consumption (e.g., BlaBlaCar, CouchSurfing). On the contrary, Jennie Germann Molz's (2014) definition of sharing economy places more emphasis on the use of new media to facilitate the exchange of material goods. Sharing economies of consumption have also been defined, as John (2013b) and Germann Molz (2014) point out, in terms of "collaborative consumption". Following Botsman and Rogers (2010), Germann Molz (ibid.) explains that collaborative consumption is based on access to goods and experiences rather than ownership. Within sharing economies there can be monetary exchange (e.g., Airbnb, BlaBlaCar), or the exchange can be altruistic (e.g., Timebanking, CouchSurfing). Germann Molz (ibid.) and John (2013b) note that the exchange in sharing economies happens among strangers and is based in values such as trust, altruism and reciprocity. As observed by John (ibid.), within the sharing economy practices of collaborative consumption shift previous borders of private property and private space. For instance, he analyses the case of CouchSurfing where users share their private space when hosting other users. This anti-capitalist and communitarian ethos is connected with the anarcho-communist and collaborative imaginary of the gift economy (Barbrook, 1998) discussed earlier.

Other scholars (e.g., Van Dijck & Nieborg, 2009; John, 2013a; Dror, 2013; Kennedy, 2013; Brake, 2014) have also analysed how social media companies use communitarian and emotional pitches to encourage users to share more information online. Van Dijck and Nieborg (2009) discuss how Web 2.0 open philosophy appropriated the communitarian "network culture" ideology to market these new platforms in a positive and attractive way to their potential users, despite these social media monopolies using user generated content for profit. Yuval Dror (2013) examined high-profile Web 2.0 companies founders' manifestos and found that these documents faced the challenge of having to address venture capitalists, advertisers, and general public with the same discourse. Dror (2013) explains how these founders solved this challenge by addressing different stakeholders using an emotional speech:

> Using old and new myths, the founders' texts work to reframe the business discourse, while simultaneously constituting a parallel one that is not fixated on hard, financial data but on soft, emotional arguments. They call upon potential investors not to invest in their companies only because they perform well financially, but also because they will "make the world a better place", "make people happy", "make people play", or "give everyone a voice" (2013, p. 11-12).

Building on Turner (2005), David Brake (2014), in his empirical work about risk and exposure on social media, acknowledges how communitarian narratives inherited are used by social media companies to encourage users to share more data and as counter-narratives to conventional concerns about privacy. Likewise Gillespie (2010) observes that the commercial turn that Web 2.0 entailed was not in line with the communitarian and open source philosophy of network culture, which was based on the gift economy (Barbrook, 1998). Following this communitarian ethos, Jenny Kennedy (2013) argues that social media platforms position the imperative of sharing within a participatory culture whose objective is community development. In this rhetoric of sharing, Kennedy (2013) notes, users are expected to share for the common good of the community: "Good subjects post, update, like, tweet, retweet, and most importantly, *share*" (2013, p. 132). Social media platforms, some scholars (e.g., John, 2013a, 2013b; Kennedy, 2013; Van Dijck, 2013a) argue, have mobilised the meaning of the word sharing. Building on Castells (2009), who suggested that today's

communication landscape is embedded in a culture of sharing, Kennedy (2013) observes that sharing is the rhetoric of the social web. She suggests that while the term "platform" has been associated with a neutrality principle, as other authors have noted (e.g., Gillespie, 2011; Van Dijck, 2013a), the term "sharing" has positive connotations. Kennedy (2013) finds this association problematic because it hides the real intentions of the use of the term by social media monopolies:

> By emphasizing the social affordances of the platform (helping you to "connect", "keep up", and "view the world through each other's eyes"), the politics of data handling, ownership, and monetization are hidden from view. Sharing is (after all) political (2013, p. 133).

Kennedy (2013) argues that the mobilization of the meaning of the term "sharing" has been engineered by social media companies. John (2013a) looked at how Facebook portrays itself through its communications and found out that Facebook used affective terminology to refer to the act of sharing. He found out that words such as "friend" and "caring" were often associated with sharing practices for the platform to promote its services. Social media platforms have appropriated and mobilized some terms such as "friend", "social" and "sharing", which are part of the culture of engineered sociality; as Van Dijck (2013a) puts it: "In reality, the meanings of these words have increasingly been informed by automated technologies that direct human sociality" (2013a, p. 13) John (2013a) argues that most social media services include in their slogans the word share, either to instigate users to share or to explain that the service actually allows them to share. Thus, social media platforms encourage people to share different kinds of creative content and details of their lives in public as a differentiating mechanism from one another in order to create self-branded identities, which are used to navigate technologically mediated relationships. He suggests that users need to be familiar with the new meaning of sharing in the context of social media in order to understand that it stands for participating in the service.

In social media platforms the default is social, as boyd (2008) notes, insofar as it is easier to share than to hide information. Following Feenberg (2008), who referred to the defaults of design as "constitutive bias", Brake (2014) highlights how the defaults affect users' behaviours. In his comparative study of different social media platforms

Tierney (2013) observes that most social media platforms are designed to promote users to expose plenty of information about their lives. In this process, Cohen (2012) suggests:

> Norms of transparency and exposure are developed to legitimate and reward practices of self-exposure and peer exposure. These practices are the morality plays of contemporary networked life, they operate as both spectacle and discipline (2012, p. 135).

Social media architecture invites us to disclose a lot of information to participate in the service, and also encourages us, Theresa Senft (2012) argues, to monitor the activities of others. This activity of watching our peers was already advanced in 1977 by McLuhan when discussing the global village in the context of electronic media: "This has become the main business of mankind, just watching the other guy (and) invading privacy. Everybody has become porous" (McLuhan & Staines, 2006, p. 309). Other authors have labelled this activity of watching one another as "lateral surveillance" (Andrejevic, 2005, p. 481), "participatory surveillance" (Albrechtslund, 2008), or "social surveillance" (Marwick, 2012, p. 378). Nevertheless, Senft (2012) notes, users are already learning how to manage the publicness of social media, as they are increasingly aware of both the positive and negative outcomes of publicity. Thus, she suggests that the design of social media platforms, which are public by default, and the visibility of the interaction among members they afford have normalized public exposure with the aim to keep people sharing information, as these platforms use this data for profit. Likewise, several scholars (e.g., Miller, 2010; John, 2013a, 2013b; Van Dijck, 2013a; Brake, 2014) point out that social media have normalized public disclosure, so the increasing public exposure through different platforms is changing existing social norms and the boundaries between the public and the private. I will expand the debate about intimacy in public through social media in the next chapter.

In this context, Van Dijck (2013a) argues that social media is a public realm where norms are shaped. She suggests that the power of norms in social interaction is more influential than the power of law, and the quick evolution of the norms for "sharing" private information in the context of online interaction is a good example. Thus, in

line with John's (2013a) argument, Van Dijck (2013a) believes that social media platforms have deliberately participated in the change of social norms to foster users to disclose more personal information in order to monetize users' information by selling it to advertisers. She analyses how Mark Zuckerberg claimed in 2010 in an interview for *Time* magazine that the objective of Facebook was to create a platform where "the default is social" in order to "make the world more open and connected" (Van Dijck, 2013a, p. 45). For Van Dijck (2013a), Facebook's "radical transparency" philosophy is encapsulated through the use of the word "sharing": "The values of openness and connectedness are quintessentially reflected in the word favoured most by Facebook's executives: *sharing*" (2013a, p. 45-46). This principle of radical transparency, coined by Anderson (2006) in reference to the openness in the disclosure and management of data by organizations, is useful to understand this shift towards a more open and transparent society. In this context, transparency is understood as being beneficial for personal relations in the sense that it helps to eliminate deceptive and antisocial behaviour. Thus, continues Van Dijck (2013a), this new imperative of sharing by default, has also mobilised the meaning of privacy as something negative, which implies "opacity, nontransparency, and secrecy" (2013a, p. 46). She disagrees with Mark Zuckerberg's statement about privacy being an "evolving norm" (ibid.) by arguing that it is actually the concept of sharing which is evolving. Likewise, Adam Joinson and colleagues (2011) highlight that the new politics of sharing fostered by social media platforms leads to over-exposure, but users engage in those practices because it would be considered anti-normative otherwise: "In the era of radical transparency there is little scope for secrecy. With its emphasis in sharing, lack of sharing not only leads to a reduced user experience on many web 2.0 sites, but could also be seen as anti-normative" (2011, p. 39).

Facebook is the social media platform that has been claimed to be mainly responsible for the evolution of the concept of sharing. Nevertheless, Facebook has never revealed that their intention was to create an attractive platform to facilitate sociability in order to generate profit from users' data, argues Van Dijck (2013a), nor have they explained openly how they were actually monetizing the impressive traffic that the site supports. Despite claims made by social media CEOs against monetary gain being the main objective of their service, widely discussed by Dror (2013) in his article *"We are not here for the money": Founders' manifestos,* some scholars (e.g., John, 2013a, 2013b;

Kennedy, 2013; Van Dijck, 2013a; Brake, 2014) suggest the contrary. Kennedy (2013) points out that the underlying objective in the imperative of sharing is the generation of profit:

> Facebook itself hates unfriending, for commercial reasons, and thus makes it easy to hide updates from tiresome contacts without their knowing. The social media platform prefers you to share with as many others as possible. Greater connections mean wider sharing with further opportunities to generate data (2013, p. 132).

On the other hand, Van Dijck (2013a) acknowledges that the ambiguous use of the term "sharing" in the context of social media, is also used to explain to users that their data is going to become a commodity: "it relates to users distributing personal information to each other, but also implies the spreading of that personal information to third parties" (2013a, p. 45). Similarly John (2013a) observes how social media companies also appropriated the positive connotation of this term when explaining to users in the "Terms and conditions" section what they do with their data: "References to the transfer of data about users to advertisers as 'sharing information' with third parties serve to mystify relationships that are in fact purely commercial" (2013a, p. 169).

Any kind of content can be shared through social media platforms, ranging from pictures, videos or newspaper articles to personal and intimate information. Some authors (e.g., John, 2013b; Hinton & Hjorth, 2013; Papacharissi & Gibson, 2013) have focused their attention in the affective dimension of sharing. John (2013b) suggests that the act of sharing is constitutive of social relations, and sharing any kind of content, including one's feelings, has become central in the creation and maintenance of intimate relations. The main feature that promotes the sharing of feelings is the status update feature. Thus, John (ibid.) notes, in both Facebook and Twitter status updates sharing means telling; he suggests that users are encouraged to share their feelings with questions such as "What's on your mind?" John (ibid.), drawing on Illouz (2007), finds connections between the positive connotation of sharing on social media and the therapeutic narrative of sharing one's feelings. For instance, in the

description of the "Share button", Facebook uses the expression "the people you care about" to refer to the public that your act of sharing is meant for (John, 2013b, p. 125).

Hinton and Hjorth (2013) suggest that activities which can be considered banal in the social media environment generate "new forms of affective sharing", and users negotiate the level of intimacy by carefully selecting the publics they want to share particular information with: "Choosing what to share and who to share with allows people to control the privacy or publicness of their information that goes beyond the relatively clumsy tools provided by social networks" (2013, p. 19). The negotiation of intimacy in public in the context of social media will be discussed in more depth in *Chapter 5.4. From diaries to profiles: The rise of public intimacy?* by using empirical data.

In conclusion, the concept of sharing is an umbrella term, which includes different kinds of activities. The culture of sharing fostered through Web 2.0 platforms includes three different spheres, as John (2013b) noted: sharing content (pictures, videos or status updates); sharing economy (which is also defined as collaborative consumption of services or goods with or without monetary exchange); and sharing one's feelings, as a cultural requirement for building intimacy within personal relationships. In this section, I have addressed the principles of the sharing economy. Then, I have explained how Web 2.0 business models have appropriated the logics of participatory culture under the rhetoric of "sharing", which comes from network culture values, inspired by the anarcho-communist movements from May'68. Finally, I have analysed the imperative of sharing on social media, which might bring intimacies, which used to be kept in private, to the public realm. Thus, Web 2.0 companies encourage users to disclose a large amount of personal information through marketing pitches, by using the imperative of "sharing" as their leading principle. In the next section, I continue the analysis of Web 2.0 technologies to discuss the tensions between participatory culture and commodification that operate in social media interaction.

2.6. Social media dynamics: Between empowerment and commodification

In recent years an extensive body of literature has discussed the potentialities for empowerment through the use of Web 2.0 technologies. The main claims are that they increase agency, creativity, and participation. On the other hand, some authors criticize the commercial turn that the Internet experienced in the last decades, and Web 2.0 companies for commoditizing users' data and their lack of transparency in this process. As the focus of my research is intimacy practices, I discuss the commodification of intimacy and personal life both by users and social media companies. I address how Web 2.0 is approached from three different perspectives: (1) a tool which empowers users by allowing them to do things together; (2) a capitalist system that fosters the commodification of personal relationships and intimacy; and (3) a technology which both empowers users and takes advantage of their personal data for profit, the perspective where I locate myself.

First, I review the benefits of the use of social media. Web 2.0 technologies have been claimed to be empowering for their users insofar as they allow and facilitate: lower communication costs (e.g., Curran, 2012), collaboration (e.g., Barbrook, 1998; Jenkins, 2006, 2013), democracy (e.g., Coleman & Kaposi, 2009; Papacharissi, 2010); social capital (e.g., Wellman et al., 2003; Ellison et. al, 2011); and intimacy (e.g., Baym, 2010; Chambers, 2013; Jamieson, 2013; boyd, 2014). Barbrook (1998) was one of the first authors to refer to the participatory ethos of the social web, which he suggested it was embedded in the gift culture. Barbrook (ibid.) highlighted how these ethics come from the counterculture movements of May 1968. Later, other authors discussed how the collaboration through the Internet could lead to a wide enhanced knowledge, what Lévy (1999) labels "collective intelligence" (1999, p. 111), and James Surowiecki (2005) calls "wisdom of the crowds" (2005, p. xiv). The Wikipedia would be a good example of this phenomenon. Henry Jenkins (2006), in *Convergence culture: Where old and new media collide,* also acknowledged the possibilities of collaboration through online interaction, in particular he focused his attention on fan cultures. Jenkins (2006) coined the term "participatory culture" to describe cultural production by fans (2006, p. 3). Later, as Jenkins and colleagues (2013) note, the term evolved to refer to "a range of different groups deploying media production and distribution to serve their collective interests" (2013, p. 3). On the other hand, some

authors (e.g., Coleman & Kaposi, 2009; Papacharissi, 2010) point to the democratic potentials of Web 2.0, as they see the online environments as the new public sphere, because on social media platforms anyone can post comments and debate.

Another concept closely interrelated to participation is social capital, which relates to the benefits from personal associations (Putman, 2001). In this regard, several scholars (e.g., Wellman et al., 2003; Ellison et al., 2007; Vitak et al., 2011) have conducted research about the benefits of social media used to generate social capital. Wellman et al. (2003) found that online interaction increased social capital. Jessica Vitak and colleagues (2011) conducted a study to understand how users perceived gaining social capital through Facebook interaction. Following Robert Putman (2001), Vitak et al. (ibid.) differentiate between bonding social capital (close relationships, which provide help and emotional support), and bridging social capital (weak ties, which may facilitate useful novel information such as finding a job). They concluded that Facebook played an accrual role on developing bonding social capital, especially when the close relationships were situated in distant locations. I will expand the debate about how social media affect the creation and maintenance of personal relationships in the next chapter.

Second, I address the issue of commodification of data and intimate relationships in social media contexts. David Hesmondhalgh (2013), building on Jean-Guy Lacroix and Gaëtan Tremblay (1997), explains that "commodification involves transforming objects and services into commodities" (2013, p. 69), namely things that can be exchanged and sold. As Hesmondhalgh (2013) observes, the study of the issue of commodification raises questions about what kind of information can be traded. Most societies believe certain domains should be protected from market intervention, which include one's personal life, religion and political views. It seems that both social media companies and users engage in the commodification of users' private lives, relationships and personal data.

Social media business models range from paid services, to *freemium* models[4], to online advertising. Overall, the most common way of monetize web traffic is through the commodification of users' data to provide them tailored advertisements or share this data with third parties. As Brake (2014) observes, most social media platform's revenue comes from customized advertising, whose value depends on three points:

> Firstly on the number of users they can attract, secondly on the value of each user linked to their propensity to spend, and thirdly (and most appropriately to the social media) on ability to target such users with precision based on information about themselves (2014, p. 65).

Tamara Shepherd (2014) explains that in addition to the traditional way of audience commodification of mass media, advertising takes a new dimension in social media contexts because marketers can gather users' personal and behavioural information. From a critical political economy approach and drawing attention to the issue of commodification, some authors (e.g., Andrejevic, 2010; Gillespie, 2010; Couldry, 2012; Basset, 2013; Gehl, 2013, 2014; Van Dijck, 2013a; Fuchs, 2014) argue that online customised advertising is a mechanism by which Internet companies commoditize users. In order to participate in social media services, users must create an account and disclose certain kinds of personal information such as gender, date of birth, location, which can then be used by companies in marketing campaigns. Gehl (2014) explains that social media companies gather more personal information such as "user names, images, personal interests, wishes, likes and dislikes" (2014, p. 16), which are used to customise advertisements and segment audiences. Van Dijck (2013a) highlights that the traces that users leave when interacting online are also a source of value for social media platforms: "Besides generating content, peer production yields as valuable by-product that users often do not intentionally deliver: behavioural and profiling data" (2013a, p. 16). Likewise, David Berry (2013) observes that social media companies have recently discovered the potential for profit of tracking users' behaviour through cookies in order to gather information about "browsing, purchasing, and clicking behavior" (2013, p. 38). As Couldry (2012)

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[4] *Freemium* business models include a basic service for free, as well as paid premium options (Doerr et al., 2010).

notes, the focus in today's media environment is on the identification of niche audiences catalogued as high-value consumers via continuous online tracking "which targets them *individually and continuously*, as they move around online" (2012, p. 21)

This kind of research represent a form of resistance against the lack of transparency of social media platforms and the way they commoditize users' data (see for example, Berry, 2013; Basset, 2013; Patelis, 2013; Gehl, 2013, 2014). In this sense, Gillespie (2010) explains that commercial advertising does not fit with the collaborative and communitarian network culture ethos discussed earlier. Moreover, he highlights that user generated content is being used to generate traffic to sites where users do not receive any revenue in return. By the same token, Mark Andrejevic (2010) notes that users' immaterial labour generates value for social media companies, although these users may enjoy in the process. Following John Banks and Sal Humphreys (2008), Andrejevic (2010) argues that "online forms of co-creation complicate standard critiques of exploitation" (2010, p. 82), in the sense that users freely upload content on social media without any kind of coercion, although this has been discussed in terms of peer-pressure to participate in the network and a social need for connectivity. Thus, users obtain connectivity, social capital and reputation management in exchange for their personal and behavioural data. As Caroline Basset (2013) observes, personal data is the currency for participating in social media. Different scholars (e.g., Gross & Aquisti, 2005; Nissenbaum, 2009; Andrejevic, 2010) have also discussed social media monitoring and tracking in terms of privacy invasion, a topic that I develop in next chapter. In chapter 7, I discuss how most participants accept the trade-off of data mining for connectivity.

Van Dijck (2013a) highlights that commoditizing relationships is what social media platforms have discovered as "the golden egg their geese produced" (2013a, p. 16). By placing emphasis on the affective nature of social media interaction, some scholars have discussed the production of value under different names: gift exchange (Barbrook, 1998), free labour (Terranova, 2000), playbour (Kücklich, 2005), produsage (Bruns, 2008, p. 6), and affective labour (Gehl, 2013), depending on the area the analysis is focused on. Gehl (2013) observes that the kind of activities that users perform on social media, such as liking, chatting, friending, or commenting, are usually emotional, affective labour. Drawing on Tiziana Terranova's (2000) concept

of "social factory" (2000, p. 33), Andrejevic (2010) explains how social media platforms extract value from user sociability: "The social factory puts our pleasure, our communications, our sociability to work, capturing them in order to extract value from them" (2010, p. 90). Likewise, Adam Arvidsson (2006) argues that personal relationships "can be subsumed under capital as a source of surplus value" in the context of online dating:

> In internet dating, our common ability to construct mutual symbolic meanings, shared experiences and affective bonds is put to work to generate a kind of content that can be commercialized successfully (2006, p. 672).

Following Michael Schrage's (1997) notion that the real creator of value in online environments is relationships, Arvidsson (2006) argues that this value is so marketable that online platforms can charge access fees. Many online dating platforms charge a small fee to access the platform or particular premium services (e.g., Match, Badoo). Yoder (2014) explains that the industry behind the online dating market has reached a value of $2 billion. Pascal Lardellier's (2015) study explores the political economy of dating sites in France. Some of his participants compared the use of online dating to prostitution, since they were paying "to have relationships with a stranger" (Lardellier, 2015, p. 2). Intimacy, Zelizer (2009) notes, often appears like a commodity. Zelizer (ibid.) highlights that historically there has been an ongoing interaction between intimacy and economy. For instance, she explains that sexual relationships often include a transfer of money, being in the shape of marriage, prostitution or courtship. In this sense, people engage in categorisations of "good" and "bad" intimacy practices, by drawing moral boundaries. Zelizer (2009) explains that people constantly negotiate intimate ties and economic relations, for example through gift-giving or economic collaboration within households. Thus, in her view, this is not a new phenomenon. Even if intimacy and economy have long been closely intertwined, and mutually sustaining, social media may make this relationship more visible.

Illouz (2007) introduces the concept of "emotional capitalism" (2007, p. 60) to explain how intimate life and economy are intertwined and mutually shape each other. Illouz (2007) suggests that we live embedded in an emotional culture based on an ideal of

authenticity through the display of intimacy, which generates new intersections of public and private life. In this changing environment, argues Illouz (2007), intimate lives are increasingly represented and articulated through social media, reflecting the culture of "emotional capitalism", where "emotions have become entities to be evaluated, inspected, discussed, bargained, quantified and commodified" (2007, p. 109). Using dating sites as a case study, Illouz (2007) argues that the management of personal relationships follows the logic of the market: "relationships have been transformed into cognitive objects that can be compared with each other and are susceptible to cost-benefit analyses" (2007, p. 36). Within this capitalist mindset one question arises: are dating sites effective for finding a partner?

Arvidsson (2006), in his study of Match.com in Denmark, concluded that "Internet dating appears to be a comparatively efficient venue for finding a partner" (2006, p. 686), since statistics of the site show that 10% of paying users find a long-term partner within a year. In the US, the last Pew Research report about online dating conducted by Aaron Smith and Maeve Duggan (2013), identified an increase in the effectiveness of dating sites from 17% (2005) to 23% (2013). The study based its conclusion in asking participants whether they knew someone who had found a long-term relationship through online dating. Nevertheless, in the study about dating sites conducted by Begonya Enguix and Elisenda Ardèvol (2012), where they also used Match as a case study, participants complained about the quality of the users in the site. I explore the efficiency of online dating through Badoo in chapter 8, where most participants were using the free version of the site and mentioned that they did not find it so efficient because they were still single.

Vicente Verdú (2006) suggests that pervasive consumer society is leading individuals to desire "the consumption of the other" (2006, p. 71). Verdú claims that subjects become objects of desire, given way to *sobjects* (2006, p. 17). In the CouchSurfing case, for instance, Bialski (2007) argues that users engage in "emotional tourism", where one does not observe the individual's desire to experience the private, the "house", but a need to experience another human being. Thus, some authors (e.g., Verdú, 2006; Bialski, 2007; Lardellier, 2015) suggest that with the advent of social media intimacy has become a commodity in itself and, as a result, social media users also engage in the objectification of other users, and even of themselves. In this sense,

it seems that users also internalize the logics of the market and engage in self-branding and self-commodification. Some scholars (e.g., Arvidsson, 2006; Illouz, 2007; Heino et al., 2010; Enguix & Ardèvol, 2012; Cocks, 2015; Lardellier, 2015; Lindsay, 2015) have analysed how in the online dating environment users follow the logic of the market to find a partner. In Enguix and Ardèvol's (2012) study, one participant compared the dating service to a "meat market" (2012, p. 506), where the interaction was mainly led by the looks. Drawing on Elizabeth Jagger (2001), Megan Lindsay (2015) suggests that the dating industry transforms users into products marketable as daters based on physical attractiveness, which Lardellier (2015) calls "romance marketing":

> On dating sites, everyone conforms to the principles of romance marketing, considering themselves as exclusive products to promote, or one product in competition with thousands of others. In fact, on dating sites (like on social networks), many also indulge in personal branding, both consciously and subconsciously (2015, p. 98).

Lardellier (2015) explains how the site AdoptaUnTio (AdoptAGuy) uses the market metaphor to the extreme, as the platform design is a virtual supermarket. In this site, where the women choose who to talk to, men are represented as products to buy. Harry Cocks (2015) notes that the rise of online dating services is often connected to the dominance of capitalism, which extends to their users who engage in self-marketing strategies. In this context, intimate relationships may be based on deceptive self-presentation, built through exaggeration of personal qualities or major lies. I will approach the issue of deception in chapter 8. On the other hand, Rebecca Heino et al. (2010), in their research about the marketplace metaphor, found that dating sites users felt better about themselves as a result of their efforts to market themselves through the platform.

In generalist social media platforms, such as Facebook or Twitter, a lot of content users share is related to their private lives. As some scholars argue (e.g., Hearn, 2008, 2010; Marwick & boyd, 2011; Senft, 2012; Marwick, 2013; Abidin, 2014), users may curate and commoditize this content in order to promote themselves in the network, in order to create value in the "attention economy" (Marwick, 2013, p. 143). Hearn

(2010) has conducted a critical analysis of the digital reputation economy, by using a historical perspective. Hearn (2010) uses the term "self-branding" to describe how people who are immersed in the celebrity culture disclose intimate information to gather public attention and build reputation with the goal of monetary accumulation:

> Individuals generally craft reputation via the self-brand because they hope this work will eventually find its realization in the general equivalent – money; the celebrity industry works ideologically to valorize this hope (2010, p. 435).

Thus, Hearn recognizes users' agency to trade their intimacy when publishing details about their private lives through social media. Likewise, Alice Marwick and danah boyd (2011), in their empirical study about celebrity culture on Twitter, argue that this practice generates tensions between me-marketing and the possibility of creating deeper connections with other users:

> This view of micro-celebrity practice assumes an intrinsic conflict between self-promotion and the ability to connect with others on a deeply personal or intimate level. Some view strategic audience management as dishonest "corporate-speak" or even "phony, shame-less promotion" (2011, p. 15).

Marwick and boyd (2011) point out that the practice of commoditizing one's private life is seen as anti-normative. In order to avoid these negative implications of self-branding, Crystal Abidin (2014) argues that commercial bloggers learn to obscure the commerciality of their posts in order to keep intimacy with their followers by disclosing intimate information. Abidin (ibid.), explains how bloggers use this tactic to promote themselves as trustworthy sources, and at the same time, the brands they represent. These commercial bloggers may reach high salaries with the commodification of their intimate lives. Thus, Marwick (2013) and Abidin (2014) point to a positive side of self-commodification, where users consciously participate in the monetization of their intimacy. Marwick (2013) suggests that users should take advantage of the publicity facilitated by social media platforms and behave as if they were in a public stage. I will explore the relationships between celebrity culture and public intimacy practices on social media in more depth in the next chapter.

Third, I approach the perspective that considers that social media simultaneously empower users and commoditize users' data. Social media have been claimed to be both empowering and controlling (e.g., Hinton & Hjorth, 2013; Jenkins et al. 2013; Papacharissi, 2014). For instance, Hinton and Hjorth, (2013) discuss how social media platforms afford users a certain level of empowerment by allowing them to express themselves and connect with people all around the world, but at the same time, they control users' agency insofar as social media companies gather users' data and use it for profit. Hinton and Hjorth (ibid.) observe a double logic of empowerment and commodification. Likewise, Jenkins and colleagues (2013) gather in their book *Spreadable media: Creating value and meaning in a networked culture* the results of participation in the academic research project "Convergence Culture Consortium" where they conducted research in collaboration with corporate partners such as Yahoo! or MTV, in an effort to foster dialogue between academy and the industry. The main objective of this research project was to explore the relationship between current industry discourse and the interests of media companies and their audiences in the context of digital communication. In this study, Jenkins and colleagues (ibid.) note that it is important to observe both forces of empowerment and commodification when conducting a critical analysis of social media. The failure to acknowledge this double logic may lead to myopic utopian or dystopian accounts of the social media ecosystem:

> While we are certain our focus on transformative case studies or "best practices" throughout may be dismissed by some readers as "purely celebratory" or "not critical enough", we likewise challenge accounts that are "purely critical" and "not celebratory enough", the downplay where ground has been gained in reconfiguring the media ecology. We believe media scholarship needs to be as clear as possible about what it is fighting *for* as well as what is fighting *against* (Jenkins et al., 2013, p. xii).

On the other hand, Hinton and Hjorth (2013) observe how Web 2.0 allows users to become producers of content by disrupting the traditional media production model dominated by a few. Nevertheless, at the same time, they argue Web 2.0 technologies may control users' social lives. In this sense, Jenkins and colleagues (2013) suggest that despite social media companies receiving profit from users' data, it is necessary

to acknowledge that participating in social media services may be meaningful and rewarding for users. Moreover, we cannot assume that users are completely unaware of the logic of commodification inherent in participation on social media services. In fact, as Jenkins and colleagues (2013) note, users are learning about the workings of social media companies: "It seems audiences are increasingly savvy about the value created through their attention and engagement: some are seeking ways to extract something from commercial media producers and distributors in return for their participation" (2013, p. 57). Thus, users' agency cannot be dismissed. It is necessary to include users' perspectives in any accurate analysis about the political economy of social media. The study conducted by Helen Kennedy and colleagues (2015) to examine what social media users think about different kinds of social media monitoring practices in commercial and academic contexts is a good example of how useful it is to give voice to the users, in order to enrich debates about the political economy of social media.

In summary, I consider social media platforms as both empowering and controlling, insofar as they facilitate sociality and, at the same time, gather users' data for profit. In order to explore the different forces that operate in social media interaction, I have first analysed how Web 2.0 services empower users by allowing them to participate, co-create, and gain social capital. In the area of personal relationships, the role of social media platforms was found especially relevant in long-distance relationships. Then, I have focused the analysis on the commodification of users' data and relationships. In particular, I have discussed the affective dimension of activities that social media companies commoditize, as users invest a large amount of time in the maintenance of personal relationships through social media platforms. I have also acknowledged that users participate in self-commoditization in order to achieve their personal goals, as they internalize and follow the logic of the market. Finally, I progressed the discussion to counterbalance both approaches to observe the double logic of empowerment and commodification that operates in social media environments. I have found that there is a lack of studies about users' perspectives in topics related to the political economy of social media.

2.7. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have analysed the workings of social media platforms covering social, philosophical, technical, and economic factors that create and encourage a culture of constant connectivity. All these factors are interconnected but they have been separated here for the sake of the analysis. Central themes revolve around: (1) the values of network culture: freedom, communitarianism, altruism, and collaboration; (2) the appropriation of these values by the ideology of Web 2.0 and the mobilization of the concept of "sharing" for commercial gain; (3) the politics of the architecture of social media platforms, and (4) the double logic of empowerment and commodification, where I position my study.

The values of network culture are communitarianism, free circulation of information, collaboration, and altruism. Network culture's values are rooted in the meritocratic academic culture in which the Internet originated; the hacker culture and its collaborative and free values based on the gift economy; the counterculture movements of the 1960s and 1970s in the San Francisco bay area; and the entrepreneurial spirit of Silicon Valley's start-ups. Web 2.0 companies, which emerged after the dot.com crisis, appropriated these values and the "participatory culture" rhetoric to encourage users to disclose a large amount of personal information through marketing pitches, by using the concept of "sharing" as their leading principle. As stated earlier in this chapter, the political economy of social media is an important factor that determines the design of social media platform's architecture and the kind of sociability that is fostered within them. Moreover, the commodification of sociality and intimacy is emerging as a new business model. The lack of transparency and the way these sites gather and trade users' information is problematic. However, it is important to acknowledge users' agency when interacting through social media, and the benefits that they receive by participating in the service and in self-branding, including the potential for enhancing new business opportunities, collaboration, social capital, democracy, and intimacy. I will address this political economy debate in chapter 7.

The technically-mediated interaction provided by social media platforms has become so integrated in everyday practices that it has turned invisible through a process of domestication. We use social media platforms to forge intimate and more superficial

relationships, which range from friendship, romantic, familial, professional or hobby-related relationships. Thus, it is necessary to create a framework to understand intimacy practices in this new context of extensive use of social media. In the next chapter, I will approach different topics related to intimacy practices in the context of social media in order to explore mediated intimacy in contemporary society. This framework will start with the definition of the concept of intimacy and it will move to address debates around self-presentation and self-disclosure, privacy, reputation, trust, safety, and gender. The focus will be on how users negotiate tensions between privacy and publicity, between self-disclosure and over-exposure, between safety and the creation of new relationships, to shed light on the complex task of managing intimacy in the age of social media.

Chapter 3
Intimacy Frameworks in the Context of Social Media

3.1. Introduction

The importance of intimacy lies in its contribution to the development of emotional well-being. Many scholars (e.g., Prager, 1997; Jamieson, 1998; Hassebrauck & Fehr, 2002) highlight the beneficial effects of intimacy on health and well-being. The use of social media to negotiate personal relationships has become a common practice and is integrated in everyday life. Social networking sites are mainly used to maintain ongoing relationships, or keep in contact with acquaintances. Nevertheless, there are a number of social media services for meeting new people online, which range from dating sites, to hospitality exchange networks, to meet up services. As Michael Rosenfeld and Reuben Thomas (2010) put it: "the Internet is a new kind of social intermediary that may reshape the kinds of partners and relationships we have" (2010, p. 36).

According to Baym (2010), in the context of social media interaction, self-disclosure is an essential part in order to create, foster and maintain personal relationships because it is essential for getting to know one another and building trust. It also helps to build intimacy, argues Lynn Jamieson (2013): "self-disclosure may generate a fleeting sense of intimacy between hitherto strangers or develop the intimacy of an already established relationship" (2013, p. 18). Baym (2010) states that disclosing an honest self in online settings can be empowering and liberating, because this practice helps to develop skills such as assertiveness, which can then be transferred to embodied encounters. Notwithstanding, intimate self-disclosures and the co-construction of identities through interaction with others through social media by commenting on pictures, tagging, and posting content, as several scholars (e.g., Ellison et al., 2006; boyd, 2010a; Joinson et al., 2011; Cohen, 2012; Chambers, 2013) note, may introduce new risks related to privacy and reputation. As Cohen (2012) puts it: "pervasive transparency and exposure are troubling because they constrain the range of motion for the development of subjectivity through both criticism and performance" (2012, p. 149). Thus, users often engage in impression management in order to find a balance between the opportunities (for empowerment, intimacy,

sociability) and challenges (regarding surveillance, context collapse, misunderstanding) afforded by social media platforms (e.g., Koskela, 2004;; Livingstone, 2008; Ellison et al., 2011; Marwick & boyd, 2011). Thus a close relationship between privacy, disclosure and intimacy is suggested in social media interaction.

In this chapter, I present my intimacy conceptual framework, discussing a number of concepts related to intimacy mediated through social media. I pay special attention to the transformation of the traditional private/public dichotomy throughout all the sections. First, I approach intimacy definitions and dimensions, and I discuss the issue of intimacy in public, analysing how social media facilitate the exhibition of one's intimacy in public. Second, I examine the concept of privacy and the scholarly debate about how it is negotiated in online contexts. Third, I explore the concepts of online self-disclosure and self-(re)presentation, as scholars agree that disclosing personal information is necessary to build intimacy. Fourth, I address the issues of trust, safety, and gender in the context of social networking sites, particularly related to the interaction with strangers.

3.2. The concept of intimacy

There are different definitions of the concept of intimacy (e.g., Fried, 1968; Rachels, 1975; Giddens, 1992; Inness, 1996; Jamieson, 1998; Berlant, 2000; Zelizer, 2009, Marar, 2012). I discuss some of its meanings and dimensions (physical, informational, and emotional) in this section in order to approach my "starting point" concept of intimacy in the research project. In addition, I will address the relationship between intimacy and publicity, and in particular, I examine this interplay in the context of social media.

The first and more extensive definition of intimacy, according to the Oxford English Dictionary (2015c), is:

> The quality or condition of "being intimate", and it includes three different meanings:
> (1) the state of being personally intimate; intimate friendship or acquaintance; familiar intercourse; close familiarity; an instance of this;

(2) *euphem.* for sexual intercourse;

(3) Closeness of observation, knowledge, or the like.

Following this definition, Viviana Zelizer (2009) identifies three different dimensions of intimacy: physical, informational, and emotional, although she notes that they may be interconnected and complement each other.

The popular meaning of intimacy, as Jamieson (1998) points out, is related to the emotional dimension of intimacy, often a kind of "closeness, of knowing, of being attached to another person" (1998, p. 1). Building on David Morgan's (2011) concept of "family practices", Jamieson (2012) introduces the term "practices of intimacy" to refer to "practices which enable, generate and sustain a subjective sense of closeness and being attuned and special to each other." Some scholars (e.g., Fried, 1968; Rachels, 1975; Giddens, 1992; Plummer, 2003; Marar, 2012) define intimacy as related to the act of mutual sharing of inner thoughts and feelings. Ziyad Marar (2012) argues that intimacy is intrinsically reciprocal as it involves knowledge of each other and mutuality: "Intimacy exists *between* rather than within people; you can experience unrequited love, but you cannot experience unrequited intimacy" (2012, p. 49). Likewise, Jamieson (2012) states that "love" and "intimacy" are close relatives, but she emphasizes that although expressing feelings of love may build intimacy, feelings of love can occur without reciprocity, whereas intimacy always refers to some form of interpersonal connections acknowledged by both parties as a relationship. Although some professional relationships may be intimate (i.e., prostitute-client; doctor-patient), meaningful relationships (based on love or friendship, for instance), the intimate relationships we value for their own sake, are the realm where intimacy usually flourishes.

Harry Reis and Phillip Shaver (1988) developed the interpersonal process model of intimacy (IPMI) framework, which is based on the notion that intimacy is achieved and enhanced through mutual intimate self-disclosure and validation. Other scholars (e.g., Cohn & Strassberg 1983; Shaffer & Tomarelli, 1989) also examined how self-disclosure recipients are more likely to engage in the same practice as they feel the need to reciprocate with an equal intimate disclosure. Following Stacy Adams (1965), Valerian Derlega and John Berg (1987) suggest that equity social norms, based on the

quid pro quo principle, would foster mutual intimate self-disclosure and help to develop intimacy, even among complete strangers. Nevertheless, they pointed out that if intimacy would only be based in mutual self-disclosure both terms would be synonymous. Hence, drawing in Edward Waring et al. (1980), Derlega and Berg (ibid.) state that what actually powers the intimacy process is that the information shared is valued by both discloser and recipient.

Nonetheless, other authors, such as Jeffrey Reiman (1976) and Julie Inness (1996) consider that it is actually the context of love, liking, and caring which makes sharing of inner information significant, intertwining both informational and emotional dimensions of intimacy. As Reiman (1976) points out: "The revealing of personal information then is not what constitutes or powers the intimacy. Rather it depends and fills out, invites and nurtures, the caring that powers the intimacy" (1976, p. 305). Likewise, Lauren Berlant (2000) argues that intimacy involves a shared story, which is usually experienced in the context of loving relationships: "within zones of familiarity and comfort: friendship, the couple, and the family form, animated by expressive and emancipating kinds of love" (2000, p. 1). Jamieson (2012) adds casual sexual relationships to the list of types of relationships where intimacy may arise because, she argues, intimacy can also be physical, bodily intimacy, although sexual contact can occur without intimacy. Jamieson (2012) agrees with Reiman (1976), Inness (1996), Berlant (2000) and Plummer (2003) in the need for some kind of liking or love in order to call a relationship "intimate", but she does not believe that all intimate relationships involve caring and sharing. Thus, Jamieson (1998) affirms: "Intimacy involves close association, privileged knowledge, deep knowing and understanding and some form of love, but it need not include practical caring and sharing" (1998, p. 13). Zelizer (2009), for instance, explains that there are certain types of negative intimacy that definitely do not involve caring, such as abusive sexual relations or malicious gossip.

Intimacy lies in the edge between vulnerability and support. Zelizer (2009) points out that intimacy involves particularized knowledge such as "shared secrets, interpersonal rituals, bodily information, awareness of personal vulnerability, and shared memory of embarrassing situations" (2009, p. 34); but also attention by other person(s), which includes, inter alia, bodily services, private languages, and emotional support. Marar

(2012) highlights that intimacy requires a "degree of exposure or vulnerability that could be betrayed" (2012, p. 10). For instance, in the context of social media interaction, as Joanne Garde-Hansen and Krystin Gorton (2013) observe, "those loved have the power to exploit that intimacy online" (2013, p. 43). For this reason, Marar (2012) suggests, some people may be tempted to "play safe" and not to get involved in intimate relationships. Giddens (1992) argues that personal boundaries are necessary to negotiate intimacy, in order to find a balance between openness, vulnerability and trust. I return to the question of trust in mediated environments below. Giddens (1992) points out that it is also necessary to find a balance of power within personal relationships to avoid intimacy becoming oppressive. In order to do so, Giddens (1992) refers to women's sexual emancipation "no longer harnessed to double standards" as the engine to arrive to the ideal of "the pure relationship" (1992, p. 94), based on the quality of mutual emotional satisfaction. In addition, Giddens (1992) coins the term "plastic sexuality" (1992, p. 2) to include non-heteronormative sexual relationships within this sexual emancipation framework.

In contemporary society, some authors (e.g., Giddens, 1992; Papacharissi, 2010; Rainie & Wellman, 2012; Chambers, 2013) argue there is more freedom to choose intimate relationships outside of the family and the community, which has radically changed the way people interact. As Rainie and Wellman (2012) point out:

> The shift to person-to-person networks has profoundly affected how people relate. This is not a shift toward social isolation, but toward flexible autonomy. People have more freedom to tailor their interactions. They have increased opportunities about where — and with whom — to connect (2012, p. 125).

In this new social operating system, which Rainie and Wellman (2012) term *networked individualism* (2012, p. 3) (see also , previous chapter), they suggest that the individual becomes a *networked self,* "a single self that gets reconfigured in different situations as people reach out, connect, and emphasize different aspects of themselves" (2012, p. 126). This connects with Papacharissi's (2010) notion of the *networked self*, which emerges as a result of networked sociality afforded by social media:

The flexibility of online digital technologies permits interaction and relations among individuals within the same networks or across networks, a variety of exchanges and ties, variable frequency of contact and intimacy, affiliation with smaller or larger, and global or local, networks formed around a variable common matter (2010, p. 307).

To add a further layer to this, intimate relationships vary in kind and degree in relation to the amount and quality of information disclosed, and the level of trust likewise varies accordingly. Indeed, as Zelizer (2009) notes: "Because we are dealing with a continuum, exactly where we set the limit between intimate and impersonal relations remains arbitrary" (2009, p. 35). In this sense, Chambers (2006) highlights the fluidity of personal relationships in contemporary society: "Personal relationships are transient, mobile, and experimental. Friendship sometimes merges with, and sometimes separates from, family, sexual relationships and work relationships" (2006, p. 152). Chambers (2006) finds problematic the lack of borders to define personal relationships. Marar (2012) refers to the ephemerality of intimacy, using the term "intimate" to describe both long-term relationships and one-off encounters between strangers. In fact, Zelizer (2009) points out, personal relations cannot be constrained to a binary of strangers and intimates, personal relationships come in many more than two varieties. In this regard, Germann Molz (2012) argues the social media platforms enable new forms of intimacy and togetherness and redefine who counts as a "friend" or a "stranger". The term "resonance" is suggested by Vincent Miller (2015) to capture those experiences of affinity or belonging which happen between these extremes, which may be "intense, intimate and meaningful, but at the same time ephemeral and tenuous." Miller (2015) defines resonance as "an experience created in the moment, as a temporary, ad-hoc, or fleeting form of meaningful association." Although those experiences are fluid and transient, argues Miller (2015), they still involve forms of intimacy. Despite the liquidity of personal relationships in contemporary networked society, Marar (2012) highlights the intrinsic ephemeral character of intimacy *per se:*

The promise of intimacy is the promise of being vouchsafed a glimpse of your soul while offering up mine in return; despite the fact that the full blown promise is illusory. This is not to say that is impossible, only that it is as unstable and elusive as we are, and thus is hard to define (2012, p. 22).

On the other hand, the value and substance of intimacy is often located (e.g. Fried, 1968; Reiman, 1976; Garzón, 2003; Marar, 2012) in being an exclusive, scarce, restricted commodity. Marar (2012) states that intimacy is exclusive, this is, it exists between two people and excludes others. He acknowledges that his position is controversial because it implies that intimacy does not really exist within groups. Jamieson (2013), on the other hand, sustains that gregarious intimacy exists, that "groupal" intimacy may be experienced within a group of friends, but it still would be exclusive for that group. As Reiman (1976) states, the value of intimacy is located in its exclusiveness:

> The value of intimacy lies not merely in what I have, but essentially in what others do not have. The reality of my intimacy with you is constituted not simply by the equality and intensity of what we share, but by its unavailability to others, in other words, by its scarcity (1976, p. 305).

Charles Fried (1984) describes intimacy's informational dimension as "the sharing of information about one's actions, beliefs, or emotions which one does not share with all, and which one has the right not to share with anyone" (1984, p. 211). Thus, intimacy is also, as Gabriela David (2009) put it, "our secret garden" (2009, p. 79), which includes our dreams, desires, and fantasies. Likewise, Ernesto Garzón (2003) states that intimacy is the inner realm that the individual does not share with anyone: "the sphere of intimacy is the realm of our thoughts, our decision-making, of doubts that sometimes cannot even be clearly formulated, of what we repress, of what has not yet been expressed" (2003, p. 20). Thus, taking into account Garzón's (2003) concept of intimacy as that which is not disclosed, when intimacy is expressed "it ceases to be intimate and is instead transferred to the private, and sometimes even to the public, sphere" (2003, p. 26). Privacy, as Ferdinand Schoeman (1984) noted, includes the norms that protect personal and intimate information and it is also the gated space where people can develop meaningful relationships away from the watch of the outsiders. In addition, Robert Gerstein (1984) points out that privacy grants the control over information and space, which enables us to maintain degrees of intimacy. Some authors (e.g., Reiman, 1976; Fried, 1984; Garzón, 2003) argue that intimacy has traditionally been experienced in the private realm. Garzón (2003) explains that

there are certain kinds of behaviours people prefer to perform without witnesses or with selected relationships within the private sphere. It is usually the sphere where people are able to be intimate, as Garzón (2003) observes: "The private realm often is also the most appropriate realm for revealing some part of our intimacy (because, in general, this is less dangerous here than in the public sphere)" (2003, p. 27).

Contemporary society, some authors (e.g., Berlant, 1997, Nicholson, 1999; Foessel, 2010; Reynolds, 2010) argue, is experiencing the ascendance of public intimacy, within what they label the "affective turn". This intimate public sphere, Berlant (1997) suggests, arises as a result of the process of collapsing the political and the personal. In contemporary society, intimate lives are increasingly represented and articulated in public realms. Thus, Reynolds (2010) states: "The very nature of intimacy in relation to private and public realms has to be reconceived and re-valorised within ethical and emancipating discourse" (2010, p. 35). In this sense, Foessel (2010) suggests that intimacy was previously understood as a bastion and reserve against the claims and demands of public life, but nowadays intimacy is an important aspect of defining who we are and therefore it is often publicly exhibited as an ingredient of social identity. Scholars also link this shift to the emergence of social media. As Hinton and Hjorth (2013) put it: "social media affords certain kinds of social performance that involve making intimacy more public" (2013, p. 3). Hinton and Hjorth (2013) point to an "intimacy turn" on social media interaction, where affection is the glue of users' engagement with the platform (2013, p. 139). They use the term "intimate publics" (2013, p. 44) in order to talk about social media users in this context. Likewise, Papacharissi (2014), in her research about users engagement with politics on Twitter, discuss the concept of "affective publics" (2014, p. 133) when examining how social media sustain and transmit affect. Papacharissi (2014) points out that the imperative of sharing embedded in the social media dynamic is both an affective and energizing drive that makes users feel that they are part of a bigger evolving narrative.

Since social media exploded onto the media landscape, numerous scholars have been quick to comment on the way in which these tools of sociability and communication have radically transformed existing notions and experiences of privacy and intimacy. Following Berlant (2000), Garde-Hansen and Gorton (2013) suggest that blogs or social media profiles are good examples of online settings where intimate storytelling

is practiced, as people tell intimate stories about their family, their travels, or their parenting experiences. The shift with social media is the increasing publicity of information previously defined as private, and this is fostered by social media platforms architecture, as discussed in the previous chapter. David (2009) in her analysis about exposed intimacy through digital media argues that the popularity of sharing platforms, such as Youtube or Flickr, has normalised the practice of sharing videos and pictures. Drawing on Ira Wagman (2010), Lomborg (2013) explains that the use of social media has become an everyday activity, which opens space for intimacy practices, especially intimacy at a distance (for an extended review of intimacy at a distance see Elliot & Urry, 2010). In this context, it is useful to refer to boyd's (2010a) analysis of *social network sites as networked publics*, "which are simultaneously (1) the space constructed through networked technologies and (2) the imagined community that emerges as a result of the intersection of people, technology, and practice" (2010a, p. 46).

In this environment, intimate lives are increasingly represented and articulated through social media, which are public by default. Thus, boyd (2008) claims that social media make social information more easily accessible and "can rupture people's sense of public and private by altering the previously understood social norms" (2008, p. 19). Helen Nissenbaum (2010) argues that activities and interactions on social media cannot be clearly categorized as either public or private within this dichotomy. Other authors suggest alternatives to the problematic traditional privacy-publicity dichotomy. Sarah Ford (2011) proposes a model of privacy as a continuum, affirming that users can experience varying levels of privacy as a function of controlling access to their information. On the other hand, Jurgenson and Rey (2012) agree with boyd (2008) that privacy and publicity are "intertwined" and assert that: "publicity and privacy do not always come at the expense of one another but, at times, can be mutually reinforcing" (2012, p. 191). For example, when someone shares part of a story publicly through social media, there is always a part of the story that is not told, hence the rest of the story becomes more valuable for those who can access it, and the relationship with the confidant is made more intimate by giving them exclusive access. This connects with Reiman's (1976) idea that intimacy is a commodity valued by its scarcity.

On the other hand, Monica Taddicken and Cornelia Jers (2011), argue that although intimacy may be established in social media through limited access, the sense of intimacy is usually illusive. Also, Van Manen (2010) suggests that "digital intimacy" can be illusory as a result of publicness of social media interaction:

> Digital intimacy may offer the sensibility of one-to-one closeness, but the one-to-one may be "real" or illusory. I am sitting at my computer chatting on Facebook and feeling that I am here with you. Within this binary sphere of intimacy between myself and the screen, you are addressing me, only you and only me (even though many others may be reading your writing and feel the intimacy I feel) (2010, p. 1029).

Paula Sibilia (2008) and Samuel Mateus (2010) apply the Lacanian concept of *extimacy* (the public exhibition of intimacy) to the social web, while David (2009) describes this phenomenon by using the term "exteriorized intimacy" (2009, p. 86). Sibilia (2008) suggests that social media are widely used to perform intimacy in public, thus intimacy ceases to be, becoming *extimacy*. The extreme case of *extimacy* is when people are eager to display intimate lives in public; examples on television are talk shows or reality shows such as *Big Brother*. In social media we can point to user profiles being updated continuously, hyperactive bloggers and live webcams. Some authors (e.g., Koskela, 2004; Rubin, 2010) consider this *new media exhibitionism* (see Allen, 1999) as empowering. Hille Koskela (2004) introduces the concept of *empowering exhibitionism* (2004, p. 199) to describe the practice of revealing one's personal life. Thus, visibility becomes a tool of power by the user that can be managed to rebel against anonymity. Koskela (2004) suggests that: "exhibitionism is liberating, because it represents a refusal to be humble" (2004, p. 210). Senft (2015) explores mediated public exposure through selfies posted on social media from a feminist perspective and suggests liberating potentialities in this practice as well.

Illouz (2007) regards self-disclosure practices through social media as part of an emotional culture, which includes reality TV and talk shows, wherein people expose inner problems and feelings. However, as stated by Jamieson (2012), sharing emotions and feelings with others has always been part of intimacy practices; the public nature

and scope of these practices in the context of social media appears to contradict the secrecy and exclusiveness previously associated with the concept of intimacy in Western societies.

Following this debate, David (2009) questions the reasons why people may want to engage in this public exposure and how the very nature of intimacy may be transformed: "If we share our memories or our privacy, does our intimacy become public? Is privacy now public and intimacy that what privacy used to be?" (2009, p. 86). This concept connects with Garzón's (2003) notion about when intimacy is disclosed it is transferred to the private or even to the public realm. By the same token, David (2009) suggests that the concepts of sharing and intimacy are intertwined online: "Previously iconic and sacred, intimacy is nowadays sometimes overexposed, and intertwines with the concept of sharing: we show and give ourselves to be seen by others" (2009, p. 84). Mateus (2010) believes that the nature of intimacy is transformed in the process of becoming public, destroying secrecy and installing a new concept. Nevertheless, Mateus (ibid.) believes that individuals make public only a small part of their inner thoughts and feelings:

> Only what is essential to enrich the individual's personality is publicly displayed. Intimacy seems to be composed of more parts than those related to appearance. Individuals' emotions and thoughts, even if exposed, are deeper than those taking part in extimacy (2010, p. 69).

Hearn (2010) acknowledges that the public intimacy practices often follow the logics of the market (e.g. in reality television). Likewise, Lasén (2013) connects public intimacy with commercial practices:

> The affective turn of these last decades could be the sign of a shift in the civilizing process, as affects and bodies matters are not relegated to the private realms but configure different modes of public intimacies, in parallel to what has been happening in the sphere of commercial media, reality television or political communication (2013, p. 97).

Self-intimate disclosures through social media are often commoditized, such as professional fashion bloggers (Abidin, 2014) or celebrities, but also in everyday social media practices of ordinary users, as we saw in previous chapter. John Thomson (2008) suggests that the reason people share banal personal details is because social media platforms make people feel "like a celebrity" by allowing them to publicize their lives and measure the popularity of their pictures through the number of likes, followers, and comments. As discussed earlier, the concepts of "being-as-mediated" and (Kember & Zylinska, 2012, p. 40) and "life-streaming" (Marwick, 2013, p. 205) are helpful in approaching the rise of new public intimacies. So intimacy becomes entertainment content (in the sense of something shown to others), "I" becomes part of the show and in this transformation, intimacy ceases to be, as it changes to *extimacy*, as Sibilia (2008) observes. Some scholars (e.g., Ellison et al., 2006; Hearn, 2008; Marwick & boyd, 2011; Baym, 2010; Meldenson & Papacharissi, 2010; Enli & Thumim, 2012; Marwick, 2013; Senft, 2013) state that users engage in impression management through social media, the so-called self-branding (Hearn, 2008), to present themselves positively and attractively. For some users, the practice of self-branding may be perceived as performance and lacking of authenticity. For Van Manen (2010) this sense of digital intimacy can be illusory:

> I felt close to you but did not realize that it was not you. Or, I may realize that you were not really yourself when you seemed to be showing off and "posturing" to your readers online through your primed postings and pictures (2010, p. 1028).

So far in this section I have explored the concept of intimacy, paying special attention to the notion of intimacy in public. I have analysed how social media platforms have changed the way people interact, since they afford more freedom to choose intimate relationships outside existing social circles. At the same time, social media platforms facilitate the publication and broadcasting of any kind of information, including intimate information. In this sense, there is a growing debate about the ascendance of intimacy in public, performance, and lack of authenticity through self-(re)presentation on social media, which I will discuss by analysing my empirical data later on. In the next section, I examine how people negotiate the publicity afforded by social media,

asking what kinds of strategies they use to achieve privacy in social media settings. First, I turn to the concept of privacy and how it operates on social media.

3.3. Networked privacy

Control is necessary to ensure liberty of choice in the selection of the people to be intimate with. As Thomas Gerety (1977) states: "we should be able to share our intimacy with others only as we choose. It is the value of sharing such knowledge that is at stake in the right to privacy" (1977, p. 268). In this section, I first explore the concept of privacy and secondly address how the affordances of digital media shape privacy online. I then turn to the relationship between intimacy, privacy and publicity, and their interplay in online settings. Finally, I examine the strategies deployed by social media users to protect their privacy.

Reiman (1976) defines privacy as "the condition under which other people are deprived of access to either some information about you or some experience of you" (1976, p. 30). From the informational point of view, some scholars (e.g., Fried; 1968; Schoeman, 1984; Inness, 1996) emphasize that it is the control of our personal and intimate information what defines privacy. For Nissenbaum (2010) the concept of privacy is not only a matter of control over personal information, but also includes reasonable expectations of common norms regarding information flows, which are shaped by habit and convention and which allow us to live together in civilized societies. Nissenbaum states that there is some personal information we have an expectation to keep private, what Gerety (1977) labelled "intimacies of personal identity" (1977, p. 281). Nissenbaum (2010) explains that intimacies of personal identity may include: "close relationships, sexual orientation, alcohol intake, dietary habits, ethnic origin, political beliefs, features of the body and bodily functions, the definitions of *self*, and religious and spiritual beliefs and practices" (2010, p. 123). In every society, argues Nissenbaum (2010), there are different expectations relating to privacy about different matters, as the concept of privacy is culturally shaped. As Amy Hasinoff and Tamara Sheperd (2014) observe, problems may arise when users have different assumptions about what kind of information can be published.

Defining what is private is, in this view, a subjective matter, made more complicated when interactions take place through social media. Sabine Trepte and Leonard

Reinecke (2011) suggest that the subjective experience of privacy sometimes may be even richer through social media than offline because people perceive that they can share their thoughts and feelings without censorship with selected publics: "People create *online spaces of social and psychological privacy* that may be an illusion; however these spaces seem to be experienced as private" (2011, p. 62). On the other hand, boyd (2008) asserts that increasingly it is more difficult to keep our private lives "private", since in the past privacy was taken for granted because it was easier not to share than to share, but with the advent of social media, the equation has been inverted due to the affordances of the medium. boyd (2010a) identifies four main affordances of digital communication: (1) persistent (information online lasts forever); (2) replicable (information online can be copied and posted somewhere else); (3) searchable (information online can be easily searched through a Web search engine such as Google or Yahoo!); and (4) scalable (information online can reach a wider audience, e.g. information posted on a popular site or becomes viral).

In particular, there is extensive literature (e.g., Turkle, 2011; Aboujaoude, 2012; Laouris, 2014) about the problematic perennial presence of personal data in the Internet. Turkle (2011) suggests that users may experience illusions of privacy when interacting publicly online and that may explain why they do not protect their privacy:

> The cocoon of electronic messaging, we imagine the people we write to as we wish them to be; we write to the part of them that make us feel safe. You feel in a place that is private and ephemeral. But your communications are public and forever (2011, p. 258).

Elias Aboujaoude (2012), from a psychological point of view, discusses how permanent personal records may affect psychological autonomy and reputation. Yiannis Laouris (2014), who participates on the *Onlife Initiative* by the EU Commission, argues that the perpetuity of the content online problematizes the concept of privacy:

> Data and information immortality pose enormous challenges to the concept of privacy. Privacy has two aspects: the power to control what information the individual wishes to reveal and the power to erase information that belongs to

or concerns the individual. While the first becomes increasingly complicated, the second is virtually impossible today because of legal and technological constraints (2014, p.10).

In fact, Laouris (ibid.) explains, the deletion of online content is one of the major discussions in relation to the EU Data protection regulation. The European Commission (2014) has recently approved a law about the "right to be forgotten" online (for a discussion of this new right, see Rosen, 2012), where users can ask Google to delete any personal records which are not for the public interest. On the other hand, Van Dijck (2013a) argues that there are a number of activities, such as exchanging gossip, showing holiday pictures or checking on a friend's wellbeing, which used to be casually and ephemerally shared only with selected individuals, but now, through the use of web 2.0 technology, have been engineered and expanded to a wider number of friends and acquaintances. In relation to the potential scalability of personal information through our own networks, John Palfrey and Urs Grasser (2008) argue that the damage towards reputation in reference to malicious gossip is amplified online.

Increasingly, social media platforms permit users to control with whom they share information through privacy settings (e.g., Baron, 2008; Debatin et al. 2009; Madden & Smith 2010; Ellison et al., 2011; Trepte, 2015). Users can usually define if their profile is public or private. In the case of Facebook, users can create different friend lists, which can be applied to status updates and photos. As Trepte (2015) observes, the configuration of privacy settings allows the negotiation of personal relationships:

> By adjusting our privacy settings on a social network site, managing our friend lists, or opting out of certain services, we are negotiating privacy with the website. At the same time, this determines how we lead and maintain our relationships (Trepte, 2015, p. 2).

Ellison and colleagues (2011) argue that people can use three strategies in order to control the audience for their disclosures on social media: friending behaviours, disclosures on the site, and managing audiences via privacy settings. Accepting only known "friends" can be a good strategy for general social media platforms, such as

Facebook or Bebo, but in other platforms, like CouchSurfing or Badoo, where the interaction is mostly among strangers, the gains will be almost annihilated if users only interact with people they already know offline. The disclosure of only superficial information about oneself is another strategy commonly used to control privacy (e.g., Thompson, 2008; Brandtzæg et al., 2010; Hogan, 2010; Attril & Jalil, 2011; Gürses & Díaz, 2013; Young & Quan-Haase, 2013). Here, users engage in self-censorship. Hogan (2010) introduces a theory of "lowest common denominator" culture in relation to communication through mainstream social media where context collapse, as explained by Marwick & boyd (2011), may occur. As Gürses and Díaz (2013) note: "Privacy practices are hence associated with silence as much as with expressing oneself" (2013, p. 7). Another way of controlling undesired disclosure, as Mary Madden and Aaron Smith (2010) observe, includes untagging photos and more extensive deletion of content. boyd and Marwick (2011) also referred to a privacy protection strategy that teens often use that they label "social steganography" (2011, p. 22), this is, to code messages publicly in a way that only a few members of the audience would understand.

In response to the sense of lacking privacy in mainstream social media platforms, new social media services have appeared, like the mobile app Snapchat, which is based on the ephemerality of the video and photo messages exchange. Nicole Poltash (2013) claimed that this app has extensively been used for sexting (especially by teenagers). Thus, as Edgar Gómez-Cruz and Cristina Miguel observe (2014), the privacy afforded by the auto-destruction of the messages creates an ideal setting for sharing intimate experiences. In the US, most social media users have changed their privacy settings (public by default) in order to protect their privacy, and only 26% of men and 14% of women keep their profiles public. There is a clear gap between genders; men appear less worried about privacy (Madden, 2012), a topic that I will expand later in this chapter when discussing issues around gender.

People use social media profiles to locate a great amount of biographical information in order to receive attention and validation from others, argues Elias Aboujaude (2011). The growth in sharing intimate information through Facebook led Mark Zuckerberg to claim, in 2010, that privacy was "no longer a social norm" (Arrington, 2010). This ideological position, as observed by Joinson et al. (2011), is based on the

idea that openness and transparency are positive for society and interpersonal relations, a topic that I already discussed in the previous chapter. This ideology could explain why people expose their intimacy in public as they may consider that openness is beneficial for their relationships. Likewise Daniel Miller (2010) argues that: "Facebook is transforming our relationship to privacy" (2010, p. 172). Miller (2010) expresses concern about the intentional exposure of private issues into the public through Facebook and the way users seem to be comfortable with this radical transparency. Drawing in Anders Albrechtslund (2008), who developed the concept of "participatory surveillance" explained earlier, Miller (2010) argues that some Facebook users are concerned about being watched by their peers. Here, it is interesting to observe Kate Raynes-Goldie's (2010) distinction between social privacy (related to the control over which people in users' social circles get access to their information) and institutional privacy (that is, mining of personal data by social media platforms, institutions, or other third parties). Alyson Young and Anabel Quan-Haase (2013) build on this distinction, arguing that social media users are mainly concerned about social privacy. Likewise in a study conducted by Nicole Cohen (2008) participants did not express much concern about data mining by social media companies but "participants were more concerned about surveillance by teachers, the government, parents, and current and potential employers" (2008, p. 211). One question here arises: do social media users accept the trade-off of commercial social media monitoring for connectivity or they are unaware of data mining practices? I will address this topic in chapter 7.

Daniel Solove (2007) claims that people still want privacy despite privacy being much more complex than previously. In Solove's opinion (2007), the main issue is how to negotiate privacy concerns and social capital needs in a social media environment in front of networked publics: "Rarely can we completely conceal information about our lives, but that doesn't mean that we don't expect to limit its accessibility, ensure that it stays within a particular social circle, or exercise some degree of control over it" (2007, p. 200). Nissenbaum (2010) theorized how different contexts are governed by different norms. She developed the *contextual integrity* framework (2010, p. 2), which together with boyd and Marwick's (2011) concept of *context collapse* (2011, p. 9) are helpful to analyse how different publics interact in the context of social media through the same platform, and the different privacy expectation and social norms which

operate in different social circles. Lambert (2013), drawing on Gordon Hull et al. (2010), suggests that Facebook negates contextual integrity and undermine "norms of distribution" (2013, p. 36) (i.e. by posting photographs which depict friends in an unflattering light). On the other hand, in her cross-platform study, Lomborg (2013) looks at how people use different social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, and blogs) for different ends and develops a framework of social media genres. She found that people defined their disclosures as "personal not private" (2013, p. 175). Lomborg interprets this answer as the result of a negotiation process that users have been experiencing in recent years about what is appropriate or not to publish on social media as a result of users being concerned about social privacy. Lomborg (2013) emphasizes how public disclosures have become normalized, but she also acknowledges that users follow the social norms that have been standardised in each platform.

As stated above, privacy has traditionally been valued because it protects intimacy insomuch as it grants control over information flow and space, which enables us to maintain different degrees of intimacy. Nevertheless, even using all the tools available to control privacy online, there are still risks that cannot be controlled such as monitoring and tracking, or identity theft. Scholars identify different motivations which lead people to disclose personal information while socializing online: "faith in the networking service or trust in its members; myopic evaluation of privacy risks"(Gross & Acquisti, 2005, p. 73), impression management (Utz & Krämer, 2008; Tufekci, 2008; Krämer & Haferkamp, 2011), affects, pleasures, exchange of ideas (Lasén & Gómez-Cruz, 2009) or gaining social capital from the interaction with other users due to the affordances of the social service (Ellison et al., 2011). Zeynep Tufekci (2008) found that women are more likely to use social media to keep in touch with family and existing friends, while men, although also using these sites to keep in touch within existing relationships, are more often attempting to meet new people. According to Tufekci, men protect their privacy less in order to create opportunities to meet new people. Recent studies (e.g., Krasnova et al., 2010; Krämer & Haferkamp, 2011) reveal that the higher the level of privacy concerns, the less the disclosure on social media and, hence, the less social capital gained.

While some scholars (e.g., Hogan, 2010; Brandtzæg et al., 2010; Gürses & Díaz, 2013; Young & Quan-Haase, 2013) have demonstrated that users tend to share only superficial information on Facebook, in order to keep their social privacy, other scholars (e.g., Papacharissi & Gibson, 2011; Trepte & Reinecke, 2011; Turkle, 2011; Jordán-Conde; 2013) argue that intimacy is increasingly performed in public through social media. They suggest that people have succumbed to the affordance of the networked life by choosing continual connectivity at the expense of privacy. In this view, more and more people are exposing their intimate lives through social media. This practice, which can be both empowering and risky, challenges the traditional concept that the development of intimacy requires privacy. These tensions highlight how the social media environment complicates the negotiation of privacy concerns with social and emotional desires to be accomplished within these networks. In chapter 5, I will address how participants negotiate public exposure through social media with privacy concerns in order to achieve their interpersonal goals. In the next section, I discuss how intimacy is created and negotiated through self-disclosure and self-presentation through social media profiles.

3.4. Online selves

In this section, I explore the role of online self-disclosure in developing intimate relationships. I also pay attention to the concept of self-(re)presentation, since it is a more curated type of self-disclosure. Following Erving Goffman (1969), Brake (2014) identifies the tensions in the differentiation between the concepts of self-disclosure and self-presentation in this context:

> It appears from studying those who disclose online that much self-disclosure online is not deliberate self-presentation, with creation or maintenance of a persona as its object, but of course whether intended or not it potentially becomes a self-presentation in the minds of those who view or read it (2014, p. 44).

The concept of self-(re)presentation involves debates about performance, impression management and authenticity. The following discussion suggests that both self-disclosure and self-(re)presentation foster the development of intimacy online. Self-disclosure does not need to be intimate, as playful or everyday information may also

lead to the development of intimacy among social media users. In addition, curated self-(re)presentation, although it may be perceived as performance, which lacks authenticity, can help to claim attention from other users and, therefore, facilitate liking and intimacy. In addition, I examine the role of images to portray and develop intimacy through social media. Finally, I analyse which topics users consider intimate when interacting through social media and which ones they do not consider appropriate to disclose through public features.

3.4.1. Self-disclosure

According to Sidney Jourard (1971) and Richard Archer et al. (1980) self-disclosure consists of revealing personal information to other people. Some authors (e.g., Reis & Shaver, 1988; Prager, 1997; Joinson et al., 2011) link the quantity and depth of self-disclosure with the development of intimacy. As Joinson and others (2011) put it: "by controlling disclosure, individuals manage the degree of intimacy in a relationship" (2011, p. 36). Self-disclosure can be analysed in three dimensions: frequency, breath, and depth, as Nguyen and colleagues (2012,) observe, where the depth dimension would be defined as the "intimacy of personal information divulged" (2012, p. 103). Intimate self-disclosures contain valuable information related to thoughts and feelings, which help others to get to know the person better. This is the basis of the social penetration theory formulated by Irwin Altman and Dalmas Taylor (1973), which also suggests that self-disclosure helps to improve understanding and liking.

The breadth and depth of the information shared increase as the relationship develops. Altman and Taylor (1973) observed that as relationships progress, individuals start to share more and deeper intimate information. Nevertheless, Sonia Utz (2015) argues that social penetration theory is not enough to explain relationship development on social media where most public posts are not intimate, but include humour and are entertaining. In her research about self-disclosure through social media among German students, she found that in the context of social media interaction social penetration theory was validated in private communication but, at the same time, public entertaining self-disclosures also helped to create a feeling of connection. Her participants engaged much more in private communication when they wanted to discuss intimate topics. Similarly, Lambert (2013) identifies "playfulness" (2013, p.

177) as a characteristic of public communication among intimates. Lambert (2013) argues that despite the inexistence of deep emotions in this type of "fun" communication, it is a signal of "warmth of an interpersonal bond" (2013, p. 172).

As we saw earlier, intimacy involves some kind of love, liking or caring. In their recent research Susan Sprecher and colleagues (2013) found that the recipient of disclosure experiences more liking and closeness than the discloser. Similarly, Utz (2015) discovered that people like the ones to whom they self-disclose, but not necessarily the ones who disclose intimate information to them. In this regard, some scholars (e.g., Thompson, 2008; Hjorth, 2012) affirm that continuous awareness through textual and visual self-disclosure, constantly knowing banal information about people you know (i.e. what your friends had for breakfast), may create what Reichelt (2007) calls *ambient intimacy*, a term that defines the possibility to "keep in touch with people with a level of regularity and intimacy that you wouldn't usually have access to, because time and space conspire to make it impossible." However, since too much self-disclosure may lead to reduced liking, Joinson et al. (2011) suggest that over-exposure in the context of social media may produce *digital crowding*, term that means excessive social contact or insufficient personal space, which may affect personal relationships:

> Digital crowding, through excessive contact or sharing, can be detrimental to privacy and the quality of relationships. The first is the danger inherent in radical transparency or unregulated openness. The second is through overlapping social spheres and users' inability to maintain dynamic boundaries (2011, p. 36).

Thus, users have to find a balance between enough self-disclosure to develop intimacy and too much disclosure, which would lead to rejection. There are also social norms about what it is acceptable to disclose or not at different stages of the development of a relationship and in relation to the kind of relationships kept with others, as Joinson et al. (2011) put it: "It is not just the environment that dictates social norms and expectancies of self-disclosure, but also the nature of the relationship between interaction partners" (2011, p. 36). Similarly, Cohen (2012) states that in the context

of social media self-presentation management skills are used to handle different kinds of relationships.

Drawing on the enhanced self-disclosure theory, Crystal Jiang and Jeffrey Hancock (2013) analysed self-disclosure as an intimacy-enhancing process across different interpersonal media. Jiang and Hancock (2013) suggest that the affordances of each medium would influence the development of intimacy: "when individuals communicate using a medium that involves reduced cues, reduced synchronicity, or increased mobility, they should increase behavioural adaptation by self-disclosing more frequently" (2013, p. 561). Early CMC research (e.g., Walther, 1996; Joinson, 2001; Tidwell & Walther, 2002; Bargh & McKenna, 2004) showed that text-based communication enhanced self-disclosure, and intimacy as a result. Joseph Walther (1996) developed the Hyperpersonal Communication theory, which states that CMC is more socially desirable than face-to-face communication because it allows strategically selecting, editing and improving self-presentation. It is suggested that the control over their self-disclosure and the lack of physical cues may make users feel more comfortable to disclose intimate information, which may generate stronger intimacy. Walther (1996) also found that users who engage in CMC tend to idealize to their counterparts. Following Walther, Lin Qiu et al. (2012) suggest that users tend to publish positive emotions to improve their social image. Likewise, Illouz (2007), in her research about dating sites, recognizes this ideal that the self is better expressed online without the constrictions of the body, but concludes that it is not that the Internet enhances intimacy, but it allows people to connect and increases sociability and relationships. In addition, early Internet research suggested that the anonymity facilitated by chat rooms and bulletin boards (which usually did not include pictures) fostered self-disclosure and helped to build intimate relationships. In the same vein, Lasén (2013) observes that users tend to disclose more intimate information online because they feel less embarrassment:

> Distant and asynchronous modes of communication help to avoid some of the risks and embarrassing consequences of emotionally charged exchanges, so that the apparent lower affective bandwidth appears to be an advantage for the display, expression and performance of more intense emotions (2013, p. 95).

Nevertheless, Joseph Walther and Malcolm Parks (2002) concluded that people considered CMC less intimate than face-to-face interaction. Nguyen and colleagues (2012) reviewed the literature in this area, concluding that self-disclosure was not found to be greater online than face-to-face. In a recent study of Facebook, Park et al. (2011) concluded that self-disclosure online does lead to the development of intimacy, just as in face-to-face interaction. However, they argue that users' awareness of the curated self-(re)presentation on the site may hinder the transformation into intimacy. I explore the concept of self-(re)presentation further in the next section.

3.4.2. Self-(re)presentation

In the process of creating a social media profile, scholars (e.g., Baym, 2010; Joinson et al., 2011; Thumim, 2012) emphasize that self-(re)presentation and the disclosure of certain kinds of information (location, name, gender, sexual orientation, and so on) are preconditions for participation in social media service. As Baym (2010) notes, a unique quality of most social media platforms, is that "they engineer self-presentation by providing predetermined sets of categories through which to build identities" (2010, p. 110). As noted in the previous chapter, De Ridder (2013) showed that some users of Netlog considered these categories "out limiting". De Ridder suggests that the answers to pre-defined number of choices function like an identity classifier: "intimate identities become fixed constructs that are continuously reiterated within the 'community'" (2013, p. 11). In Chapter 7, I analyse how social media platforms engineer user's self-presentation and interaction.

On social media profiles self-(re)presentation is both textual and visual. Most profiles provide a section including a user's personal description and what things the user likes, which is usually called the "About me" section. Baym (2010) explains that social media platforms foster users to disclose interests and tastes in order to find like-minded people: "the assumption being that people who share tastes are likely to be interpersonally compatible and hence good prospects for relational success" (2010, p. 110). Illouz (2007) looked at 100 "About me" sections and found that most people used the same kind of adjectives to describe themselves (e.g. "I am fun and adventurous"). Illouz (ibid.) suggests that self-descriptions are led by cultural scripts of desirable personality:

When presenting themselves in a disembodied way to others, people use established conventions of the desirable person and apply them to their selves. In other words, the use of written language for self-presentation creates, ironically, uniformity, standardization, and reification[5]. I say "ironically" because when people are filling in these questionnaires they are meant to experience themselves and display to other the uniqueness (2007, p. 81).

The crafting of the profile, argues Illouz (2007), implies a process of self-reflection. Similarly, Miller (2010) points out that this process may lead to self-knowledge: "Facebook is a virtual place where you discover who you are by seeing a visible objectification of yourself" (2010, p. 179). Following this, Lambert (2013) suggests that Facebook functions as a mirror where people can observe and analyse their own behaviours, which can contribute to "a kind of media self-awareness" (2013, p. 40).

Cohen (2012) highlights that self-(re)presentation management in the context of social media shapes the development and maintenance of different kind of relationships: "Intimate relationships, community relationships, and more casual relationships all derive from the ability to control the presentation of the self in different ways and to different extents —enabled by some SNS" (2012, p. 146). Yet, boyd (2008) asserts that the presence of different audiences such as friends, family, co-workers, acquaintances and so on, within a single space may generate social convergence: **"**Social convergence occurs when disparate social contexts are collapsed into one" (2008, p. 6), and this clash might be problematic because different social context provides different kinds of norms which lead individuals to behave in a certain way (e.g., a person behaves quite differently in the pub than at work). Several scholars (e.g., Miller, 1995; Sannicolas, 1997; Baym, 2010; Hogan, 2010; Kalinowski & Matei, 2011; Brake, 2014) have applied the dramaturgical framework developed by

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5 Reification is defined as "a relation between people (that) takes on the character of a thing and thus acquires a 'phantom objectivity', an autonomy that seems so strictly rational and all-embracing as to conceal every trace of its fundamental nature: the relation between people" (Lukács's definition in Illouz, 2007, p. 81).

Goffman (1969) to analyse how users engage in impression management through social media. Goffman (ibid.) developed the concept of "drama", which emphasizes the fact that all people interpret roles in the "drama" of everyday life. For Goffman, interpersonal lives are marked by performance, and life unfolds as a "drama". Individuals try to manage the ways that others perceive them, and try to present themselves in a positive way. Hence, social media platforms are seen as the new stages where the "drama" can be also performed.

Thumim (2012) distinguishes between "self-presentation" or performance, that we continuously engage in, which is often an unconscious process, and "self-representation", which is a conscious and curated representation of the self, that we can find (among other places) on social media. For Thumim (2012) self-representation constitutes a genre, which is key on social media although it is not exclusive to digital culture. Following Thumim (2012) and drawing in feminist theory, Amy Dobson (2015) argues that: "social media self-representations provide rich data for an analysis of *gender* as it is constituted and produced performatively and discursively through symbolic, repetitive and normative expression" (2015, p. 12). In chapter 6, I discuss how participants manage their self-(re)presentation in their profiles, in particular through the negotiation of intimate disclosures, what I label "intimacies of digital identity." This negotiation of intimate self-disclosure is mainly led by gendered expectations and cultural scripts.

The representation of the self on social media is also curated in order to manage personal relationships. Cohen (2012) argues that in the actual "culture of performance" the control of the presentation of the self in different ways through some social media platforms is used to foster different kinds of relationships. Performing, as observed by Baym (2010), can lead to the recognition that behind the text in the user profile there is a real person: "our expression of emotions and immediacy show others that we are real, available, and that we like them, as does our willingness to entertain them" (2010, p. 62). If we do not engage in impression management to address different audiences or we gather all these audiences in the same setting *context collapse* (e.g., Ellison et al., 2011; Marwick & boyd, 2011; Vitak & Ellison, 2013) may occur. Nicole Ellison et al. (2001) observe that access to novel information on Facebook may help to bridge social capital, but "it may also result in negative personal

or professional outcomes associated with the unanticipated disclosure of information about the self to unintended audiences" (2001, p. 30). Therefore, they identify potential privacy risks involved in self-disclosure to unintended audiences in the context of social media.

On the other hand, if we offer different presentations of the self to address different audiences in the same context, Lambert (2013) argues, part of the audience may consider unauthentic a particular "version" of the self that we are displaying. Nowadays social media are immersed in a culture of authenticity, as Elisabeth Staksrud and Bojana Lobe (2010) note, which is geared by the real name policy. Most social media platforms are designed to display true identities (e.g., Hogan, 2010; Patelis, 2013), as discussed in last chapter, hence people usually reflect online accurate selves, in contrast to pseudonym identities often used in the nineties in online contexts (e.g., chats and forums). In the nineties, there was an extensive literature about how the Internet could be used for identity play, with Turkle's *Life in the Screen* (1995) as its major exponent. Recent studies (e.g., Robinson, 2007; Gosling et al., 2011) have shown that most users disclose honest (re)presentation of the self. As Laura Robinson (2007) puts it:

> I find that in creating online selves, users do not seek to transcend the most fundamental aspects of their offline selves. Rather, users bring into being bodies, personas, and personalities framed according to the same categories that exist in the offline world (2007, p. 94).

Following this discussion, Tierney (2013) asked her participants about how well social media profiles represented themselves and she found out that most participants believed that profiles only represented a small part of who they are (41%), or this representation was "somewhat accurate" (37%), and only 22% of participants stated that it was accurate. In this sense, Lambert (2013) suggests that accurate self-disclosure appears as the "desirable happening" (emphasis added) in order to foster the development of intimacy:

If disclosures are indicative of interpersonal processes in which people seek to build intimacy through revealing their inner selves, then they should reflect a certain desire for authenticity (2013, p. 18).

Lambert (ibid.) argues that authenticity may be seen as the desirable characteristic of self-presentation in order to build intimacy, but he also identifies tensions between authenticity and performance in different social contexts. Therefore, he suggests that in the context of social media it would be useful to avoid linking the concept of intimacy with the presentation of an authentic self because the concept of authenticity is contextual. In generalist social media platforms, such as Facebook, where different social spheres collide, what may be perceived as authentic for one audience can be perceived as unauthentic for another. Different publics may know the person from different environments (e.g., sport club friends vs. work colleagues), where the person may show different facets of her personality. Nevertheless, in the context of interaction with strangers, authenticity, in the sense of not engaging in deceptive practices, becomes a continuous quest for users, especially in the online dating environment. I will discuss issues about deception and safety in relation to the creation of new relationships later in this chapter.

Moreover, as some scholars (e.g., Walther et al., 2008; Davis, 2010; Baym, 2010; Joinson et al., 2011; Chambers, 2013) point out, most social media platforms allow the co-construction of user's identity through posts, comments, tags, and references, which shape observers' impressions and may counterbalance enhanced self-presentation. Chambers (2013) applies George Mead's (1934) notion of "the generalized other" in this context in order to highlight the social construction of the self in social media environments. This is in line with Goffman's (1969) idea that the self is constructed in social relations to others. Christina Kalinowski and Sorin Matei (2011), who applied the Goffman's social interactionism framework to the study of online dating, conclude that self-presentation is shaped by both platforms' design and interaction with other users:

Changes documented among individual profiles over time illustrate how the self is socially produced through this dynamic interplay between social

structure and interaction. The self, even when presented online, is not static: it is processual and susceptible to change by external influences (2011, p. 18).

Following Robinson (2007), who observes that on social media the "I" is reflectively constructed in relation to other's reactions, and Marwick and boyd's (2011) concept of "imagined audience", Chambers (2013) states that social media users adapt their self-presentations to fit the norms of a particular imagined public, given way to the "networked me" (2013, p. 71). This approach is useful to understand how identities are socially constructed through interaction. The expression of identity through self-(re)presentation, affiliation, and interaction has been labelled "mosaic identity" (Lara, 2007; Caro, 2012), wherein identity is a compendium of explicit and implicit self-disclosure (e.g., groups membership, likes) and information posted by other contacts in one's profile, for example, pictures kissing one's partner. Thus, online identity becomes a complex picture composed of many pixels or, following the metaphor of the mosaic, composed of many tesserae. In addition, the public exposure of our connections, as Lambert (2013) suggests, imply popularity and signify exclusive connection with a certain circle of friends.

In relation to textual disclosures, Zayira Jordán-Conde (2013) ranked three "highly intimate" topics: "feelings and attitudes toward death, sexual behaviours, and emotional aspects of self" (2013, p. 156). Meanwhile Lomborg (2013) discovered that information about spouses and children was deemed appropriate and occasionally shared by Twitter users, while relationship problems and sex lives were considered to be too intimate and rarely tweeted about. In the same vein, Pedroni and colleagues (2014) found that excessive expression of feelings, what they label "deep intimacy", or sex-related posts were not welcomed by users. In the next section I will focus the attention in pictures to highlight the important role they play in social media interaction.

3.4.3. The role of images

The big shift with social media in comparison to previous online settings is the extensive use of images. Scholars (e.g., Van Dijck, 2008; Mendelson & Papacharissi 2010; Lasén & García, 2014) analyse the performative use of photographs in social

media platforms and emphasize the important role they play in self-(re)presentation, as they inscribe the body in the network. Some social media platforms allow including a description with the pictures, which helps to contextualize self-presentations (Davis, 2010). In the case of dating sites, Illouz (2007) argues that, despite the disembodying aspects of digital communication, pictures representing beauty and the body are paramount in the online dating market. Illouz's argument is supported by Gómez-Cruz and Miguel's (2014) study in which they observe that in the profiles of hook-up/dating platforms there is a short personal description but a number of pictures, which usually can be rated by other users, and are central to claim attention from them. In their study about uses and gratification of photo sharing though Facebook, Aqdas Malik et al. (2016) identified six different gratifications to participate in this practice: "affection, attention seeking, disclosure, habit, information sharing, and social influence" (2016, p. 129).

There is still little research about the role of photography in the development of intimacy in social media. In his study about Facebook and intimacy, Lambert (2013) draws on John Berger (1982) to argue that photographs can be a kind of "emotional disclosure" (2013, p. 16). In the context of photo sharing through camera phones, Ito (2005) found out that "photos tend to be restricted to a more intimate circle of family or lovers" (2005, p. 1). Similarly, Nancy Van House (2007), who has studied photo sharing through Flickr, argues that users replicate prior uses of personal photos: life chronicling, for the user and for her close relationships, which highlights the importance of staying informed about one another's lives within intimate relationships. Also Van House (2007) identified experiencing "togetherness" as a main use of public photo sharing through social media in the context of personal relationships: "The telling of stories with and around photos reinforces relationships both in the content of the stories and the act of viewing photos together" (2007, p. 2718). Nevertheless, Van House (ibid.) argues, the audience in social media range from friends and family to strangers, who can be geographically dispersed. Thus, Van House (2008) suggests that photo-sharing practices allow distant closeness: "staying close to, informed about, people who may be distant physically and/or socially" (2008, p. 2721). This connects with the concept of co-presence (Hjorth, 2012) and *ambient intimacy* (Reitchel, 2007), commented upon earlier. Likewise, Lasén (2015) links selfies practices with the concept of co-presence and the negotiation of intimacy in

public facilitated by the *shareability* (see Fletcher & Cambre, 2009; Papacharissi & Gibson, 2011) affordance of social media:

> Selfies practices are one example of how nowadays intimacy is modulated outside the private realm. The ability of digital inscriptions to be displayed, replicated and shared facilitates these forms of public and mobile intimacy. Some examples of the modulation of intimacy are different forms of presence and co-presence, ways of sharing, modes of accessibility and forms of affective attunement through digital connections (2015, pp. 75-76).

In this sense, Lasén (2015) argues that social media platforms are stages where people negotiate intimacy through selfie disclosure "in a choreographic way" (p. 76), where comments are useful to check other people's reactions and affections. Heather Lipford et al. (2009) suggest that photographs that depict various people can be seen as "shared artefacts" (2009, p. 988). In addition, Kerry Mallan (2009) points out that "sharing yourself" fits in the equation of the "sharing logic" (2009, p. 53) that dominates social media interaction discussed in previous chapter.

Lambert (2013) notes that posting pictures with other people reinforces the right to expose other people's private lives in relation to ours and may convey intimacy as they denote "reality": "Photographs emphasise this private meaning by the manner in which they transmit intimacy through the eye" (2013, p. 85). Similarly, Tierney (2013), drawing on Roland Barthes' (1981) notion that photography may inspire subjective affect, argues that photographs may evoke and pull past shared intimate experiences into the present time on social media platforms such as Facebook, where people interact with existing relationships. Following AlSayyad's (2010) argument against distinguishing between the real and its representation, Tierney (2013) suggests that real happenings and their representations have merged in the age of social media, as discussed in previous chapter. This implies that the representation of intimate moments is itself intimate, begging the question: are people's disclosures through social media actually intimate?

According to Cohen (2008) posting pictures of parties, travels and friends is a popular practice on Facebook. Her study revealed that most users were concerned about overly

sexually provocative pictures. Likewise, Andrew Mendelson and Zizzi Papacharissi (2010) observed that college students rarely posted pictures showing overt sexual behaviour, including kissing on the lips (which was seen as an indicator of a serious relationship). On the other hand, they discovered that uploading pictures of kissing on the cheek and hugging was common practice among female users, although this gender difference disappeared in the context of parties, perhaps, they suggest, due to the presence of alcohol.

So far in this section, I have discussed the role of self-disclosure to develop intimacy online. Not only intimate self-disclosure, but also curated self-presentation and fun content may help to develop intimacy on social media environments. Self-promotion practices through the selection of the best pictures and nice descriptions often claim attention from other users and hence foster interaction. The role of images to develop intimacy through social media is still understudied, although it seems that images may create, sustain and convey intimacy. There are certain intimate topics that social media users often considered it inappropriate to disclose, such as sex lives or relationship problems. In the next section, I discuss issues around trust and safety when interacting online, and I explore the gendered nature of social media interaction as well.

3.5. Trust, safety and gender

Most people join social media services in order to keep in contact within existing relationships, but some social media platforms facilitate making new friends or finding partners. The Internet allows users to overcome physical barriers, however there are a lot of people who are not motivated to interact with strangers (boyd, 2010a). Chambers (2013) affirms that relationships started online are still in the minority. A certain social stigma continues to surround people who meet online as they are considered to lack the social skills to create new relationships face-to-face (e.g., Chambers, 2006; boyd, 2010b; Hine, 2015). The popularity of dating sites services, some scholars (e.g., Ellison et al., 2006; Chambers, 2013) argue, is diminishing the stigma attached to meeting strangers online. Ellison and colleagues (2006) point to the affordability of dating sites fostering the perception that online dating is an efficient option to meet a partner.

In the context of online interaction with strangers, where users seek to create new relationships the generation of trust is very important. The concepts of trust and safety are closely interrelated. This is, if we can trust in someone we will feel safe with that person. For this reason, social media platforms have developed verification and reputation systems, in order to foster trust and safety among members. In this section, I begin by defining trust and connecting this concept to social media settings and safety issues. In addition, I discuss how gender roles generate different dynamics for interactions that take place via social media, and especially, how patriarchal gender roles are reproduced online.

To be intimate, Marar (2012) argues, requires that "we are confident enough to confide our confidences to a confidant: 'for your eyes only'" (2012, p. 77). In this sense, Trepte and Reinecke (2011) affirm that privacy helps to build trusting relationships online: "By creating intimate social interactions and enhancing confidentiality and trust among interaction partners, privacy is very likely to increase the willingness for openness, sincerity, and truthfulness in close relationships" (2011, p. 67). Intimate relationships, as Zelizer (2009) notes, depend on a degree of trust. Trust fosters intimate self-disclosure, and therefore, involves positive and negative implications for the trustors. Giddens (1992) argues that trust and accountability are closely tied together and they need to be reciprocal to create long-lasting intimate relationships:

> Trust without accountability is likely to become one-sided, that is, to slide into dependence; accountability without trust is impossible because it would mean a continual scrutiny of the motives and action of the other. Trust entails the trustworthiness of the other –according "credit" that does not require continual auditing, but which can be made open to inspection periodically if necessary (1992, p. 191).

As scholars have argued (e.g., Vincent & Fortunati, 2009; Wessels, 2012; Ess, 2014), in the context of online interaction between strangers, the lack of co-presence makes establishing trust challenging and hence, create a hard environment for intimacy to flourish. Jane Vincent and Leopoldina Fortunati (2009), from a technological deterministic approach, argue that communication technologies complicate the

development of trust and intimacy due to the perceptions they evoke: "Emotions stand for instinct, spontaneity, authenticity, 'naturalness', whereas technology evokes materiality, reasoning, calculation, artificiality" (2009, p. 209). On the other hand, from a social deterministic approach, scholars (e.g., Donn & Sherman, 2002; Peris et al., 2002; Anderson, 2005) have studied negative attitudes towards online daters. A number of characteristics are attributed to people who use dating platforms: shyness, social awkwardness, loneliness, social anxiety, only interested in sex, and potentially deceitful. The MTV program Catfish, analysed by Leslie Rasmussen (2014) to approach the study of online dating public perception, addresses how and why people deceive others to achieve romantic purposes by creating fake profiles on Facebook and dating sites. Some scholars (e.g., Ellison et al., 2006; Hancock & Toma, 2009) identify the tensions between impression management and authenticity operating in online dating. I will discuss how issues around authenticity arise in relation to online dating in chapter 8, as it is the main environment where this debate arose in my empirical data.

In response to the general mistrust of the authenticity of the identities and disclosures displayed through social media interaction, some social media companies have incorporated verification and reputation systems to overcome deceptive practices and foster the creation of new relationships and safety. Jennie Germann Molz and Sarah Gibson (2008) connect the concepts of trust and safety, explaining that in order to generate trust among users, CouchSurfing developed a security system, which was characterized by several components: *vouches*, personal references and identity verification. The *vouching* system was based on a chain of trust. Only users who had been *vouched* three times could *vouch* other users and it was mandatory to have met in person to *vouch* another couchsurfer. The symbol that represents a *vouch* consists of four arms linked together. Next to this symbol is the number of times a couchsurfer has been *vouched* for. Teng and colleagues (2010) observed that *vouches* were highly reciprocated: 70%. This reciprocity was due, they argued, to the public display of the *vouches*, because by clicking on the *vouch* symbol, the list of the people who previously *vouched* for the couchsurfer used to appear. They suggested that reputation systems could use the absence of reciprocity as implied distrust. Likewise, Félix Requena (2008) observes that an important aspect of trust in communities is the principle of reciprocity. Reciprocal altruism emerged in rural communities because it

stimulated the ability to work together, that is, to use social capital benefits. Bialski (2007) emphasizes that trust, based on a system of reciprocity through publicly displayed personal references is fundamental to online communities such as CouchSurfing.

Germann Molz and Gibson (2008) recognise that the most important safety system is personal references, which are the basic component of reputation systems. Through rates and evaluations, reputation systems provide histories of members and give visibility to the past actions of all other members. Future interactions can be set on the basis of these reports of past behaviour. Paul Resnick (2000) explains that reputation systems work as shortcuts in establishing trust between strangers online:

> A reputation system collects and distributes the comments on the behaviour of the aggregates in the past participants. Such systems help people decide who to trust, encourage trustworthy behaviour, and discourage the participation of those who are dishonest (2000, pp. 45-46).

In addition, verification systems allow identities to be checked by connecting other social media accounts or a phone number to the user profiles. Verification systems are useful to control fake profiles, and as a security measure, in order to identify users in case someone commits a crime. Social media platforms, Bridgette Wessels (2012) argues, have developed verification systems to overcome the lack of traditional markers of co-presence. Papacharissi (2010) explains that one of the strategies social media platforms use to authenticate identity is the association of users to their social circles. The public display of social connections can help users to validate their reputation. Nevertheless, online it is not only about "you and me", trust in the platform is also important. Alessandro Acquisti and Ralph Gross (2005) propose "trust in the service" (2005, p. 73) as one of the reasons to disclose personal information online. In chapter 7, I analyse how Badoo, CouchSurfing and Facebook generate trust and rapport among their users through reputation and verification systems, but also how social media bad practices generate mistrust among them.

The practice of interacting with strangers through social media is still stigmatized (e.g., Chambers, 2006; Peter & Valkenburg, 2007; boyd, 2010b; Hine, 2015). As noted above, apart from the general belief that meeting strangers online is dangerous,

as boyd (2010b) notes, there is a stigma surrounding "people who meet new people online", as they are considered to be unable to make friends offline. Crimes involving the abuse of trust include identity theft and online scams (e.g., Whitty & Buchanan, 2012; Brake, 2014). In particular, Monica Whitty and Tom Buchanan (2012) in their report about online dating romance scam[6] explain how 230.000 British citizens may have already fallen victim to this type of cybercrime. In addition, Brake (2014) suggests that not only do cybercriminals misuse information that the victims self-disclose on their social media profiles, but they also may access information about their friends. Recent studies (e.g., Joinson et al., 2011; Guan & Tate, 2013) show how people are increasingly aware of the risks implied in self-exposure through social media.

There are other potential risks involved in social media interaction, such as privacy invasion, sexual harassment, or cyberstalking, which have been analysed by several scholars (e.g., Gross & Aquisti, 2005; Halder & Jaishankar, 2009; Ellison, 2011; Livingstone, 2013). Debarati Halder and K. Jaishankar (2009), who conducted a study about the victimization of women online, found out that women are often subject to harassment when interacting through social media. However, June Chisholm's (2006) study shows that women are both victims and perpetrators of online harassment within existing relationships, as with the case of cyberbullying. In addition, in the context of existing relationships Mirca Madianou (2013) highlights that "revenge porn" has emerged as a new risk wherein ex-partners upload intimate videos on social media platforms to damage their former partner's reputation. In revenge porn, as observed by Lasén (2015), women are usually the victims, since "the consequences of the disclosure of such images are not the same for women than for men" (2015, p. 74). Lasén (2015) explains that growing practice of "revenge porn" has caused social media platforms such as Reddit to implement regulations to avoid nude content to be published without the consent of the people who appear in the pictures.

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[6] An Advanced Fee Fraud, typically conducted by international criminal groups via online dating sites and social networking sites (Whitty & Buchanan, 2012, p. 5).

In addition, women who upload very revealing pictures of themselves often face slut-shaming[7] when interacting through social media, as some scholars have observed (e.g., Burns, 2015; Dobson, 2015; Lasén, 2015; Tanenbaum, 2015). Slut-shaming is a problem that women face when sexually charged images where they appeared are publicly distributed online, while men involved in those pictures are not object of any judgement: open sexual behaviour transforms women into "sluts", while men's reputation remains intact. Traditional sexual roles legitimate men showing their sexual desire publicly, since manifesting sexual desire is coded as masculine (Giddens, 1992). Thus, double sexual standards, Anthony Giddens (1992) notes, represent men as naturally interested in sex, and women as more inclined to romance. Women are often denigrated for open sexual behaviours, while men are usually admired. As Giddens (1992) put it:

> There is no male equivalent of the loose woman and the sexually adventurous man is often esteemed, particularly among other men. […] Women are, as ever, divided into two categories so far as sexual contact of such men are concerned: those who have to be "chased" and can therefore be conquered, and those who are in some sense beyond the moral pale and therefore "do not matter" (1992, p. 79).

Giddens (1992) shows that the patriarchal stereotype of "Men want sex, women want love" needs demystifying as it fosters inequality (1992, p. 66). Indeed, Walther et al. (2008) analysed gender differences in comments written by others in relation to sexual encounters or the exhibition of someone being drunk and found that gendered double standards were perpetuated through social media. Chambers (2013), drawing on Walther et al. (2008), highlights how male chauvinist comments published online affect one's reputation:

> These gendered codes, which tend to endorse greater sexual freedom for men than for women, have a significant influence on impression formation in general. The findings draw attention to concerns about the potential of

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[7] The term "slut-shaming" has crept into the feminist vernacular during the last decade to describe a multiplicity of ways in which females are called to task for their real, presumed, or imaginary sexuality (Tanenbaum, 2015, p. xv).

Facebook dynamics to perpetuate double standards stereotypes and also encourage social practices that may be harmful to groups such as college students (2013, p. 66).

Leora Tanenbaum (2015) defines double sexual standards as "the mind-set that the males are expected to be sexually active, even in an uncontrolled manner, while women are supposed to police themselves (and other females) to remain minimally sexual" (2015, p. 8). Therefore, when women represent themselves online as sexually liberated and in search for sexual encounters, people seeing through the lens of traditional gender roles may find this behavior non-normative. Some authors (e.g., Cohen & Shade, 2008; Poole, 2013, Burns, 2015; Dobson, 2015) claim that traditional patriarchal gender roles, which are both maintained and reinforced online, are the basis for harassment. Since slut-shaming is a serious problem that fosters gender inequality and perpetuates rape culture, Emily Poole (2013) proposes changes in law to protect women, especially teenagers, from this kind of cyberbullying. Poole (ibid.) points out that LGBT individuals are often object of the same kind of cyberbullying.

Stefanie Duguay (2014) argues that non-heteronormative sexual orientation is still heavily stigmatized and describes how complicated it is disclosing queer sexual orientation when users' familiar environment is traditional; hence, online environments are often used to "come out" first. Mike Thelwall (2011) found that LGBT individuals tend to have greater personal security concerns than heterosexual people because they are often the targets of hate crime violence. In order to safeguard themselves, Thelwall (ibid.) explains that LGBT individuals prefer to reveal their sexual orientation only to trusted friends or within the LGBT community. In specialized LGBT online communities sexual minorities can meet others safely, but in general social media platforms they are more guarded. In addition, Chambers (2013) argues, although social media platforms are often seen as safe spaces for personal interaction, the risks may appear during embodied encounters. As Baym (2010) points out, new technologies are always accompanied by moral panics, often including sexual predation. Nevertheless, Baym (ibid.) notes that sexual assaults between strangers remain extremely infrequent in relation to sexual predation within existing relationships, and sexual assaults between people who met online represent a tiny proportion of stranger crimes.

On the other hand, Whitty (2008) suggests that the safe environment that arises online from the lack of immediacy of face-to-face interaction makes social media good for flirting, especially at the beginning of relationships. In addition, the traditional social convention that dictates that men start flirting with women, while women wait to be approached, could be inverted on social media. However, some scholars (e.g., Chambers, 2013; Jamieson, 2013) argue that social media recreate conventional hierarchies of sexuality and gender.

Female users spend more time online to maintain personal relationships. Eileen Green and Carrie Singleton (2013) point out that although UK statistics (ONS, 2011) show that men have greater access to the Internet than women, women use the Internet more often for contacting family and friends. Likewise, Yang et al. (2013) found that men took a more instrumental approach to the use of digital communication (e.g., send documents, form study groups) and did not mention "the intimacy sequence of communication technology use as much or as explicitly as females did" (2013, p. 17). So in this sense, women are using social media more often than men for intimacy practices. But, the question remains, are these practices liberating those women from traditional gender roles? I will discuss this issue in chapter 8. While social media may not be particularly empowering or liberating for overcoming patriarchal gender roles, Usha Zacharias and Jane Arthurs (2008) argue, they do "create a space for new idioms of intimacy" (2008, p. 197), which may help women to negotiate their intimate relationships in creative ways.

Drawing on Niels Van Doorn and Liesbet Van Zoonen (2008), Koen Leurs and Sandra Ponzanesi (2012) identified three general strands in the literature of gender and the Internet: the utopian, the dystopian, and the in-between perspectives. From a utopian point of view, early cyberfeminist scholars (e.g., Haraway, 1985, 1997; Plant, 1998) argued that the Internet is especially liberating for women. Among other debates around the relationship between humans and technology, Haraway (1997) highlighted that virtual worlds allowed identity play, which would, in turn help to liberate women from the constraints of a gendered-ruled society. On the other hand, Sadie Plant (1998) was one of the first scholars to argue that femininity was the core element of cyberspace. She suggested the medium had the potential for new experiences of

intimacy: "digital zone facilitates unprecedented levels of spontaneous affection, intimacy" (1998, p. 144). Building on Plant, Catherine Driscoll (2008) discussed the traditional association between women and intimacy, arguing that women are better able to achieve intimacy through social media, as they are usually more open to sharing feelings: "Intimacy is undoubtedly an important set of skills in contemporary online culture—it's both a currency and literacy. Women may have easier access to online intimacy in both these senses" (2008, p. 201). Indeed, there is a wealth of evidence pointing out that women use social media to disclose more intimate information than men (Thelwall, 2011), and to engage with others more often (e.g., Green & Singleton, 2013; Yang et al., 2013).

On the other hand, dystopian views (e.g., Gregg, 2008; Jamieson, 2013; Degim & Johnson, 2015) show the Internet reproducing existing gender roles. Thelwall (2011) observes that social media interaction usually reflect offline masculinities and femininities. Likewise, Jamieson (2013) suggests that there is little evidence of social media disrupting traditional patriarchal gender roles: "There is no clear storyline of radical change or transformative impact arising from the opportunities of developing personal and sexual relationships with unknown others afforded by digital technologies" (2013, p. 24). As Enguix and Ardèvol (2012) note in their study about dating sites, the socio-technical design produce engendered practices, which are interwoven with media practices through bodies and their representations. Digital intimacy, Alev Degim and James Johnson (2015) argue, has become "a normative mode of social interaction" (2015, p. 11) within social media. They acknowledge that the socio-technological space of social media platforms reproduce patriarchal gender roles, insofar as it "creates an environment of existing beliefs and behaviours that, at times, maintain a hetero-normative hierarchy" (ibid.). In this gendered Internet, Nina Haferkamp et al. (2012) suggest that users are aware of the gender norms operating and they "conform to stereotypical gender-specific expectations" (2012, p. 92) to fit in and avoid rejection. In the same vein, María Martínez-Lirola (2012) found that patriarchal modes of courtship were reproduced in Badoo.

Finally, scholars (e.g., Van Zoonen, 2002; Wajcman, 2010; Leurs & Ponzanesi 2012; Tsatsou, 2012; Chambers, 2013) do argue that reality lies in an in-between perspective, where gender and the Internet interplay in antagonistic ways. Judy

Wajcman (2010) argues that: "technology as such is neither inherently patriarchal nor unambiguously liberating" (2010, p. 148). Following this social shaping of technology view, Van Zoonen (2002) highlights that "gender and the Internet are multidimensional concepts that are articulated in complex and contradictory ways" (2002, p. 5). In the same vein, Panayiota Tsatsou (2012) shows that while the Internet opens new spaces for the performance of alternative sexualities, it also supports the "re-masculinization" of gender relationships. Likewise, Chambers (2013) acknowledges the potentiality that social media offer to interact in a safe space where traditional gender inequalities could be overcome, and where both men and women could experiment with new ways to relate to each other. Nevertheless, Chambers (ibid.) observes, people mainly reproduce traditional gender roles online. Drawing on Giddens, Chambers (2013) argues that although social media offer the possibility of exploring individual choices apart from social norms their design foster traditional ways of intimate association:

> Yet even in the context of mediated love, conventional romance remains a strong ideal that propels the discourse and sets parameters on desires and practices of intimacy. While social network sites intimacies signify choice, fluidity and plastic intimacy, their design and use indicate a surprisingly conventional culture of intimacy (2013, p. 139).

I position my research in this in-between perspective, since I recognize how social media platforms can empower users by helping them to experiment with their sexualities, and create and maintain personal relationships, while this process is still embedded in traditional patriarchal structures, which constrain the potential liberatory aspect of social media interaction.

In this section, I have addressed the issues of trust, safety and gender in the context of social media interaction, especially in relation to the creation of new relationships. Although social media companies provide technological features aimed at generating trust and safety among their members, there is still a level of risk when interacting with strangers through social media, in particular in embodied encounters. In addition, I have discussed the different perspectives in scholarship about the relationship between gender and the Internet. In this sense, I acknowledge that women take

advantage more often than men of the potentialities to develop intimacy through social media platforms but, at the same time, patriarchal gender roles are often reproduced online.

3.6. Conclusion

In a summary that responds to the discussion above, a main question arises: to what extent does the intimacy that exists on social media differ from that offline? In order to shed light upon this enquiry, I find it useful to draw together boyd's (2010a) concept of *networked publics* (2010a, p. 39), Papacharissi's (2010) notion of the *networked self* (2010, p. 307), and Rainie and Wellman's (2012) concept of *networked individualism* (2012, p. 3). I then use the term "networked intimacy" in order to conceptualise intimacy in the context of social media.

Indeed, the concept of *networked publics* (boyd, 2010a, p. 39) is helpful in conceptualising the notion of networked intimacy because it considers the ways in which the affordances (persistency, replicability, searchability and scalability) of social media platforms generate a particular kind of environment wherein users interact. Such a consideration emphasises context within my conceptualisation of networked intimacy, recognising that interactions are partly framed by social media platforms and their affordances. In addition, boyd (2010a) argues that three dynamics render social media interaction complex: blurring of public and private, invisible audiences, and social convergence. Furthermore, she uses the concept of networked publics in order to refer to the collections of people connected by different social media platforms, such as MySpace or Facebook, who negotiate their self-(re)presentations and public lives through these platforms in a way that allows them to experience different levels of publicity. This is useful when considering the concept of networked intimacy because it reframes notions of public and private – boundaries considered central to intimacy – for a digital world. Building on this concept, Hinton and Hjorth (2013) use the term "intimate publics" (2013, p. 44) in order to suggest that affection acts as a sort of glue of users' engagement on *and* with the platform. Their term extends boyd's (2010a) argument, highlighting the important role intimacy plays in the configuration of these digital publics. Together, these concepts prove useful to me in conceptualising networked intimacy as a primary driver and result of

social media interaction, operating within a digital environment that is dominated by specific affordances allowing for different kinds of publicity.

A further consideration relates to Papacharissi's (2010) notion of the *networked self* (2010, p. 307), which asks us to consider *both* the interaction occurring amongst people on social media *and* the way the self is conceptualised differently in the digital age. Indeed, within the context of networked sociality, a networked self arises as a result of the convergence of different practices (political, intimate, work-related, and economic) taking place on the social media stage. The public display of social connections helps co-construct one's identity online. Such co-construction adds another layer, which asks us to consider not only the content of the interaction, but also the subjective experiences that accompany this content, similarly shaping the concept of networked intimacy. In addition, Papacharissi (2010) highlights the flexibility offered by social media platforms in interpersonal interactions with diverse kinds of people, who might be geographically dispersed, belong to one or more different networks, and exert variable levels of intimacy. Likewise, Rainie and Wellman (2012) emphasise the flexibility and freedom that social media offer to decide where and with whom to interact. Such flexibility and freedom places agency with the user. Indeed, Rainie and Wellman (2012) use the term *networked individualism* (2012, p. 3) in order to describe the new type of social operating system that emerges from fragmented networks (as opposed to the traditional communities, e.g. the family, the neighbourhood), which were formed prior to the Internet, but have been exponentially enhanced given the advent of social media. Rainie and Wellman suggest that the social itself is reconfigured within the digital age. In this sense, Chambers (2013) highlights the ways in which social media affordances allowing choice and flexibility to connect with different kinds of people correspond to late modern ideas of transformation and democratisation of the concept of intimacy.

Taken together, these authors nuance the notion of networked intimacy so as to include the digital context, content, subjective experiences, power relations and interaction. Moreover, they remind us that intimacy is both reconceptualised in a digital age *and* longstanding, embedded within existing practices and social norms. Indeed, this is not a radical transformation of the notion of intimacy, but an adaptation of intimate interaction to social media environments, which possess particular

affordances. As Byam (2010) acknowledged, "people appropriate media characteristics as resources to pursue social and relational goals" (2010, p. 59). For me, the extent to which the intimacy that exists upon social media is different from that occurring offline touches the heart of these debates, not least because it directly addresses the presumptions surrounding intimacy as a concept, as well as the digital environment in which that concept is currently contested.

In this chapter, I have reviewed the literature that addresses questions of how self-disclosure and self-presentation; privacy and publicity; and safety, trust and gender operate in relation to intimacy practices in this environment. Despite growing debate about the nature of digital communication in general and questions of intimacy and privacy online in particular, there is not enough research about the relationship of both concepts; it would be useful that the relationships between intimacy and privacy would be addressed more in depth. It seems that some scholars use both concepts interchangeably; it would also be interesting to analyse if social media users think the same. In addition, research shows that users seem more concerned about their social privacy than about their intuitional privacy. I will address these topics in chapter 5.

I also identify a tension between a trend to disclose intimacy in public and a trend towards less intimate self-disclosure. The current debate around social media interaction is shifting from claims about disrupting public exposure and privacy concerns towards a focus on the negotiation of contextual norms characteristic of each social media platform. As a result of this learning process users seem to have developed unwritten norms that help them to navigate their interactions. This is an interesting argument that needs to be corroborated with more cross-platform studies. I will discuss the extent to which participants engage in public intimacy practices through social media in chapter 5.

On the other hand, it seems clear that self-disclosure and self-presentation help to build intimacy on social media. Self-presentation is a condition *sine qua non* to participate in social media and consequently to develop personal relationships begun online. Recent research shows that users mainly portray their real identity instead of experimenting with different identities, as it was common in the 90s. However, there is little research in relation to the role of images in developing intimacy through social

media. There are also few studies about the topics that users consider intimate and which ones they consider appropriate to disclose in public through social media. I will address how participants negotiate the disclosure of topics they consider intimate both through textual and visual communication in chapter 6.

In my study, I use a cross-platform approach to explore the different norms that operate in Badoo, CouchSurfing and Facebook, in order to understand how participants manage different platforms' architectures and politics to negotiate intimate relationships. Most research to date has focused on public communication through social media, while there is very little research looking at the private communication conducted through the chat or inbox features. There is a need to acknowledge and explore that social media platforms provide both public and private means of communications, and that users often prefer to use the private feature to communicate about intimate matters. I will discuss this topic and how participants manage platforms' features to navigate issues around trust, privacy and reputation in chapter 7.

I have also addressed the creation of new relationships online, and how this practice is still stigmatized. I have discussed how social media users deal with safety concerns when participating in social media to meet new people. In relation to gender, I have shown that social media platforms both empower and control women. Female users engage in intimacy practices more often than male, which is a positive outcome, since these platforms offer them more tools to connect with like-minded people and develop personal relationships. On the other hand, patriarchal double standards are reproduced online, especially in the courtship process, despite earlier cyberfeminist scholars hopes that the Internet would be a space where women could be free from sexist gender roles. It is key to analyse how people use different social media platforms in order to both build and maintain intimate relationships, and how they experience and integrate this new phenomenon within their everyday practices, with a special attention to gender differences, topics that I will examine in chapter 8. In the next chapter, I discuss methodology and detail the research design used in my study to explore the topics that emerged from the literature review.

Chapter 4
Methodological Trajectory

4.1. Introduction

This research aims to contribute to understanding intimacy practices mediated by social media. Scholars in a range of disciplines including anthropology, gender studies, social-psychology, cultural studies, and sociology are interested in people's use of technology to keep in contact with significant others at a distance. As John Law (2004) points out, these studies are focused on "describing decentred subjectivities and the geographical complexities that arise when intimacy no longer necessarily implies proximity" (2004, p. 3). Law (2004) explains how there is a need of qualitative approaches to study this new networked or fluid world, which is highly unpredictable and changeable and cannot be explained in the mathematical sense. Hine (2015) suggests a multiple approach in order to understand how technologies are adapted and adopted in everyday life to negotiate personal relationships.

Following this view, I conducted a qualitative study based in a multi-sited approach to understand different kinds of intimacy practices facilitated by social media at several levels: across different platforms (Badoo, CouchSurfing and Facebook), multi-modal (online/offline), and in different locations (UK and Spain). Drawing in feminist epistemology (e.g., Reinharzt & Davidman, 1992; Stanley & Wise, 1993; Skeggs, 1995) and using an ethnographic approach (e.g., Rybas & Gajjala, 2007; Horst & Miller, 2012; Gómez Cruz & Ardèvol, 2014; Hine, 2015; Pink et al., 2015), I investigate the intimate experiences of social media users who use these services to interact with new and existing relationships. One characteristic of feminist and ethnographic research is that the researcher tries to forge a connection between the reader and the people studied. As Rybas and Gajjala (2007) point out, "The first-person autoethnographic narratives breach the separation of researcher and subjects and establish intimacy with the reader as a co-participant of the dialogue." The use of the first person has been part of the feminist project. I use the first person to locate myself in the thesis as part of my feminist approach and, on some occasions, my own experience was used as autoethnography in order to contextualize particular situations. John Van Maanen (1988) states that in "skilled hands" the use of the first

voice in a confessional tale[8] may help to the reader to better understand the problematic nature of the fieldwork.

In this chapter I first present my research design, which is built around a multi-sited case study using an ethnographic approach. Second, I introduce my methods for recruiting participants, which were based on convenience sampling; my data collection techniques, which include participant observation, interviews, and user profile analysis; and how I analysed the data. Third, I address the main ethical considerations of the study, although I also explain my ethical choices in the methods section. Finally, I observe the limitations of the study.

4.2. Research design

In this section I explain how my personal and professional background influenced the research design and process, since I chose a topic I was interested in, and a particular methodology I was familiar with. In addition, I justify my research design choices by using other Internet studies as examples to give background to my research project.

Commonly the researcher explains how the research project is linked to her personal life. Some feminist media scholars (e.g., Walkerdine, 1986; Markham, 1998; Kendall, 2009) described how their own interests and background led both the research design and research process. As Shulamit Reinharz and Lynn Davidman (1992) note, this is not an unbiased research practice but a feminist standpoint where the public and private merge:

> Writing such as this is not a confession or "bias" as it would undoubtedly be labelled as positivist framework. Rather it is an explanation of "the researcher's standpoint" in a feminist framework. […] The researchers who adopt this view draw on a new "epistemology of insiderness" that sees life and work as intertwined (1992, pp. 259-260).

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[8] Confessional tales are autobiographical self-reflective accounts used to complement fieldwork reports (Van Maanen, 1988).

Carolyn Ellis (2005) affirms that explaining why the researcher was interested in the topic is useful to contextualize the research: "including researcher's interest in the topic in the writing account provides background to help readers understand better the study" (2005, p. 73). Following this personal reflexivity of situating the researcher's personal dimension in the research process, I acknowledge that my own biography influenced my study and my way of understanding the research field. First of all, New Media is my academic background, as I hold a Masters in *Interactive Digital Communication*. I chose my topic because I was genuinely interested in personal interactions both mediated and facilitated by social media platforms, as I am a heavy social media user myself, since I use different platforms to interact with both people I know and strangers. In this sense, as Hine (2015) observes, moving from participant to observer allowed me to retain a sympathetic understanding of the setting studied while shifting to another kind of relationship with participants and a different register of analysis.

This study explores the intimate experiences facilitated by social media, using a cross-platform multiple case study composed of three social media platforms: Badoo, CouchSurfing, and Facebook. Sharan Merriam (2009) defines a case study as descriptive, heuristic and explanatory. On the other hand, a case study, as defined by Robert Yin (2009, p. 18), is "an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context." According to Yin (2009), case studies usually answer what? how? which? and why? research questions. Following Herriott and Firestone (1983), Yin (2014) highlights that the evidence from research which uses multiple case studies is often more compelling and robust. This cross-platform approach helps to map and understand the complexity of the current social media ecology, which Couldry (2011) calls "media manifold". As Sarah Kember and Joanna Zylinska (2012) point out: "a multi-sited case study may be useful to capture a holistic picture of a practice" (2012, p. 32). My main aim was to study intimacy practices in an integrated fashion, therefore I used this multi-sited approach.

The concept of multi-sitedness was mainly developed by Massey (1992) and Marcus (1995). Multi-sited research, Hine (2015) notes, is characterized by "connection and mobility rather than static location" (2015, p. 61). Drawing on Monika Büscher and John Urry (2009), Hine (2015) explains that there is a body of research interested in

analysing mobility, which includes "virtual travel across networks of meditated communications; and communicative travel as people are connected in interactions face-to-face and via mediated communications" (2015, p. 63). Johana Sumiala and colleagues (2015) also apply the term to the study of both online and offline interaction. Moreover, they study the use of media by young people in different locations around the city in two countries (Finland and the UK), and through different online platforms. Following Mark-Anthony Falzon (2009), Sumiala et al. (2015) used a multi-sited research design, which not only relates to different places, but also includes cross-platform and multi-modal perspectives, in order to approach the inherently mutable character of the studied phenomena. My research design is very similar to the one used by Sumiala and colleagues (ibid.); it is multi-sited at different levels: cross-platform, multi-modal, and participants were located in two countries.

Drawing upon an ethnographic perspective, I try to picture how users appropriate different social media services in their search for intimacy. Badoo and CouchSurfing platforms allow users to create and develop personal relationships. Initially, I was more interested in researching why people actively seek interactions with strangers online. I wanted to explore whether finding meaningful connections to enrich one's life was the main motivation for participating in particular social media services where the interaction is chiefly among strangers (e.g. dating sites or hospitality exchange networks), what CouchSurfing (2015) called "to find meaningful relationships". I think that the rhythm of our lives has become so fast that we do not have time to create intimate relationships, and that social media provide the opportunity to find certain kinds of intimacies, although they may be transient. However, during the fieldwork participants continuously mentioned Facebook, therefore I decided to incorporate it in the study in order to analyse both intimacy practices within new and existing close relationships. Despite the fact that some new sexual and romantic relationships may be created through Facebook, it is mainly used to communicate with existing friends and significant others. Including Facebook in the analysis allowed me to observe the differences in intimacy practices in two different contexts: (1) the interaction with strangers in the search for sexual and romantic relationships and friendships, and (2) the maintenance and development of existing friendships and romances. In addition, Facebook, as the mainstream social media service, was also used to observe how users migrated the interaction from Badoo and CouchSurfing to Facebook. Thus, the study

also explores the migration of the communication within relationships started online to other platforms or face-to-face encounters. This research analyses the kind of intimate interactions facilitated by these platforms both online and offline and how participants integrate these practices in their everyday life. The hybrid nature of intimacy practices, which may start online or offline and develop through one of the two settings (or both), as Edgar Gómez Cruz and Elisenda Ardèvol (2014) note, is acknowledged through this multi-sited approach.

In line with this ethnographic inquiry lens, I also pay attention to how the architecture and policies of Badoo, CouchSurfing and Facebook shape the way people communicate, and how participants navigate the different features that the platforms provide. The combined study of platforms design and users' features choices has been labelled "ethnography of affordances" (Race, 2015, pp. 499-500). I apply this multidisciplinary perspective that includes users' agency while accounting for social media platforms as actors (Latour, 2005). This perspective is useful to explore broadly the role that different social media technologies play in individual's personal relationships from a twofold approach: (1) The role of social media platforms as intimacy mediators, and (2) How adults adopt and adapt technical affordances that these sites provide to create and develop personal relationships. The objective is to understand how users create and maintain different kinds of relationships through different platforms by navigating social media platforms' affordances and how different social norms emerge through time and experience in this environment.

In this study, participants were identified as users of Badoo or CouchSurfing in the cities of Leeds (UK) and Barcelona (Spain). I selected Leeds and Barcelona because these are big cosmopolitan centres and it is easy to find people who use social media to create new relationships. The cosmopolitan and multicultural nature of these locations, with a large amount of mobile inhabitants living in these cities for a short-medium period of time, made them suitable to find people who decided to look for new personal relationships through social media. In addition, I chose these two locations for practical reasons, such as the possibility to gain access to CouchSurfing users (I belonged to both Barcelona and Leeds local CouchSurfing communities), and the possibility to communicate with participants in their own language, as I am fluent in English, Spanish and Catalan. Nevertheless, as many participants were expats, I

conducted interviews with people whose mother language was outside of the aforementioned three languages. I cannot describe this study as culturally comparative research between England and Spain, because in both countries participants were from a wide range of nationalities.

I wanted to present users' perspectives of their own intimacy practices in the context of social media, but, at the same time, as Markham (1998) observed in her own research about virtual environments, I was aware that I was conditioning them with the concepts I was using to formulate the questions. Acknowledging this reality does not diminish the validity of the research project. On the contrary, it is very helpful to understand the dynamics and process through which we scholars build knowledge. In feminist scholarship, as observed by Beverley Skeggs (1995), an epistemological question arises: "How do we make evaluations of the knowledge we receive if we do not understand how it was produced?" (1995, p. 2). This act of reflexivity in the research process is nicely expressed by Markham (1998):

> I created an interview protocol that led interviewees in particular directions that I chose. Yet, as I engage this context to study it, the very context changes. Each interview changes slightly, because I get to a different place in my own understanding of the context and, consequently, I ask different questions. I am changing as a result of my interaction with this context. In turn, this changes the way I see participants, changes the way I seek out and obtain participants, changes the way I interview the participants, and most importantly, changes the way I interpret the transcripts of the interviews (1998, p. 82).

In addition, incorporating the researcher's personal experiences is a valuable asset and distinguishing feature for feminist researchers and ethnographers. Whereas valuing the researcher's personal experience, feminist researchers carefully differentiate between their own experience and the experience of participants. Although the researcher becomes a character in the narrative of the research, the focus remains on the participants. Some feminist scholars have used autobiography or autoethnography as their main research method (e.g. Walkerdine, 1987; Ellis, 2005; Senft, 2008). Autoethnography, which is defined by Ellis (2005) as the "research, writing, story, and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and

political" (2005, preface), is indeed useful to contest objectivity and it builds a bridge between theory and experience. As the Internet is more and more integrated in everyday practices, Hine (2015) explains that autoethnography can be useful to explore the emotional dimension of our relationship with technology.

Melissa Gregg (2004) points out that the use of anecdotes, such as those in section *4.3.2. Recruiting participants,* is useful to approach everyday practices, what she calls "the mundane" (2004, p. 364). Following Gregg (2004), Kennedy (2011) observes that although anecdotes have not been traditionally considered in positivist scholarship, they can help to build an empirically-grounded argument. Nevertheless, Gregg (2004) and Baym (2009) highlight that although the process of self-reflexivity in research is a strategy that helps to develop richer findings; this level of self-disclosure is often considered inappropriate. Traditional positivism stands that the researcher must be detached from its subject of analysis. In response to this criticism Anita Biressi and Heather Nunn (2013) suggest that personal experience and anecdotes, if used reflexively, are "strategic manoeuvres" (2013, p. 220) in order to inform current debate, theorizing or practice. Skeggs (1995) highlights that this discussion of experience as a knowledge resource focuses attention on "how subjectivities are produced through the research process" (1995, p. 6). In this regard, some feminist scholars (e.g., Stanley & Wise, 1993; Skeggs, 1995) link the basic feminist statement "the personal is the political" with the concept of experience as a knowledge resource. Thus, a reflexive account of my role as researcher played a key role in every stage of my research process.

My fieldwork started in March 2013. The first two months were dedicated to immersing myself in Badoo and Couchsurfing, and to finding participants for the interviews. The interviews took place in 4 different waves: May and August 2013 in Leeds, and September and December 2013 in Barcelona. January and February 2014 were dedicated to negotiating with participants, gathering user profiles and concluding the participant observation. This qualitative study is mainly based on in-depth semi-structured interviews. In the next section, I explain how I selected the sample, and how I engaged with participants. In addition, I introduce my other data collection techniques: participant observation and user profile analysis, and the data analysis technique: thematic analysis.

4.3. Methods

In this section I introduce my methods for sampling, data collection and data analysis. I recruited participants using convenience sampling. My data collection techniques included participant observation, interviews, and user profile analysis. The data was analysed by using thematic analysis. The fieldwork took place between March 2013 and February 2014. I created academic accounts on Badoo and Facebook and presented myself as a researcher in my personal description. After an initial phase of immersion lasting two months, where I got to know the workings of Badoo and Facebook, I proceeded to recruit participants through convenience sampling by issuing calls for participants and using my personal network. I conducted interviews in May and August 2013 in the UK, and in September and December 2013 in Spain. I collected user profiles manually in word format after the interviews took place, since I wanted to have written consent before data collection. Finally, I used Nvivo software to gather all the data in one setting and code it by using thematic analysis. I explain these methods further in this section. The selection of the participants is detailed hereafter.

4.3.1. Recruiting participants

As explained earlier, participants were identified as members of either CouchSurfing or Badoo, or both, in Leeds (UK) and Barcelona (Spain). The focus of the research was in adult social media users, nevertheless I did not look for any particular class or national backgrounds (i.e. only British and Spanish). It happened that people who were willing to participate in the research were from different nationalities and with different occupations, ranging from unemployed participants to students to professionals. The research targeted adults aged 25-49 (although the oldest participant was actually 47 years old). My focus was on adults because there are already plenty of studies about intimacy practices among teenagers and college students, and few about adults (see chapter 3). I tried to find a balance between the number of female and male participants. Participants self-identified as male (16) or female (14).

The study included fifteen participants based in the UK, twelve of whom are CouchSurfing users, seven of whom are or were Badoo users and all of which are or were Facebook users. Twelve of them befriended me on Facebook. The other fifteen

participants were based in Spain, nine of whom are CouchSurfing users, eleven of which are or were Badoo users. All of participants based in Spain were Facebook users, and thirteen of them befriended me on Facebook for the study (see *Table 1.Distribution of participants* in Appendix F). Participants who did not want to have their Facebook profile analyzed claimed not only to be concerned about their own privacy, but also about their relatives' and friends' privacy. Taking into account participants' privacy concerns, I provided all participants with pseudonyms. I used their age, gender and place of residence to identify them as subjects of the study.

One of my first concerns was the negotiation of my position as insider or outsider to the community being researched. Following Janet Finch (1993) and Beverly Skeggs (1994), Jacqueline Watts (2006) affirms that being an insider familiar with the culture of the industry was useful; she already understood the industry she was researching. Speaking the same language as participants is helpful in order to build rapport. Similarly, I was a member of all the social media platforms that form part of my study since 2007/2008, although I had barely used Badoo. For the purpose of the research, I created academic accounts on these three social media platforms and presented myself as a researcher. Nevertheless, I decided to keep using my CouchSurfing personal account because I have a good reputation in the network, since I have a number of positive references from my past interactions with other users. I included in my personal description that I was a researcher. On CouchSurfing I was an insider. I already spoke the same language as the other *couchsurfers*, and I benefited from my prior connections to conduct the research. On the other hand, as Hine (2015) notes, insider status may also be problematic: "Being an insider presents some problems in developing an appropriate positioning and retaining the ability to question the taken-for-granted" (2015, p. 85). In order to overcome this issue, Hine (2015) recommends thinking of the familiar as strange again. In this sense, I questioned the motivations users had to join CouchSurfing and how personal relationships are developed through the platform.

I used convenience sampling to find participants through one-to-one approach (including my personal network), and call for participants. Alan Bryman (2012) explains that: "convenience sampling is one that is simply available to the researcher

by virtue of its accessibility" (2012, p. 201). Following Zoltán Dörnyei (2007), Farahman Farrokhi (2012) defines convenience sampling as:

> "A kind of non-probability or nonrandom sampling in which members of the target population are selected for the purpose of the study if they meet certain practical criteria, such as geographical proximity, availability at a certain time, easy accessibility, or the willingness to volunteer" (2012, p. 784).

Thus, the participants in this study are CouchSurfing or Badoo users (25-49 years old) located in Leeds or Barcelona, who were willing to take part in the study.

In the case of Badoo, I had to contact (potential) participants one by one through the chat feature, as there are no groups or other means of public communication to address users. This technique was very time-consuming since most male users were interested in flirting with me instead of participating in the research. Beverly Skeggs (1995) states that we, as researchers, have a specific social-political-cultural-economic position defined by our gender, class, sexuality, nationality and race, which influences every stage of the research, from the selection of participants to the interpretation of the data. The researcher's personal identity affects the research practice. In relation to gender, I was aware that my identity as a young female researcher might affect the relationship with participants. In my study, my own identity as a feminist and the gendered context of my fieldwork (especially in reference to Badoo) led me to think reflexively about the role that I, as a female researcher, played in the data collection process.

Female scholars conducting field research in mixed-gender settings, as Reinharz and Davidman (1992) noted, are vulnerable to a special set of obstacles, such as sexual harassment or physical danger: "In a society that is ageist, sexist, and heterosexist, the researcher who is female and young may be defined as a sex object to be seduced by heterosexual males" (1992, p. 58). In the case of Badoo, which is a hook-up/dating site, the context of the interaction contributed to being treated as a sexual object by some male Badoo users. Whenever users expressed their personal interest in me, I asked them if they had read my profile where I stated I was a researcher, only interested in developing an academic relationship. As Catherine Marshall and

Gretchen Rossman (1999) point out, the researcher may have to teach participants about her role, as I did. Some common jokes were "Yes, research me, please!", or "Can I interview you later?", which showed their lack of seriousness about participating in the research. I never arranged an interview with any Badoo user who behaved like that, as I did not believe their real intention was to participate in the research and I was concerned about my safety.

Finding female Badoo users who wanted to take part in the study was the hardest task. Once I completed the interviews with male participants I specified in my Badoo profile that I wanted to chat only with women, although this did not prevent men from contacting me. I got few messages from women and they were only interested in dating, apart from the two women who agreed to the interview through this approach. As commented in chapter 3, Thelwall (2011) suggests that women are more concerned about their privacy online because they post more personal information than men. In addition to the female concern to protect their privacy online, the fact that the practice of meeting people online is still stigmatized, joined to the general belief that meeting strangers online is dangerous, which I discuss in chapter 8, may have contributed to the difficulty in finding female Badoo participants. Thus, I had to use my personal network to find more female participants who were Badoo users.

In the case of CouchSurfing in the UK, I spread the call for participants through the "Leeds" group and through other smaller groups of general interest, such as "Language Exchange". I also spread the call for participants through the "Leeds CS Events" Facebook group, which is the mirror "Leeds" CouchSurfing city group on Facebook. I discovered during the fieldwork in Leeds that it was common that some participants were users of both CouchSurfing and Badoo. Thus, I also looked for participants who were users of both sites by posting a call for participants looking for Badoo users in different CouchSurfing groups in Barcelona, such as "Barcelona" or "Wine lovers" groups. I received few response from the calls for participants. As Hine (2015) notes, a general call for participants often produces a limited number of volunteers, for this reason more targeted approaches to explain the objectives of the study are usually more effective than general appeals.

I e-mailed CouchSurfing members that I had as friends on Facebook to ask them to participate in the study. Most people contacted were reluctant to participate in the research. Attending meetings with CouchSurfing people was the most effective way of getting participants for the research, where they could ask me questions face-to-face and get to know better the objectives of the study, and where I could explain to them in detail that all the information provided would be confidential and anonymous. Despite the fact that I had known some CouchSurfing members for years, they were not familiar with research ethics, and I had to assure them that they could be completely confident that all the information provided would be kept in the strictest confidentiality, and I explained them that my research proposal had already passed the ethical board of my university. In this sense, the face-to-face interaction was needed to address any concerns that potential participants may have in a more direct way.

A common controversy in the process of selecting the sample is the benefits of interviewing strangers or people that we already know. Reinharz and Davidman (1992) analysed the process of recruiting participants in several research projects and they found that some scholars claimed that: "they needed to have close relationships before the interview took place" (1992, p. 26). Likewise, some scholars explained that some participants refused to take part in some research due to the "lack of relationship". On the other hand, other scholars claimed that interviewing strangers may lead to more self-disclosure. Apart from the fact that it was hard to recruit strangers to participate in the study, I also included known people in the study in order to find a balance in the type of participants I was recruiting. Most "stranger" participants identified themselves as "very open", therefore their concept of intimacy was quite different to those participants that would not have participated in the research if they did not know me in advance. In fact, one CouchSurfing user during the interview explained that she had seen the call for participants in April 2013 but, because she did not know me at that moment (we met in May 2013 in a meeting), she did not reply. She asked me about the recruiting process and the object of the study at the end of the interview. We discussed that if I had recruited participants only through a call for participants many introvert people such as her (as she qualified herself as shy), would not have been present in the research.

I decided to offer participants a drink in exchange for collaborating in the research, not only because of the time involved in taking part in the interview, but also because sometimes I carried out the interviews in cafes and I considered that it was not fair that they had to spend money to participate in the research. Stephen Borgatti and José-Luis Molina (2005) explain how it is fair to give rewards to participants to compensate them for their time and avoid exploitation. Rose Wiles (2013) highlights that the issue of "rewarding participants" has been subject of debate, since rewards can be seen as elements that compromise the freely given consent, but she also acknowledges that rewards can be just a fair recompense for the time and energy employed in the study.

After the interviews, all CouchSurfing participants agreed to friend me on Facebook, but not all Badoo participants did. Usually Badoo users who did not want to friend me on Facebook stated that from the beginning and I did not insist. There was one particular case of one female Badoo participant who I found through personal contacts who was very reluctant to send me the link to her Badoo profile. She forgot her password because she had not used her Badoo account for a while and she excused herself saying that she was too busy at work to take care of that. It took her three months to send me the link to her profile. Although I insisted that all the information was confidential and anonymous, I think that the fact that we had a common friend made her concerned about confidentiality. This anecdote highlights the sensitive nature of intimacy, and how important the development of trust for self-disclosure is. On the other hand, some Badoo users kept contacting me through the chat function to have casual talks. I did not want to be rude; therefore I talked to them a bit some days. A couple of times I had to make it clear to them that our relationship would be only professional, as two of them asked me for a date.

The process of looking for participants and the ongoing relationship with them was a very important part of the research process. Following feminist scholars (e.g., Reinharz & Davidman, 1992; Stanley & Wise, 1993; Skeggs, 1995) and ethnographers (e.g., Rybas & Gajjala, 2007; Hine, 2015; Pink et al., 2015), I reflected in the research process to acquire knowledge. I took regular field notes to use this experience as (participant) observation to understand the nature of the relationships that different sites foster. In the next section, I will explain more in depth how I

conducted the observation as well as the interviews and the analysis of the user profiles.

4.3.2. Data collection techniques

Feminist media scholars conducting ethnographic studies (e.g., Gajjala 2004; Orgad, 2005; Senft, 2008; boyd, 2014) use a combination of observation, interviews, and textual analysis. Similarly, I used a combination of those methods. I immersed myself in my three case studies' platforms. I logged in regularly. I analysed the characteristics of each platform. Then, I used this expertise to engage with people's experiences both through their narratives in the interviews and the analysis of their profiles, which are both part and representation of their identity and lived experiences. My primary sources were the interviews with participants, my field notes, and the social media platforms themselves, with a focus on participant's user profiles. In order to understand more in depth the workings of Badoo and CouchSurfing, and prepare the questions for the interviews, I first conducted participant observation in these platforms.

(Participant) observation

Generally in feminist research participant observation, Reinharz and Davidman (1992) point out, is valued because it forges personal connections with participants, insofar as it fosters "openness to intimacy and striving for empathy, which should not be confused with superficial friendliness" (1992, p. 68). In addition, in media studies, as noted by Kember and Zylinska (2012) participant observation involves engaging in everyday activities and recording and analysing those activities. Researchers usually record their observation through field notes. Hine (2015) explains that field notes allow the researcher to record what happens, but they also help to develop further insights in the research project, insofar as field notes are helpful "to capture her provisional thoughts about what these observations may mean, her ideas about what to look at next, and her concerns about aspects that puzzle or frustrate her" (2015, p. 74).

Observational methods have been extensively used to study media use. For instance, Walkerdine (1986) in *Video replay: Families, Films and Fantasy*, observed how a working family watched the film "Rocky II". By using participant observation she

attempted to analyse the constitution of subjectivity within a variety of cultural practices, such as watching videos, and dived into her own life memories when she was a child, in order to help her to describe different aspects of family life in the context of popular culture. Heather Horst and Daniel Miller (2012) are also a good example of the extensive use of participant observation in their study about the use of Facebook by people from Trinidad. They observed participants in their homes or workplaces when interacting online with other users. They mainly used this method to observe the different contexts in which Trinidadians engaged in Facebook interaction, and the different meanings Facebook use had for them. In my research, participant observation had two phases: immersion phase, where I also started looking for participants; and the interaction with participants during and after the interviews. I took field notes, a sort of personal reflections and observations to describe what I became aware of through the day and I recorded chat conversations with Badoo participants. Like Hine (2000) reported in *Virtual Ethnography*, these regular conversations signified the "rich insight of their involvement" (2000, p. 13).

First, I immersed myself in both Badoo and CouchSurfing to conduct participant observation in March-April 2013. In this phase, I positioned myself as *observer participant*. Bruce Berg (2008) affirms that researchers when performing the role of observer as participant "move away from the idea of participation but continue to embrace the overt role as investigator" (2008, p. 81). Thus, as explained earlier, I disclosed through my profile that I was a PhD student conducting research about intimacy practices through social media and that I was using the site as one of my case studies. Online participant observation allowed me to acquire expertise about the characteristics of each platform, regulations, the verification systems that Badoo and CouchSurfing provide, and the paid premium services available on Badoo to acquire more visibility or to be able to contact more users (see chapter 7). The key idea, as observed by Hine (2008), is that "the researcher should become immersed in the social situation being studied and should use that experience to try to learn how life is lived there" (2008, p. 4). Markham (1998), in her research about virtual environments, noted that online participant observation allowed her to learn about communities' norms, values, and sociality norms. Likewise, in the process of looking for participants, the interaction with other users through Badoo helped me to understand how the site works, shared social practices and the nature of the interaction in the site.

For instance, like Daniel Miller and Don Slater (2000) in their research about Internet use in Trinidad, I discovered that some Badoo users have several accounts in order to be able to contact more users without having to pay premium services. As part of analysing the workings of platforms and users profiles, I draw on my own experience as a user of these platforms to contextualize and deepen the analysis. In the case of CouchSurfing, I was already familiar with the practices and the social norms, but as Hine (2015) recommends, I did the exercise of thinking in the familiar as strange again to acquire a deeper understanding of the phenomenon.

Second, participant observation was also useful during the course of the interviews in order to explain the context of the interview and participant's behaviour. After the interviews I kept in contact with participants through Badoo or CouchSurfing sites in order to negotiate to friend them on Facebook. As commented earlier, some Badoo participants often talked to me if they saw me online in Badoo or Facebook. Although I gathered user profiles in MS Word format, I checked their user profiles in the different networks once a week during a period of two months after the interviews in order to gain more insight about their social media practices, and I continued taking field notes. I will explain more in detail the process and craft of the interviews in the next section.

Semi-structured in-depth interviews

Although I used other data collection techniques, interviews played a central role in my research process. Semi-structured in-depth interviews are useful to explore people's life experiences from their own point of view. Thus, Reinharz and Davidman (1992) affirm that: "Interviewing offers researchers access to people's ideas, thoughts, and memories in their own words rather than in the words of the researcher" (1992, p. 19). Likewise, Hine (2015) points out interviews are "a way of delving into a specific informant's experiences and understandings" (2015, p. 78). Therefore, the interviews focused on gathering information about online mediated intimate experiences and the encounters that (may) be experienced as a result of these interactions. Although following a guide, as Hine notes, in a semi-structured interview the researcher adds questions in function of the narrative of the interviewee: "an ethnographic interview is often conducted with quite an open schedule in mind, allowing for unanticipated avenues to be explored" (ibid.).

The interviews lasted between forty-five minutes and two and a half hours and were audio recorded. In general, establishing a date and time for interviews was more complicated than I expected. For instance, one CouchSurfing participant changed the date of the interview six times. Although most interviews were conducted face-to-face, I also conducted two interviews online through the Badoo chat function with two UK participants. It could seem that conducting interviews online is the best setting to conduct research about social media interaction; however, online interviews have advantages and disadvantages. Claire Madge and Henrietta O'Connor (2002), who conducted a study about the use of the Internet as amedium for research, state that participants may feel more comfortable at their own homes, providing a sense of "safety", which may allow the researcher to gather more intimate information. In my study, I felt that the information that I was gathering through online interviews was poorer than face-to-face; participants seemed less engaged and gave less elaborated answers. Therefore, I decided not to conduct more interviews online.

The setting of an interview is very important. In her study about the use of MySpace by teenagers, boyd (2015) explains that to find a place where participants feel comfortable to share their stories was paramount. Chih Hoong Sin (2003) conducted research about how the place where the interview is conducted affects the construction of knowledge. I conducted the interviews in a vast array of settings. I interviewed all CouchSurfing participants in their homes, because I felt safe, as I already knew some of them or they had positive references in their profiles. On the other hand, I usually interviewed Badoo participants at coffee shops due to safety concerns. Thus, although interviewing all participants at home would have been the ideal situation in the sense of promoting them to open up, for practical and security reason I conducted half of the interviews in public spaces.

As I will expand in next section, participants were given information sheets and consent forms before interviews. Some participants asked me questions in relation to anonymity and I explained that all the information was anonymised, that I would never use their real name or any kind of information that could lead to identifying them. This affirmation usually helped to build rapport. Feminist research often includes a strong connection between the researcher and participants. Being trusted

by the interviewee is necessary to developing rapport, and the private environment of the interview also fosters participants opening up and engaging in more intimate self-disclosure (Kember & Zylinska, 2012). I tried to keep eye contact all the time and I rarely took notes during the interview. Instead, I usually describe if the participant is using some kind of non-verbal communication and I asked her or him to explain what they meant with that gesture. Thus, by these various strategies I aimed to build trust and rapport. As feminist researchers, such as Finch (1993) in her playgroup study notes, the comfort of the interviewee has a direct impact on what participants feel able to speak about during the interview, as well as being a matter of ethical concern.

Before the interviews, participants were asked to complete a pre-info sheet in order to facilitate some demographic information and other data such as political affiliation and alcohol intake (see Appendix C). Then I asked them to indicate which of that data they considered intimate, and which they revealed in their social media profiles. Thus, the objective of the pre-info sheet was to identify what kind of information participants considered intimate, which of this information they shared in their CouchSurfing, Badoo or Facebook profiles. It also gathered some details about their social media activity: names of sites they used, years of use, main purpose, and regularity. After participants finished completing the pre-info sheet, I started to record the conversation, beginning with questions about how participants first heard about CouchSurfing or Badoo. Reinharz and Davidman (1992) explain that the use of simple questions is a good technique that functions as an ice-breaker and helps to establish rapport. During the interviews, participants were asked to comment on questions with as little interruption as possible. However, if the informant's response was too brief or ambiguous, I then raised additional questions in order to reach a more in-depth understanding of the participant's comments. In designing the interviews, I tried to avoid directing the participants towards determinate types of answers. For instance, when asking about privacy online I started with: "Have you ever thought about privacy online?", instead of asking: "Do you think that privacy is diminished online?"

Traditionally, as observed by Skeggs (1995), it has been considered that the researcher was in a privileged power position in relation to the participant, as the participant provides information about her or his life when they do not receive the same level of disclosure from the part of the interviewer. In this regard, Ann Oakley (1981) explains

the importance of reciprocity between the interviewer and the interviewee. Oakley (1981) stresses that the researcher should take the maximum "no intimacy without reciprocity" (1981, p. 49) as a principle guideline. Equality of the research relationships is one of the key issues in feminist scholarship. In the course of the in-depth interviews, I answered all of the questions participants asked me, even when they were of a personal matter (e.g., the way I had used Badoo or CouchSurfing in my personal life) because researcher's self-disclosure is necessary to generate rapport and equalize the power relation between researcher and researched. Then, I carefully thought about how to deal with the power relationship involved in research. Skeggs (1995) considers more important addressing issues related to power relations than other research issues, such as which method to use.

Participants' narratives during the interviews were used to explore both online interactions and offline intimate encounters facilitated by the use of those platforms. After the interviews, as explained earlier, I took some field notes about the interaction, focusing on participants. Also I looked at user profiles to check that the information reported to be in the profile was actually online. In addition, I analysed user profiles to examine how each interface fostered a particular kind of self-disclosure, and how users navigated social media platforms' features to represent themselves in the network.

User profile analysis

User profiles are cultural artefacts because, as Reinharz and Davidman (1992) stated, cultural artefacts are narratives and visual texts produced by people. One of the main characteristics of cultural artefacts is that they are not created *ad hoc* for the research project. Reinharz and Davidman (1992) noted that cultural artefacts "possess a naturalistic, 'found' quality because they are not created for the purpose of the study" (1992, p. 147). Following Bernie Hogan's (2010) exhibitionistic approach, which builds on symbolic interactionism (Goffman, 1969), I analysed user profiles as cultural artefacts, that is, tools for self-(re)presentation and impression management. Users' profiles remain in servers for a long period of time; for this reason, to a certain extent, they may be considered as archives of affect (Gehl, 2013) or archives of feelings (Kuntsman, 2010; Ferreday, 2013). Building on Kuntsman (2010), Debra

Ferreday (2013) points to the usefulness of analysing user profiles to understand "the specificities and contingencies of online and offline life" (2013, p. 56).

I gathered user profiles manually and created one file per participant and network in MS Word format. Hine (2015) finds it problematic to analyse data recorded in files instead of analysing it online because, she argues, this practice may disembed the researcher from the setting. In addition, she considers that in order to understand digital-mediated practices, not only is it interesting to analyse user profiles, but also to directly observe how users interact through social media, like Miller (2011) did in his research of Facebook in Trinidad. As Hine (2015) puts it:

> As with data scraped from social media, data from automatic logging of activity will require considerable interpretation. Whilst logged data apparently represents exactly what participants did, it only portrays that particular stream of technology mediated activity, and it may be difficult to reconstruct other non-technologically mediated activities that went on alongside the logged activities (2015, p. 76).

In my study, due to the sensitive topic, I found it quite unlikely that participants were going to collaborate in logging observation. There was only one participant who insisted on showing me her Badoo account, so I could have an idea of the amount of messages she received and the content and tone of those messages.

I did not include any direct quote from user profiles in order to avoid participants being searched and identified. I analysed all the pictures users have on CouchSurfing and Badoo and only their "profile pictures" folder on Facebook, provided that only the participant appeared in those pictures because for ethical consideration pictures where other people appear were excluded from the study, as I did not have their consent to use those images for the research. Kelsey Beninger et al. (2014) found that social media users were more concerned about the dissemination of research containing pictures, because text can be easily anonymized (by paraphrasing, for instance), while with pictures people would recognize the participant. Participants may feel embarrassed by the publication outside of the context of social media of certain images. For that reason, I decided not to include any participants' picture in

the thesis. I also analysed the captions, because, as Davis (2010) notes, captions help to "contextualise self-presentations and reduce ambiguity" (2010, p. 1113).

In addition, Janet Salmons (2014) highlights that when conducting research on social media we have to be aware that we have consent from participants, but not from his/her friends. As discussed in chapter 2, Ess (2012b) explains that social media platforms reintroduce some characteristics of the orality in the communication landscape expanding the auditory, as well as the visual. He claims that the sense of selfhood is changing in the culture of connectivity, and Western cultures are moving from an individualistic sense of privacy toward "group privacy", which would be located in the boundary between public space and individual privacy (2012b, p. xvii). Ess (2012b) connects this idea of new relational and emotional senses of selfhood with the emergence of virtue ethics in the context of online communication (e.g., child pornography). In relation to the information gathered from user profiles, although information published in social media is considered by many people as public, there are different expectations of privacy in public, which Ess (2012b) considers "group privacy" (2012b, p. xvii). Nissenbaum (2010) developed a framework to explain how different people have different expectations of privacy that are culturally and contextually shaped, called contextual integrity, which can be applied to online settings. As we cannot know which are the expectations of privacy of participants (or of her/his friends), the best ethical approach is to consider that all of them have high expectations of privacy. By the same token, I only analysed the information disclosed by the participant in the profiles, as expressed in the sections "Interests" in CouchSurfing and Badoo, "Groups" in CouchSurfing and Facebook, "Personal Description" section in CouchSurfing, and the "About me" section in Badoo and Facebook.

The interplay of the data gathered through different methods was very helpful to arrive to a holistic understanding of mediated intimacy practices. How I analysed the data gathered through these methods is specified in the next section.

4.3.3. Data analysis

The data gathered in the interviews and through participant observation was combined with the information collected from user profiles. Triangulation allows verifying data

and enriching data gathered from one method with data gathered from a different method. For instance, the analysis of users' profiles was useful to verify what participants explain in the interviews and what was actually there. Data directly observed in profiles is more reliable than information reported in interviews, mainly due to the inability of users to remember all the data they have included in their profiles or the privacy options they had applied. I compared the information gathered through the pre-info sheet and during the interviews with the information *actually* disclosed in profiles. This helped me to understand how users negotiate the disclosure of what has been called "intimacies of personal identity" (Gerety, 1977, p. 281), that is, what kind of intimate information (both visual and textual) users disclose through their profile(s). In this way, I was able to identify what kind of data participants disclosed through their profiles and which data they considered to be intimate. Why they decided to publish intimate information online was discussed during the interviews.

In order to identify emerging topics, the interview data and the user profiles were analysed using thematic analysis. Mohammed Alhojailan (2012) argues that thematic analysis identifies the key themes in the data gathered, but also allows connections to be created between ideas among the data gathered through different data collection techniques, over time and in different situations. I used Nvivo software to gather all the data in one setting and code the empirical data. I also coded my literature review with this software to be able to cross my findings with the existing literature in a systematic fashion. I conducted the first wave of interviews in the UK and I coded the data before starting the interviews in Spain. Following David Gray (2009) I began analysis of the data immediately instead of waiting until the end. After a first coding phase I reviewed the codes[9], (e.g., Braun & Clarke, 2006; Bazeley, 2009; Gray, 2009) and began to identify the main themes as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006). Later, I initiated the data reduction process (e.g., Miles & Huberman, 1994; Alhojailan, 2012) wherein I selected, simplified and transformed the data reducing it to a more manageable size. Finally, I made connections between the themes, identified different positions within them, and interpreted the data (Bazeley, 2009).

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9 AKA the "recoding phase."

I selected the interview extracts that I considered that represented better the key themes. Some feminist scholars (e.g., Reinharz & Davidman, 1992; Stanley & Wise, 1993; Skeggs, 1995) argue that the researcher must position herself in the same intellectual plane as participants and avoid exploiting them as *mere* data sources. Skeggs (1995) suggests that another good strategy to negotiate this research-participant power imbalance is to think carefully about the representation we provide about participants' lived experiences. Reinharz and Davidman (1992) note that many feminist researchers include quotations from the interviewees to help to build a bridge between the reader and participants: "When the interviewees 'speak for themselves' or 'use their own voice', the reader is better able to understand" (1992, p. 267). I wanted to give voice to the users too because as Elaine Lally (2009) pointed out: "Research participants are themselves the experts on their own life-world" (2009, p. 161). For this reason, I reproduce many interview extracts so the readers can have a closer connection with social media users' perspectives.

In this section, I have explained how I selected participants; my methods for collecting data: participant observation, user profile analysis and in-depth interviews; and my method for analysing data: thematic analysis. In the next section, I present the ethical considerations that I took into account in this study.

4.4. Ethics

Ethics, as defined by Joan Sieber (1993), is "the application of a system of moral principles to prevent harming or wronging others, to promote the good, to be respectful, and to be fair" (1993, p. 14). Gray (2009) explains that research ethics are concerned to the "appropriateness of the researcher behavior in relation to the subjects of the research or those who are affected by it" (2009, p. 68). Markham (2015) describes how there are a number of documents, such as UN Declaration of Human Rights or the Declaration of Helsinki, which gather the main principles of research ethics and ethical treatment of persons. In academic research, Markham (2015) explains, ethics is related to how researchers treat participants. She links the practice of ethics in the research process with feminist perspectives:

Producing ethics comes with responsibility. It shifts the burden from the regulatory arena to the personal and makes the personal political (in the feminist sense). Deliberately highlighting the future as the aim of research, the individual can more fully work within a logic of accountability (2015, p. 10).

In the last version of the ethical guideline of the Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR), Annette Markham and Elizabeth Buchanan (2012) suggest that Internet research problematizes fundamental research ethics question of personhood. Researchers conducting studies in online settings must consider whether one's digital presence is an extension of the self. Wiles (2013) points out that some special considerations may be necessary when researching in online settings. Nevertheless, drawing on Rebecca Eynon et al. (2008) and Helen Snee (2008), Wiles (ibid.) argues that research ethics of studies involving online data can be drawn in traditional ethical frameworks.

Ethical consideration may be observed in all stages of the research from design to publication. This study received approval by the University of Leeds Research Ethics Committee before starting the fieldwork, and ethical issues were observed at every stage of the research process. Different data collection techniques may imply particular ethical issues. I have included ethical considerations in the methods section to better explain them in the context of the research process. Nevertheless, general ethical principles (e.g., Sieber, 1993; Gray, 2009; Markham & Buchanan, 2012) are usually categorized in four areas: avoid deception, ensure informed consent, avoid harm, and respect of privacy of participants. In this section, I discuss the overall ethical implications of the study in relation to these four areas.

4.4.1. Avoid deception

I decided to spend a large amount of time looking for participants in order to avoid deception. As I presented myself as a researcher through my profiles in each social media platform, I was conducting overt research. Although some studies show the difficulty to find participants among chatrooms users, I decided to disclose my identity as a researcher both in Badoo and CouhcSurfing. The study conducted by James Hudson and Amy Bruckman (2004) about research in 525 chatrooms to measure how participants react to online research found that users had a negative reaction to being

studied without consent. When they disclosed their status as researchers, they only got 4 participants out of 766 users. In fact, it was very hard to find participants, especially on Badoo, where the communication is chat-based. The process of recruitment of participants was time-consuming, but it was the most ethical approach I could take. As explained earlier, some Badoo users did not read my profile before they first talked to me; therefore I explained to everyone who contacted me that I was a researcher in case they had not read the description in my profile to avoid misunderstandings.

Providing information, Wiles (2013) argues, is important to assure that participants fully understand what participating in the study might involve. Wiles (2013) notes that it may be useful to provide "some introductory information" (2013, p. 27) to prospective participants, and provide an extended version of the information about the study only to participants who express their interest in taking part in the research. I approached potential participants with brief information about the study; in case they were interested I provided them with more details about what their participation in the research would imply. Prospective participants received information, verbally or in writing, about the nature of the research and the different forms of participation they could opt for (see "Information sheet" in Appendix A). Basically participants agreed to participate in an interview and to have their Badoo or CouchSurfing user profile analysed. In addition they could agree to be friended on Facebook in order to give me access to their Facebook profile.

4.4.2. Ensure informed consent

Informed consent, as Wiles (2013) explains, consists on "providing participant with clear information about what participating in the research project will involve and giving them the opportunity to decide whether or not they want to participate" (2013, p. 25). Previous to gathering any users' data, I needed participants' consent, thus I conducted user profiles analysis after the interviews, where I got participants' signed consent. Beninger et al. (2014), in the last report of the NatCen Social Research in the UK about users' perspectives on Internet research, note that there is not agreement among users about the need to ask for consent in Internet research, as some users consider the information to be publicly available. In particular, Beninger et al. (2014) identified a range of factors that social media users consider important to ask for consent in Internet research: "Mode and content of the posts; social media website

being used; the expectations the user had when posting, and; the nature of the research" (2014, p. 28). In particular, social media users explained that depending on the sensitivity of the content it would fundamental or not to ask participants for permission. Therefore, due to the sensitive nature of my research topic, I considered it necessary to ask for the consent of all the participants before analysing any digital data.

Participants signed a "consent form" before the fieldwork began. The informed consent included a personal agreement for maintaining anonymity and confidentiality (see Appendix B). It also informed participants that they could withdraw from the research at any point without giving any kind of explanation. Alternatively, at the beginning of the recording of the interview I explained verbally to the interviewee the same information contained in the consent form and her/his consent was recorded.

4.4.3. Avoid harm

The primary ethical obligation of any research is not to cause any harm (e.g., Sieber, 1993; Hine, 2000; Gray, 2009; Kozinets, 2010; Markham & Buchanan, 2012). On social research, Wiles (2013) argues, harms are mainly related to participants' emotional well-being. Research would be considered harmful, for instance, if it generates any kind of mental distress or embarrassment for participants. The potentially sensitive topic of the research project, which deals with intimacy practices, is an ethical issue itself. Wiles (2013), drawing on Claire Renzetti and Raymond Lee (1993), highlights the importance of avoiding any risks for participants "particularly in research on topics which are in some way "sensitive" because they focus on personal issues" (2013, p. 55), as is the case in my research project. For this reason, especially during the interviews, I took care that the participants felt comfortable. Talking to people about their intimate experiences involves feelings and it is important to be sensitive to the reactions of the participants to the questions and to change of topic, take a break or finish the interview in case the participant got disturbed. Of course, participants were not forced to reveal any information they did not want to provide. Davina Cooper (2007), following Carol Gilligan's (1995) work in feminist ethics of care, highlights the importance of taking care of participants in feminist research: "Care has become a central frame for feminist scholarship, providing a primary term through which intimacy and labour are configured" (2007, p. 243). Thus,

I was very careful to formulate all questions in a respectful way and I changed the topic in case I observed any signal of distress. This only happened with one participant who did not look comfortable talking about her personal relationships. I moved on to some technical questions, which were related to the configuration of privacy settings in the social media platforms she used.

Some scholars (e.g., Sieber, 1993; Gray, 2009; Wiles, 2013) affirm that not only do researchers have to avoid causing any harm, but they also should aim to provide positive benefits to participants. Benefits for participating in research, as explained by Wiles (2013), may include: "feeling listened to, having an opportunity to express their views or feeling that their views will influence policy or practice" (2013, p. 56). In fact, in this research some participants seemed to vent by telling me their personal stories, such as in the case of Laura (40, Spain), when retelling the abuse and robbery suffered by her former partner that she met through Badoo. When I asked Laura at the end of the interview whether she had something else to add, she emphasised that although she had a bad experience, she still believed that dating/hook-up sites might be useful for many lonely people to find a partner, but she would like to advice new users to be careful, and take their time to get to know a potential partner met through these means before moving forward in the relationships, as she did. Thus, she was pleased about the idea that her personal experience could benefit other people who were *newbies* in these environments to avoid the same bad situation to happen to them. Participants also benefited from a better understanding of how they negotiate their different intimate relationships through different social media platforms. In fact, one participant commented after the interview that he had never thought of his practices in such a deep way. He expressed that his better understanding of his own intimacy practices through social media was a positive outcome of participating in the research. My main objective when conducting research from this ethical point of view was avoiding harm. Nevertheless, I always tried to help participants with my knowledge of social media to make sense of their own intimacy practices when interacting online.

4.4.4. Respect of privacy of participants

It is widely accepted that research participants must have their right to privacy, confidentiality and anonymity protected and, as Claire and Lee (1993) note, this is especially important in research that involves revealing intimate information.

Confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed to all participants in order to protect their privacy. Following Paul Oliver (2003) and Ian Gregory (2003), Wiles (2013) defines confidentiality as a concept related to the principles of privacy and respect for personal autonomy, and is often understood as the concealment of personal information which cannot be repeated without the discloser's permission.

In order to protect participants' information, I followed the Data Protection Act (British Parliament, 1998) related to data storage. Audio recordings were transcribed as soon as possible, and they were destroyed after the transcription. All documents (audio recording, transcripts, field notes, and consent forms) were kept in a secure location at the University of Leeds (a locked cupboard at the School of Media and Communications for printed copies, and a computer protected by password for the digital documents). The original data was not shared with anyone, apart from my supervisors. Anonymity was ensured; as explained earlier, participants were given pseudonyms. Likewise, participants were not required to give their legal names or other information that could identify them, such as address or date of birth. They were asked to give their age and gender, and these two variables were used to identify them as subjects of the study, together with their place of residence. No kind of personal data of the participants was stored or recorded. In addition, I did not include any direct quote from user profiles in order to avoid participants being searched and identified.

So far in this section I have analysed how I prevented deception by conducting an overt research, ensured informed consent, avoided harm, and respected privacy of participants. In the next section I address the limitations of the study.

4.5. Limitations of the study

In this section, I present a number of methodological limitations of the research project, which revolve around the issue of sampling.

The international sample, although it shows the kinds of users that participate in the services, does not allow analysing cultural differences since half of participants were expats. For that reason, I could not conduct a comparative study between Spain and the UK.

Convenience sampling might have not provided the most representative sample for the study. Using a purposeful sampling technique with a more specific sample frame may lead to finding participants who better represent the population of social media platforms where the interaction is among strangers.

Although I combined both a call for participants and a one-to-one approach, it was difficult to locate successful online daters who found a long-lasting relationship through Badoo, since they would not be using the platform at that moment. It would be interesting to look for participants through snowballing techniques, or with a call for participants through other means outside of the sites themselves, in order to measure the effectiveness of dating services. In chapter 9 I will adress further research directions that could be taken in future studies about intimacy practices in the age of social media.

4.6. Conclusion

This chapter has presented how I conducted the research project. The research design of this study is based in a multi-sited qualitative case study. The concept of multi-sitedness is helpful to understand how intimacy practices facilitated by social media may happen online or offline and in different locations. This study focuses on three social media platforms: Badoo, CouchSurfing and Facebook. The different kinds of personal relationships these platforms foster and facilitate are useful to map and understand the different kinds of intimacy practices that users may experience through social media. In order to approach these practices among adults, I targeted users aged 25-49 years old in Leeds (UK) and Barcelona (Spain). A cross-platform research design is useful to explore broadly the role that different social media technologies play in personal relationships from a twofold approach: (1) The role of social media platforms as intimacy mediators, and (2) How adults adopt and adapt technical affordances that these sites provide to create and develop personal relationships.

My epistemology is based on the feminist standpoint that "all knowledge is situated", and also draws on ethnographic perspective. I have engaged in reflexivity to analyse the way that I, as a researcher, acquired knowledge, and also to understand how my personal background and experience affected the research process when explaining my research choices in the methods section. In addition, I have highlighted the

limitations of my methodology, for example in relation to the lack of representativeness of convenience sampling, or how the use of online interviews may have facilitated female participants to open up more. I have also addressed the different ethical implications involved in different stages of the research, such as the location of the self in the research when recruiting participants, participant observation, in-depth interviews, and user profile analysis.

This study received ethical approval by the Ethical Research Committee before I started the fieldwork, but ethical considerations were taken into account at every stage of the research in order to protect participants' privacy and avoid any harm. I used mainly in-depth interviews to collect data, complemented with user profiles analysis and participant observation. The data gathered through these methods was analysed using thematic analysis. Triangulation allows verifying data and enriching data gathered from one method with data gathered from a different one. For instance, the analysis of users' profiles was useful to verify what participants explain in the interviews and what was actually there. The interplay of the data gathered through different methods across different platforms was very helpful to arrive at a holistic understanding of mediated intimacy practices in the age of social media, analysis that I present in the next chapters.

<center>**Chapter 5**</center>

<center>**Redefining the Concept of Intimacy in the Age of Social Media:**</center>
<center>**Users' Perspectives**</center>

5.1. Introduction

Increasingly people are using social media to create and maintain personal relationships. Social media appears as a new venue where intimacy practices are experienced and negotiated. For this reason, it is necessary to explore the concept of intimacy within these social media contexts to understand how it is transformed in "the process of mediation" (Silverstone, 2005). As (Chambers, 2013) puts it:

> Recognising the major role now played by social media in maintaining personal ties, this broadening of the debate about the mediation of personal relationships foregrounds the quintessentially mediated nature of intimacy and friendship and, therefore, the need for a reconsideration of the concept of "intimacy" (2013, p. 39).

The main aim of this chapter is to explore the concept of intimacy in the context social media interaction to question if it *really exists* (Baym, 2010; Ito et al., 2010; Jamieson, 2013; Lambert, 2013), if it is *redefined* (Sibilia, 2008; Turkle, 2011), or if it is *illusory* (Van Manen, 2010; Taddicken & Jers, 2011). The opinions and experiences of social media users about intimacy through social media will be discussed to contribute to this debate. This chapter is focused on the interpretation of the concept of intimacy in the age of social media by participants: how participants describe the concept of intimacy, which ways participants believe that intimacy is affected by social media affordances, and how participants understand intimacy practices performed in public when interacting through social media.

To do this, I use the data amassed from interviews and, in some instances, I refer to participants' intimacy practices observed in their social media profiles. The different kinds of definitions of privacy and intimacy concepts reported by participants will also be analysed. I specifically focus on whether or not participants differentiate between the two aforementioned concepts. I then move on to exploring the concept of

intimacy within the context of social media. Finally, I discuss users' perspectives on the relationship between intimacy and their perception of social media as public or private. As most of the participants consider social media platforms to be public venues (in relation to the broadcasting affordances provided by their public features), I address intimacy practices in public through social media. Despite some scholars pointing to the increasing performance of intimacy in public (e.g., Sibilia, 2008; Thompson, 2008; Turkle, 2010), most participants claimed to not engage in this practice because they considered it inappropriate, and even disturbing.

5.2. Disentangling privacy and intimacy?

During the first stages of the fieldwork I realised that some participants mixed up the concepts of privacy and intimacy. In order to explore how the clash of both concepts occurs, in this section I present privacy and intimacy definitions provided by participants, and discuss when a clash between the two concepts was expressed. The concept of privacy was mainly defined as non-disclosure, secrecy, confidentiality, opposite to public, related to the control over personal information, or non-interference in one's own space. On the other hand, the concept of intimacy was mainly defined within privacy, as closeness (emotional connection), physical (sexual, touching, looking in the eye), exclusive (restricted to a small circle), and dependent on trust.

Constraining to reveal personal information was often included in participants' privacy definitions. Many participants defined the concept of privacy as non-disclosure. For example:

> Basically everything I don't share, something that is for me. So I don't like people to ask me about that stuff that I don't talk about, so for me everything that I don't mention is private (Alice, 29, UK).

> Things that are only for me and I don't share them with anyone (Ivana, 32, Spain).

> What you keep for yourself and you don't share with the others (Olga, 40, Spain).

Things you keep to yourself, you don't want other people knowing about yourself. Like things you don't want the general public or your friends to know. Maybe close friends, but not the wider circle of friends (Caroline, 26, UK).

As Caroline commented, sometimes people disclose what they consider their private information to a close circle of friends. Within these close circles of friends confidentiality, built on trust, is implied, as the following quotes show:

Privacy for me is just, I suppose, close to confidentiality, so whatever I say stays there (Mateo, 43, UK).

Something private is something I tell to people I trust that I know they are not going to talk about that to other people (Gemma, 43, Spain).

In relation to confidentiality, some participants referred to control over personal information, and who has access to it, to define the concept of privacy. The notion of control is central to these definitions. For example:

That the person has control over his/her information (Luis, 30, Spain).

Something which protects your personal information (Mario, 36, UK).

Maintaining control of my information and who has access to it (John, 28, UK).

On the other hand, there were a few participants who also mentioned the notion of space to define privacy:

I think it's something like personal space. It's some kind of bubble, I would say, because I think that some things should stay in this bubble (Vanessa, 29, Spain).

Privacy, when I'm at home, is being able to do what I want (Oscar, 41, UK).

I understand, for instance, privacy in your house and intimacy is your person, yourself and your feelings and your things (Sara, 39, Spain).

In relation to personal space, Viel (38, Spain) claimed that cultural differences were key in creating misunderstandings around what was an acceptable behaviour when interacting with people from other cultures:

I'm a touchy person. […] It's something cultural different but if you are travelling this is something that cultural differences make people, like first impressions, reject you. For us (Spanish people), like to kiss to each other, it's something natural (Viel, 38, Spain).

By the same token, Ivana (who is originally from Poland but lives in Spain) also thought that in Spain people are very touchy by her standards:

I think it comes from my nationality (Polish). Here (in Spain) you are very open, you touch each other a lot, and you kiss each other. It took me half a year to get used to giving two kisses in the cheeks whenever I met someone. I feel very well in Finland: nobody kisses you, nobody touches you, no hugs... (Ivana, 32, Spain).

On the other hand, other participants defined privacy in relation to the concept of publicity, as opposed to publicity. Some of them also referred to that relationship as a continuum, where different levels of privacy can be achieved along that continuum, as the following excerpt from an interview with John indicates:

I think for me anything that is discernible from just my everyday public life. So the things I do out in public at the street: go out with my friends, be a white heterosexual male, all of those things I don't consider them private because I do them publicly. I think that the things that I'm concerned about are things that I do privately. So my sex life that's private, the fact that I'm straight and white is not. […] So I guess it's about levels of privacy and there are some things, my name is entirely public, certainly my first name: entirely public,

and my bank details: entirely private. Everything else sits on a spectrum […] for how public or how private it is (John, 28, UK).

This definition is quite similar to Ford's (2011) model of privacy as a continuum in the context of social media. Ford affirms that users can experience different levels of privacy in relation to the different privacy settings they apply to their profiles and other privacy strategies to control access to their personal information. In relation to the concept of privacy as opposite to publicity, some scholars (e.g., Garzón, 2003) represent the interplay of publicity, privacy and intimacy as concentric circles where intimacy would be in the centre, a realm that only the self can access; the private realm would be open to close relationships; the public realm would be open to everybody.

Some participants referred to a similar concept and described intimacy as something personal to oneself. For instance, Raquel (35, Spain) explains that intimacy is something more inner than privacy: "Privacy is towards others, and intimacy is more something seen from me." Still, other participants included the significant other in the circle of intimacy as well. For instance, Caroline (26, UK) explains that what she shares with her partner is intimate, while what she shares with her friends would only be private. In relation to this, some participants located the concept of intimacy within privacy. For example:

I would consider intimate to be the subsection of privacy that relates to personal details and to my personal life rather than my business or professional life (John, 28, UK).

Intimacy for me refers to how close you are with the partner. What you actually do with that partner. It's a very private word for me it's, you know, what I do with my partner "behind closed doors". So for me intimacy is our sex, I miss you, stay, see you later, that's intimacy (Oscar, 43, UK).

Oscar highlighted that for him intimacy was both physical and emotional, but it was always related to his partner. There were other participants who also related intimacy to the body, though not always in a sexual sense:

Intimate is like more stuff to do with like sexual stuff or things to do with your body that you wouldn't necessarily want everyone to know about. Like sex or if you have some kind of like, I don't know, horrible infection or something like that. You don't really want to talk to like all your friends about that, do you? or maybe some of them, but like not everyone (Lulu, 25, UK).

It's how I feel; it's part of me. Yes, with intimacy I think about my body […] something physical, I don't know, I don't have any idea, sexual, maybe (Mario, 36, UK).

Many participants explained that for them intimacy was not only sexual, but was also related to a feeling of closeness to another person, an emotional connection. For example:

Being close to someone, like being in a relationship. Maybe not just even being in a relationship but just like – like boy and girl, but like between friends as well you can have intimacy, I guess. It doesn't have to be about sex, I guess, it's just like closeness and feeling connected with someone, maybe (Lulu, 25, UK).

Deeper personal interaction, not just physical or sexual (David, 30, UK).

Like a connection […] for me intimacy is that link that is created between those two people when they are a couple, that only that person and you know about it, and for more that you try to explain it you won't be able to describe it properly. […] The sensation you have, not to be able to explain it, that's intimacy (Cesar, 44, Spain).

Cesar also referred to reciprocity in the intimate connection between two people, to complicity, "because just with one sight we know what the other is thinking about." On the other hand, one of the characteristics that most participants emphasized was that intimacy is exclusive: "for your eyes only", as the following interview extracts show:

> For me, I would say, it's probably what you keep in the circle (Vanessa, 30, Spain).

> So intimacy is more like close, you don't do that with everybody, with a selected people, closer number of people (Mario, 36, UK).

> So intimacy, you are going to share things to people you are close to, your close friends, your lovers or whatever. You don't share with all your friends, only with selected people (Gary, 41, UK).

These circles of intimacy are created and sustained with an expectation of trust. Even some participants highlighted that it was trust first and then intimacy:

> I suppose it's the trust that you have with someone to talk about something else than what you did on the weekend. When you trust someone and you have this kind of relationship that you trust him (Peter, 32, UK).

> If I trust someone face to face, but if I'm with the people I want to be with. I mean, if I don't have some trust with you I'm not going to tell you about my life, but if I trust you, I don't have any problem with telling you my life (Ana, 35, UK).

> Intimacy is more for myself, or with a very small group of people that I really trust, that I know they are not going to tell someone else (Gemma, 43, Spain).

> Just maybe with people that I trust a lot which are not so many (Robert, 43, UK).

Many participants had a real problem coming up with different definitions of privacy and intimacy. Some participants defined intimacy as their private life, which led them again to the concept of privacy. There were a number of participants who found it very difficult to distinguish between the two concepts. For example:

Maybe I should check what is the line that separates, because it sounds similar to privacy to me: what is private is intimate, so I would say it's the same (Olga, 40, Spain).

I think it's something within the privacy context, it is still privacy, but it's more intimate privacy, it's more kind of personal, like I don't know, sexuality maybe, or things more... it's difficult to differentiate it between the two, because privacy is part of it. Intimate is something more close to me, while privacy is something more general. Intimacy is something more related to sex, I don't know, or... (Mario, 36, UK).

Despite the fact that some participants conceptualize intimacy as a euphemism for sex, the main conclusion I arrived at after analysing these interviews was that most participants located intimacy in the private realm. They identified privacy as the protection of intimacy, and most of them asserted that intimacy lost its status in cases where it was revealed in the "public gaze", like some scholars have highlighted (e.g., Sibilia, 2008; Mateus, 2010). In the next section, I analyse how participants conceptualize privacy in social media interactions, focusing on the concepts of social and institutional privacy.

5.3. How is privacy achieved on social media?

There are certain characteristics of social media environments that complicate the possibility of achieving privacy. Some participants pointed out that digital communication affordances of replicability, persistency and scalability (boyd, 2008) make it quite difficult to achieve privacy on social media. In this section, I will discuss how participants deal with these affordances in order to experience privacy when interacting through social media and how they understand privacy within this context.

Gary, who is a UK-based social media user who spends more of his social media time on Badoo, commented on these affordances in reference to the possibility that another Badoo user that he had interacted with could copy and paste any private conversation between the two of them and publish it elsewhere, making that information more vulnerable. For this reason, he curates the information he discloses through the chat feature: "I want to be careful about using websites like Badoo, because you could say

something that you literally regret for the next year" (Gary, 41, UK). Some participants highlighted the difficulty of deleting content once uploaded online, which makes reference to the persistence of information in digital environments, for example: "It's very easy at the moment to upload information but once you have uploaded it, it's extremely difficult to get it back. Until that is more, say, regulated or more controlled, you just have to be careful of what you put" (Sara, 39, Spain). In relation to scalability, Petro remarked that privacy is much more difficult to keep in the age of social media. He used an example of controversial pictures taken in public and uploaded on Facebook by a common friend:

> This happened to some friends of mine who were cheating on their girlfriends and the pictures went online. Because you can be in Plaza Catalunya kissing a girl and 20 people can see you, but through Facebook a lot of people can see you. […] I think that when I was 20 years old I didn't care about kissing in public, but nowadays I do care (Petro, 29, Spain).

The co-creation of online intimacies through photos uploaded by other users was an issue that participants often reported. For example, Caroline (26, UK) clarified that she shares intimate information on a one-to-one basis through the chat feature, but she would not publish intimate information on her Facebook profile for all other users to see. She expressed her concern about the information published by other people about her, such as pictures, because she is a lesbian and she has some family members as friends on Facebook who are unaware of her identified sexual orientation, a piece of information she would like to keep private from them. I will discuss how participants negotiate the disclosure of topics they consider intimate in the next chapter, where sexual orientation was one of the topics that they more often mentioned.

When asking about the definition of privacy on social media, David (31, UK) defined privacy on social media as "(non) disclosure to others or third parties." He made reference to the two dimensions of privacy that I discussed in chapter 3: social privacy (to other people) and institutional privacy (to third parties, e.g., companies, government). Indeed, most participants defined online privacy in relation to social privacy, to what their friends and family could see through social media about their private lives, mainly in reference to Facebook. They emphasized how difficult it was

to achieve privacy on Facebook because they had a large number of contacts and they pointed to the configuration of privacy settings as a way to control it, though only a few of them created friend lists. For example:

> I don't think that on social media you can control that, because your friends can almost see everything you do, unless you set the groups (friend lists) (Mario, 36, UK).

> It's very hard, on social media there is little privacy, I can block a lot of things, or I cannot disclose a lot of things, but a friend is linked to my profile, so his friends can access my profile. Privacy is only what I can create by not publishing personal things (Laura, 41, Spain).

> Well, you need to read the networks that you use and see with whom you share this or that information, what you should know if you are a user in Facebook that if you post something in your wall it's going to be seen for all the contacts you have. So if you don't put the restrictions it's up to you. That's why sometimes I don't understand when people are complaining online saying this should not be like this, why you say this or that? It's very simple if you don't want somebody to steal your pictures: don't put them! (Olga, 40, Spain).

Following this definition of privacy in relation to social interaction, some participants expressed major concerns about lateral surveillance (from peers) more than they expressed concerns about institutional surveillance (commercial or governmental). For example:

> I'm more worried about my mom seeing them (pictures posted on social media) (Lulu, 25, UK).

> What I'm more concerned about is what friends, family, colleagues can see and what the public in general, anyone who would want to look for me, especially since I'm a relatively public person (John, 28, UK).

I think their basic concept is the same but online is more dangerous because you sometimes put things and you don't know what to put or where it's going to go. For me, I have a fear that when I put something in the Internet, in Facebook or whatever, I put things that it will be a big drama if they go beyond my friends or whatever. There are people who are like: "Oh, my God, privacy! I couldn't use this because it's against my privacy." I say: "You just put whatever you don't mind to be known." Even if I have that just for my friends, I just put things that can be seen. I don't put a picture of me naked or put confidential information that I don't want to be online (Sara, 39, Spain).

Although most participants expressed having issues related to their social privacy when interacting through social media, and that they engaged in self-censorship to preserve their privacy, other participants observed that users have internalized the practice of watching one another, which would be in line with Zuckerberg's affirmation: "Privacy is no longer a social norm":

Maybe because if you are interested in someone, you go to his/her Facebook profile, you look at his/her pictures, or you look at what he/she writes in his/her wall (Peter, 32, UK).

Whereas now it's all like: "Oh, yeah, I googled you!" It's quite accepted and it's like the girl I've been seeing now, she's been stalking my Facebook. That doesn't bother me. She can actually use that word and I'm flattered. I like the fact that she's been looking at me, she wants to know more about me. That actually is a compliment to me. So that whole concept within a short space of time, it changed completely. Whereas six years ago it would freak me out if a girl had done that. Now it's like: "Oh, yeah! She wants to know more about me" (Oscar, 43, UK).

In relation to this transformation of the notion of privacy in the context of social media, Zuckerberg also claimed that "Transparency is good for social relationships", as we saw in chapter 2. Likewise, Esteban (35, Spain) considered that a good outcome of this radical transparency is the fact that people have to perform friendship in public. Chambers (2013) acknowledges that the main shift in relation to intimacy and social

media is the public performance of friendship. In fact, when Esteban mentioned it during the interview I asked him why he believed that it was positive to display friendship publicly on social media, and he could not define exactly why he thought that way. I referred to Zuckerberg's claim, and he said that he agreed with that statement.

On the other hand, participants considered institutional privacy more out of their control than social privacy, as Gemma put it: "In the social one you can restrict a bit, but on the rest you cannot do anything" (Gemma, 43, Spain). There were some participants who expressed unpleasant feelings in relation to commercial monitoring:

> Yes, because they can control and then what happens… I am an IT guy, so I put some protections in my PC when I navigate in the computer to filter commercials. So in my Facebook, in my computer, I have blocked all the commercials. But if I'm at work, I try to put it at work, but sometimes I cannot use like protection in my telephone, for example. But I know that there is traffic of information about me on Facebook (Viel, 39, Spain).

> I don't know. I think they seem to have a very *laissez-faire* approach to other people's information and to privacy. There's something about them and Zuckerberg that seems nasty. I'm not sure what I'm basing that on, it just seems a bit unpleasant (John, 28, UK).

> Over all Facebook or, for example, Google. The fact that these companies have so much information about oneself… I don't like that a private company owns so much information, even though it is trivial such as your age and these kinds of things, but you never know who is seeing your information and what they can do. It's something that people accept as something normal, but you always have this… (bad taste) […] No, I don't like it. Yes, but not, at the end of the day I'm there, and I put pictures and comment, so I accept it (Peter, 32, UK).

Though they expressed concerns about social media monitoring, all these participants claimed that they accepted the trade-off of commercial monitoring for connectivity.

However, some participants referred to governmental surveillance as a major privacy concern:

> Everything you do online it's exposed to monitoring by the authorities… (Marc, 39, Spain).

> I think it's an important political issue in what security services and other people can involve but that's sort of slightly abstract. I think that the revelations that have come out recently about Prism and about American surveillance are unbelievably chilling and I think… […] I don't think necessarily that the Obama administration is some sort of terrible force that we should be concerned about, my concern is what would happen, the precedents it sets (John, 28, UK).

Taking together all these privacy concerns, Viel, who is an IT consultant, commented: "In fact, we should go back to take our typing machines and forget about online intimacy" (Viel, 39, Spain). As we saw in the previous section, Viel was again blending the concepts of privacy and intimacy, this time in the context of social media. However, as we will see below, Viel actually engaged in intimacy practices in public through social media. In the definitions and concerns about privacy, I could identify differences among genders. It seems that female participants referred to their "private lives" and they were mainly concerned about social privacy, while male participants, although they also expressed concerns about their social privacy, were more inclined to comment about institutional privacy and "personal data" as well. In the next section, I explore how intimacy is understood in social media contexts and, in particular, whether participants believe the medium affects their understanding and practice of intimacy.

5.4. Redefining intimacy (online):

In order to highlight the characteristics of intimacy through social media, most participants tended to compare online and offline settings. When comparing intimacy through social media and offline, there were diverse opinions about whether or not users could achieve intimacy online, and in the affirmative case, about whether there was more, less, or the same level of intimacy online than offline. Some participants

claimed that it was not possible to experience intimacy on social media because of the publicity afforded by the medium, because they located intimacy within privacy. These participants were thinking only of interaction through public features, a topic that I will discuss further in the next section. Others considered it impossible to experience intimacy online, or they deemed online intimacy to be of lower quality than intimacy experienced face-to-face, because of the lack of physical interaction. On the other hand, some participants claimed that intimacy could be experienced through social media, though they identified some issues related to trust in the context of interaction with strangers.

Close/closer were words that some participants often used in order to describe intimacy in general, but interestingly participants did not mention these terms when talking about intimacy online. These definitions of intimacy were related more to physicality and embodiment. Following the previous definition of intimacy as *closeness*, in the context of social media interaction, there were a few participants who claimed that the feeling of closeness was related to the type of relationship, not to the means of communication:

> I personally think that intimacy can happen on social media, I'm speaking from my own personal experience (Sandra, 39, UK).

> In the moment I meet that person and I feel comfortable it's the same as if I had met this person in another place (Ana, 35, UK).

> To me it doesn't really make any difference if it's online and not offline, you can still connect with people because I believe that when we connect with somebody we connect through energy. It doesn't really matter if you really connect to somebody, if it's on the other side of the world, if it's opposite you. […] It doesn't matter if you do it through social media or whatever, it's the feel that you have for the person (Mateo, 47, UK).

Later in the interview the last participant, Mateo, specified that even though he believed that it is possible to experience intimacy interacting through social media, it is not the same level or quality of intimacy. However, in the case of the creation of

new relationships, he considered that social media were a good starting point for developing intimacy in embodied encounters:

> CouchSurfing, I think, is just the point where you start and, I think, for somebody is where you start and from then on intimacy will come from interacting more with the person (Mateo, 47, UK).

Participants that considered it impossible or difficult to experience intimacy through social media had defined intimacy in relation to the body, particularly to sex. For this reason, they found that lack of physical contact would be an obstacle to experience intimacy:

> I guess you can have like webcam sex but that's not very intimate that's just wanking in front of a camera. I'd say that generally intimacy is better face-to-face and I don't think until they develop a really serious, clever computer plug-in that's always going to be the case, because intimacy is about physical, it's about looking in someone's eyes. If you wrote someone a love letter then, yes, of course Facebook is just as good as writing a letter although there's something more charming about a letter. That isn't the way that I would be intimate with someone. I want to hold their hand or look into their eyes or be in bed with them (John, 28, UK).

> I think you can never substitute the real connection through human touch (Mateo, 47, UK).

> You can't really tell if someone's being serious in a conversation when you're chatting. I can put "lol" but I'm looking like at you (serious face) and saying "lol" and I'm not laughing out loud. So you don't really know what the reaction is when you're saying something intimate, when you're chatting and you say something that person you don't exactly know what the reaction is. I would prefer it to be face-to-face. I would not chat and say to someone… At least I would like to hear their voice, if not by chat, at least listen to them so I know exactly what they feel, how they're reacting to it (Isaac, 26, UK).

Even though Isaac claimed to prefer face-to-face communication to online communication, he was a very extensive social media user. He had more than one thousand friends on Facebook, and 920 pictures uploaded to his profile. Originally from India, Isaac explained that he recently moved to the UK, and he used to communicate with his family and friends on a daily basis through Facebook. Thus, we can observe that despite his preference for offline interaction he was mainly communicating with his significant others through social media because it was the most convenient means of communication in his current personal situation as an expat. The lack of physicality, which was deemed problematic for developing intimacy online, was considered positive for shy people in order to foster intimate self-disclosure. Some participants explained that they found it easier to communicate deeper thoughts and feelings through social media because they did not have to face their interlocutors:

> I guess it is probably easier online because you knew you haven't got someone sitting with you talking to them like we are now, then I feel if I talk to them something really personal, and I feel like: "Oh no! I can see you looking at me", whereas if you are online you just say it to someone who is not there, you just say it to like a non-entity or something, even though you know there are so many people out there looking at it, but because they are not physically there with you, I guess it's easier. But I'm very aware though, that when I put information there are people looking at it although they are not here with me right know it doesn't mean they are not going to read it. Although it's easier to put it online, I'm also aware of the bad things (Lulu, 25, UK).

> I would say you can probably say more things online than you would say offline, face-to-face, just because you've got a kind of barrier there, so maybe you feel you are in your home environment, you feel more comfortable to say things there, meanwhile face-to-face I may not, you know, say something, I'd probably lie instead of like saying it, but online you probably could say it because you, you know, in front of the screen it's more... easier, it's less fuss or something, so you can say whatever you want (Caroline, 26, UK).

> In Badoo people are more daring, if you are shy, for instance, because you don't have the person in front of you (Petro, 29, Spain).

> I think is easier when you are writing because you don't see the other person, if you want to say something you feel braver to say it online because you don't have to look at the eye to the other person (Laura, 41, Spain).

These participants found that social media act as intimacy-facilitators, because it is easier for them to talk through digital means rather than face-to-face. Esteban, who is a high school teacher, observed that for many people "the Internet is a great help, they are all the time connecting and writing" (Esteban, 35, Spain). In this sense, participants linked intimacy on social media with self-disclosure. As Jamieson (2013) points out, online self-disclosure "may generate a fleeting sense of intimacy between hitherto strangers or developing the intimacy of an already established relationship that began with co-presence" (2013, p. 18). Thus, some participants when defining intimacy through social media identified the concept with self-disclosure:

> Personal experiences like just whatever you feel – whatever you feel comfortable putting on there like information or personal experiences, memories or like photographs (Lulu, 25, UK).

> Sharing deeper personal information and photos (David, 29, UK).

> That personal connection between two people and being able to be openly share your personal thoughts about yourself, feeling comfortable within yourself to speak openly. There is a level of intimacy in my opinion (Sandra, 39, UK).

> If I want to project what kind of person I am and people to understand how I'm thinking, yes, it's intimate. Now intimate doesn't have to be necessarily sexual intimate, it can be intimate to what I'm actually thinking as a person, as a human being (Mateo, 47, UK).

Gary, speaking about Badoo, related self-disclosure through the chat feature to reciprocity: "I generally say or disclose as much as it's disclosed back to me" (Gary, 41, UK). Also, other participants relate the concept of intimacy as *self-disclosure* to the notion of trust: they need to trust the other users in order to disclose intimate information to them, and at the same time, through the disclosure of personal and intimate information about themselves they build trust in one another. In the context of the creation of new relationships, most participants considered it problematic to achieve closeness through digital communication because they have trust issues with the medium itself and with other users. This lack of trust had a negative impact on the engagement in intimacy practices through social media. For example:

> I had some problems with considering something what you're going to send by the Internet as intimate. I use the Internet, that's obvious, but for me it's not safe enough however stupid it sounds. I can't feel really intimate, or let's say confident, when I'm having a kind of relationship with people only by Internet or social media. I can't call them my friends or something like this but only if I know somebody in person then sometimes it is something like friendship or not, but only if I know this person from my real life. I just don't trust the Internet personally for this (Noelia, 25, UK).

> It's based on a picture, you like it or not, you talk, but you cannot trust 100% about what she is talking about, the person can be more shy or not, therefore yes, they are more superficial. Until I don't meet someone face-to-face I cannot know if it is for real, and I haven't met anyone yet so... When there is a screen in the middle you can confuse things (Patricia, 31, Spain).

> Some guys asked me at some point if I had Skype, but I don't trust Badoo very much, and I never felt the need to have cybersex (Raquel, 35, Spain).

> When you are comfortable talking to one person (in the chat) you share, sometimes you don't give many details... you can give very intimate details, but nevertheless you are not telling them your name, or where you work (Ana, 35, UK).

Ana stated that when interacting with other users through Badoo, the anonymity facilitated by the site might lead her to communicate intimate details about her life, whilst not disclosing information that could identify her. Ana uses her second name on Badoo, which works as a nickname. Although she publishes her own pictures on the site, the perceived anonymity helped her to open up. Likewise Viel, who used to write an anonymous blog, explained how anonymity fosters intimate self-disclosure:

> If they don't recognise you they don't know. You can put whatever you want. […] Face-to-face you can tell your intimacy to a friend and your friend can say: "Okay, I do not say anything to anyone." But after that, your friend may start speaking to all your friends and at the end they all know about you. You cannot control that (Viel, 38, Spain).

Although social media platforms are increasingly implementing real name policies, there are still some types of platforms, such as blogs, which are often used in anonymous ways through the use of nicknames. I will expand on this debate in the next chapter in section 6.2. *Real name or pseudonym?*

The previous discussion highlights the wide and diverse range of opinions that participants have regarding the topic of intimacy in social media. While some participants thought it was impossible or problematic to experience intimacy through social media because of the lack of physicality, and trust issues related to authenticating the information received, others considered that intimacy may be experienced, and even enhanced, through social media interaction, especially in the case of shy people. Therefore, in relation to whether intimacy on social media exists, is redefined or is illusory, the findings suggest that it is possible to achieve intimacy when interacting through social media, although for some participants it would be of less quality since it is not possible to see or touch the other person to observe their reaction to your intimate self-disclosure. By the same token, some participants pointed out that the lack of physical cues causes mistrust about what people they meet on social media tell them, and this prevents intimacy to flourish, since for many participants the development of intimacy was based on trust. On the other hand, for other participants intimacy would be enhanced online, since they found it easier to disclose intimate information through the screen. In general, we could conclude that

intimacy through social media is mainly experienced as an emotional connection achieved through self-disclosure based on trust. The characteristic of mutuality, described by Zelizer's (2009) as inherent to intimacy, was seldom mentioned by participants when defining intimacy online.

Although some participants referred to the chat feature when discussing online intimacy, most participants thought about intimacy on social media as intimacy through public features. In the next section I discuss whether participants think that intimacy can be experienced through public features and whether they participate in these public intimacy practices.

5.5. From diaries to profiles: The rise and fall of public intimacy?

In order to explore public intimacy practices on social media, the first question that arises is whether participants consider social media to be public or private. Thus, in this section, I analyse how participants understand social media settings in relation to privacy/publicity. Then, I address the issue of public intimacy through social media. The main objective is to discuss whether participants engage in public intimacy practices, and examine their views about these practices.

Social media platforms provide both public and private means of interaction. Despite these private features, in general, participants considered social media to be public because of the publicity they afford, although a few participants reported that insofar as they had applied privacy settings to their social media profiles they were private. For instance, Petro, a heavy social media user, contemplated that users can experience intimacy online insofar as it is protected by the privacy afforded by the configuration of the privacy settings, although he acknowledged that it is complicated because privacy settings policies change very often: "you have to be careful because they are always changing the privacy policy, you always have to update which is available for the others and which is not" (Petro, 28, Spain). On the other hand, David, a UK-based participant, affirmed that the information published on social media is not entirely public or entirely private but "somewhere between the two" (David, 31, UK). Also, some other participants believed that social media could be either public or private depending on the nature of the information you post. In general all participants agreed

that social media was an open environment where privacy was hard to achieve. For example:

> On the social media I think is totally public, everybody can see that. Even if you put this information that nobody can find or something, but there are always a lot of friends. Let's say you have more than 300 friends on Facebook and I'm pretty sure that there are at least 100 you don't actually know, so you have no idea what they can do with this information, especially if they have other friends who have other friends; it's some kind of pyramid. Yes, it's totally public for me (Noelia, 25, UK).

> The chat is more private, but in Badoo everybody can enter. […] I see it like you are in the public realm, because Badoo is the public realm. […] Because you cannot filter things, you are there like "on sale", it's not like you are going to be intimate with someone, it's like being in the public gaze, and showing yourself. There (on Badoo) privacy is quite limited (Raquel, 35, Spain).

Raquel connects her participation on Badoo with a market metaphor, like other authors (e.g., Arvidsson, 2006; Illouz, 2007; Heino et al., 2010; Enguix & Ardèvol, 2012; Cocks, 2015; Lardellier, 2015; Lindsay, 2015) found in their studies, discussed in chapter 3. As Raquel highlighted, social media platforms may facilitate private interaction through private features, but these private features can be also considered public because anybody can contact her in an open platform like Badoo.

Most participants considered social media platforms to be public spaces, mainly in reference to the publicity they allow and because, despite applying privacy settings, on average they had a large number of friends (on Facebook). On the other hand, when asking participants if the information they publish on social media was public or private, most of them asserted that private information loses its status as private and its status as intimate when it is published through social media, as we can see in the following quote:

> I think that when you go online you enter in a realm that is not intimate... what could it be the most intimate? Maybe something I published on Facebook,

something related to me, but as it goes out from my intimacy it becomes more, more of network. […] I decide what is not intimate anymore and goes to the social sphere (Raquel, 35, Spain).

Yet, there were some participants who thought they could experience intimacy in public. In particular, one participant observed that people can see the intimacy in public but they cannot participate in it: "I think it can be shared between two people in a wider area, but it's only you two who are experiencing it" (Caroline, 26, UK). Nevertheless, most participants agreed that they did not negotiate their private lives through social media very often, for instance: "No, I'm not publishing anything connected with my private life" (Noelia, 25, UK). Examples of the few self-reported intimacy practices in public through social media can be seen in the following interview extracts:

Viel (her partner) posted in Russian. I think that the day when I moved here and he posted a message; his Russian-speaking friend helped him. In Russian: "Now nobody is going to tear us apart" and I went: "Ohhhhh". […] I usually try not to participate in these kinds of conversations in public. […] It's only for two people because what I say sometimes in our friends list, though we are open to our friends, but there are random people and from time to time I have to check my friend list just to delete some people (Vanessa, 29, Spain).

I have had like nice conversations with people on Facebook, you know, like: "I love you, and I love you"… I think that the reason why you write it on the wall, instead of send them a message, is because you want other people to see it. But a lot of the time I just send messages as well, because I feel awkward people seeing stuff like that. I don't know, sometimes I put it on the wall (Lulu, 25, UK).

In general, as commented earlier, female participants seemed more concerned about people outside from their social circle watching them. Interestingly, although some male participants explained that they shared some intimate things on Facebook (a common statement was: "I have nothing to hide"), they pointed to a number of topics they considered inappropriate to publish on social media. For example:

> Personally I would share everything, and more or less everything is on Facebook. I don't see any risk. What is the worst they can do? The worst they can do is taking my photographs. [...] If Facebook had an option of my income I wouldn't want everyone to know what my income is. [...] I have everyone on Facebook and because of that I don't know who's watching, with what intention they're watching. So I would not do it to that intimate level of my wife's pregnancy (Isaac, 26, UK).

In the next chapter, I will explore more in depth the topics that participants consider intimate and how they negotiate their publication on social media. A popular topic about intimacy in public through social media was related to exhibitionism. As Thompson (2008) observes, some social media intimacy practices are connected with celebrity culture, and some people behave as celebrities exposing their intimacy online in order to gather more likes and followers. Vanessa explained that in VKontakte (a popular Russian social media platform), the exhibition of intimate pictures was a common practice and she described how VKontakte users objectified relationships in order to increase their popularity and how she disliked this practice. Similarly, John observed these kinds of practices and considered them egocentric:

> I mean I think social media has led to a vast sort of outpouring of egotism, everyone thinks what they're doing is important. […] I don't want to tell people what I'm up to the whole time and I don't want to know what other people are up to the whole time. I want to communicate with people, yes, I don't want to know what someone's had for dinner every night (John, 28, UK).

Following this discussion, Mario, in line with his definition of intimacy, stated that intimacy needed to be protected by privacy, that it is why he could not understand why people engage in public intimacy practices:

> It's a thing you experience with your wife, why do you have to share it with all the public? […] Why do you put that on Facebook? If you put that for me it's not intimate. You don't put things that are intimate, which are closer to you. So if you go to my profile and check my pictures, I don't think you'll see any of

those, because with those I would have protected them, so if it's there anyone can see this (Mario, 36, UK).

Mario related intimacy to the private realm. Mario suggested that intimacy needed the protection of privacy, as scholars such as Schoeman (1984) and Gerstein (1984) have also pointed out. Mario and other participants also questioned why people needed to exhibit their intimacy online. In this sense, some participants admitted that they used to post more often about their whereabouts, but they had diminished this practice notably in recent years:

> Some people (we) abuse a bit of the wall, we use it like our diary, where we write our intimate things. I have even used the Facebook wall to write very intimate things, and I'm now a bit more conservative in that sense... (Raquel, 35, Spain).

> I like less and less sharing my things, I don't share so many things, I don't care that much telling what I'm doing. There was this trend of having to tell what you were doing all the time, but I don't tell everything I do now. If I want to say something to someone I send them an email (Gemma, 43, Spain).

As commented in chapter 3, this constant intimate self-disclosure through social media can generate *ambient intimacy* (Reitchel, 2007) or can produce, in some occasions, digital crowding (Joinson et al., 2011), which is the overexposure of personal information. Likewise, some participants expressed that they feel uncomfortable with these *extimacy* practices through social media and define them as "awkward". Most participants expressed their discomfort with these practices finding them annoying and kind of intrusive:

> I think that some people share too much. I think that intimacy means something different for different people so something I find like awkward, it won't be awkward for someone else. […] For me some people just cross the line I would never cross. But again, that's the freedom of speech, and the freedom of showing whatever they want, so... (Alice, 29, UK).

Alice effectively stresses the difficulty of coming to a common definition of intimacy in social media as it may be something different for different people. Nevertheless most participants agreed that sexual orientation, relationship status, sex, relationship problems and overly emotional disclosures were not appropriate to be published on social media. I will discuss which topics participants considered intimate when interacting on social media and how they negotiated their publication in next chapter.

On the other hand, as most quotes show, participants often referred to pictures when asked about intimacy on social media, which highlights the importance of visual communication to negotiate intimacy on these environments. As commented in chapter 3, Ito (2005) argue that photos tend to be shared within the intimate circle of family, friends or lovers. Similarly, in my study, although most participants did not upload intimate pictures with their family and partners on their Facebook profiles, in some cases their significant others uploaded intimate pictures with them, and they kept the tags on those pictures. For example:

> Those kinds of pictures that I consider intimate I don't share them. I know that there are pictures of me kissing my ex, but it was her who uploaded them. And that was really a problem. She used to put many things that I considered too much for Facebook. […] Once one girl uploaded a picture where I was kissing her and I asked her to remove it, we were just friends, we weren't dating, so it wasn't appropriate. And she removed it. If I consider that something is intimate I don't upload it on Facebook. Sometimes I play with my own personal limits, and sometimes there are things that yes... but essentially if they are there it's because I think is ok that they are there (Peter, 32, UK).

What Peter did not consider acceptable at all was to have intimate pictures on his profile with someone outside of his intimate circle. Looking at the profile of this participant I could observe that his ex-partner had recently deleted those intimate pictures, but he was now tagged in other pictures kissing his current partner. Therefore, although he would not upload those kinds of pictures himself, he did not feel annoyed enough by this practice, as he did not untag himself or ask his current partner to delete those pictures. Following this conversation about the co-creation of

public intimacies, other participants observed how difficult it was to control what other users upload about themselves.

The way participants negotiate their use of references on CouchSurfing is a good example of how they usually prefer not to talk about their intimate experiences with other couchsurfers in public. For instance, in the cases where participants who had a casual sexual relationship left references to each other implying a certain level of intimacy, they did it in a concealed way, so other users would not fully understand what had happened between them. For example:

> A little blink towards that person. I have a couple of references that I'm reading them and I perfectly understand what this person is trying to tell me […], but I don't know if other people understand what this person is trying to tell me with that reference… I feel that intimacy, but I don't know if other people would understand it, but I perceive it because I know about our relationship (Gemma, 43, Spain).

Since social media is considered mainly to be public, therefore we can say that intimacy on social media is usually intimacy in public, although for some participants intimacy in public (through social media) is an oxymoron, as they identify intimacy as privacy. Most participants claimed that it was hard to achieve privacy on social media because of the number of friends they had on these platforms or due to the affordances of digital communication, yet some of them pointed to the use of private features or to the configuration of privacy settings as a way of communicating privately. In fact, most participants identified social media with their public features (e.g., the wall, the profile). A few participants saw themselves as having engaged in public intimacy practices through social media, but they explained that they tried to keep them to a minimum. A common statement was in reference to the frustration of having "too much" information about their friends' lives through Facebook, which highlights the characteristic of intimacy to be shared with(in) a small group of people; a group of significant others.

Most people do not want to be intimate with everybody; they find that annoying. By the same token, most participants do not post intimate information on Facebook,

although some of them did not untag themselves from intimate pictures posted by partners (e.g., kissing). This implies that they accept that level of public intimate disclosure with their significant others, but they would not allow that kind of intimate disclosure with people outside of their intimate circle. It seems that most participants share a common understanding of what is appropriate to publish on Facebook, which shows that social media practices shape users' behaviour and create non-written rules that help them to navigate their interaction through the platform. On the other hand, few participants referred to Badoo when discussing the topic of intimacy in public through social media, and no participant mentioned CouchSurfing within this debate. It seems that most participants identify social media with Facebook, since it is the platform where they spend more time interacting through, and it is also the platform that affords a more public interaction through the wall. Interviews about this topic led people to talk not about Badoo and Couchsurfing, but about Facebook. As I commented in the previous chapter, although originally the inclusion of Facebook in the study was as a secondary case study to observe the migration of interaction from Badoo and CouchSurfing to Facebook, it became another main case study during the course of the fieldwork, since participants kept talking about Facebook.

5.5. Conclusion

In this study, the definition of emotional intimacy as a "sense of closeness within personal relationships, achieved by sharing inner thoughts and feelings" has been validated. Intimacy was often located within privacy and, as a result, some participants identified both concepts and considered it inappropriate to disclose intimacy in public, as it was often seen as an act of exhibitionism. Most participants' perceptions of privacy were in line with Schoeman's (1984) privacy definition, where privacy includes the norms which protect personal and intimate information and it is also the gated space where people can develop meaningful relationships away from the watch of the outsiders. In addition, most participants were more concerned about their social privacy than about their institutional privacy. The fact that participants' concerns are related to their social privacy highlights the importance of intimacy in their lives. In this sense, more policies to protect social privacy online should be implemented, or existing law, such as the privacy law, should be properly applied online, in cases of disclosure of intimate information by other users without permission, such as cases of revenge porn.

Most participants used the word "sharing" in order to describe the conveyance of information about the self through social media. As discussed in chapter 2, within Web 2.0 the sharing of emotions is the constitutive activity of the intimate relationships. The activity of sharing entails specific interpersonal dynamics, such as trust, reciprocity and openness, which are the dynamics that most participants also identified within their intimacy practices on social media. In fact, some participants identified intimacy only with sexual relationships and love life. Obviously, when interacting through social media, it is not possible to experience physical intimacy; therefore the intimate interaction is based in sharing/exchanging text and pictures. In particular, visual intimacy through pictures appeared as an emergent topic.

There were a few participants who stated that the lack of embodiment made social media a bad tool with which to achieve intimacy. Conversely, some participants explained that they found it easier to communicate deeper thoughts and feelings through social media because they did not need to face their interlocutors, an argument that has been corroborated by numerous early studies of computer-mediated communication (e.g., Walther, 1996; Bargh & McKenna, 2004). In this sense, they pointed out that social media is a good tool for shy people to develop personal relationships. In the context of the creation of new relationships, through self-disclosure people develop a feeling of closeness with strangers that may be a good starting point to build a relationship offline. In the case of existing relationships, that feeling of closeness may be conveyed through the disclosure of shared memories through pictures, or keeping intimate conversation through the chat, but in general participants did not use public features (e.g., the wall, references) to be intimate with their contacts.

Despite social media platforms allowing users to configure privacy settings and providing private features to communicate, participants mainly considered social media to be a public venue in reference to the publicity these services afford. As Chambers (2013) put it: "The multifaceted nature of social media means that it is not simply a personal medium since it contains a public dimension" (2013, p. 27). Despite a few users acknowledging that they have participated in public intimacy practices through social media, especially with their partners, most of them deemed this practice

inappropriate and even disturbing. In the next chapter, I explore intimate disclosures in public through social media. I examine the topics that participants classify as intimate within this context, and whether they decide to publish this intimate information on different platforms and why.

Chapter 6
Intimacies of Digital Identity

6.1. Introduction

Creating a profile, as observed by different scholars (e.g., Baym, 2010; Thumim, 2012; Joinson, 2012), is a necessary precondition to participating in social media services, and usually implies the disclosure of certain kinds of information: name, gender, age, sexual orientation, relationship status… amongst others. Thumim (2012) suggests that social media profiles are crafted representations. As we saw in chapter 3, social media platforms usually provide a closed number of categories to fill in, to represent the user in the network. Although online dating platforms, as Rasmussen (2014) discusses in her research, are perceived as environments where deceptive self-presentation happens often, studies have found (e.g., Robinson, 2007; Gosling et. al, 2011) that people tend to present their true selves online. In chapter 3, I described how As discussed earlier, Nissenbaum (2010), drawing on Gerety (1977), explains that there are certain kinds of information related to the self that people expect to keep private, which are called intimacies of personal identity. Nissenbaum (2010) states that intimacies of personal identity may include: "close relationships, sexual orientation, alcohol intake, dietary habits, ethnic origin, political beliefs, features of the body and bodily functions, the definitions of *self*, and religious and spiritual beliefs and practices" (2010, p. 123).

This thesis questions the extent to which users actually engage in intimacy practices through social media, which often are performed in public. The main objective of this chapter is to conduct a cross-platform analysis and identify disclosure patterns in each platform. Drawing on Hogan's (2010) exhibitionistic approach discussed in chapter 4, in this chapter I analyse user profiles as cultural artefacts, which are tools for self-(re)presentation and impression management. The observation of user profiles is combined with the interviews with participants where they explained which topics they disclosed online and considered intimate. The first step was to ask participants before the interview through a pre-info sheet about what fields they filled in to create their profiles, which of these they considered intimate and what information they actually disclosed in their social media profiles. Second, I reviewed with them the different topics they qualified as intimate and why they decided to publish or not that

information in their profiles. Third, I analysed user profiles to observe and contrast what participants had expressed before and during the interview.

The topics that participants frequently identified as intimate were relationship status, sexual orientation, political and religious beliefs, sex, alcohol intake, and feelings. Thus, users negotiate which intimate information they want to disclose depending on the audience. For instance, sexual orientation was widely disclosed on Badoo, where the online presence was targeted to potential partners or lovers, and it was hardly disclosed on CouchSurfing, where the main objective is hospitality exchange, and Facebook, where the audience was mainly composed of friends and other contacts (e.g., colleagues, acquaintances, relatives). As discsussed in chapter 3, some scholars (e.g., Thompson, 2008; Brandtzæg et al., 2010; Hogan, 2010; Young & Quan-Haase, 2013) demonstrated how users share on Facebook only superficial information in order to keep their social privacy. Other scholars (e.g., Lomborg, 2013; Brake, 2014) have also observed how users have adapted their sharing behaviours over time, as they have developed their social media communication skills by using different social media services, and have learnt the social norms that operate in each particular platform. This selective disclosure behaviour was also observed in this study, where participants disclosed different kinds of information on Badoo, CouchSurfing, and Facebook.

Apart from fixed categories that users have to fill in, social media profiles have other sections where users can write more freely, e.g. "About me" section on Badoo and CouchSurfing, or "the wall" on Facebook. In these sections people discuss intimate topics such as political and religious beliefs, feelings or sex. As stated in chapter 3, previous studies about intimate disclosures on social media platforms (e.g., Jordán-Conde, 2013; Lomborg, 2013), identified sex and emotional aspects of the self (e.g., relationship problems) as intimate topics. Participants usually uploaded pictures to their profiles (6 pictures on average on Badoo, 10-20 pictures on CouchSurfing, and around 200 pictures on average on Facebook), although on a few occasions the pictures they published through social media platforms were considered to be intimate. In this chapter, I analyse which topics participants considered more intimate when crafting their profile or interacting online, which at the same time, inform debates about the relationship between privacy and intimacy. For example, when I

talk about which topics participants considered intimate and which ones they disclosed in each social media platform, sometimes these topics are connected to participants' definitions of online intimacy, and how they negotiate the disclosure of intimate information in different platforms. Beforehand, I consider it interesting to discuss whether participants used their real names or pseudonyms in order to represent themselves on the social media platforms, and I address this in the next section.

6.2. Real name or pseudonym?

The first feature of online identity, as Baym (2010) points out, is one's name. The main shift on the Internet landscape in recent years is the move from anonymous interaction through bulletin boards or chat rooms to *nonymous* interaction through social media platforms. Some scholars (e.g., Zhao et al., 2008; McNicol, 2013; Patelis, 2013; Van Dijck, 2013a) have discussed social media platforms' imposition of "real name" policy and its relationship with their business models based on data mining. As discussed in chapter 3, Facebook's real name policy has fostered a culture of authenticity that users have internalized and has also been applied to other platforms. Zhao et al. (2008) argue that social media communication is mainly among known others; that is the reason why people usually provide their real forename and surname. In the contemporary social media landscape, as observed by Patelis (2013), online identities are considered an extension of real social life. Patelis (ibid.) explains that identity play through the use of pseudonyms, which was a common practice in the 1990's, has become stigmatized insomuch as it is understood as "fake".

This trend is observed in this study, and even on Badoo and CouchSurfing, social media platforms where the interaction is among strangers, yet where participants still largely disclosed their real names. Most participants have their real forenames on Badoo, although this platform does not include the surname, therefore identity is not as easily identifiable than in other platforms. There were two participants who claimed that they had pseudonyms on Badoo. One of them, Ana, a 35 year old UK-based heavy social media user, explained that she did not care about disclosing other kinds of personal information on Badoo, such as her physical description, but she did not want other Badoo users to be able to locate her, and so she took care not to disclose the kind of information that might lead to someone finding out who she was or where she worked:

I can put that I studied at the university, but I don't say anything else, like that I work on marketing, but I don't give more details of anything else. They are things that don't expose me. I never use my name, I use my second name that nobody knows, and it's more like a nickname (Ana, 35, UK).

When asking Ana whether the information she shared on Facebook, where she used her real name, was the same as in Badoo, she replied that she had shared less information because her Facebook friends already knew her:

It's less, because it's supposed that everyone I have there knows me. For example, on Facebook I make jokes, I say that I studied in Neverland, that I work as a dream's president in the chocolate factory... […] it's supposed that who is there (on Facebook), certain details, who has to know them already knows them (Ana, 35, UK).

This is a clear example of the use of pseudonyms in order to protect one's private live. As we will see in chapter 8, online daters, especially women, are very concerned about safety and usually take care in the depth and breadth of information they share with strangers through dating sites. In the case of CouchSurfing, there was only one participant who had a pseudonym and it was motivated by identity play rather than any desire of anonymity. Identity theft was also identified as the reason to use a pseudonym on Facebook. Some participants claimed to have privacy concerns about security, such as the possibility of their house being broken into while they were on holidays, or data gathering by social media companies. Similarly, Nissenbaum (2010) identified a variety of issues related to the existence of digital dossiers ranging from customized advertising to criminal offences (including identity theft, scam or stalking). These concerns are nicely expressed in the following interview extract:

Petro: Even when you delete them Facebook is saving the pictures in its servers. And I share less information, I started with my real name, I changed it. I went to Amsterdam I changed it to X, and I change it to Z now, which is a Bulgarian short name of my name. It's remaining the surname and the date of birth.

Interviewer: Why did you do this? Do you think they (Facebook) can use this information against you?

Petro: Because... yes, they can. Likewise thieves can break into your place if you publish your holiday pictures on Facebook, they can steal your identity, and so on (Petro, 29, Spain).

On the other hand, in relation to anonymity provided by the use of pseudonyms, Viel, a heavy social media user of different social media platforms (including several dating sites), explained that he used to write his intimate feelings and thoughts in a blog, believing that anonymity could be liberating and may help to accomplish full intimacy online. Sibilia (2008) who has explored the use of blogs as diaries in anonymous ways, describes how users feel protected by anonymity. Thus, she argues, the privacy provided by anonymity allowed them to confess their innermost thoughts and feelings. Viel went on to say that although he considered that intimacy could be fully achieved online thanks to anonymity, at the same time, it is really hard to be anonymous online nowadays:

The thing that putting on a blog that it's not personal but it can be used in an anonymous way. If you use an anonymous blog you have like total freedom to put what you want and it makes intimacy 100% because nobody knows. I have a friend that just wrote a blog about sexual fantasies and she had a lot of followers, and she was looking for people to write down their fantasies but anonymously. Nobody knows who write this text or the other. […] but right now there is not completely 100% anonymity on the Internet. I think they always can find you. There are ways to hide that. You have to be like hi-tech to know how to hide your IP. […] I know how to do it. I know that there are websites that they can go there, but I think right now to be completely anonymous on the Internet it's more complicated (Viel, 38, Spain).

Viel argued that online spaces of privacy may help users to experience authenticity and self-determination. The main difference between SNSs and blogs is that most SNSs are nonymous. As I explained earlier, most users disclosed their real names to represent themselves on the Badoo, CouchSurfing and Facebook, plus used a number of pictures, which made anonymity more difficult. It is suggested that the liberating

effect of anonymity would be constrained with the current *nonymous* social media dynamics and, as Viel observed, the technical possibility to trace IPs which makes it possible to identify a particular user's location. Likewise, Hinton & Hjorth (2013) argue that in order to maintain their privacy users require a "high level of technical proficiency" (2013, p. 25).

On the other hand, some Badoo female participants explained that sometimes they received rude messages from male users who felt protected by the screen, and these participants believe that these kinds of users would not behave in the same way face-to-face. In this sense, these aggressive users may perceive certain level of anonymity (although they disclose their own pictures through Badoo) and they may feel that they can misbehave because nobody is going to be there to punish them. Online harassment would be the negative outcome of anonymity, and it will be more extensively discussed in chapter 8.

Self-presentation involves choices, and usually the first one is to decide whether to use a real name or pseudonym to represent one's self in the platform. In my research most participants chose to disclose their real name, I argue that they were influenced by Facebook's real name policy trend. Only a few participants decided to use pseudonyms; they reports to use nicknames moved by a desire to protect their privacy and because they were concerned about online security. After the disclosure of one's (nick) name, then other categories follow to build the online presence, such as age, gender, sexual orientation, relationships status and so on. In the next section, I discuss sexual orientation and relationship status, which are both fields you can fill in when creating your profile on Badoo and Facebook, and were actually the topics that most participants identified as intimate.

6.3. "It's complicated": disclosing sexual orientation and relationship status online

Sexual orientation and relationship status are closely interrelated topics. In the case of having a partner, the disclosure of his or her identity through social media may imply sexual orientation, although obviously it does not show the full sexual identity of the user. Half of the participants disclosed their sexual orientation either on Badoo, Facebook, or CouchSurfing. Some participants considered sexual orientation as an

intimate topic, and few of them still disclosed this information online, mainly on Badoo. All Badoo participants disclosed their sexual orientation on Badoo, although none of them disclosed it on Facebook. In fact, few other participants disclosed their sexual orientation through Facebook. Some Badoo users explained that on Badoo it was necessary to specify their sexual orientation because the platform was designed for those looking for a romantic or sexual partner, but they did not find it necessary to disclose that information on Facebook. Patricia, a 31 year-old Spain-based Badoo user, defined herself as a lesbian, and she actually considered sexual orientation an intimate topic. She explained that for her it was easier to disclose her sexual orientation through social media than face-to-face:

> On social media is different because you don't have the closeness of face-to-face, therefore privacy changes. For instance, if you ask me face-to-face whether I'm gay I would be shocked, but it's easier to write it on a website. I don't consider it so private in that context, because there you go to meet people, so you need to share certain information. Also in order to select, if I'm a lesbian I will put it in order to avoid boys to contact me; to disclose what I'm interested in; and also for people to know if I can fit in what they are looking for. Something that you would not say face-to-face but that in the context of social media you have to say it on the website. I share more on social media than face-to-face (Patricia, 31, Spain).

As we saw in the previous chapter, some participants, like Patricia, found it easier to disclose intimate information online than face-to-face because they felt somehow protected by the screen. In relation to the disclosure of her sexual orientation, Patricia highlighted that disclosing that she was gay on Badoo was paramount because she was looking for a partner and she needed to show her preferences to avoid male users contacting her. The rest of the Badoo participants claimed to be straight. Nevertheless, Sandra, who disclosed through her Badoo profile that she was straight and had children, explained during the interview that she was bi-curious[10] and she started to chat with other women on the site until she finally found a female partner. As Duguay

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[10] Bi-curious: (Of a heterosexual person) interested in having a sexual experience with a person of the same sex (Oxford English Dictionary, 2015a).

(2014) also observed in her study of sexual orientation disclosure through social media, the fact that certain platforms only allow users to define their sexuality as straight, lesbian, gay or bisexual creates limitations for expressing fluid sexual orientations less recognized by mainstream understandings of sexuality. In her study, Duguay (ibid.) also acknowledges how non-heteronormative sexual orientation are still heavily stigmatized and describes how complicated it is disclosing queer sexual orientation when users' familiar environments are traditional. Thus, in my research most LGBT participants expressed their concern about disclosing their sexual orientation on Facebook, and one of them even lied about this topic in this platform. Viel, who considered sexual orientation as being intimate, was actually in a straight relationship, and appeared on Facebook as interested in women. Nevertheless, he explained during the interview that he was bisexual but that his girlfriend did not feel comfortable with his sexual orientation. That may be the reason why he wanted to emphasize through his Facebook profile that he was straight, in order to make his girlfriend to feel more comfortable.

Caroline, a lesbian participant who did not identify sexual orientation as an intimate topic in the first place, clarified during the interview that she did not want to disclose it publicly through Facebook because she was "friends" with some family members who did not know she was a lesbian and she did not want them to know. Interestingly, although she did not indicate anything in the "Interested in" field, she liked several gay Facebook pages, which could be interpreted to convey her sexual orientation. Therefore, her actions did not correspond with her concerns about not revealing her sexual orientation. As we saw in Chapter 3, the expression of identity through self-disclosure, affiliation, and the interaction with other users has been labelled "mosaic identity" (Lara, 2007; Caro, 2012). In this case, Caroline was engaging in self-presentation through her group membership. In a second view of her profile, I observed that she was no longer a member of these lesbian Facebook groups. This management of her self-presentation to avoid the disclosure of too intimate information shows how users carefully curate their online presence in order to protect their intimacy. Caroline still disclosed her sexual orientation on CouchSurfing through her membership on lesbian groups. Since the interaction on CouchSurfing was with strangers, she did not find it problematic to disclose her sexual orientation on this platform.

Several participants actually disclosed their relationship status in one or more social media platforms. Relationship status was identified as an intimate topic by some participants, and half of them still disclosed their relationship status on Badoo, CouchSurfing or Facebook. Raquel, the only Badoo user who specified that relationship status was intimate, during the course of the interview clarified that she considered relationship status to be private instead of intimate, and she would not disclose that on a CV, for instance. She explained how she was asked in a job interview about it and she thought that the employer did not have the right to ask her about those kinds of private matters. Thus, taking into account Raquel's clarification we could say that all Badoo participants disclosed their relationships status on Badoo, and none of them considered it to be intimate. It is possible that the use of a dating site and having to disclose this kind of information in order to participate on the service led them to think about this topic as not being intimate.

Due to the dating nature of Badoo, it is not surprising that all participants displayed their relationship status on the site as single. Two of them, who also facilitated their Facebook profile for the study, indicated that they were single on Facebook as well. Nevertheless, Robert, who was actually in a relationship at the time of the interview, appeared as single both in his Badoo and Facebook profiles. When I asked him why he appeared as single, given that he was in a relationship (he even received a phone call from his girlfriend in the course of the interview), he responded that he was not on good terms with his partner and he was looking for someone else. As with other participants, Robert deleted his relationships status from his Facebook profile later on. The trend of revealing only superficial information on Facebook in order to avoid context collapse, advanced by Hogan (2010), may be the reason why Robert and other users decided to delete this information. Sandra, as mentioned earlier, was in a relationship with another woman she met on Badoo, however, she appeared as single on the site. Sandra explained that because of personal circumstances they had not met face-to-face yet, although they considered each other as partners as they talked to each other through the site and by the phone on a regular basis. Hence, the fact that all participants appear as single on Badoo did not mean that they were actually single. Issues of authenticity and online dating will be discussed in more detail in chapter 8.

On CouchSurfing there is not a field to specify relationship status, nevertheless some participants in the section "Couch Information" explained that they lived with their partners[11]. For instance, Vanessa, who actually met her boyfriend through CouchSurfing, considered her relationship status to be intimate, but pointed out that she felt the need to specify it on CouchSurfing because potential guests needed to know that they would be hosted by both Vanessa and her partner. She spoke in plural in most part of her CouhcSurfing profile describing the interests of both partners. Her boyfriend, Viel, also explained in his CouchSurfing profile that he was in a relationship with Vanessa and he even included a link to her profile. In the case of Facebook, Viel explained how they negotiated to publish their relationships status on social media, as she was reluctant to do it in the first place:

| Viel: | Well, from my part in Facebook I have put that I'm in a relationship from the first day, but at the beginning with my girlfriend she didn't want and I was like pressing her to do it. |

| Interviewer: | Why? |

| Viel: | Because for me I know that it has to be (common) but I want to show I'm happy I have this relationship. I don't mind, it's what I have, I don't want to hide. In this kind of information I don't want to hide, but I understand. |

| Interviewer: | Do you feel proud of your relationship and you want people to know? |

| Viel: | Yes, of course, but in that case I have a little bit of conflict with my girlfriend but right now, myself, I have it on Facebook and on ContactU (with these Russian people), I have it in both platforms. |

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11 It is also common practice for couples who live together to create a common CouchSurfing profile because they are both actually hosting other members.

Interviewer: That you are in a relationship?

Viel: Yes, and I put the name. I think on Facebook it's from both sides. In the Russian Facebook (Vkontakte) I think only on my side, but I can decide on my side but I cannot tell my girlfriend about what to put or not to put (Viel, 38, Spain).

This extract represents the tensions generated by different concepts of privacy and intimacy of partners in a relationship, and the complex negotiation of the exhibition of the happiness of the relationship versus the desire of privacy. At same point after the interview they both removed their relationship status from their Facebook profiles, although they still specified that they were a couple through their CouchSurfing profiles. The deletion of their relationship status on Facebook shows the tensions inherent in finding a balance between the different opinions partners may have about what is desirable to disclose on a particular social media platform regarding its publics. Thus, Vanessa considered it necessary to inform their potential CouchSurfing guests that Viel and she lived together, but she considered it intrusive for all of their Facebook friends to know about their relationship. In fact, most participants did not disclose their relationship status on Facebook. John, a 28 year old participant who did not consider relationship status as being intimate but who did not disclose it through Facebook, pointed out that the main reason he did not want to disclose his relationships status was because of the moment of the break-up which he considered private:

Actually the main reason I didn't do that is because as you so often see then when the relationship goes from "in a relationship" to "single" again you get loads of people bloody knowing about it. I don't want that. It's more the break-up of a relationship is private. I don't want popping up on everyone's timeline *John has changed his status from "in a relationship" to "single"*, and loads will know we've broken up and stuff (John, 28, UK).

Thus, John acknowledged that the real reason he was disturbed with the publicity of his relationship status was related to the unwanted publicity of the potential end of the relationship, which he wanted to keep private. It is suggested that each type of social

media platform has different social norms, as we already discussed in the previous chapter. Sexual orientation and relationship status are the kinds of information that are necessary and expected to be disclosed on Badoo because the objective of using the site is to find a partner. Nevertheless, on Facebook, most participants decided not to disclose this information in order to avoid gossip about their private life. Especially LGBT participants were more concerned about the disclosure of sexual orientation and explicit information (e.g. pictures) showing their relationship status on Facebook because of the possibility of reaching unintended audiences. In the case of CouchSurfing, where the interaction was among strangers, only Caroline could actually be identified as a lesbian because of her membership in the CouchSurfing Lesbian group. Sexual orientation was not considered as relevant information to be disclosed on the CouchSurfing platform. Caroline pointed out that she joined the CouchSurfing Lesbian group because she felt more comfortable exchanging hospitality within the LGBT community. On the other hand, in relation to relationship status, CouchSurfing participants who were living with their partners considered it important to specify it because both of them would host potential guests. Thus, a participant's decision to disclose sexual orientation and relationship status in the different social media platforms was mainly led by what was needed or sociably desirable on each platform rather than by their consideration of these topics as being intimate or not.

Other topics that participants qualified as intimate were political views and religious beliefs. Although any of the case studies were niche platforms related to these topics, some participants expressed their religion or political views through their profiles. Some of them considered these topics intimate and others did not, as we can see in the next section.

6.4. Religion and political views

Political and religious beliefs are fields that users can fill in when creating a Facebook profile, although they are more usually expressed through posts on the platform. Most participants did not disclose their political or religious beliefs. There were only a few participants who actually filled out the relevant fields on Facebook, and a few participants also joked in order not to disclose their real thoughts. Nevertheless, another way of conveying religious or political beliefs was through pictures, like in

the case of Gemma, a 43 years old Spain-based participant, who did not actually specify her political beliefs on the "Information" section, but was pictured holding an independence Catalonian flag in some of her pictures on Facebook. In the context of Badoo interaction, participants did not disclose any kind of religious or political beliefs. Some participants claimed that political and religious beliefs were intimate topics. When discussing the topic of religion, few participants considered it intimate. Among those, some users such as Luis, a Badoo and Facebok user, considered religion an intimate topic and explained how he would never post about the topic on social media:

> Well, for me it is intimate when some people write thoughts that I will never post. […] For instance religious people who write "I love God"… (Luis, 30, Spain).

On the other hand, there were other users who specified that religion was an intimate topic but they still disclosed it through their Facebook profile. Also, some participants changed their mind in relation to this topic during the course of the interview. For example, Mario, a UK-based CouchSurfing and Facebook user, first specified religion as an intimate topic through the pre-info sheet, but during the interview he commented that he thought religion was more private than intimate. Other contradictions can be appreciated in the following interview extract where the participant first says that she rarely tells anyone about her religious beliefs, and then she publishes that on Facebook:

> Raquel: For instance, I'm a Catholic, but I'm not a very religious person, but those kinds of topics are quite intimate and I don't share them with anyone.
>
> Interviewer: So you don't usually comment with people that you are Catholic..?
>
> Raquel: No, it's rare. I think I have it on Facebook… Only when people are talking about religion, if people ask me: what's your religion? I would reply: I'm Catholic, I've been baptised, but I've been taught other things that are not related with

> Catholicism, things which are more related to Philosophy... So,
> these kinds of things are intimate for me, I share them with
> someone I love (Raquel, 35, Spain).

These kinds of contradictions demonstrate the complex task of defining what is intimate and what is not, and how to negotiate the disclosure of intimate information on social media. For some participants, expressing their religious beliefs on social media is not socially acceptable, while others felt comfortable publishing their religion online, although they did not often discuss the topic because they considered it too intimate (as Patricia explained in the case of her sexual orientation). Others did not have a clear idea whether religion was intimate or private, which is an ontological discussion that was presented in chapter 5.

When discussing political beliefs during the interviews with participants who considered the topic intimate, I found different reasons why they considered this topic intimate and how they negotiated its disclosure or not through social media platforms. In the case of CouchSurfing, Viel pointed out that the intimate information he disclosed through his CouchSurfing profile was actually his Catalan independence political beliefs, and he dedicated a lot of space in his profile to talk about the topic. In his CouchSurfing profile he described, among other data, that his first language was Catalonian, that he is an active member of a group of *castellers* (traditional human towers which are usually built in Catalonian celebrations) and why he considered Catalonia not to be part of Spain. For Viel, his political views were intimate, but it was an important part of his identity, and therefore he wanted to display it in public and so he dedicated a lot of space in his CouchSurfing profile to explain to potential guests facts about his Catalan identity and particularities of Catalonia.

On the other side of the spectrum we have John (28, UK), who did not disclose his political affiliation at all. John explained that because he was a journalist, he was supposed to be objective and he could not publicly declare his political beliefs. On the other hand, Mateo (47, UK), who did not disclose his political beliefs through any platform, described how he did not want to be associated with any radical political view through social media. Mateo, who was originally from Greece, commented that he even deleted "friends" from his Facebook profile if they were too politically radical

because he was a pacifist and considered that these kinds of radicalisms were responsible for creating polarization in society:

> There are some things in Greece now going on regarding political parties and because of what's happening it's a very similar situation to when Hitler came to power in Germany. So what's actually happening at the moment in Greece is that because the government at the moment doesn't look after the people, you have a lot of very far right wing people coming into the parliament. These people are working in fascist ways and it creates a lot of friction among society in Greece at the moment. So if I have people from there I don't want to have them on my profile, I don't want to be associated with them (Mateo, 43, UK).

Walther and colleagues (2008) found in their research about impression management on Facebook that the appearance and behaviour of a user's friends played an important role in user's identity perception by other users in the network.. Mateo seemed to be aware of this fact and also actively engaged in impression management to protect his image by unfriending extremist political contacts from his friend's list, in order not to be associated with them. Thus, among participants who classified political beliefs as intimate there were three different approaches: (1) explicit disclosures on social media about their political views; (2) not to disclose any kind of political information; (3) delete politically radical contacts to not to be associated with them.

Finally, some participants did not have a clear idea about whether to classify political beliefs as intimate or not. For example, Lulu (25, UK), who did not disclose her political affiliation, affirmed that she usually posted about politics on Facebook. Although she did not indicate political beliefs as an intimate issue in the pre-info sheet, during the interview she described that she felt that posting about political beliefs was kind of intimate for her because it showed what she thought about a particular issue:

> I like talking about – I really like politics and I always post quite a lot
> of politics especially on Facebook, like I'll read an article and then I'll
> repost it and just like say a little thing about what I think. I guess that
> is like intimate in a way because that's how I feel about something but
> to me that's okay because it's – why is that okay? I don't know,

because it's not about something that's like sexual or about... (Lulu,
25, UK).

For Lulu, her political beliefs were an intimate topic, but she considered it acceptable
to talk about them in public through social media. She suggested that it was socially
acceptable to discuss politics in public (although for her it was a bit intimate) unlike
sex, which was kind of taboo. In fact, explicit sexual references through social media
profiles are still unusual. The negotiation of the representation of sexual behaviour
and alcohol intake (which was also usually considered somewhat taboo) will be
addressed in the next section.

6.5. Sex, alcohol and social media

Explicit sexual references and portraits of users being drunk in their own profiles are
still taboo topics due to the potential damage of their reputation, especially when
looking for a job. Sexual behaviour and alcohol intake were practices linked to parties,
which could be observed in some young social media user profiles. Mendelson and
Papacharissi (2010) found a correlation between pictures of parties, where alcohol
was present, and affectionate pictures (e.g., hugging or kissing on the lips) in
Facebook photo albums. Nevertheless, in their research about Facebook photo
galleries among college students, Mendelson and Papacharissi (ibid.) found that
explicit sexual disclosure, and even posting pictures of people kissing on the lips, was
rare to find in pictures uploaded to Facebook. Similarly, in my research, which is
among adults (25-50 years old), explicit references to sex on participants' profiles
were also uncommon. Only some participants had sexualised pictures in their profiles,
either in a bikini or wearing revealing clothes. Nudity or the visual representation of
sex is not usually allowed on mainstream social media (Badoo, 2015; CouchSurfing,
2015; Facebook, 2015).

As we saw in a previous chapter, the term intimacy is often used as a euphemism to
mean sexual intercourse. In fact, when participants were asked to define their own
concept of intimacy, some of them related the term exclusively to sex. The following
quotes are some examples of participants linking both concepts. Participants often
either choose not to disclose that kind of information or they talked about sexual
matters through the chat:

I don't know really, bedroom stuff? […] It depends who is with really but, say, if it's your girlfriend I wouldn't want to post information about when I've had sex with her. So that would be really intimate in that relationship (Isaac, 26, UK).

On Badoo for sure, talking about sex, talking about intimate things (Viel, 38, Spain).

CouchSurfing was not mentioned in relation to sexual disclosure. Some participants commented on sexy pictures, especially on Badoo, as it is a dating/hook-up site, where users try to claim attention in different ways, and the use of erotic pictures is a common practice. Nevertheless, most participants did not include these kinds of pictures in their own profiles. In this sense, Luis (30, Spain), described the process of creating his Badoo profile. First, he uploaded some pictures, then he checked other users' profiles and he felt that he did not fit in the network because his pictures were not sexy:

I felt I was not using the same codes than the rest of the users. I felt a bit out of place. I was looking at profiles and I saw very sexy pictures, like club dancers, and pictures in the toilet and things like that… so I felt a bit out of place (Luis, 30, Spain).

Luis compared Badoo to another dating/hookup site called AdoptaUnTio (AdoptAGuy), and he considered that in Badoo, selfies in the bathroom with revealing clothes were very common compared to the other site, which he considered to be more "elegant":

The profile of people who are there is different, there aren't many selfies in the toilet. […] Well, there are some pictures of people in the beach, but not with the bra in the toilet. There isn't a big difference, but the aesthetic is different, it seems higher class. […] I suppose that among them they have a good match, the girls with the bras in the toilet and the boys without T-shirt, and I'm there with my glasses… (Luis, 30, Spain).

Jessica Ringrose (2011), in her study about the digital performance of a "sexual self" among British teens in Bebo, found similar disciplinary norms, where "holiday photos were acceptable, while underwear shots were not" (2011, p. 107). Her female participants also reported to self-censor the kinds of pictures they uploaded in order to look sexy but not "like a slut". I will discuss the topic of sexy pictures on Badoo further, in particular in relation to gendered double standards, in chapter 8.

Although most Badoo participants made references to other's users profiles that included erotic pictures, most of the pictures in a bikini or half naked were found on Facebook. I argue that the reason for having more sexy pictures on Facebook than on a dating site is because of the higher amount of pictures that are actually available on Facebook (one participant had more than 1.000 pictures uploaded). On Facebook participants reported that it was not unusual to find some sexy pictures from parties or at the beach, but in my study I found few sexy pictures uploaded by participants. Some participants described that they considered pictures with few clothes (e.g., in a bikini) as intimate, and they did not upload those kinds of pictures, or at least tried to keep them to a minimum, for example:

> But like showing pictures from the parties, or half naked, for me that is intimacy, I wouldn't put pictures like that. And I don't need to see someone else doing it, so... (Alice, 28, UK).

> What it concerns me more is when I google myself and there appears a lot of information with pictures. Maybe a picture of myself in a bikini... why? I don't like it, therefore I try to upload less of these kinds of pictures, and that's all, because I don't have other tools (Raquel, 35, Spain).

There were mainly female participants who claimed they would not upload pictures showing their bodies on Facebook. In fact, some of the male participants had several pictures in bathing suits on the beach uploaded on Facebook and they did not consider that intimate.

Moreover, when talking about intimacy online, some male participants also referred to AdultFriendFinder, a social media platform to look for sex partners. For instance,

David (43, UK), who identified intimacy with sexuality, reported that he used the hook-up site AdultFriendFinder in order to find intimacy online:

David: In AdultFriendFinder I would expect to talk intimately there but you are only going in there for intimacy. So in that case, I would be very intimate online because that's why I'm going. So when I meet somebody in AdultFriendFinder, it's not: "hey, what do you like doing at weekends?", I don't talk about personal or very rarely, it's very: "what you like sexually?", that's what the site is about.

Interviewer: Which kind of pictures people post in AdultFriendFinder?

David: Like sexy, yeah. I don't, because I think that's much more fun to see for the first time in the flesh, but a lot of people there will do…

Interviewer: Completely naked?

David: Yeah. And that is very intimate but it's a website where I expect intimacy. Because I'm going actually for sex or to be honest recently for a lot of years I've been on it. My girlfriends have been bisexual and so we're using it as an avenue to find another girl or another couple. There was quite an interaction, we wanted to know them physically to make sure they're compatible. I expect that in that website because that's what that website is all about.

David commented that for him each social media service had its own use, and although he knew some people who had met a partner through CouchSurfing, for him CouchSurfing was for travelling and meeting other travellers; Facebook was for friendship; and AdultFriendFinder was for sex. Thus, he would never engage in a sexual conversation through Facebook because he considered that it not to be the right place. For David, AdultFriendFinder was the most appropriate place for flirting,

talking about sexual preferences and finding sexual partners. He actually acknowledged how his participation on the research project had helped him to reflect upon his own social media practices and how his different online activities were clearly compartmentalized. Nevertheless most participants did not have their practices so separated, and they might flirt with other users on CouchSurfing and Facebook, or make friends through Badoo. Thus, they might use sexy vocabulary and provocative pictures on Facebook, for example, to attract potential partners, although in general there was little evidence of those practices through their photo albums or in their walls. Although male participants linked online intimacy with sex more often than female participants, in general, across all platforms, both male and female participants usually restricted conversations about sex to the chat and rarely uploaded sexy pictures.

Alcohol intake was another topic identified as intimate by participants. Alcohol intake was often disclosed through pictures, although on Badoo alcohol intake is also a category in the profile. It is possible to choose among: "No", "No, never", "In company" (previously called "Socially"), and "Yes, please". All Badoo participants filled in the field and none of them indicated that alcohol intake was an intimate topic. CouchSurfing was not a site that participants referred to when talking about the representation of parties and alcohol intake during the interviews. Nevertheless, Ivana (32, Spain), who indicated that alcohol intake was intimate, explained in several places in her CouchSurfing profile that she liked beer and wine, to emphasize that she drank alcohol on a regular basis. Then, the main question was how participants negotiate the disclosure of their drinking habits through Facebook.

Participants narrated that they usually untag themselves from pictures where they appeared clearly drunk, and that sometimes they even ask the person who uploaded the pictures or to the platform itself to remove those pictures. Some participants claimed that alcohol intake was intimate, and half of these participants, in spite of this, had a lot of pictures on Facebook drinking, playing drinking games and partying visibly drunk; more than the rest of participants who did not consider alcohol intake an intimate topic. For instance, Ivana (32, Spain) had some posts on her Facebook wall about being hangover, and some pictures of her partying with a lot of drinks around. Similarly, Mario (36, UK), who categorized alcohol intake as intimate, had a lot of pictures of him drinking on Facebook. Mario was one of the few participants

who considered that if his profile was set to private, that information is private, although he contradicted himself later on when he said it was not possible to control intimacy on social media "because your friends can almost see everything you do." This participant might consider that the information he shared on his Facebook profile would remain in his personal circle, although he already considered this problematic, and because he had configured privacy settings that information was supposed to be private. Another UK-based participant, John, who first stated that alcohol intake was intimate changed his mind during the course of the interview and explained that he did not consider this topic intimate, and he did not feel embarrassed by people knowing that he drank in the evenings because he did it in public (implying that if it were intimate he would do it in private):

> What else, my personal life, going out drinking? It's not intimate it's just what I do on an evening. It's not intimate because I clearly do it in public. I come back to my original kind of division of… is it something that anyone that lives next door from me could see me do? Yes, it is, because all you have to do is sit in the pub across the road and you'll see quite clearly what I like to do with my social life. So that's not really intimate (John, 28, UK).

I hypothesize that it was precisely their lifestyles and the amount of pictures about alcohol intake these participants had on their Facebook profiles that made them consider this topic as intimate, I would argue that in the sense of private more than intimate. It is a common practice for employers to check potential employees' social media profiles, and in the case of Facebook, although their profiles were set as private, sometimes the company changes the privacy settings and information previously defined as private becomes public. Also information leaks may occur through friends' posts. Thus, these participants may be concerned about the potential damage that pictures portraying them drunk may have upon their reputation. Some employers also monitor what kinds of negative comments employees write about the company online. Another topic that was frequently discussed, mainly about Facebook, was the expression of positive or negative feelings. In the next section, I will analyze how participants expressed their feelings and emotions online and whether they consider this practice as intimate or not.

6.6. Feelings and e-motions

References to feelings and emotions were common when defining online intimacy and these kinds of disclosures were usually related to the Facebook wall. Feelings on social media may be related to many different topics or relationships. Participants usually referred to the disclosure of feelings in relation to their romantic relationships, their family or their friends. Feelings and emotions can be conveyed through textual or visual communication. As we already saw in chapter 3.4. *Self-disclosure and Self-(re)presentation*, Lambert (2013) drawing on Berger (1982), suggested that photographs could be considered visual representations of emotions. When interviewing Viel, he explained that he used to write a blog as a kind of diary to write down his feelings. Participants usually claimed that they did not understand why people actually posted those kinds of feelings publicly on Facebook. Some of them characterised this practice as inappropriate, because they believed that intimacy should be disclosed privately, as we discussed in previous chapter. For instance, Vanessa (29, Spain), mentioned that although her partner talked about their relationship on Facebook, and sometimes disclosed his feelings towards her online, she would not talk about their feelings on social media. She stated that she would not engage in this kind of disclosure in public because she located those feelings in her private zone.

Other common topics around feelings were pictures with family members. Not all participants classified family pictures as intimate, and among those who considered them intimate, there was a division of opinions about whether it was appropriate to publish them on Facebook or not. Nevertheless, most users considered it inappropriate to upload pictures with children, as the following interview extracts show:

> I don't know why. I think that's wrong, it makes me think that's wrong. But I may be wrong. It's like many parents post pictures of their children, I don't give a shit, to be honest, it's a thing you experience with your wife, why do you have to share it with all the public? (Mario, 36, UK).

> I have a friend who made his son a Facebook profile. I wouldn't do it or upload pictures of my children (29, Petro, Spain).

On the other hand, Qiu and colleagues (2012) found in their research that Facebook users mainly disclosed positive information in order to display themselves in a better light. Nevertheless, in my study participants seemed to convey that if they did not post negative feelings it was because they considered it a claim of attention, as an act of exhibitionism, and they viewed it as socially awkward. For instance:

> One bad thing that one friend of mine published, she had a problem with her ex-boyfriend and she was publicly talking about that. So I think that those kinds of things shouldn't be there. I don't need to know about that. I knew about it because my friend had told me, but I called her and I asked her: why are you putting that on Facebook? (Raquel, 35, Spain).

This is in line with the rule, Maragarita Köhl and Gerit Götzenbrucker (2014) argue, that "positive feelings can be shared with others, while negative feelings are to be kept inside" (2014, p. 519). Despite her criticism about publishing about relationship problems in public, Raquel (35, Spain) was one of the few participants who actually posted about her feelings on her Facebook wall, often about negative matters. For instance, she posted that her father died, that she needed a friend or that she was sad or happy. Moreover, she posted about her experience using dating sites; she was a bit disappointed about it and she complained about a lack of spontaneity on her dates. Raquel tagged me on that post and asked me for my (expert) opinion. In this case her posts were clearly a cry for help and support. Most participants did not engage in these kinds of practices, and some of them questioned why people published their negative feelings online. For example, Gemma, who actually posted "I love you mum" through Facebook, expressed it nicely in the following quote:

> I used to post more things in the past. But sometimes you wonder: "What's Facebook for?" I used to explain more how I was feeling and stuff, but I quit doing it because what are they going to comment: an opinion? Because who really knows how I'm feeling they already know that, I don't need to post it. "What's the objective of posting it: to claim attention, or validation? What for?" So I don't do it. If I feel bad my real friends already know about that, you usually post positive things… (Gemma, 43, Spain).

Likewise, Ramon (37 Spain) commented how he considered that people who engaged in these kinds of practices were crying for help. Ramon highlighted that he did not share feelings on Facebook because he actually did not share his feelings face-to-face either. Nevertheless, although Ramon did not express his feelings in writing, he used to upload pictures on Facebook showing his love for his former girlfriend. He explained that his ex-girlfriend was not happy about him uploading intimate pictures of the couple showing their romantic relationship on Facebook. As Tufekci (2008) found in his study about online privacy behaviour, Ramon observed that women are often more concerned about privacy online than men:

Interviewer: When you had this relationship in the past with your girlfriend did you use to upload pictures of your travels?

Ramon: Yes, with hearts and love and stuff openly.

Interviewer: Do you have any pictures kissing, for instance, or showing that you were a couple?

Ramon: Yes, and she had a problem with privacy or intimacy.

Interviewer: Why? What did she say?

Ramon: She just said maybe I'm not comfortable with some people knowing about that on my profile. She's a girl so it's maybe… […] I don't know… girls are very careful. I don't understand why.

Again, as we saw in the case of sexy pictures on Badoo, female social media users seem to be judged in a different way than male users. Ramon suggested that his ex-girlfriend might be worried about being judged by people for having pictures kissing online because women were more often denigrated for public sexual behaviour than men. I will explore this debate further in chapter 8.3. *"Men are the hunters": Reproducing patriarchal gender roles online*. Apart from Viel, who explained how he openly posted about his love for his partner, most male participants did not disclose

their feelings online in writing, although some participants, like Ramon, did upload pictures showing that they were in a relationship. In general, participants found the disclosure of feelings and emotions openly through social media as socially inappropriate, especially when those feelings were negative. Contrary to what other studies showed, participants claimed that they did not want to write about their bad emotions online because they found it exhibitionistic and as a cry for help. On Facebook, the public display of feelings and affection towards other people was often expressed through pictures or commenting on them. It is common practice to upload intimate pictures with friends or partners and tag them, so the pictures also appear in their profiles. This co-construction of the online self is also carried out through comments on those pictures by other users and through references, and they play an important role in how users are perceived by their contacts on the platform.

6.7. Conclusion

Badoo and CouchSurfing are social media platforms designed to connect people and foster the encounter face-to-face. Most participants chose to disclose their real identity, as the objective of these personal networks of physical-virtual interaction (Yus, 2011) is to meet face-to-face. Therefore the potential future meeting made users behave in a relatively honest way, as Samuel Gosling et al. (2011) observed in their study about online daters. In the search for intimacy, there is always a certain level of exposure that implies vulnerability. Thus, users negotiate the breadth and depth of their disclosures in order to both achieve intimacy and protect themselves from potential harm. The topics most participants considered intimate were relationship status, sexual orientation, political and religious beliefs, alcohol intake, sex, and feelings, which are mainly related to embodiment. Pictures were categorised as intimate by many participants, mainly in the context of Facebook. Participants did not identify pictures uploaded on CouchSurfing as intimate, although some participants had pictures with their partners on their CouchSurfing profiles. This fact makes me question if what makes those pictures intimate was that the potential public could understand the feelings behind the picture. In the case of Facebook, where most of the audience consists of existing relationships, "friends" might identify cues and interpret pictures better than in social media environments where the interaction is among strangers, such as on CouchSurfing. In the case of Badoo, the discussion was mainly about sexy pictures.

Sexual orientation and relationship status are the kinds of information necessary and expected to be disclosed because the objective of using the platform is to find a partner. Most Badoo participants did not identify those concepts as intimate; I argue that may be due to a process of "disclosure domestication". Nevertheless, on Facebook most participants decided not to disclose these kinds of information because they did not consider them necessary in that context and to prevent existing relationships knowing about their love life. Especially LGBT participants qualified sexual orientation and relationship status as intimate, and expressed their concern about other people knowing about their sexuality through Facebook, although they thought it was adequate to disclose it on a dating platform. In the case of CouchSurfing, in general, sexual orientation was not considered as relevant information to be revealed on the CouchSurfing profile. Only CouchSurfing participants who were living with their partners considered it important to specify their relationship status, as both members of the couple would host potential guests.

In relation to religious and political beliefs there were few participants who disclosed these kinds of information and also a few participants actually identified those topics as intimate. Some of these participants did not disclose their beliefs at all; others felt comfortable publishing their religion or political beliefs online on Facebook, although one participant also expressed his political beliefs through CouchSurfing; and others did not have a clear idea whether their religious and political beliefs were intimate or not. Although male participants linked online intimacy with sex more often than female participants, in general, across all platforms, both male and female participants usually restricted conversations about sex to the chat function and rarely uploaded sexy pictures. Some participants also considered alcohol intake as intimate, in particular participants who often had clear disclosures about their drinking habits on Facebook and CouchSurfing. I argue that these participants identified alcohol intake as intimate due to their lifestyle. Most male participants did not disclose their feelings online in writing. The public display of feelings and affection towards other people were often expressed by uploading pictures. In particular, most participants found it inappropriate to upload pictures with children. In general, participants found the disclosure of feelings and emotions openly through social media as socially inappropriate, especially when those feelings were negative or were related to

relationship problems. Contrary to what other studies found, participants claimed that they did not want to write about their bad emotions online because they found it exhibitionistic.

Apart from the opinions and accounts of some participants about sexy pictures, where female users were expected to self-police their pictures to avoid looking like "sluts", where a clear gender biased can be observed, in general I did not find significant differences in intimate disclosures in relation to gender or age among participants. What was more relevant in order to define the decision to reveal certain intimate information or not was the type of platform. Sexual orientation and relationship status was conveyed through all platforms, but especially on Badoo, due to its dating nature. Political and religious beliefs and emotions were mainly conveyed through Facebook. Alcohol intake and sex were usually disclosed through Badoo and Facebook. In general, I will conclude that in relation to online communication CouchSurfing would be the platform where less intimate disclosures can be found. Thus, a participant's decision to disclose different intimate topics in different social media platforms was mainly led by what was needed or sociably desirable on each platform rather than by their consideration of these topics as being intimate or not. In the next chapter, I analyse how participants navigate platforms' affordances and politics to negotiate intimacy, especially regarding the creation of new relationships.

Chapter 7

Navigating Social Media Platforms Architecture and Politics in the Search for Intimacy

7.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I combine platform analysis, taking into account participants' features choices and privacy configuration, which some scholars denominate "ethnography of affordances" (see Race, 2015, pp. 499-500), with a political economy perspective. I take a twofold approach: I look at the role of social media platforms as intimacy mediators (Latour, 2005) but, at the same time, I explore how adults adopt and adapt technical affordances that these sites provide to create and develop personal relationships. For example, some users acknowledge that the use of filters is useful to find like-minded people, and hence, build personal relationships:

> The good thing in the world of social media, and I suppose in CouchSurfing, is that you can put certain parameters there, the person you can actually apply to stay with you know that he's going to be a similar kind, and because you see also the profile you see that you're sort of compatible with the person so you can have things to talk about. So it can be a very good basis for a good relationship, I mean a friendship not a relationship (partnership relationship) (Mateo, 47, UK).

The main objective of this chapter is to answer the research question: What is the relationship between the architecture and politics of social networking sites and the emergent intimacy practices that take place within them? To address this question, I employ a multi-method approach, combining platform analysis, users' profile analysis and in-depth interviews. The observation and comparison of platforms' features is used to understand how these sites work and how they shape the way people communicate. This platform analysis is complemented with adults' choices in their user profiles and their narratives about how they understand and negotiate the use of different features within the management of their personal relationships.

In particular, I focus on verification and reputation systems, private/public features, and privacy settings. I analyse the relationships of users with these features in the different platforms: whether they choose to verify their accounts, whether they leave and receive references, what kind of features they prefer using for intimacy practices, and which kinds of privacy settings they apply to their profiles. In social media interaction, the role of social media companies, which foster specific types of communication through different features, is key to understanding how intimacy practices are shaped and negotiated. The architecture of social media platforms is closely connected with their business models. In order to stress the connections between the political economy of social media companies and the intimacy practices they facilitate, I examine the business models of Badoo, CouchSurfing and Facebook. In addition, I discuss how participants perceive the ways these companies monetize their traffic and the market intervention in the creation of new relationships.

7.2. Are you genuine?: Building reputation and trust through platforms' affordances

In this section I combine an affordance-based analysis of Badoo and CouchSurfing, with a particular focus on reputation and verification systems, with an empirical study, based on in-depth interviews to understand the meanings and significance that participants ascribe to their social media practices. I start addressing the basic characteristics of these social media platforms user profiles, which revolve around self-disclosure features, such as "About me" sections, to (re)present the user in the network. Then, I focus on verification and reputation systems, since they play an important role in the context of the interaction among strangers on social media.

CouchSurfing and Badoo ask their users in the profiles to disclose personal information in order to promote the encounter online, offline or both. Each new user creates a profile of her/himself; Germann Molz (2007) explains that it is a kind of business card that establishes the "I" to other users on the system. Most users add pictures, hobbies and the kind of people they like. On CouchSurfing, users also add places they have travelled to. Within the CouchSurfing user profile there is a list of friends, who are the other people in the community that the couchsurfer knows. There is also a list of references, where the other members with whom the couchsurfer has interacted evaluate the experience they have had with her/him in order to build

reputation. Hence, CouchSurfing profiles often include a reflection of shared offline experiences. On the other hand, Badoo's user profile usually includes less information than the CouchSurfing profile. The public part of the Badoo profile basically includes location, the objective for using the platform (I'm here to: chat, make new friends or date), a list of Facebook friends (optional), a "Personal info" section, interests, and a number of pictures, which can be rated by other users. Badoo's user profile also has a ranking of popularity, which goes from an ice to a fire symbol. Buying premium services raises popularity. In addition, Badoo's user profile includes sections that are only visible for the owner of the profile: a list of friends, a list of visitors, a list of people who favourited the user's profile, and a list of people who liked the user's profile (the last two features are only accessible for premium users).

Pictures, as observed by some authors (e.g., Illouz, 2007; Gómez-Cruz & Miguel, 2014; Lasén & García, 2014) are key for self-(re)presentation on social media. We already discussed in the previous chapter the increasing importance of pictures in the negotiation of intimacy on social media environments. Lasén and García (2014) explain that picture policies may vary across different platforms, in relation to the number of photos allowed, or whether the presence of explicit sexual depictions is allowed or not. As explained in the previous chapter, on Badoo and CouchSurfing explicit nudity or photos showing sexual acts are not allowed, nevertheless some users upload sensual pictures, especially on Badoo due to its hook-up objective. Badoo requires users to upload three pictures to be able to see the pictures of other users. In order to see other users' pictures uploaded through the Facebook app, Badoo users have to upload pictures from Facebook as well. Thus, Badoo utilizes the principle of reciprocity in order to foster the disclosure of pictures among its users. In addition, pictures must be verified by Badoo staff. In order to generate trust among users, Esteban suggested that on CouchSurfing, it would be useful for some fields in the profile to be mandatory to fill in, and for there also to be a system to verify pictures, similar to the picture verification system that Badoo provides:

> (On CouchSurfing) there should be basic information in profiles mandatory to fill in, like a number of pictures, because some people don't upload pictures of themselves. So someone would check pictures in order to improve the service, because there are people who create a profile, fill in four things and

that's all. No, there should be a minimum of fields to fill in and a person who could check that all the information is alright and would approve the profile (Esteban, 35, Spain)

In the case of CouchSurfing, no participant expressed concern about deception on the site. For instance, Gemma found couchsurfers more trustworthy than people she had met through dating sites (e.g., GentComTu, a Catalan dating site she also uses):

There is a bit of falsity online, face-to-face you can also lie, but online, for instance, in these dating sites where you first exchange messages before you meet face-to-face, you can tell a lot of things, but until you don't see that person face-to-face, you don't know his friends, you don't see what kind of people he interacts with, you don't really have enough information (Gemma, 43, Spain).

Likewise, participants who were both Badoo and CouchSurfing members claimed that they trusted people they met through CouchSurfing, but not people they had met on Badoo. The main issue Gemma highlighted in relation to dating platforms was that they did not provide enough information. In this study, CouchSurfing might be deemed more trustworthy by participants because profiles there display a lot of information about the user through different "About me" sections and a public list of friends. Before 2015, the list of friends included a rating to evaluate the kind of friendship among couchsurfers with the following options: "best friend", "good friend", "friend", "CouchSurfing friend", and "acquaintance"; and a statement to explain how the couchsurfers had met. Teng et al. (2010) found that the level of reciprocity in the type of friendship chosen to label a friend was very high, to avoid the friend feeling insulted. Some participants commented about this issue, how they felt somehow bad for labelling one friendship as "CouchSurfing friend" when the other user had labelled it as "good friend". Moreover, in previous years, at the beginning of the friends list, the degree of connection with other users was visible. When looking at another user's profile it was possible to view up to six degrees of separation with common friends, which was called the "friend of a friend" feature. In a sense, it was similar to the "mutual friends" feature on Facebook. By the same token, Badoo includes a list of Facebook common friends, available when users connect their

Badoo and Facebook accounts. Thus, the visibility of the friends' list and mutual friends seems to have been designed, specifically, to build trust between users.

On the other hand, some Badoo participants reported to have been contacted by users they thought to be robots. These "users" asked them to click on certain links or to call premium numbers. Preventing the presence of robots is one of the reasons why Badoo (2015c) claims to employ a verification system, as explained in its privacy policy:

> For safety and security and to ensure you have the best possible user experience, we require users to verify their accounts (because we want to make sure you are not a robot!) and might ask for your phone number. Don't worry! This is only to make sure you are real and breathing!

Badoo and CouchSurfing offer optional verification systems to validate users' identity in order to generate trust and safety among users. As I discussed in chapter 3, verification systems are designed to check users' identities to control fake profiles, to overcome the lack of traditional markers of co-presence, and as a security measure. It is actually very easy to verify one's Badoo account with a Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Google+ or Twitter account, or telephone number. Once a user gets verified through another social media account, Badoo then has access to certain information from these social media accounts. For instance, Badoo can show shared friends on Facebook (like the Tinder dating app). However, only a few participants had their accounts verified, mainly through a connection to their mobile numbers, Google+ or Facebook accounts. As Bechmann (2014) observes, users do not connect data across platforms unless they are forced to do so to optimize the service. On Badoo verified users have the option to only be contacted by people who are also verified. Raquel (35, Spain) explained that she chose this option, not for security reasons, but because she was tired of the amount of messages she received, and this worked as a filter to receive less. In relation to the level of safety provided by this verification system, Viel (37, Spain), who works in IT, highlighted how easy it was to trick these kinds of verification systems, and he pointed to the possibility of creating a fake network with different fake social media accounts on several sites. Another way to verify an account on Badoo is by buying *superpowers*, which work in a similar way to CouchSurfing's

verification system: when users purchase *superpowers* their identity is verified through their credit card details.
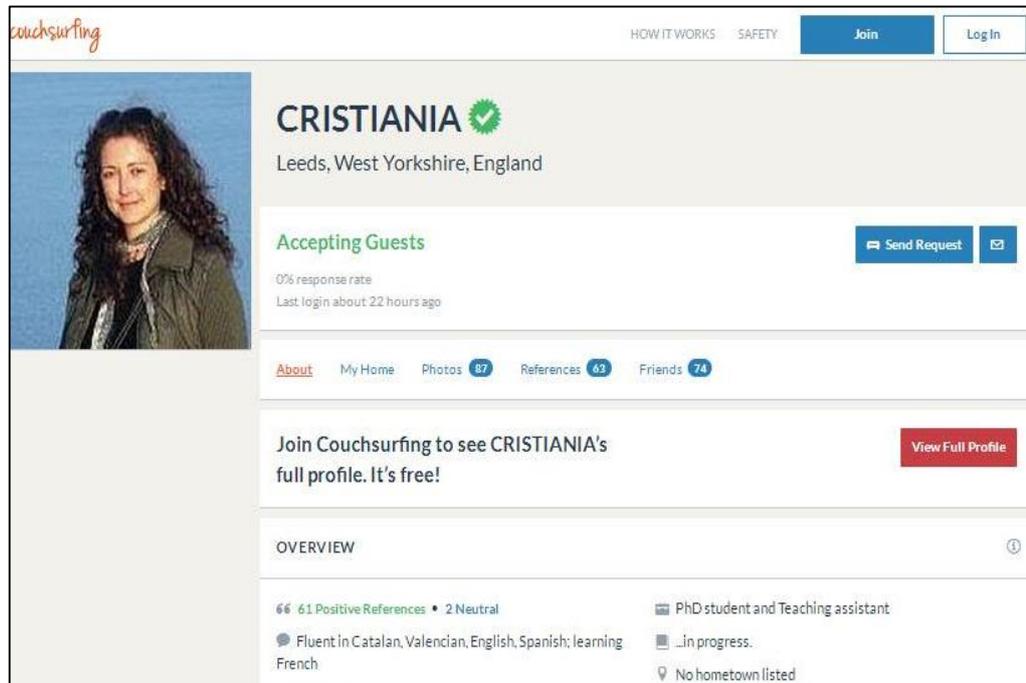
Image 1. CouchSurfing profile

Image 1 shows my CouchSurfing profile, which is verified, as represented by the green check symbol. CouchSurfing's verification system involves the verification of the user's identity, telephone, and location. In this case, the verification of location is important because of the hospitality exchange objective of the platform. Although claims made by the company about the verification system being helpful in finding a host quickly because people feel safer, most participants did not see it in this way. For example, Robert (43, UK), who is a verified user himself, explained that he did not pay attention to the fact that his potential hosts or guests were verified or not. Likewise, Raquel did not consider it beneficial to pay for verification. Although I highlighted the security component of the verification system, she still did not believe it guaranteed avoiding any potential harm via interaction with other couchsurfers, as this interview extract shows:

> In the case of CouchSurfing I never paid for the verification system because I never needed it. I wrote to people, people replied to me... and I surfed in many places without having to be verified. So that verification system didn't benefit

> me, so I didn't pay for that. […] Well, I think that if something has to happen to me is going to happen anyway... I've seen many verified members that you think that when they are drunk they may try with the guest (Raquel, 35, Spain).

Thus, participants did not consider the verification system worthwhile in relation to safety. The feature that was considered more useful in generating trust and safety among couchsurfers was "references", which are a key component of reputation systems. References are designed to allow users to rate one another within a network, in order to generate trust and safety among strangers. They also help to define some characteristics of the user and can be the reflection of shared intimate moments.

In the case of Badoo and CouchSurfing, reputation systems include public references, secret comments, *vouches* (trust votes) and other badges. References allow members to rate each other after meeting through a comment posted on their respective profiles. In the case of CouchSurfing, the experience with other users is either rated as positive, neutral or negative. The references cannot be deleted and they are reciprocated most of the time. On one level, references help to create a safe environment insofar as they are a reflection of past interactions among members. Robert (43, UK) observes that it is very unlikely that a couchsurfer with a lot of positive references is a bad person. As Jennifer Gibbs et al. (2011) note, the verification of users' identity through third parties comments forms an important part in the warrant process to trust other users.

On CouchSurfing, it was possible to amend a reference after it has been published (since November 2015 this is not possible any more). Therefore, CouchSurfing users could update their opinion about other couchsurfers in case they develop a more intimate relationship over time (either in a positive or negative way). When analysing CouchSurfing profiles, I also noticed that through some references, one could infer that a certain kind of intimacy have been developed between the couchsurfers in meetings, or through host-guest experiences, as discussed in chapter 5. On the other hand, references might contribute to building the online identity of the referred user through the storytelling of (intimate) shared moments, as some participants put it:

> I think it is more about CouchSurfing, because on CouchSurfing when you put the reference, you actually know some information, like private information,

like we've been there and there, or he took me there and there. So you put more information about the person and ... it could be more private than on Facebook for me, because you do share more than normally would, just to present the person in a really good way or in a bad way as well (Noelia, 25, UK).

It's like a personal reflection of you, what they are writing about is how they're seeing you, and how you behaved or how they felt welcomed, what interaction you had at the time that they write on your profile (Caroline, 26, UK).

References also were deemed as a more accurate representation of one's identity. Robert (43, UK) explained that it was not an easy task to describe oneself through the profile, therefore he considered references useful in the sense that they helped to create the identity of the couchsurfer through the narratives of other members. He suggested that the information disclosed through references was more authentic than one's own (re)presentation, as shared opinions about the same person have more weight than self-description. As discussed in Chapter 2, online identity is composed of self-(re)presentation, group membership, and public disclosure of the interaction with other users (e.g., through references or comments on pictures), which has been called "mosaic identity" (Lara, 2007; Caro, 2012). Likewise, Christofides et al. (2009) have argued "identity is a social product created not only by what you share, but also by what others share and say about you… The people who are most popular are those whose identity construction is more actively participated by others" (2009, p. 343).

In the same vein, at the beginning of 2015, Badoo incorporated the feature "Secret comments", which is a reputation system, based on private feedback between users. Badoo users cannot read the feedback that other users have left them and only verified users can leave and receive comments. This reputation system allows publishing comments about other users without their awareness. The system tries to prevent abusers doing damage to other users by posting a warning comment about that particular user. As I discuss in the next chapter, there are a number of stalkers and misogynists on Badoo. In the interviews, some participants, mainly women, reported to have suffered some kind of abuse, either through online interaction in the chat feature or through face-to-face interaction with other Badoo users. "Secret comments"

was not available when I conducted my fieldwork, and therefore I do not have the opinion of participants about this new feature. Some participants suggested using a similar private reference system on CouchSurfing. Reputation is very important on CouchSurfing in order to be hosted; therefore, they explained, most couchsurfers did not want to leave a bad reference, in order to avoid receiving a bad reference in return. This viewpoint echoes the view found by Teng et al. (2009), who concluded that ratings would be more accurate if they were more private. In response to these demands, CouchSurfing has changed the reference system from October 2015 and implemented a new one very similar to the review system used by Airbnb (2015a). Thus, CouchSurfing users have 14 days to write a review after the hospitality exchange, the references cannot be changed in the future, and it is possible to leave "private" feedback.

Until 2014, there was another reputation system on CouchSurfing called *vouching*. As explained in chapter 3, a *vouch* signified that the couchsurfer was trustworthy. At the moment of writing this thesis, the number of *vouches* couchsurfers had received still appeared in their profile as "old school badges", but it is not possible to see which users *vouched* for them. Another old school badge is "pioneer", which was given to users who were verified before 2015, when a $25 donation was used to maintain the service and to verify a user's identity. Apart from their original trust and support to the community meanings, both *vouches* and pioneer badges are now signifiers of long-term engagement and participation in the CouchSurfing community.

Badoo also uses different awards[12] to reward users' participation on the site or to highlight their popularity in the network or on other social media connected to their Badoo profile. The company has access to information about the other social media profiles of users when they verify their account using a particular social media platform. Badges, based on popularity, introduce a gamification component in the social media interaction, as Judd Antin and Elizabeth Churchill (2011) observe, and

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[12] Badoo provides the following awards: the most active people, the most visited profile, the chattiest, the most complete profile, the hottest people, the most matched people, the biggest window shopper, top voters, most popular on Facebook, most popular on Twitter, the most social people, and secret awards.

have different social psychological functions, including reputation and status/affirmation. I received two awards during my fieldwork, which were the most popular active people (the badge with the thunder), and the most visited profile (the badge with the eye) as can be observed in image 2. This fact helped me to understand the gamification component of receiving awards, as I experienced the pleasure of the recognition of my participation in the platform.
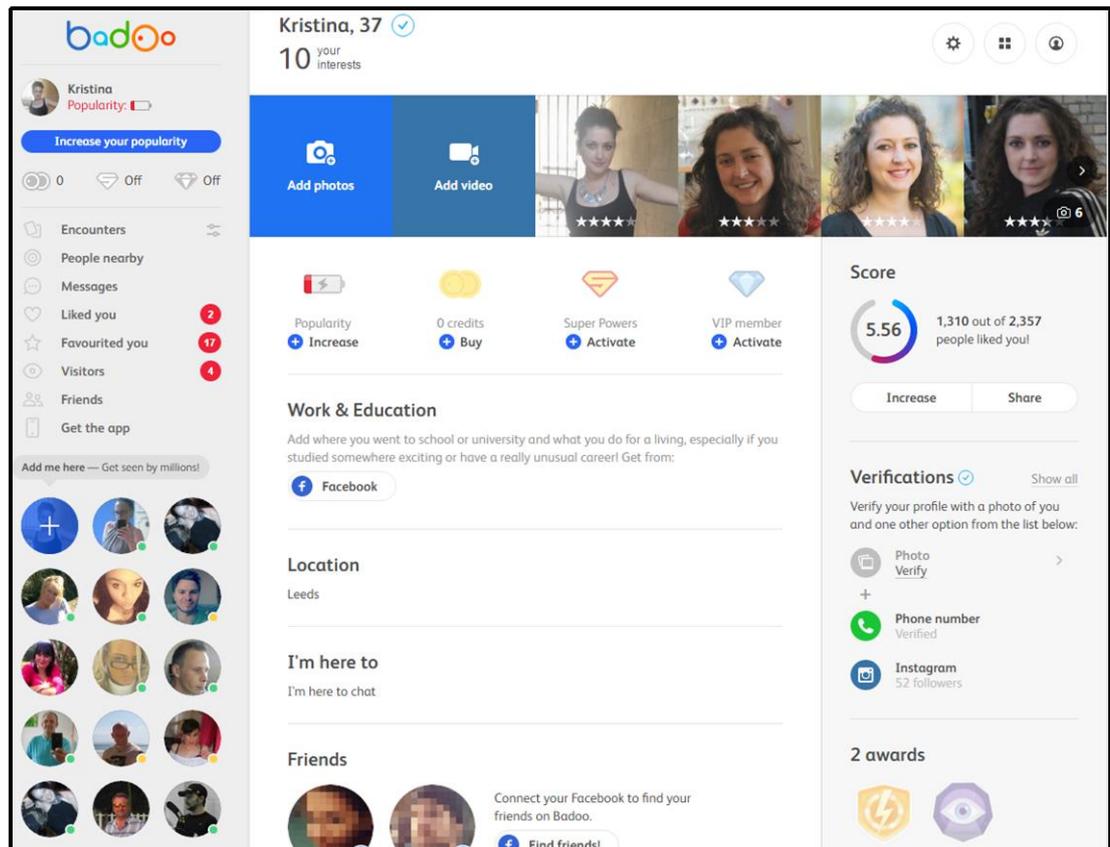
Image 2. Badoo profile

Despite these reputation and verification features, most Badoo participants affirmed that they did not trust the platform, or the people they met through the site, mainly due to the abundance of fake or deceptive profiles (a topic which I discuss further in next chapter), and the ease with which the verification system could be manipulated. In the case of CouchSurfing most participants claimed that they generally trusted the platform and other couchsurfers. Reputation systems were deemed more useful to develop trust than verification systems. Thus, the public display of connections and references seemed to help build trust among users, and this may be the reason why Badoo has recently incorporated the tool "Common Facebook friends", for users who

have verified their profile with their Facebook account, and "Secret comments", which allows users to leave a public reference about other Badoo users without them seeing it. It is interesting to note that some participants suggested implementing a similar "private" reference system on CouchSurfing in order to improve the accuracy of the references. The company has actually listened to its users and has recently implemented private feedback. In the next section, I explore the use of private features and privacy settings in Badoo, CouchSurfing and Facebook. The objective is to draw connections between privacy strategies and intimacy practices when interacting online.

7.3. Private features and privacy configuration: implications for the negotiation of intimacy

In this section, I examine how Badoo, CouchSurfing and Facebook provide different features and privacy configurations to allow users to communicate in private, as well as how users negotiate the use of the features in order to develop intimate relationships through these platforms. The study shows that all users had their Facebook accounts set to private, while Badoo and CouchSurfing were more often set to public. In general, all users expressed their preference for the chat feature to communicate intimate topics.

The chat feature and message system are the most private forms of communication on Badoo, CouchSurfing and Facebook. In reference to Badoo, Ana explained how she considered the chat feature more intimate because it allowed private interaction. In this interview extract it is also clear how Ana uses the concepts of privacy and intimacy interchangeably, an overlapping that I discussed in chapter 5:

> It's a bit more intimate, because the conversation is between you and the other person, it's not published what you talk to the other person, I think there is privacy there. Everybody can see the profile pictures, but the conversations are private (Ana, 35, UK).

On Badoo the chat feature works very similarly to the chat feature on Facebook, where users can access recorded conversations at any time. When I first joined CouchSurfing

in 2007, the platform also provided a chat feature, but a few months later the chat feature disappeared, and private communication was limited to inbox messages. This chat feature, like Facebook's chat feature in the past (before it merged with the inbox), was ephemeral. The conversations disappeared once the session was ended. In this sense, the social media platform Snapchat, as I discussed in chapter 3, claims that it offers the most intimate way of communication because of the privacy that the auto-destruction of the messages affords. Some participants pointed out that they did not disclose intimate information through social media because the information was there forever and it might be leaked, as we saw in chapter 5. On the other hand, there were other participants who were not concerned about their conversations being recorded. For example, Isaac expressed his preference for the change in Facebook's chat to permanent records because it allowed him to access past conversations. He did not believe that the permanency of information on Facebook would prevent him from being intimate with people through the chat feature. On the contrary, he found it useful that conversations were recorded, because it helped him manage his personal relationships rather than rely solely on memory. He illustrated this point by sharing an anecdote about an intimate moment he had with a close friend in the Facebook chat feature:

> In fact, the other day a good example which I remember in fact when you mention it was one of my very close friends she told me that she was pregnant. But it was one of those days, I'd just had an accident and I was confused and I did not remember anything for a few days. During that time I was chatting with her, but I did not remember that conversation. One month later, when she mentioned it, I did not remember I had that conversation with her. So she said: "No, go and look!, we actually spoke about it, and I told you I'm pregnant." I actually went back and looked, and it was the case: she did tell me that she was pregnant. So that was very helpful (Isaac, 26, UK).

In addition, social media platforms provide privacy settings to help users manage the level of publicity of the content they share. At the beginning, CouchSurfing and Badoo profiles had only two privacy options: public or private (members only). In recent years, Badoo has been incorporating more options into its privacy settings. At the time of writing, privacy settings in Badoo allowed users to control who could see their

email address, and who could comment on their pictures, among other options, which can be seen in image 3.
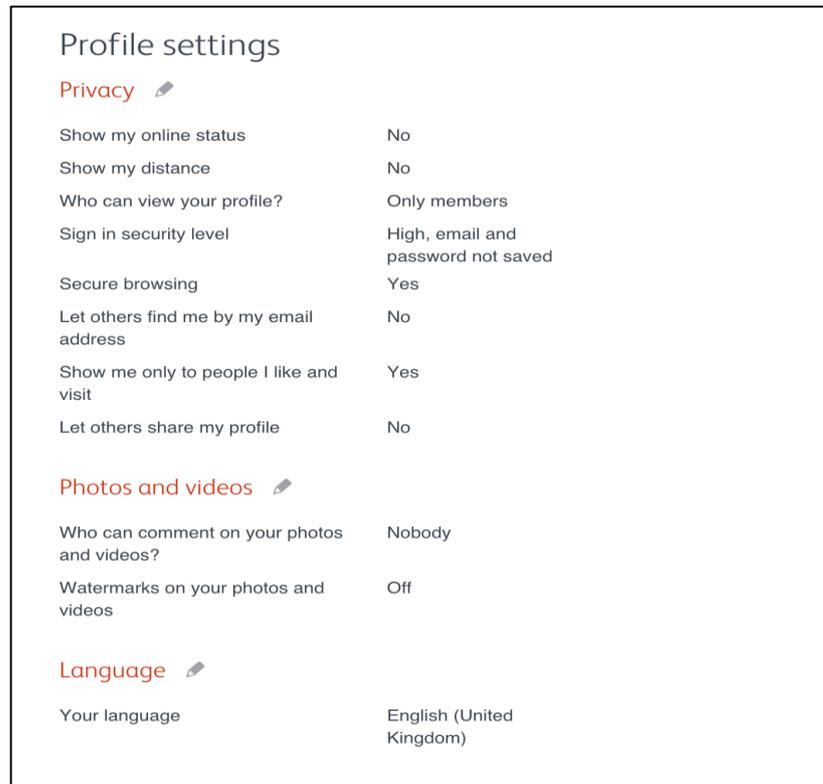
Image 3. Badoo's privacy settings

In the case of CouchSurfing, the platform has moved to a more transparent privacy configuration. In previous versions it was possible to hide one's profile from searches in the platform. CouchSurfing platform used to allow the use of pseudonyms, but this option is only available for older users, as can be seen in Image 4. This move towards "real name policy", as discussed in chapter 2, is part of a philosophy of radical transparency that some social media companies promote (see Zhao et al., 2008; Van Dijck, 2013). It is increasingly more complicated to create an alternative identity online, especially on social media platforms that are designed to move the interaction to face to face, as they incorporate policies which foster authenticity.
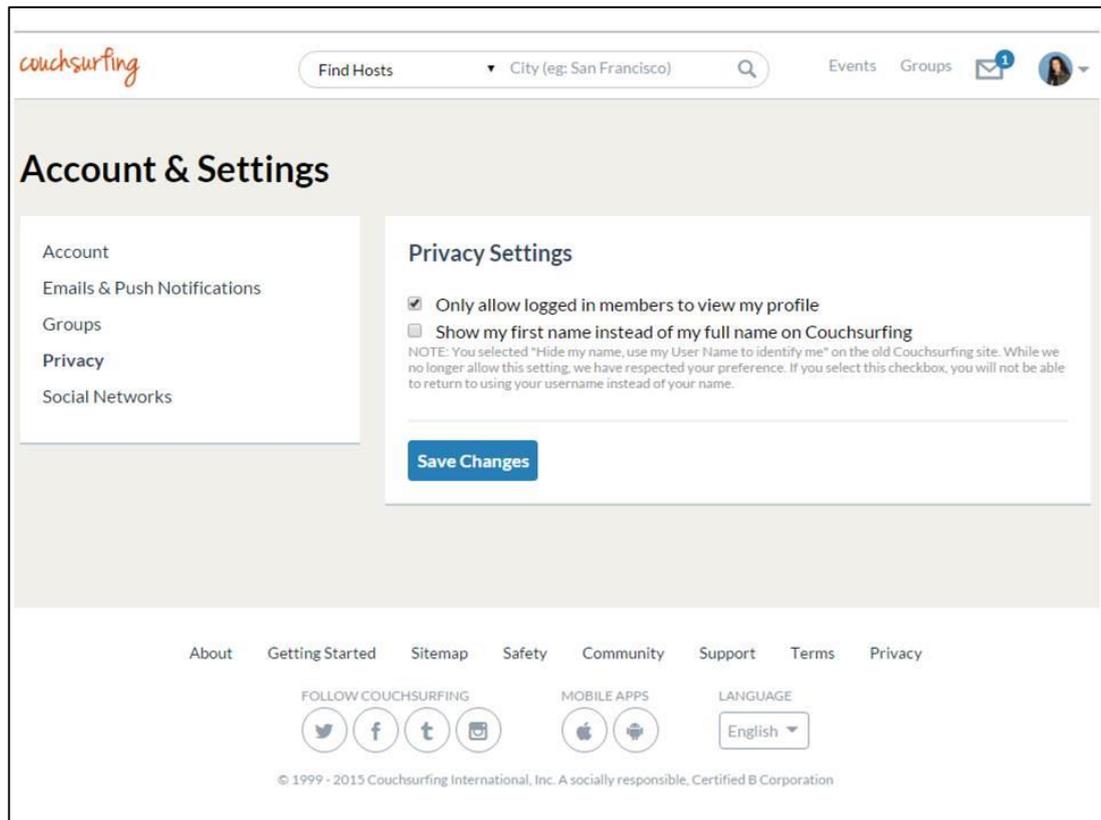
Image 4. CouchSurfing's privacy settings

Facebook includes three main privacy options: public, "friends of friends", and "only friends". It also provides more sophisticated privacy settings, which include a number of "friend lists" to categorize different kinds of relationships: best friends, friends, work colleagues and so on, that can be applied to photo albums and posts. Other privacy options are the control of the tags on pictures and the visualization of the list of friends.

Some participants highlighted that it was problematic that privacy policies changed quite often, and in particular, in reference to Facebook. Most participants have not read the privacy policy of the social media services they were using, with some exceptions:

> In Couchsurfing I did it because I wanted to know where I am going and be sure that I am sharing the mentality of the group. Then in Facebook also I read for the first time I join but since that day a lot of things have been changing permanently. So one day you discover that somebody's talking to you that is not your friend and you say what happened, and in that moment you go, you

check the settings and then you start blocking the things that automatically they just unblock when they changed the versions (Olga, 40, Spain).

In this sense, Olga believed that users were responsible for understanding how the services they were using worked:

Well, you need to read the networks that you use and see with whom you share this or that information, what you should know if you are a user in Facebook that if you post something in your wall it's going to be seen for all the contacts you have. So if you don't put the restrictions it's up to you. That's why sometimes I don't understand when people are complaining online saying this should not be like this, why do you say this or that? It's very simple if you don't want somebody to steal your picture: don't put it! (Olga, 40, Spain).

A few participants expressed some confusion about how privacy settings worked, although they did not seem overly concerned about privacy, as they have not investigated further about privacy options. Marc, for example, reported that his Facebook account was public although it was actually set to private and, as he explained later in the interview, he even had to approve tags in pictures. He claimed that the configuration of his Facebook account was public because he did not publish anything he deemed intimate:

My configuration is public, but I do it like that because I don't publish… (I have some friends who do it), but I don't publish anything that I consider intimate or private. I publish things that everybody knows, such as my age. I share poems, most of them aren't mine, videos… These kinds of things I don't mind that everybody watches them (Marc, 39, Spain).

Marc claimed that his Facebook account was public because he did not apply a friends list to the content he published, so it was public in the sense that all his 319 friends could see all the content he uploaded. He also thought that his Badoo profile was private, when it was actually public. There were a few other participants who believed that their profiles were private on Badoo or CouchSurfing, when they were actually public. Also, there were some participants who were not aware of the possibility of

changing their profiles to private, and they were public (as this was the default setting), which prompted me to explain to them how privacy settings worked. In the case of Vanessa (29, Spain), she was not sure about her privacy configuration on CouchSurfing because she shared passwords with her boyfriend, and he might have changed their account settings. The act of sharing one's passwords and devices with a partner is a symbol of trust and intimacy within personal relationships, as boyd (2008, 2014) observed in her research of social media use by teenagers. Likewise, Amanda Lenhart and Maeve Duggan (2014) found that "67% of Internet users in a marriage or committed relationship have shared the password to one or more of their online accounts with their spouse or partner." Vanessa explained that another reason she delegated the security of her social media accounts to her partner was his level of expertise with computers, because he was an IT technician.

In their experimental study about privacy on social media, Petter Brandtzæg and colleagues (2010) found that adults older than 40 years had more problems configuring their privacy settings than younger users. However, as discussed in chapter 3, Madden (2012), in her report for the Pew Research Project, found that there was not an age gap in relation to the configuration of privacy settings among US social media users, but a gender gap, with women choosing the most private options, because they appeared to be more open in their disclosures and hence, more concerned about safety. However, in this study I did not identify any particular gender or age gap in relation to the configuration of privacy settings, maybe because participants in this study were moderate or heavy social media users, and most of them were adept in the use of privacy settings.

On Badoo and CouchSurfing, there were people who chose a public configuration to either have more visibility, or because they did not have concerns about privacy since they claimed that they did not disclose any intimate information on those platforms. Moreover, a few participants did not consider CouchSurfing to be a social media platform. For this reason some participants had their CouchSurfing account set as public even though they were concerned about privacy, and protected their Facebook's accounts. It is possible that the not-for-profit origins of CouchSurfing, as I discuss later in this chapter, and the altruistic hospitality exchange that the service affords, creates a different idea in the mind of participants about the platform in

comparison to other social media platforms. For example, when I asked Lulu whether she had changed her privacy settings on CouchSurfing, she replied that she had not, and she was wondering why not, when she cared so much about her privacy on Facebook:

> Not on CouchSurfing, I haven't. In fact I've been a bit lax on CouchSurfing. I think I need to go into that and have another look at the privacy settings. For some reason though, I feel like CouchSurfing isn't as big of like threat or whatever as Facebook is, which is ridiculous, because it's still social media. But I'm always really careful around Facebook, but I'm not that careful on CouchSurfing. (On Facebook) I just have like the most secretive one. Like just "only friends", you know, how like… there is like three different sides and there is like "only friends", that one for everything (Lulu, 25, UK).

On the other hand, all participants had a private configuration on Facebook. Peer pressure was one factor that influenced participants' decisions to change privacy settings. For example: "I changed it recently because everyone started saying: it's public go to private" (Isaac, 26, UK). Nevertheless, most participants claimed they uploaded more content to Facebook than to other platforms, and hence, were more concerned about who could access their content. For instance, Robert had his Badoo and CouchSurfing accounts set to public, and his Facebook set to "only friends". Moreover, he reported that he did not want some "Facebook friends" to interact with the content he uploaded, so he created a personalised list of friends: "I've changed the settings because there are some people that are always commenting, commenting, commenting and you don't really want that" (Robert, 43, UK). Robert highlighted that he wanted to choose who could participate in his shared memories because they were not meant for everybody, only for certain people. In this sense, he was creating circles of intimacy by restricting access to his profile to people he did not consider to be part of his inner group. Likewise, Ana explained that she curated the privacy settings on Facebook depending on the different publics she interacted with by applying friend lists. For a while, Ana also considered forbidding people to write on her wall, however, in the end, she decided not to apply this privacy option because she acknowledged that if her "friends" could not interact freely with her content on Facebook, it would not be entertaining to participate in the service:

If I don't allow people to behave with a bit of freedom it's not funny to be on Facebook. It's supposed that I don't have strangers (sometimes I allow some strangers to enter), therefore everybody has to behave freely, and when I allow strangers to enter I try to put them high privacy (Ana, 35, UK).

Giving exclusive access to private content creates a sense of intimacy among users. In chapter 5, I mentioned that online intimacy is mainly understood as self-disclosure to an exclusive group of significant others, and many participants made references to pictures in particular, when defining online intimacy. For example, Esteban (35, Spain), who had all his accounts set to private, explained that it was possible to experience intimacy with a specific group of friends on Facebook by creating a private album. In this sense, users negotiate the level of intimacy within their personal relationships through different privacy configurations on Facebook, as Isaac explains:

Most of my albums will be public so even if you are not a friend of mine you can still view them. If it's something more personal with my family it will be "specific to friends" or "friends of friends" and not open to everyone but that's about it (Isaac, 26, UK).

As Chambers (2013) puts it: "In this online framework intimacy as *disclosure* becomes a marker of authentic, *bona fide* intimacy in a broad sense. It performs a symbolic role as an indicator of closeness and trust" (2013, p. 47).

Badoo also allows users to set some pictures to private. These pictures are often erotic pictures that users have to give permission to other users to view. Petro (29, Spain) provided an interesting anecdote in reference to private pictures on Badoo. Petro talked to a girl who he thought had really ugly pictures in her profile, and he could not believe that she was actually the girl in the pictures, because he was used to seeing "more or less" sexy pictures in female Badoo profiles. After talking to her for a while, she allowed him to see her "private pictures" and he could see that she was actually pretty. She told him that she was using ugly pictures to prevent men from contacting her based on her physical appearance. In this case, she was using fake pictures as a filter to avoid shallow men contacting her. When allowing Petro to access her real

pictures, she was creating a circle of intimacy between them. On the other hand, Badoo requires that users upload pictures from Facebook if they want to see Facebook pictures from other users. Petro also mentioned that he tried, by mistake, to upload pictures from Facebook to Badoo, but he was very uncomfortable when he saw all his Facebook pictures on Badoo. He immediately proceeded to delete all of these Facebook pictures, because he did not want his spheres of Badoo and Facebook to collide. As I examine in the next chapter, when I discuss safety issues, Badoo participants rarely add other Badoo users on Facebook. They prefer to move the interaction to WhatsApp, because there is less information there.

At the other end of the spectrum, there were participants who had all their accounts set to private. The most extreme case of privacy protection was Mateo (47, UK), who did not even allow people to write on his Facebook wall, and had to approve tags in pictures as well. His Facebook account was more professionally oriented, which might have been the reason why he did not want to have content that he deemed irrelevant on his wall. In relation to her work, Caroline (26, UK) commented that her Facebook account was very private because she was a teacher and did not want students to find her or add her as a friend. Thus, she did not want to mix her personal life with her professional life. As discussed in previous chapter, Caroline is a lesbian, and it is easy to find out about her sexual orientation looking at her Facebook profile. She expressed her concern during the interview about some of her family members who did not know about her sexual orientation guessing that she was a lesbian by her posts or pictures. In the case of Badoo, some participants explained that they set their profile to private because they did not want to appear in public searches. Luis (30, Spain) reported that he chose a private configuration for his Badoo account because he did not like his Badoo profile showing up if someone searched for a picture of him on Google. He expressed concern about using dating sites because he believed there was a certain social stigma around using social media to meet new people; a topic that I discuss in more depth in the next chapter.

Despite a few of the participants' unawareness of the workings of privacy settings on Badoo and CouchSurfing, most of them knew how privacy settings worked. All participants had their Facebook profiles set to private, mainly for "only friends". Two main trends were identified in relation to the configuration of privacy settings: (1)

public configuration on Badoo or CouchSurfing and different levels of private configuration on Facebook, and (2) private configuration in all accounts. Thus, in opposition to moral panics about oversharing due to a lack of digital literacy or due to the contemporary turn to a more public intimacy, it is clear that participants are increasingly learning how the social media platforms they use operate and how to manage their privacy on these sites. Although on occasion, participants may engage in more public intimacy practices through the disclosure of intimate moments in references, or through pictures, most of the time, they prefer to discuss intimate topics though private features. As discussed in chapter 5, participants seemed more concerned about their social privacy than about their data being collected by social media companies, in line with studies conducted by some scholars (e.g., Raynes-Goldie, 2010; Young & Quan-Haase, 2013). In the next section, I address this issue of data mining in the context of social media business models and the commodification of personal relationships.

7.4. The monetization of intimacy: Who cares?

Social media companies are both empowering and controlling, as discussed in chapter 2, since they facilitate users to create or maintain personal relationships and, at the same time, monetize their activity in the site through fees or customized advertising. Some scholars (e.g., Arvidsson, 2006; Degim & Johnson, 2015; Lardellier, 2015) highlight that by monetizing the creation of romantic relationships by charging a fee, dating services commoditize intimate relationships. Other scholars (e.g., Andrejevic, 2010; Hearn, 2010; Langlois, 2013, Gehl, 2014) have discussed the concept of "affective labour" to address the monitoring of users' behavioural activity in relation to the negotiation of personal relationships, such as commenting and posting, to provide them customized advertising. In this section, I examine the different premium services that Badoo and CouchSurfing charge for. The analysis of my case studies' business models are complemented with adults' perspectives about how they perceive the monetization of intimacy through social media platforms, where most participants accepted market intervention in the creation of new relationships.

Social media business models, as we saw in chapter 3, range from paid services, to *freemium* models, to customized advertising through users' data mining. Badoo and CouchSurfing are both based on *freemium* business models. Badoo offers paid

premium services, which can be purchased through credits or *superpowers*. Credits[13] allow users to purchase the following services*:* rise up to first place (in searches), send gifts (emoticons), step into the spotlight (top positioning in the home that lasts 5 minutes), get their profile picture shown more, appear more times in "Encounters" (a matching system), chat to 20 more people in a single day, appear as "ready to chat", add stickers to chats, and get exclusive attention from a particular user. Badoo allows individual users to contact up to 20 people per day for free. So using credits to contact 20 more people is useful, for example, if a user wants to talk to more people on one particular day. In fact, as Cesar (44, Spain) observed, if you pay for credits it does not mean that you actually talk to 40 people; it means that you have the possibility to try to contact them.

The other premium service that Badoo offers is called *superpowers*, which allows users to find out who wants to meet them, to see who adds them to their favourites, to deliver their messages first, to customize their profile, and to visit other users' profiles invisibly. This term, which is represented with the "S" of Superman, is used to market these premium services, connecting it with the superhero imaginary. *Superpowers* are subscription services[14] and the default setting is that the subscription will be renewed automatically. In fact, Mateo complained because he did not notice that the option of automatic renewal had been automatically checked. He only wanted to pay for the service for one month and he ended up paying for three months because he did not know how to change the option. As discussed in chapter 5, lack of trust in the service was identified as a reason to stop using Badoo, as in the case of Mateo, whose distrust led him to decide not to use the service any more:

> To me it's not a site I like using because it leaves me a bad taste. So if I was desperate, let's say, to find a partner through social media, I definitely wouldn't go to Badoo, I would go to something that I will find somewhere else (Mateo, 47, UK).

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[13] Credits can be purchased in different packs, which range from 100 credits for £1.50, to 2750 credits for £29.99.

[14] There are four different *superpowers* subscriptions types, which range from 1 week for £1.49/week, to 6 months for £5/month.

This default setting is a common way to catch users to get them to pay more months than they expected. Unsubscribing from the service is complicated since the option is hidden. Other companies such as eHarmony (2015) use similarly misleading tactics in their subscription services.

Most participants who had tried *superpowers* commented that premium services were useful to contact popular women. Petro (29, Spain) reported that he tried *superpowers* once because he wanted to talk to some "popular girls". Cesar also explained that *superpowers* were the only way to reach popular women:

> On Badoo, for instance, if there is a person who has a lot of messages (which is actually that she didn't read the messages for a while), if you don't have *superpowers* you cannot talk to her. In Badoo they called it "this person is very popular (requested)" and there is a symbol of a flame in her profile to show that. So it's also a way to decide if you want to try to talk to her or not (Cesar, 44, Spain).

As Raquel (35, Spain) commented earlier, women receive plenty of messages on Badoo, and *superpowers* allow users to deliver their messages first. Badoo users can try *superpowers* for free by sharing their contacts from their email account with Badoo, which gives permission to the platform to send invitations to their contacts to join Badoo. Marc (39, Spain) reported that he tried *superpowers* for free, but then his contacts received messages from Badoo to join and he did not like it, because he could be perceived as a spammer. Similarly, I also tried the *superpowers* for free during my fieldwork and my supervisor received an email from Badoo with the following message: "Hi Nancy! Jon has a message for you. Log in and read the message!" She found this practice quite intrusive and misleading, as it suggested that a Badoo member knew her personally. Nevertheless, the purpose of this practice is to recruit new users, and it actually works. When asking participants about the first time they heard about Badoo, Laura (40, Spain) explained that she joined the platform as a result of receiving a similar message. It is also possible to try specific premium services (e.g., top positioning) by accumulating points through participating in the service, as Patricia explained:

> I only tried to put myself on the loop, because if you enter to Badoo from the Badoo mobile app every day you receive points, and when I arrived to 100 points they put me in the loop (Patricia, 31, Spain).

Following the conversation about the political economy of Badoo, some participants made comments about bots[15], which asks users to call premium numbers. For instance, Patricia said that although she believed that these kinds of messages were generated by outsiders, she would not be surprised if Badoo were involved in this practice because she thought that they had to earn money in some way. She questioned whether the actual business model of Badoo was providing the company with enough revenue: "If most people use the free version of the site... the website cannot earn a living from 4 people who pay for the *superpowers*" (Patricia, 31, Spain). Like Patricia, all participants were aware of the *freemium* business model behind Badoo, and some of them commented that they found Badoo's promotion of its premium services intrusive. Meanwhile, in the case of CouchSurfing, some participants did not have a clear idea whether there was a business model behind the service. For example: "I think (Badoo) it's more business oriented and CouchSurfing is completely free, there is no charge or anything of that sort, so that stands out" (Isaac, 26, UK).

As explained in the Introduction, Couchsurfing was created in 2004 and developed as a not-for-profit organisation run mainly by volunteers until 2011, when it received $7 million from venture capitalists and became a B corporation (Feldman, 2012). CouchSurfing received additional funding in 2012, which accounted for a total investment of $22.6 million in the company (Gallagher, 2012). Since then, the owners have been experimenting with different ways of monetizing the traffic of the site. From 2015, CouchSurfing has incorporated advertising in the site for users who are not verified, and they also promote the verification system as another source of revenue. In order to verify their identity and location, users pay $25 so that their credit card information can be verified. When CouchSurfing receives the payment and checks the user's identity, a green check symbol appears in the user's profile with the text "payment verified". Then, after a period of 4-6 weeks, users receive a code by

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[15] Social media robots.

postal mail to verify their address. Once this code is entered in the user's profile, another green symbol appears under the profile picture with the text: "address verified". It prevents users from seeing advertising on the site and promises to find them hosts twice as fast. However, participants in this study paid for verification when the service was a charity run and supported by users, because they wanted to help to maintain the site. As the ratio of verified users on CouchSurfing is still quite low, and the company did not earn enough revenue from this feature, they incorporated advertising at the beginning of 2015.

CouchSurfing was the site that participants expressed major concerns about its current for-profit-driven business model. Nowadays, Couchsurfing even has a Facebook social button to log in, but many of its users have disagreed with the commercial turn that the site has taken, as Zeena Feldman (2012) discusses in her study of community building on CouchSurfing. Likewise, in my study, some participants expressed discomfort with the change in CouchSurfing's charity status to a B corporation, as the following interview extracts show:

> I think it was before it was a kind of charity, no? A non-profit. But now they are trying to get money from, I think some kind of… I'm not very sure, but business is managing now, people make money from managing the website or something. I think it's something that is different and it's something that maybe people don't like it (Mario, 36, UK).

> Couchsurfing is becoming not the idea of what I have of Couchsurfing. My idea is a place to share and not to make money. It seems that the objective now is to make money and create a commercial platform to make money, and for me this not Couchsurfing. The idea of Couchsurfing was to share and to have free way of interaction of people and offer hosting, surfing. I heard rumours about next year that people have to pay. If people have to pay monthly or yearly subscription, Couchsurfing will go down users very quickly because people will move to another platform like Be Welcome, which is free of charge (Viel, 39, Spain).

I don't think it's good for CouchSurfing, for couchsurfers, and so on. It seems to be a business now and not a non-profit organisation anymore. I am still thinking if I want to be a part of this (Noelia, 25, UK).

The main issue that participants had with the commercial turn of CouchSurfing was that the hospitality exchange service is based on the altruism of its users; the service was developed by the community and now a few people (founders and venture capitalists) aim to gain money from couchsurfers' hospitality. CouchSurfing is based on the "gift economy" (e.g., Rheingold, 1993; Barbrook, 1998), where people do things for one another, in the spirit of building something between them, rather than a strict *quid pro quo*. The sense of community created on CouchSurfing is based around shared values such as communitarism, love for travel, or cosmopolitanism, which are key elements of this kind of "sharing economy." These are being jeopardized with the commercial turn that CouchSurfing has experienced in recent years. When altruism and affective relationships become commoditized by economic interests, participants felt that they were exploited. CouchSurfing was founded in San Francisco, which was the main hub for the emergence of virtual communities in the 1980s based on communitarian and hippie values, as we saw in chapter 2. Thus, the CouchSurfing ethos is rooted in free-exchange and communitarian culture, which is incompatible with market intervention. That is the reason why long-term CouchSurfing participants expressed their disapproval of the commercial turn the site has taken. The affective labour was made more visible when the site changed from an open source platform to a commercial one, compared to sites such as Facebook, which was privately owned from its inception.

On the other hand, John (28, UK) was one of the few users in favour of CouchSurfing being for profit. In fact, what John found problematic was that CouchSurfing did not have a clear business model, as he thought that the company needed money to improve the user experience they offered through their mobile apps:

It's the mobile apps that are awful. I think the mobile experience is a weak one and I think the way that people use the Internet now is very much based around mobiles and tablets. I think that CouchSurfing needs to do more to invest in that. Now maybe the problem is they don't make any money, I guess it's not a

very profitable site. I know they don't have advertising and there's no subscription. I don't know how they do it, but I think it is a problem (John, 28, UK).

In April 2015, CouchSurfing changed the privacy policy to add information related to advertising, the use of cookies and the sharing of information with third parties (CouchSurfing, 2015). Since CouchSurfing's commercial turn in 2011, some participants including Viel (39, Spain) have shown concern about data gathering. Viel explains that some users had recently deleted some of their personal information in the site, and changed their age to zero or one hundred because they are aware of social media monitoring. Viel works in IT and knows how online advertising works. He explicitly expressed concern about data mining, especially in the case of Facebook. Viel was exceptional; most participants did not seem concerned, making statement like "I don't have anything to hide", or as Robert (43, UK) put it: "I'm a victim maybe of the big brother but I don't mind." When asking participants whether they would pay to have Facebook without monitoring, most of them replied that they would not pay or that they would be willing to pay a small fee, like in the case of WhatsApp. Although some participants were concerned about data mining on Facebook, especially by the government, which I discussed further in chapter 5, most of them accepted the trade-off of monitoring for connectivity, as the following interview extracts show:

> If it's advertising I don't even look at it. I don't know if the robot notices that I don't click in that banner maybe it would process something else. [...] Moreover, I've seen in the tablet that it says: "this software can check your data", and you have to accept it, you enter in the game, because at the end of the day social media are tools to keep connected with your friends, so at the end you accept the game (Raquel, 35, Spain).

> In these kinds of things, if it is anonymous I don't mind, because it's marketing and I understand that they have to make money in some way, I understand the reasons and I even think that it's ok, it has to be a business, it's like this, and I would never pay, I prefer they use my data than to pay (Peter, 34, UK).

> There's this myth the Internet is free. Of course it's not free, we pay for it through being advertised to which I'm okay with that. I don't mind having banner ads, as long as it's not too intrusive, I accept that and I guess if I'm going to be advertised to I'd rather I'm offered and told about things that are of interest to me (John, 28, UK).

Despite a number of media scholars (e.g., Couldry, 2012; Gehl, 2013; Van Dijck, 2013) conducting research about the exploitative nature of social media business models, who mainly claim that users are unaware of the workings of social media monopolies, in this study, most participants were aware of how social media political economy worked. However, they considered it a fair trade-off, monitoring their social media activity to target them with tailored advertisement as exchange to enjoy the service because the service was "for free". Although most participants considered it a fair trade-off to be the object of social media monitoring on Facebook, a few of them also wished they had the possibility of choosing to opt-out of social media monitoring, which could be through a paid option, as in the case of CouchSurfing.

On the other hand, apart from the debate about the monetization of personal relationships by social media companies, participants also discussed about the morality of the intervention of money in the creation of new relationships. In Couchsurfing, as Michael O'Regan (2009) points out, it is expected that members are both hosts and guests, as a condition of membership in the community, although there is no obligation to play both roles. Despite the fact that there is no monetary exchange, the gift economy is present in the host-guest relationship. For example:

> Of course it's cheaper to be hosted than paying a hotel but I don't like that idea that you see many times in Couchsurfing that it's like a free hostel service. When I've been hosted usually, well, I probably spend less money than if I got to a hotel but it's not free. At least, I take bottles of wine, I do something when we go out, I pay for the lunch and things like that. For me it's not just saving money, it's more something about exchange, about meeting people, about knowing different points of view (Sara, 39, Spain).

In fact, most participants considered "saving money" to be a wrong motivation for choosing to participate in the service, as they considered it not to be part of the

altruistic spirit of CouchSurfing. Thus, most participants did not consider it ethical for people to use CouchSurfing to save money or to earn money out of altruistic hospitality. As discussed in Chapter 3, Hesmondhalgh (2013) notes there are certain domains that most societies believe should remain outside of market intervention, such as one's personal life. Couchsurfers share their private space, their house, with their guest, but they also share trips, stories, their daily lives, and even their intimacy with other couchsurfers during their stay, what Bialski (2007) calls "intimate tourism". Similarly, in the case of Badoo, Ramon was not comfortable with the idea of paying to meet a potential partner, in this sense he found that it was sad that personal relationships were commoditized. Ramon believed that money should not be involved in the creation of personal relationships:

> There's no way I'm going to pay. […] Because then it becomes a trade, then it becomes a factory, it becomes totally ridiculous for me. […] I think it's sad and sick that people need to pay to meet somebody. It's really sad (Ramon, 37, Spain).

Ramon's reference to the intervention of money in the creation of personal relationships as "a factory" links with Terranova's (2000) concept of the "social factory" (2000, p. 33), where value is extracted from pleasurable activities such as communication and sociability. However, Ramon contradicted himself because, although he claimed that he would not pay for meeting potential partners, he also stated that it would be a good investment in the case of a positive outcome. Ramon considered that dating sites would be worth paying for if they were more effective:

> It's true that on Meetic there is a good selection, I can say, but you can only select the people who can afford it because it becomes really expensive at some point. It's quite a budget for the month and then the ladies, on the other side, they get only the guys who can pay, who don't mind putting a lot of money there which is not a good tip to say: "Hey, I'm spending money on bullshit." You want to get married or you want to have a relationship, if the lady is saying yes, that's a very good investment for the long-term (Ramon, 37, Spain).

For some reason, Ramon believed that women did not pay for using Meetic, which is actually untrue. A couple of participants commented that they joined because they received two months for free as a trial but, at first, both women and men have to pay to access the service.

The fact that the basic service is free was the main motivation for most adults to join Badoo, in the sense of saving money, not because they considered market intervention in the creation of new relationships as unethical. In fact, some participants affirmed that they would pay for online dating services if they had more disposable income. Although most participants decided to use Badoo because it was "for free" (despite their personal data being monitored), some of them complained about the quality of the people who participated on Badoo service in comparison with dating sites such as Meetic or Parship where there was a monthly fee. For example:

> I'd have preferred to use Meetic, it's not that I love Meetic, but it looks more serious than Badoo in order to find a partner, but Badoo is for free, so...(Patricia, 34, Spain).

> Badoo is for free, there everything goes, and there is not quality, there are a lot of people who are only looking for sex (Ana, 35, UK).

Nevertheless, in the study about dating sites conducted by Enguix and Ardèvol (2012), where they used Match as a case study, participants complained about the quality as well. Most participants were using the free version of the site and mentioned that they did not find it efficient, and most participants complained about the "quality" of the people they had encountered in the site, as commented earlier. In this study, there were few participants who had met long term-relationships through Badoo. For example, Cesar (44, Spain) who often paid for premium services, reported to be very successful using the platform, in the sense of finding many dates and one-night stands, and he had also found a long-term relationship through Badoo. He valued the service because it made it easier and more comfortable to flirt with people from home, rather than having to go out, and he considered paying to meet people part of the materialistic society we live in: "Obviously we live in a materialistic society, capitalist society, so it's part of it." Mateo (47, UK) also explained that a few years ago he had met a partner

he dated for one year through Badoo, but he stopped using the service recently because of the bad practices of the company in reference to the superpower subscription, as discussed above.

Market metaphors were common when discussing the online dating environment. For example, Raquel (35, Spain) commented that on Badoo you are "on sale". As we discussed in chapter 3, some scholars (e.g., Illouz, 2007; Heino et al. 2010; Cocks, 2015; Lardellier, 2015; Lindsay, 2015) have analysed the process of objectification and commodification that users experience on dating sites using a market metaphor. In this study, some participants also made reference to the objectification of users in the dating process. Petro (29, Spain) suggested during the interview that Badoo was based on physical beauty, and he explained that he and his friends only talked to users they found attractive because it was the only feature they actually perceived online. Likewise, Cesar observed: "it usually happens that if you don't like the picture you don't talk to that person" (Cesar, 44, Spain). In addition, most Badoo users do not read the text on user profiles. I experienced this during the first phase of the fieldwork when I was looking for participants. I stated in my profile that I was a researcher and that my objective of being in the platform was to look for participants to take part in the study and I could see that most users who interacted with me had not read my profile. Ramon (37, Spain) complained about this issue, and he considered that dating services were only a good tool to find a partner for "handsome people" (a group in which he did not include himself). As Illouz (2007) observes, beautiful pictures are key elements for self-promotion in the dating market. This may give the impression that these platforms are a bit superficial and that only good-looking people with sexy pictures are successful on them. For this reason, in order to try to claim attention from other users, some participants explained how they analysed other users' profiles to find tips to enhance their own profiles. As commented in chapter 2, Heino et al. (2010) argue that online daters feel better about themselves as a result of self-branding practices. On the contrary, in my study some participants expressed frustration with their self-marketing skills, which they deemed responsible for their lack of success; like Ramon, who even asked me for tips to improve his profile.

In general, participants accepted the platforms as they are because they take their design for granted and learn how to navigate them to achieve their personal goals. In

the case of Badoo and Facebook, participants do not perceive the commodification of their personal relationships, or they do not perceive it as problematic, since they accept the trade-off of data mining for connectivity, and this makes them feel unentitled to ask for changes. Conversely, in the case of CouchSurfing, participants expressed more of a desire for changing features and politics because they believed they had contributed to the value of the service with their hospitality, and as a result, felt more entitled to ask for changes to be made to the platform. In fact, most participants expressed their desire that CouchSurfing would be back to its old charity status and old lay-out.

In this study participants who enjoyed a good user experience did not consider data mining as problematic, like in the case of Facebook, and they did not suggest alternatives to the profit-driven model. Thus, the perception of what is fair to pay for, or the extent to which they consider data mining a fair trade-off depends on the good user experience. If participants feel that they are obtaining a good value from the service, they would be more likely to accept fees and data mining to access the service. The only exception is the case of CouchSurfing, because the origin of the network was open source. For CouchSurfing participants, the dimensions of affective labour were more visible because the platform was first developed by volunteers, and the service worked thanks to the altruism of its members. This was the main reason why they did not like the commercial turn that CouchSurfing had recently experienced, as it changed, in a way, the original communitarian ethos that the service was based on until 2011. In fact, all verified participants paid to contribute to the maintenance of the service before CouchSurfing's commercial turn.

The market intervention in the creation of new relationships may be interpreted as an unethical commercialisation of intimacy, as Ramon opined. However, paying to use social media, especially dating sites, as observed by Cocks (2015), is not so different to buying the newspaper to read the lonely hearts ads section in the past, or to pay a marriage agency in order to find a partner. Despite people continuously drawing moral boundaries for improper uses of intimacy, market intervention in the creation of intimate relationships has been largely present in society (Zelizer, 2009). Some participants even engaged in self-branding practices in order to enhance their profiles,

since they were aware of the economy of attention that operates on dating platforms mainly led by beautiful pictures and smart descriptions.

The findings suggest that what is deemed more problematic is social media companies' bad practices: lack of transparency about the workings of data mining, misleading techniques to get more users, assuring that the platform will never have advertising and including it later on, hiding monthly renewals by default in premium services' payment options, and so on. Therefore, as Jenkins et al. (2013) note, the problem is not the presence of business models, but the bad practices within them.

7.5. Conclusion

Trust has been identified as a prerequisite for disclosure in the context of social media. For this reason social media platforms where the interaction is among strangers incorporate reputation and verification systems to warrant users' identity. On Badoo, issues of authenticity were expressed in reference to fake or deceptive profiles, which led half of the participants to declare that they could not find genuine people on the platform, in spite of the reputation and verification systems that Badoo provides. In the case of CouchSurfing, the reputation system, composed of a public display of references, was deemed more useful in developing trust than verification systems. Some participants pointed to private feedback, as in the case of "Secret Comments" on Badoo, to make the CouchSurfing reputation system more safe and accurate, a feature that CouchSurfing has incorporated in November 2015 (CouchSurfing, 2015). They did not value the verification system in respect to it generating trust and safety among couchsurfers, contradicting CouchSurfing communications in relation to benefits of this paid service, and relied mainly on reputation systems to decide whom to trust.

Privacy has also been valued in the development of personal relationships. Thus, most participants preferred to communicate intimate information through the chat feature or via inbox. While scholars have claimed that privacy settings are difficult for some users to understand, most participants in this study knew how privacy settings worked. The general trend was towards a more private configuration in all accounts to communicate more privately and create different circles of intimacy. Although a few participants explained that they could enjoy intimacy in public through social media,

most participants showed an interest in managing the publicity of information that they shared with other users, especially on Facebook and Badoo. In this sense, participants preferred to use the chat feature and apply different privacy settings to their accounts to communicate in private and create different circles of intimacy.

Market intervention in the creation of new relationships is not a new phenomenon, which might be the reason why there were few participants who found it problematic. In particular, participants in this study valued these social media platforms as intimacy mediators insofar as they provided them with a space to create and maintain personal relationships. Participants expressed their preference for free options with customized advertising, rather than paying a fee. Although advertising in CouchSurfing appeared after my fieldwork was completed, and the verification option prevents users from seeing the advertising, I am unconvinced that users would choose this option to avoid advertising. In general most participants accepted the trade-off of data mining to serve them customized advertising. In the case of CouchSurfing, participants expressed concerns about the commercial turn the platform had experienced, since they believed they had contributed to the value of the service with their altruistic hospitality, and they did not find it fair that "some people" got money out of it. What participants also criticized were the bad practices within social media business models, such as misleading direct marketing techniques to get more users or the lack of transparency in data mining. Thus, on social media a double logic of empowerment and commodification operates: users enjoy a communication tool to create and maintain personal relationships, but at the same time, their affective labour is commoditized in "one way or another".

In the next chapter, I analyse what kinds of relationships participants create and develop through Badoo and CouchSurfing, and the different issues that arise from interacting with strangers through these platforms.

Chapter 8
New Personal Relationships through Social Media: Challenges and Opportunities

8.1. Introduction

Social media platforms are mainly used to maintain ongoing relationships, or keep in contact with acquaintances. Nevertheless, as observed in chapter 3, there are a number of social media services for meeting new people online, which range from dating sites, to hospitality exchange networks, to meet up services. Although there are people who also create new relationships through Facebook, most participants in this study used Facebook mainly to maintain ongoing relationships. For this reason, in this chapter, I focus on Badoo and CouchSurfing experiences, as discussed by participants during the interviews. Both Badoo and CouchSurfing platforms are designed to create personal relationships in which people usually move the interaction offline and meet face-to-face. In addition, I observed how participants often migrated the communication initiated on one site to another (e.g. from CouchSurfing to Facebook, or from Badoo to WhatsApp). I take a cross-platform approach to analyse how people use social media platforms to develop personal relationships, started through CouchSurfing or Badoo, and developed through other mediums. During the early stages of fieldwork, I discovered that some Couchsurfing users were also Badoo users, as well as members of other social media platforms designed to meet new people, such as Meetic, AdultFriendFinder, or MeetUp. It seems, therefore, that people who are on social media to create new relationships are open to using different channels. To respond to this observation, I incorporated other sites into the study, namely AdultFriendFinder, Meetic, AdoptaUnTio (AdoptAGuy), and GentComTu (PeopleLikeYou).

In this chapter, I address how participants deal with social stigma and safety concerns when participating in social media to meet new people. Moreover, I show how patriarchal gender roles are reproduced despite earlier cyberfeminist scholars' (e.g., Haraway, 1985) hopes that the Internet could provide a space free of gender roles. In addition, as some authors observe (e.g., Chambers, 2006; boyd, 2010b), despite Internet-initiated relationships having the potential to develop into long-term romantic

relationships or friendships, they are usually considered superficial and transient. In fact, to investigate this topic was one of the main motivations I initially had to study intimate relationships that had originated via social media. In the last section, I explore whether users think that the relationships they started online are more superficial than the relationships that they created in other places.

8.2. Negative implications of meeting strangers online: Stigma, deception and security concerns

In this section I address different kinds of negative implications that users may face when interacting online, which range from social stigma, to deceptive identities to security issues. Despite online dating becoming an everyday practice there is still a certain stigma, as discussed in chapter 3. Among my interviewees, Patricia commented that most people believed that those who interact with strangers online only want sex: "It's a bit bad seen. If you talk through the web they think that you want sex" (Patricia, 31, Spain). In addition, most participants pointed out that people who use social media to create new relationships are considered to be socially awkward or lack the social skills to meet people in another environment as other studies have shown (e.g., Peter & Valkenburg, 2007; boyd, 2008). In this sense, some participants claimed that social media were just other places to meet people and expressed that there were some advantages to using them, such as the possibility of meeting a broad range of people, and the ability to use filters (e.g., age, level of education, shared interests). Nevertheless, there were still some participants who had a stigma about meeting people online themselves, or who observed this stigma in other users in relation to the use of online dating platforms:

> I have a lot of friends that found a boyfriend online. I don't live in an environment where this practice is stigmatized, but I know other girls who have this very hidden (Raquel, 35, Spain).

> In a dating site there is a taboo, they tell you: "People around me don't know that I'm in this website", "A friend of mine created my profile", "I'm here but I don't use it very often." […] "Well, I'm here just to try, I don't believe very much in this, but I'm here", they always need to excuse themselves (Gemma, 43, Spain).

I don't want anybody to know that I'm using dating sites. […] More than for my friends is for myself, I find very frustrated that I'm not able to find someone, because I go to a club and I'm not able to go to talk to a girl. Well, I'm able to, but I'm not successful, and I end up here as a plan B (Luis, 30, Spain).

In fact, this last participant commented that he felt that he lacked social skills to meet girls face-to-face, and he felt upset with himself for using dating sites as he saw this practice as his last option for finding a partner. It seems that some online daters tend to hide this practice or try to justify for themselves the use of these kinds of sites. Apart from trust issues, most Badoo participants did not add people who they had met on Badoo on Facebook because they did not want their "friends" to know that they were meeting strangers on a dating platform. Few participants said that they added people from Badoo as friends on Facebook, and it was usually after having met offline or because the other person wanted to close their Badoo account. Although the use of social media for meeting new people is increasingly becoming a common practice, as Hine (2015) observes, creating intimate relationships online is still stigmatised:

It would, in those early days of the Internet, still often be thought a matter of concern if someone talked about "online friends", and it would at that point certainly occasion significant comment if two people announced that they had met and fallen in love on the Internet. Such stigmatization of online intimacy can still occur (2015, p. 8).

Another major concern, in particular on Badoo, was related to the authenticity of the users. This is a theme that has been widely investigated in Internet scholarship. Several scholars (e.g., Hall et al., 2010; Heino et al., 2010; Gibbs et al., 2011) have studied deception in the context of online dating. The extreme case of deception online is called "catfishing" and it refers to the misleading practice of impersonating other people on online platforms. Rasmussen (2014) has analysed how audiences perceive online dating through the MTV program *Catfish*. As noted in Chapter 3, this programme addresses people's motivations to participate in online dating, and why some users engage in deceptive practices in order to achieve romantic goals by

creating fake profiles, mainly on Facebook. Although no participant reported to have been "catfished", a couple of participants explained that they had chatted with girls who had fake pictures in their profiles on Badoo. For example, Cesar (44, Spain) reported to be talking to a girl that was using the pictures of a Russian model. They even talked about this, and she was happy that he still wanted to continue talking to her despite knowing she was not the girl in the pictures. In addition, a common authenticity issue was related to users uploading pictures where they were much younger. Mateo (47, UK) had a date with a woman who in her profile had uploaded photos where she was ten years younger, which made him feel very disappointed when they met in person. Heino and colleagues (2010) in their research about online dating found similar deceptive practices. Likewise, Jeffrey Hall and colleagues (2010) found that women under 50 are more likely to misrepresent their age. Thus, we can observe deceptive practices in online dating, mainly related to users uploading pictures of themselves when they were much younger. Some participants noted that Badoo users engaged in this practice in order to be contacted by more people because one's physical appearance is hugely important on dating sites, as we observed in previous chapter. Gary explains that if you do not meet other Badoo users face-to-face you cannot be sure that they are telling you the truth:

> It's like until you actually meet them you don't know whether it's actually genuine they say they are. So you always have to be a little bit guarded with that (Gary, 43, UK).

For this reason, after ten years of using the hookup site AdultFriendFinder, Oscar (41, UK) has learnt to verify the identity of his potential encounters through different mediums before meeting them face-to-face:

> There is literally every scenario that you could imagine, you will find on AdultFriendFinder. And you've got to find your own ways to navigate that, so if I'm going to meet somebody, ok, we need to Skype, you need to call me and I need to know that you're genuine (Oscar, 41, UK).

Authenticity issues arise when interacting through dating/hookup sites, which create problems for initiating new relationships. For this reason, verification and reputation

systems are useful to foster trusting relationships among users. In the case of Badoo, the verification of users' identity with other social media presence, as we saw in the previous chapter, may act as a guarantee. Notwithstanding, the most common practice on Badoo is to move the communication to WhatsApp, sometimes from the very first day, especially because female users receive a lot of messages on Badoo and it is easier for them to communicate through this medium. In WhatsApp there is little information available, so it is safer to move the interaction to that instant messaging app than to Facebook, where users often disclose a large amount of personal information.

Online communication can have the advantage of a certain level of anonymity; especially on dating platforms were users are encouraged to conceal their full names and information that could identify them to protect themselves (Badoo, 2015). At the same time, this level of anonymity fosters misbehaviour as it is difficult to identify offenders. Some female participants reported that they had received unpleasant messages through the chat feature, some of these being sexist comments, a topic that I develop further in the next section. Chambers (2013) argues that a substantial proportion of people who participate in online dating platforms (29%) reported having had negative experiences, mostly related to online harassment. In this study, some participants explained how female users often experience having men aggressively insisting on keeping in contact. For example:

> One day I was contacted by a 40 something years old guy, and I replied to him: "I'm sorry, I don't want to talk to you because I don't see in your profile that we have many things in common, so I'm not interested." But he was insisting a lot. I see it like you are in the public realm, because Badoo is the public realm, people do things that they shouldn't, for instance in a meeting with friends one guy wouldn't do that, or even in a club, you say "good-bye" to a guy and he has to leave. But in Badoo people insist a lot and it's not nice. […] Because at the club you tell him: "Go away!" And he has to leave, or you can call security, but on Badoo you can't. Where are you going to say: "this guy is disturbing me?" No, you can't. You can block him, but you already had an unpleasant experience (Raquel, 35, Spain).

What I really like, a recent change that they (Badoo) did, is that some years ago you may talk to one person, once, twice, three times, even though that person wasn't replying to you, and now it's only two times. That's very positive, especially for the girls, because we guys are very bad people, and nonconformist. Some female friends told me that there were some guys that were keeping writing to them, even though they didn't reply, and they had finally to block these guys. One friend of mine told me: "I spend more time blocking people than talking to people." And that was uncomfortable (Cesar, 44, Spain).

Badoo has taken into account that users may be very disturbed by receiving unwanted messages. For this reason the platform permits blocking other users in order to avoid receiving unwanted communications. By the same token, Badoo has also recently implemented a technical restriction, as Cesar commented, that users cannot contact a person more than twice without receiving a reply. These measures try to protect users from online harassment. In addition, as June Chisholm (2006) notes, it is easier to quit relatively ephemeral social websites, like chat and dating sites, if harassment occurs.

Users may also face identity theft (see Brake, 2014) when interacting online. For example, Gemma, a CouchSurfing user, who also is a member of different dating platforms, experienced identity theft on CouchSurfing when someone took pictures from her CouchSurfing profile. The following interview extract shows how this experience caused her to develop a feeling of insecurity about continuing to use the platform:

A girl from the East (who I met in Barcelona), she was living in Switzerland at that moment, and she wrote me an email to tell me that she saw another CouchSurfing profile in Switzerland with my pics. I checked the link she sent me and there was a profile of a girl, who said she was 6 years younger than me, with my pics. I never knew why. It was an empty profile, without references; it had been created 2 months in advance. So I deleted a lot of my pictures on CouchSurfing. […] This girl who sent me the email told me that that girl contacted her through a group in order to do something together, but she never appeared, so I always wonder why this person used my pictures, I

was a bit scared and I left only one picture on CouchSurfing, this situation made me feel a bit insecure to continue using this site. So I sent an email to the CouchSurfing team and they deleted that profile (Gemma, 43, Spain).

It is not clear what the intentions were of the person who created the fake profile with Gemma's pictures. Gemma decided not to go to the police. Instead, she solved this issue through CouchSurfing channels, since she contacted the "Trust & Safety" team, which deleted the fake profile.

The possibility also exists of being the subject of a scam or robbery by a stranger met on the Net. There are a number of individuals who use dating platforms to identify vulnerable people and try to take advantage of them, what Whitty and Buchanan (2012) have labelled "online dating romance scam" (2012, p. 5). In this study no user experienced any kind of scam, however, Laura reported that she was robbed by a boyfriend she met on Badoo:

> He told me he wanted to live with me, he wanted us to rent a flat, he asked me to help him to buy a motorbike, to buy a mobile phone... I felt in love with him, so I agreed to everything he asked me. He was unemployed, he seemed to be looking for a job, I used to see him looking at the job ads in the newspaper, but since he moved with me he changed completely, he was all the day at home, he didn't even do anything at home, he used to call me to tell me that there wasn't food at home... So at the end we decided to break up, but he had a plan. […] It was a day that we weren't at home, he took the laptops, my two laptops and my flatmate's laptops, plus the previous day he attacked me because he didn't want me to see his mobile phone. […] He also stole my jewellery, a leather jacket, sunglasses (Laura, 41, Spain).

Laura went to the police and sued her ex-boyfriend. In fact, during the course of the interview in her apartment, the police came to give her the notification of the trial. Petro, who knew about Laura's story, believed that Laura was not the first victim of this criminal. In fact, he thought this was the criminal's *modus vivendi*. In Petro's opinion, these kinds of criminals look for vulnerable people in order to take advantage of them: "He looks for desperate girls, he tells them 'I love you', they fell in love with

him, and then..." (Petro, 29, Spain). Despite having had this bad experience, Laura continued using Badoo. She went on dates, but she wanted to "play it safe" this time, so she just wanted to get to know the person well before starting a relationship. Laura explained that one of the men she met on Badoo started to ask her for money by telling her a very sad story:

> I went out with a guy who was 33 years old, I explained to him that after the bad experienced I had with that guy I didn't want to look for a partner, I was more like in the mood of meeting people to go to the cinema, to go for a drink, and then look what may happen. I explained this guy I didn't want anyone to ask me for money. We went out for several weeks, he didn't ask me for money, but he came with a very sad story that he had to pay some taxes that he didn't know very well, and he told me that he had to pay 1500 euros and that he didn't have the money, and he told me that if he didn't pay by the end of the month he was going to be expelled from the country (Laura, 41, Spain).

Obviously, after her previous bad experience, Laura did not trust this man and even played with him by telling him that she had won some money in the lottery to see to what extent he was interested in her money. After she told him that she had some extra money this male Badoo user was very insistent about knowing how much she had won, hence she thought that he was also trying to get some money from her and stopped talking to him. At the end of her interview, Laura highlighted that she would recommend other people to look for a partner online but that people should take plenty of time to find out reliable information about the other person and not to provide them with any financial help in order to avoid scams.

In the case of CouchSurfing, some participants explained that their relatives or neighbours thought that hosting strangers at home was "weird" and risky. Gemma (43, Spain) reported that people had made her have doubts about hosting through CouchSurfing with their disapproving comments, but she ultimately decided to keep hosting. Other participants commented that their parents were not very happy with the idea, since they had concerns about safety. Scholars have argued that when CouchSurfing members host, they put themselves, as well as their personal belongings, at risk (e.g., Bialski, 2013; Rosen et al., 2013). In fact, Raquel (35, Spain)

commented that her parents were more concerned about her using CouchSurfing than dating sites. Thus, users who decide to participate in hospitality exchanges use different strategies to select whom they want to host or surf with. As Bialski (2013) found in her ethnographic study of trust in the context of the sharing economy, users of these services usually choose to interact with people who are similar to them. Although looking for cultural differences, users often prefer to host people of the same age range who have similar interests. In addition, references play a very important role in deciding who to interact with. Some participants explained that they felt a bit scared the first times they hosted, but they lost the fear through practice and learning to read profiles, especially references. As Olga put it:

> At the beginning I was using Couchsurfing just for going to meetings and then I started reading profiles, and the first time you host you are like waiting that it is not a "psycho killer" but then you are more relaxed. You learn to read the profiles, to check that the people are more or less serious, if they are an old member or not, if they have experience travelling, and then mostly you read the references (Olga, 40, Spain).

As I explained in the previous chapter, references are useful features to generate trust among members and create a safe environment, though couchsurfers often prefer not to leave bad references in order to avoid receiving a bad reference in return. In fact, in my study there were few participants who had received bad references. Viel (38, Spain) had three negative references. He explained during the interview that one negative reference was related to a time he hosted two women. In Viel's account, he says he undressed one of them in order to put her in the shower because she was very drunk, and the other couchsurfer left him a bad reference because she considered it to be a sexual advance. In this sense, the reference system was used as a security measure to prevent potential guests from being hosted by Viel in the future. Despite the presence of the other woman in the bathroom, Viel's behaviour seems inappropriate, especially in relation to the power dynamics that operate in the host-guest relationship. Bialski (2011) highlights that hosts are in control since they own the property and are in a position of power. The relationships created through hospitality exchange networks, Bialski argues (2011), may involve the development of intimacy, but also moments of misunderstanding and the abuse of power by the host:

Interaction among strangers who use these websites can be enriching for the host and guest, creating moments of "real warmth and affection", closeness, trust and givingness, yet can also be problematic, fostering moments of awkwardness, misunderstanding, distrust and the abuse of power (2011, p. 248).

On the other hand, CouchSurfing (2015b) platform, in its "Trust & Safety" section offers safety recommendations, which include the following: "Know your limits and enjoy responsibly. Partying like a rockstar might be fun, but it puts your safety and well-being in the hands of others." In fact, Viel's justification for his behaviour was that he was helping his guest to overcome her drunkenness, what he actually described in the reference he left as a response to this particular negative reference. Following this conversation, Viel explained that he usually touches people a lot, a fact that caused him problems with other female Couchsurfing users in the past, which he emphasised does not mean that he is sexually interested in a person: "I'm a touchy person. If I touch you this does not mean that I have sexual attraction for you or I harass you, it's my way of communication." As we saw in chapter 5, privacy is a culturally shaped concept, and what can be perceived as an invasion of one's personal space may be considered appropriate in another culture or for other individuals who have different physical boundaries. Viel claimed that cultural differences were key in creating misunderstandings around what was an acceptable behaviour or what was understood as a sexual advance in the hospitality exchange experience.

Both on CouchSurfing and dating sites, female participants have concerns about unwanted sexual advances. In particular, many participants referred to the power imbalance of women being sexually harassed by men who they had met on the platforms. In this sense, participants said that although men could also receive unwanted sexual advances from women, this would not represent a risky scenario. In this study, few participants experienced this kind of harassment themselves or referred to people they knew who experienced an unwanted sexual advance during the hospitality-exchange or on a date. A few participants reported how some users decided to use CouchSurfing channels to solve these kinds of problems. Raquel talked about one case in Barcelona where a female couchsurfer was attacked by her host, and she

decided to contact the ambassador[16] to report the incident. In order to prevent this host from repeating his behaviour, Raquel explained that he was publicly shamed and unwelcomed in CouchSurfing meetings. In other cases, CouchSurfing female users have called the police to ask for help:

> I have some friends who are policemen who told me that they had been some times in a house where there was a foreign girl and the host tried something with her. […] In fact, when you tell them about CouchSurfing, because they are not in the website, they relate CouchSurfing to these kinds of facts: "There was a case once with a Russian girl who called us because she was scared because they guy wanted to have sex with her and she didn't want to, so we had to go and intervene" (Esteban, 35, Spain).

In relation to sexual assault, some participants referred to the case of a female CouchSurfing user from Hong Kong who was raped by her Moroccan host in Leeds. The fact that female couchsurfers are expected to protect themselves against sexual attacks will be discussed in next section. The rape case appeared on the news and it had a big impact on public opinion. It created a moral panic around the use of the Internet for meeting strangers. The Sergeant who worked in the case made this declaration to BBC News:

> Nachet (the host) has preyed on the kindness and hospitality of those using the internet to meet new people and explore new places and hopefully the sentence will bring some closure to the victim and her family while also acting as a warning to those considering staying at strangers' homes on their own (BBC News, 2009).

Some participants explained that they preferred to be hosted by other women or to be hosted by a man only when they were travelling with someone else because they were

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[16] CouchSurfing ambassadors were active users traditionally designated by CouchSurfing team to promote the idea of CouchSurfing, take care of organizing activities, and deal with problems in their local area.

concerned about their safety. I will discuss this topic further in relation to gender in the next section.

So far, I have addressed some of the potential barriers that users may face when engaging in social media platforms to meet new people: social stigma, deception and safety issues. Stigma surrounding the use of social media to meet strangers online seemed not to affect participants, nevertheless, there were a range of authenticity and safety issues that participants reported experiencing themselves or which they were concerned about, such as deceptive self-presentation, online harassment, sexual advance, robbery, and identity theft. These issues contributed to the lack of trust in other users. My findings suggest that social media platforms where people interact with strangers should better inform users about risks and safety measures and implement policies to punish bad practices (e.g., misrepresentation) and harassers. Further to this, in the next section I explore how women often suffer harassment or unwanted contact on dating sites. In addition, I address other issues in relation to gender inequalities that are reproduced through social media interaction.

8.3. "Men are the hunters": Reproducing patriarchal gender roles online

Social media platforms offer new and safe environments for women to take the initiative and start conversations with strangers, avoiding safety issues they may face in embodied interaction, such as harassment. Nevertheless, as Madden (2013) found, women are much more likely to experience uncomfortable contacts (42%) than men (17%) on dating platforms. Giddens (1992), as we saw in chapter 3, points out that in the postmodern era intimacy has become more flexible and elective. Following Giddens (1992), Chambers (2013) suggests that the innumerable opportunities that social media offer to interact with a broad range of strangers would be an ideal tool to experience more fluid intimacy practices; however, most participants seem to be very traditional in their patterns of interaction. Halder and Jaishankar (2009) have claimed that traditional patriarchal gender roles are both maintained and reinforced online. In this section I discuss how the women in my study often received unpleasant communications from men and the way that patriarchal gender roles are reproduced through social media interaction.

Most participants agreed that men usually started the conversations in Badoo and considered this "normal". Some participants even implied that if women started the conversation it was because they were desperate:

> We (men) are usually who look for the girls, maybe 95% of the times (Petro, 28, Spain).

> I think that the same that happens in the club is reproduced there: it's supposed that there are girls in there and the boys go to try with the girl (Marc, 39, Spain).

> I start, but I suppose it's humans, that's their roles, isn't it? The man is the one that is giving and the woman is the one that's receiving. The man is the one who's hunting and the woman is the one hunted (Mateo, 47, UK).

A repeated expression by male participants was "we are the hunters"; it seems that they were trying to look for biological justification to perpetuate traditional courtship conventions. Other participants pointed to the larger numbers of men than women on Badoo in order to justify why men usually start the conversation, in reference to a kind of law of "supply and demand" operating in the platform. On Badoo there are around double the number of males compared to females (Alexa, 2015a), although some male participants speculated that the difference was bigger because they did not receive responses from women. In the study conducted by Katrien Jacobs (2009) about AdultFriendFinder, females were found to receive massive amounts of requests from males, while male users may be "starving for a reply for weeks on end" (2009, p. 2). Similarly, I have found that on Badoo women also receive plenty of messages while men received few responses. In fact, some female participants made reference to the large amount of messages they receive every time they logged in Badoo as the reason why they did not feel the need to actively search for men:

> Because you (as a woman) enter in Badoo and its like "come to me", you know. […] I don't have to do anything. On the other hand, men have to start to send messages, messages, and if they are lucky some women will answer (Ana, 35, UK).

Thus, female participants usually selected among the male users who contacted them, and just replied to those that they considered interesting, but they rarely searched for men. In this sense, female users can exercise certain power over male users, since it is hard for men to find a date through Badoo. As Jacobs (2009) puts it: "Since women are underrepresented on the site, they can actually be picky and exert more power over men who are trying to seduce them into sex dates" (2009, p. 4). By the same token, some participants observed that women have more opportunities than men to find a date through Badoo: "In my opinion women have more chances even in the real life, if I say, to find someone because 'we are the hunters' so women always have the chance to deny or accept" (Robert, 43, UK).

The dating site AdoptaUnTio (AdoptAGuy) tries to reverse this dynamic, mainly to make the search for a date/hook-up more comfortable for the women. In this site, men can claim attention from 5 women a day through "spells" and women may accept or decline the invitation to talk to them. A female user, on the other hand, can talk to male users at any time, and she can put male users in her "shopping basket", which means that she finds them interesting and they can talk to her. There is also the possibility to book a man for 24 hours (option that the male user has to accept), which means that this user cannot talk to other users during one day. Luis (31, Spain) used this dating platform and he commented that it was more comfortable that women have to give the first step in the conversation, so he just talked to the women who were interested in talking to him. I used AdoptaUnTio for a couple of months, and although it is true that it gives more power to women, I could feel that similar gender roles patterns were reproduced, since I was approached by a large amount of men every day through spells, and then I had to select who to talk to, almost the same as on Badoo. In addition, I could find a lot of Badoo users in AdoptaUnTio as well, coming back to the idea discussed earlier in this chapter that people who use social media to meet new people participate in a number of different social media services.

In the case of Badoo, most female participants were not very happy with the outcome of their interactions in the platform. It seems as though one of the reasons why women do not find what they are looking for on Badoo might be that male and female users have different expectations for the platform. Although most participants agreed that Badoo was mainly targeted as a platform to look for sex, both male and female users

believed that women who participated in the site were looking for a relationship, while men were only looking for sex:

> Some men may be here just for as many physical relations as they can (David, 30, UK).

> Guys are very straight forward, and women look for relationships, it's different (Ana, 35, UK).

> On Badoo I look for some interesting guy, not just sex (Raquel, 35, Spain).

> I think that most of men are there just for sex, and other websites are maybe more catered to that, but I don't know why. I don't think that women are there just for sex, I think that they look for more than that. Many women don't want just sex. I could be wrong about that, but I think that women want to get to know you well. […] Usually women are more self-guarded; I don't think that they are many women in Badoo looking for sex, unfortunately (Gary, 43, UK).

In order to navigate this problematic scenario where different expectations collide, some participants explained that male users tend to lie about their objective of participating in the site in order to try to arrange a first date:

> I think that boys, although most of them say they are looking for friendship, most of them are looking for a fling or a partner (Petro, 28, Spain).

> One female friend that I met on Badoo told me that there are a lot of guys who tell you what you want to hear. I don't do that, first of all because I don't know her, so I don't know what she wants to hear, so I say whatever I feel to say, if she likes it, good, if she doesn't like it I'm not concerned (Cesar, 44, Spain).

Although it may seem that only men lie to women on Badoo, the same scenario where people hide their real carnal intentions may happen in gay relationships. Patricia explained that she also found situations where she felt that women she was interacting

with were telling her that they were looking for friendship because they thought that it was what she wanted to hear:

> It's usually a common question that people ask on Badoo: what are you looking for? But sometimes there are people who tell you something that they think you want to hear... so sometimes it doesn't make any sense to make that question. Because you tell them "I'm here to meet people" and they reply "Me too", but at the end of the day what they want is to have sex... Just say it, it's ok (Patricia, 31, Spain).

On the other hand, when men are sexually explicit, women who are looking for a relationship may feel uncomfortable with these kinds of communications. In spite of physical safety issues that women may avoid when interacting online, they can also face some kind of verbal harassment, as we saw in the last section. In this sense, some female participants also explained how male Badoo users talked to them in a very sexually nasty way that they disliked:

> The worse is the creeps that pester you on here with dirty rude remarks towards you that's just annoying […] I can't think of any specific but rude like would like to fuck you, […] dirty sexual comments (Sandra, 39, UK).

Cesar stressed that for him, the photos users upload dictate what kind of social encounter the user wants to invite, reproducing iconographic conventions of "good girls" vs "sluts" (Tanenbaum, 2015). He narrated one experiment he conducted with a female friend, who uploaded sexier pictures in her Badoo profile and started to receive obscene proposals. In retelling the story, Cesar attempted to justify that women who upload sexy pictures to their profiles ought to receive nasty messages, e.g., "I would like to fuck you." He considered that women who upload sexy pictures are not "girlfriend material". Here we see gender disciplining (Hasinoff & Shepherd, 2014), slut-shaming (Lasén, 2015; Tanenbaum, 2015), and victim blaming (Rentschler, 2014) being extended to the realm of social media images, where Cesar stated: "I don't talk to girls with too provocative pictures, because I don't want to meet these kinds of girls" (Cesar, 44, Spain). Burns (2015) gathered similar comments from her study about self-regulation of selfie-disclosure on social media in the US. Women

who upload sexualized selfies, Burns (2015) suggests, are considered *cheap* and responsible for their own stigmatization and the viewer's disdain.

In reference to this, Cesar, a 44-year-old Spain-based participant, explained how he was asked by a friend to find his 19-year-old sister on Badoo, because he was concerned about her looseness. Cesar searched for girls of her age in Barcelona and found her profile, where she had plenty of sexy pictures, and where he commented that she looked "like a prostitute". Cesar described how he finds it inappropriate that young girls publish erotic selfies online and how he communicated it to the girl:

> "Have you seen the kinds of pictures you have on your profile? OMG!" […] I consider that a 19-year-old girl shouldn't upload those kinds of pictures on a website, moreover a person that I know, because if someone that I don't know ... do it, I'm fine with that, but if it's a girl I care about I consider that it is not appropriate. So I told her: "How come that you uploaded those pictures on your profile?" You have beautiful pictures where you are not showing your cleavage; I'm not saying that's not beautiful what you have… [She wasn't naked in any picture, but she was very provocative], so I told her there are pictures where you look like a prostitute, and you aren't (Cesar, 44, Spain).

Cesar insisted on the inappropriateness of sexy pictures of young girls, especially in this case because he cared about the wellbeing and reputation of his friend's sister, having known her since she was born. It is interesting to note that Cesar believes it is acceptable for "other young girls" to upload sensual pictures on their profiles. Dobson (2015) argues that the protective behavior towards women (from society and the media) based on moral panics to avoid a potential risky scenario of being sexually active disempowers them, since they are denied sexual agency. As Nicole Cohen and Leslie Shade (2008) observe, young females are often considered irresponsible for gaining attention from potential sexual offenders: "gender-based discourses in mainstream media have outlined limited roles for young women as agents. Instead, they have been depicted as passive consumers or misguided youth whose provocative photographs risk attracting unwanted attention" (2008, p. 212). However, when women's agency is acknowledged, as Burns (2015) notes, they are considered as "sexually licentious" (2015, p. 1723) and they are blamed for engaging in self-

sexualization. Cesar took the position that mainstream media often takes, insofar as he did not acknowledge agency in his friend's sister's behavior which required him to act as the sexual police (Tanenbaum, 2015) and put her in her place and thus within public displays that reinforce heteronormative performances of gender and sexuality (Dobson, 2015).

Later in the interview, Cesar insisted on the view that she did not want to find sex, and he implied that if that had been the case, it would have been something to feel ashamed of. Then Cesar explained that she also had private pictures (which are usually the most erotic ones) but she did not allow him to see them and deleted them. Cesar continued to describe how his friend's sister finally changed her erotic pictures after his suggestion and uploaded pictures with more clothes on. Subsequently, he reported that she started to receive invitations to go on dates as opposed to previous messages where she was asked for explicit sexual encounters. My research supports previous findings (e.g., Pool, 2013; Burns, 2015; Tanenbaum, 2015) in suggesting that this patriarchal double sexual standard, about what kind of women's sexual behaviour is socially acceptable has been absolutely reproduced, maintained and reinforced online. In relation to double standards in society, some participants explained that men had more freedom to do whatever they wanted, and women are constrained by sexist education:

> Maybe because we have also these cultural backgrounds in which there is no real equality. We have been somehow still educated in sort of sexist societies in which men have more freedom (Sara, 39, Spain).

> Probably it's culture shit, all the shit we gave to women for thousands of years (Ramon, 37, Spain).

How gender double standards work can also be seen in the case of the negative reference that Viel received the time he put a couchsurfer in the shower naked, which I discussed in the previous section. In the reference that Viel left as a response to his negative reference, he also asked why the other couchsurfer (the woman he put in the shower) had deleted her profile because, as he explained in the interview, he would have liked to have her opinion as well. It is likely that this female couchsurfer deleted

her profile to avoid public shaming. The fact that women are often denigrated and blamed if something bad happens to them when being drunk (in this case, getting undressed) might have played a role in this female CouchSurfing user to deleting her profile. By the same token, despite the most common practice in CouchSurfing being men hosting women and women hosting men, many participants pointed to the risky scenario of a woman being hosted by a man, as we discussed in the previous section, and a few of them assumed that female couchsurfers were responsible for protecting themselves from being attacked by men. In this sense, some female participants highlighted that they decided to be hosted only by other women to avoid unwanted sexual advances by men. For example:

> I would say a female maybe don't feel as comfortable staying at a man's couch, with a male host rather than with a female host, just because of the safety aspect or maybe the guy wants to try something... (Caroline, 26, UK).

> I wouldn't be comfortable being hosted by a man. I prefer that me and my friend being hosted by a man. If it's me on my own I would go and stay with a woman. But I think, I know that everyone is different, but I'm just sensible, it's just like a sensible thing to do. Yeah, so I guess it's how comfortable you feel about being safe. If you feel comfortable staying with a man, if you feel you can handle by yourself, then by all means a woman can stay with a man, but I don't think I would handle a situation like that, though I wouldn't put myself in that situation (Lulu, 25, UK).

Some participants pointed to the misconception that some male couchsurfers have that CouchSurfing is like a dating site. Although in previous years in the terms of use of CouchSurfing it was specified "CouchSurfing is not a dating site", it seems that there are still some users who believe that they can also use the site to this end. Some female couchsurfers reported having received couch requests[17] by males when they had specified on their profiles that they were not hosting at that moment, having received

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[17] A couch request is a petition to be hosted by other CouchSurfing users. When looking for a couch, users usually make a search in the city they are visiting and filter in the list the profiles of people who appear as hosting in that moment.

plenty of sexual advances in meetings, or having received messages from men to show them the city where the dating intentions were clear. For example:

> Obviously there are some men who don't get the idea of CouchSurfing and going for a meeting just for sex. So that's the reason that maybe girls don't feel safe in this kind of group but obviously it's like, okay, I'm not interested so I'm saying no. I don't need to have an interaction with you, there are other people as well. But, yes, I think at the beginning girls may be a bit afraid of this kind of behaviour. There are ten people and two of them are acting like total idiots, it's enough (Noelia, 25, UK).

> Sometimes I answer and I say: "Thank you for writing this. My husband and me we can see you for a coffee, if you want to see around, I can show you the city", because sometimes you can be wrong. Sometimes you can be thinking that there is another intention and you can be making a bad judgment. So sometimes I leave the door open and I say, okay, if this is right for you maybe we can go and we can share this. They don't answer, but some of them, two at least, they answered sometimes and said: "okay, would be great! By the way, if you have a friend you can bring a friend, a female" (Olga, 40, Spain).

It is clear that patriarchal gender roles are perpetuated through social media interaction. Although a few participants, such as Sandra, experimented more freely with their sexuality on Badoo, in general the interaction was mainly guided by heteronormative rules. Male participants started the conversations most of the time, and there was the perception that women who start the conversations are "desperate". Although most male and female Badoo participants stated that they used Badoo to meet new people, and they were open to meeting friends or (sexual) partners, during the interviews they identified a clash between the expectation of women: to find a partner, and the expectation of men: to find casual sex. In order to navigate these different expectations some male users just tell their counterpart what they think she wants to hear, which makes the initial typical question "What are you looking for?" useless.

When men engaged in direct sexual comments some female participants reported feeling offended, and they defined it as a bad experience. In relation to the disclosure of sexual desire, double sexual standards were identified, where women who upload very revealing pictures of themselves were considered to be "sluts". As discussed in chapter 3, some authors (e.g.; Lasén, 2015; Tanenbaum, 2015) acknowledge how women often face slut-shaming when interacting through social media. In addition, security, gender, and cultural issues collide in the context of CouchSurfing where the interaction is among strangers of a broad range of nationalities and cultures. There are still some participants who believed that female couchsurfers should not participate in hospitality exchange with men. Therefore, despite the apparent possibilities of social media for opening new ways of liberating both men and women from traditional gender roles (e.g. Chambers, 2013), and for making the world more cosmopolitan, the reality is that patriarchal gender roles are reproduced online. In the next section, I will explore what kinds of relationships people create online, and whether participants believe that Internet-originated relationships are better, worse, or the same quality as relationships created offline.

8.4. Towards ephemeral but meaningful associations

This section explores the tension between how people navigate online/offline environments, where issues around trust and authenticity arise, and how people make meaning from their transient (or not) relationships created online. I analyse the dynamics of relationships started through Badoo and CouchSufing, how they develop in embodied encounters, and whether participants believed that these relationships were more superficial and transient than others that they had created in other places.

Participants reported different kinds of experiences about meeting people online. In the case of Badoo, despite participants describing the platform as a hook-up and sex-oriented service, most of them claimed that they were looking to meet either people to hang out with or romantic partners. Some of them commented that they had never met anyone face-to-face from Badoo; other participants explained that they had had a few dates; and a few others were actually successful using the platform, since they had found one-night stands and partners.

Although most participants agreed that they would not keep an intimate relationship online only, there were a few participants that had created intimate relationships with people they met on Badoo whom they had never met face-to-face. Some participants highlighted that it was hard to move the interaction offline:

> Badoo seems like a good format for online interactions, although if you're looking to make new actually friends, the development into physical interaction (meeting) can prove harder than it once was making friends in the school yard but maybe that is due to age and forgetting these once taken for granted childhood skills (David, 29, UK).

Sandra, who is a divorced woman with 2 children, started to use Badoo to experiment with her feelings towards other women. In this sense, as Chambers (2006) notes, the fluidity of sexual identity can be explored through the interaction with strangers online. Sandra reported that she had met her current girlfriend on Badoo a few months before our interview, but they had not met face-to-face yet. They usually talked by phone every day. Her partner gave her different family reasons to avoid the meeting and Sandra was starting to have doubts about the authenticity of her identity. She claimed that online relationships were more superficial than offline ones: "they can appear and feel unreal, whereas offline is more realistic" (Sandra, 39, UK). Similarly, Patricia (31, Spain) considered that online relationships were more superficial because you could not be sure that the information that the other users are providing is real. Earlier in this chapter I have discussed issues around authenticity in the context of online dating. As noted in chapter 5, trust in the other users is a precondition for engaging in intimacy practices through social media. Nevertheless, Patricia, although having not met anyone face to face and having trust concerns, reported to have practiced cybersex through Badoo chat. She also said she had moved the communication to Skype to have a videoconference on some occasions, which is a platform that some users prefer for cybersex. A few other participants commented that other users had invited them to move the conversation to Skype, although most participants reported, as commented earlier, that the most common happening was to move the interaction from Badoo to WhatsApp.

There were diverse opinions about whether relationships created through social media were of the same quality as the relationships built elsewhere. Baym (2010) analysed different studies that compared online and offline relationships (e.g., Park & Roberts, 1998; Chan & Cheng, 2004) and suggests that only cross-sex friendships started online seem to be of higher quality than those started offline. Nevertheless, continues Baym (ibid.), long-term studies have shown that there are no meaningful differences between them. The last Pew Research Center report about online dating, conducted by Smith and Duggan (2013), shows that 23% of online daters have entered into a long-term relationship with someone they met through a dating site or app. In this study, there were some participants who believed that relationships started online were more superficial and less long-lasting than traditional relationships such as best friendships started in childhood. In the case of Badoo, some participants pointed out that they came to that conclusion because they did not find any meaningful relationships through Badoo, but they would think otherwise if they were to find a friend or partner through the site. However, most participants believed that the quality of the relationship was not related to the place of the first contact. They just found social media another venue to connect with people:

> I think that CouchSurfing is just the medium, if you like. After that, it's about how you connect with people, and that's what makes it superficial or not (Lulu, 25, UK).

> The nature of the relationship is not so defined by the first contact. I can make the first contact through Badoo or other site and I can have a deep relationship (Luis, 30, Spain).

> I wouldn't say there is any difference. We just met in a different way, instead of meeting in one place or at work, you have met them through the Internet (Gary, 43, UK).

Like Markham (1998) found in her research about virtual worlds, my participants may have different concepts of online settings: as "mediums", "tools" or "places". Participants also related to Badoo as a substitute of a club, and they reported that it

was easier and more comfortable for them to look for dates through Badoo from home than going out to find them:

> For me, Badoo was one of the best tools that I could use to start having dates with guys. In fact, when I don't use it for months, and I'm bored, I enter and I get 3 dates. […] What I like from this social networking site is that with my age I don't like going to a club to flirt, because it doesn't suit me, then here it is very easy to classify what I want, you know, and quickly pum, pum, it's very easy to find 2 or 3 guys, every time I use it, 2 or 3 guys and meet up with some of them I'm interested in (Ana, 35, UK).

Ana referred to the possibility of classifying what she wanted as an advantage of using the platform. She also pointed to her age as a factor in her decision to start using dating platforms, because she felt she did not fit into the clubbing scene anymore, despite the average age of Badoo user being 19-34 (Rowan, 2010), she believed that young people do not use dating services.

Most participants reported that the typical date was going out to have a drink to get to know each other, although a few also said that they went to the cinema or to have dinner with their online dates. In particular, a few of them found the lack of spontaneity problematic. As Chambers (2013) puts it: "Conversely, while online romance confirms the late modern ethos of agency, it also suggests that 'romance' is not spontaneous, authentic and passionate process but something necessarily calculated, stage-managed and premeditated" (2013, p. 141). In this sense CouchSurfing seems to be a more successful platform for finding a (sexual) partner than Badoo, since some participants highlighted that the atmosphere in CouchSurfing meetings is more relaxed for dating because it is not the main objective of participating in the meeting, therefore people do not feel the pressure to behave in a "dating mode". Most participants who were users of both sites commented that they did not find anyone interesting on Badoo, meanwhile they found a lot of interesting people on CouchSurfing: "It seems that it's easier to find a partner on CouchSurfing than on Badoo. Badoo is just for sex" (Raquel, 35, Spain).

The fact that CouchSurfing users share certain values such as a love for travelling, open-mindedness, and an interest in other cultures, some participants argued, makes the platform more suitable for finding potential partners than the big variety that you might find on a dating platform. Most participants, especially male couchsurfers, observed that they preferred to host (or be hosted by) the opposite sex because, as some participants noted, "deeply inside people look for a fling" (Gemma, 43, Spain). In addition, female participants highlighted that at the beginning of starting to use the platform, they used to contact only female, or equally male and female users, but that after several experiences receiving none or very low response from female couchsurfers they just wrote to male users because it was much easier to find a host. Likewise, in the case of Badoo, most participants explained that they mainly contacted the opposite sex (or other women in the case of the lesbian participants) because, although Badoo (2015) claims in its slogan that the site is to meet both like-minded people and dates: "Badoo is great for chatting, making friends, sharing interests, and even dating!", in reality the site is mainly oriented to look for a (sexual) partner. In fact, one participant explained that he tried to contact other men to make some friends, but they did not reply.

Although some participants said that they have found romantic or sexual partners through Badoo or CouchSurfing (in fact, several participants were in a serious relationship with a fellow couchsurfer at the time of the interview), most of them valued the friendships that they created with people they had met through these platforms. In the context of Western society, some scholars (e.g., Chambers, 2006; Jamieson et al. 2006; Spencer & Pahl 2006) suggest that friendship is increasingly replacing the traditional family-founding couple as the key intimate relationship of adulthood. In this sense, some participants reported that their best experiences of using Badoo had been to create a particular long-lasting friendship that initially started as a potential romantic relationship. Likewise, the main motivation that led participants to use CouchSurfing was to widen their social circle and build new friendships in their area. On both sites, finding "something else" was seen as "a bonus". As noted in chapter 4, almost half of the participants in this study were expats; for this reason, it is not surprising that they needed to create new personal relationships in their new cities of residence. Among the native participants, some of them also reported that they were not originally from Leeds or Barcelona; therefore they did not have a big

social circle in those cities. Thus, participants also valued augmenting their social life and circle of acquaintances as a result of using Badoo or CouchSurfing, despite most of those relationships not being very deep. As some participants put it:

> I look for making my social circle bigger, and if a friendship arises is welcomed, but I don't look for that in the first place (Gemma, 43, Spain).

> CouchSurfing I think it's a great way to connect with locals when you're new to an area (Oscar, 43, UK).

The original objective of CouchSurfing was hospitality exchange, nevertheless, lately the sociality developed through "groups" has become also very central to the service. The CouchSurfing platform allows the creation of groups around interests (e.g., Barcelona Wine Lovers, Leeds Language Exchange), so people can join these groups and organize activities together around shared hobbies. CouchSurfing weekly meetings are organized in the main cities. These meetings were a very important part of the social life of some interviewees. In fact, some of them used to regularly attend these meetings and became good friends with other regular local attendees. Travellers also join these meetings, although, as some participants commented, these regular local attendees often create a close circle of friends and it is not easy for the newcomers to enter in the circle. It is also common to find sexual partners in these meetings. In addition, some participants also found their long-term partners through CouchSurfing meetings.

In the case of CouchSurfing, keeping in contact after hospitality exchange experiences, or after having met to visit a city together is not so common. Although the host-guest relationships may seem more intimate insofar as both couchsurfers are sharing the same living space, in this study few participants developed friendships after *surfing* or hosting. Some participants explained that the most likely scenario that happens after the hospitality exchange experience is that they keep in contact online or they lose contact, if they do not live in the same place. Nevertheless, they still valued that ephemeral connection during their stay. For example:

Either you keep in contact through Facebook or CouchSurfing, or you don't see that person again. The maximum interaction you may have is that they upload some pictures in Facebook and you like them (Esteban, 35, Spain).

Yes, if it's a person that is going to live here in Leeds and I'm going to continue seeing, yes (I would add them on Facebook). But if it's a person that it's just passing by… even couchsurfers that I hosted here, although I really liked them, if I know I'm not going to see them again, I don't accept their (Facebook) friend request. In that case I may accept them as friends on CouchSurfing, but I don't accept them on Facebook (Peter, 36, UK).

It is common that people who are moving to another city request the opportunity to *surf* two or three places while they are finding a place to live. In those cases, if there was a good connection, couchsurfers might keep in contact and even become friends. Most participants claimed that it was more likely that they were going to friend on Facebook people they had met in CouchSurfing if they lived in the same place. Despite keeping in contact or not with people they had met through CouchSurfing, participants value the "here and now" experience, especially the "instant social life" when travelling somewhere else:

In CouchSurfing, you know, if I did meet some great people then, you know, I love keeping in touch with them. But for me it's more of having an instant social life wherever you have to be in the world. It's great (Oscar, 41, UK).

For me the best experience using CouchSurfing is that you wake up at 7 am in a foreign country and you haven't planned anything for that day and you can end up having dinner or playing music, laughing... and you end up saying "what a wonderful day: I met people, we shared food, we share laughs, stories." And it's something that when you travel with your partner is completely different. Also you find very open-minded people, altruists... But what I find more incredible is that you wake up, you go to a meeting, you meet different people, from different ethnics, countries, and if you click with someone they quickly ask you to join their plans: look, we are going to have dinner there tonight or we are going to that party... and you finally enjoy a

wonderful night, and you say: "I wish it would be like this every day!" (Esteban, 35, Spain).

By the same token, when hosting, some participants pointed to their aim to recreate the same good feeling they had when they were travelling and spending time with local couchsurfers. As they love travelling and meeting local people, they also enjoy showing their city to travellers and helping them have a good experience:

> It's just experiences. I like the idea that when people come to this city, come to the city I live, I'm very fond of this city and I like the idea that people that come here have a good experience and have a nice time here. Actually, I like meeting people, I like showing them round the city. […] I like travelling and that mindset and experience and I think it's sort of a proxy for it. You get a lot of the same sort of emotions that you get from going travelling that you get when you host people from CouchSurfing (John, 27, UK).

Following Alfred Schutz (1948), Miller (2015) refers to these "here and now" shared experiences as a way of experiencing intimacy and mutual understanding. This "instant social life" and transient experiences that participants make reference to, although fleeting and not very deep, they are valued by participants, as they enjoy the company of their new "CouchSurfing friends" for a short period of time, but which are still meaningful for them. CouchSurfing (2013) claimed in past versions of its "About" section, and even its slogan that CouchSurfing's mission was "to create meaningful relationships". As Sara explains, these ephemeral experiences are not less meaningful for the fact of being short or because you lose contact with the people you share your time with:

> You meet a lot of people who are at an important point of your life, who are very important to you, and then you lose the contact with these people and it was not less real because of that. Maybe with other people who at first were like more superficial, then, afterwards you become closer friends. So you just have to "live the moment" and do what there is and who knows what the future will be, but it's not important which degree of friendship you have or you don't have. So life is all the time changing and you never know (Sara, 39, Spain).

Miller (2015) makes reference to past romantic relationships as an example of relationships that were meaningful in a particular point of our lives. Likewise, Sara refers to the transient nature of personal relationships in contemporary society. However, she does not take a melancholic point of view like "good old days", she just does not find the mobility and ephemerality of current personal relationships as problematic. Sara points to a *carpe diem* philosophy in order to extract the most meaningful experiences in each situation. Likewise, Badoo promotes this *carpe diem* idea, as it can be seen it image 5, which shows a picture posted by Badoo in its Twitter account which represents this philosophy of living life at its fullest because it is ephemeral.

Image 5. Badoo banner posted in its Twitter page.

In chapter 3, I noted that scholars (e.g., Maffesoli, 1988; Touraine & Khosrokhavar, 2002; Bauman, 2003) have suggested that in individualistic Western societies individuals feel lost, as their life is no longer organized around traditional social structures, such as religion or community. Maffesoli (1988) points out that individuals miss that feeling of belonging and that is the reason why they join urban tribes. In this sense, some niche social media platforms may be useful tools to create tribes around shared interests, and can create that sense of belonging and community, like in the case of CouchSurfing (e.g., Rosen et al., 2011; Feldman, 2012). In this study participants showed acceptance of ephemeral contemporary ways of association as meaningful experiences. Social media platforms appeared as valid tools, mediums, or places to find new relationships, although most of them end up being short-term. In particular, CouchSurfing appeared as more successful platform than Badoo for finding both long-lasting friendships and partners. The few "good friends" participants found

through Badoo or CouchSurfing were valued as the best experiences of participating on the sites, over romantic relationships. This finding fits with the trend towards an increasing importance of friendship within intimate life (e.g., Bauman, 2003; Chambers, 2006), which in many instances substitutes family relationships.

8.5. Conclusion

Social media platforms offer new possibilities to meet new people and develop different kinds of relationships, either romantic, sexual, or different degrees of friendship. Nevertheless, users may face a number of issues when interacting with strangers met online, such as social stigma for engaging in this practice or safety risks, which include online harassment, identity theft, burglary or sexual assault. In particular, physical safety issues were a concern to some female participants, especially in the context of the hospitality exchange experience in relation to potential sexual advances by male couchsurfers, which led some of them to decide to exchange hospitality with other women only. This moral panic is related to the fact that they knew about some female couchsurfers who had bad experiences, but also to the patriarchal discourse that dictates that women have to prevent unknown men from attacking them. This "stranger danger" myth, Baym (2010) argues, is not correlated with statistics, which show that most sexual attacks happen within environments that are familiar to the victim. As a good security measure, most female participants pointed to common sense and the need to observe whether the potential host or guest had a number of good references.

The preceding discussion shows that patriarchal gender roles are perpetuated through social media. In the case of Badoo, men usually started the conversations and women selected among the users who contacted them first. In addition, female Badoo users who started the conversations were considered "desperate", and those who had erotic pictures were labelled "sluts". There was also a gender clash in the expectations to participate on Badoo; participants claimed that most women wanted to find a partner, while most men wanted casual sex. This traditional scenario where women are pictured as lacking sexual desire while men are sexually obsessed was also reported on Badoo interaction. Although I am not sure to what extent this double sexual standard corresponds to reality or if participants just tried to fit in conventional expectations of their gender roles, it is clear that patriarchal gender roles are

reproduced and reinforced online. As Illouz (2013) observes, male sexual power resides in the ability to perpetuate courtship rules, which may explain why male users tried to justify traditional gender roles as "natural" by using the expression "we are the hunters".

Although a few participants believed that relationships created online were of lower quality than relationships started somewhere else, most of them pointed out that social media platforms, such as Badoo and CouchSurfing, were useful "mediums", "tools" or "places" to meet new people. In particular, in relation to the "place" metaphor, some Badoo participants referred to Badoo as a substitute of a club to flirt. As an advantage of Badoo as opposed to the club, a few participants highlighted the facility to classify what they wanted by applying filters in searches (in the case of the male) or selecting among the users who had contacted them (in the case of the female). Dating practices were also found in CouchSurfing, despite its main objective being hospitality exchange. In fact, some participants recognised that they preferred to host people they found attractive because, as Gemma noted, "deeply inside people look for a fling" (Gemma, 43, Spain). Nevertheless, CouchSurfing meetings were venues where participants often created intimate relationships, from sexual and romantic partners, to friendships.

In particular, friendships with other local users were the most valued outcome of participating in both Badoo and CouchSurfing services. Since half of the participants were expats, it seems that the need to create a social circle in their new place of residence was one of the main motivations to use these kinds of platforms. In the case of CouchSurfing, many participants also highlighted as a very positive experience the "instant social life" when travelling, which they liked to recreate when hosting. The fact that most participants did not keep in contact after the hospitality exchange experience was not seen as negative. On the contrary, most participants expressed their positive feelings about these short and ephemeral encounters and pointed to a *carpe diem* philosophy to enjoy both short and long-term intimate relationships.

Chapter 9
Conclusions

9.1. Introduction

In recent years, there has been a growing debate about how the domestication of social media technologies plays an important role in the way people negotiate intimacy in their everyday life. Therefore, two main questions around intimacy and social media arise. First, how do digital communication practices affect intimacy?; second, to what extent can public intimacy in social media still be called intimacy? This dissertation has addressed how people use social media to create and manage personal relationships, by discussing different topics such as issues of authenticity, social stigma, sexual double standards, security concerns, the quality of the mediated interactions and relationships initiated online, or the disclosure of intimate information on social media in front of networked publics. This study has been especially focused on the workings of mediated interaction and on the creation of new relationships, by using Badoo, CouchSurfing and Facebook as case studies. In addition, because participants also used other social media services, I referred to other social media platforms on occasion. I argue that people who are open to creating new relationships through social media use different social media platforms, e.g., CouchSurfing, MeetUp, and a range of dating/hook-up sites, such as Badoo or Meetic. In this thesis I have approached the study of intimacy practices through social media from a twofold perspective: I have looked at social media platforms as intimacy mediators (including the study of their design and business models), and I have also analysed users' intimacy practices and users perceptions of intimate interaction through social media.

This study has shown how the platform architectures of Badoo, CouchSurfing and Facebook invite and facilitate intimate interactions by incorporating different features that foster self-disclosure, reputation, and trust (e.g., "About me" sections, reputation and verification systems). I have also discussed how users negotiate the use of different features and privacy configurations. In contrast to some critical studies about social media, which do not take into consideration users' agency, I incorporated users' perspectives in order to comprehend how users negotiate platforms' politics in the

context of their intimacy practices, and how they understand the concepts of intimacy and privacy when interacting through social media. In this section, I present my main conclusions. I synthesize the empirical findings and locate my thesis in current academic debates. I also explain implications of my study for society. Finally, I point to future research directions.

9.2. Networked intimacy

One of the first issues I identified in the study of "networked intimacy" was a clash between the concepts of privacy and intimacy, since some authors used both terms interchangeably. Therefore, what would be the current difference between privacy and intimacy when interacting through social media? Although participants often clashed both terms as well, drawing on participants' perspectives, privacy can be defined as the state of control over personal information (confidentiality) or physical access to the person. Privacy also refers to the space where people can develop personal relationships apart from others, related to restricted access and trust towards the people allowed into that private sphere. Privacy was often defined as the opposite of publicity. With the extensive use of the Internet, privacy is becoming an increasingly socio-technical matter where personal information is persistent, replicable, networked and can reach a large audience, which complicates the management and control of published information.

On the other hand, intimacy refers to a sense of closeness within personal relationships, achieved by sharing inner thoughts and feelings. An intimate relationship is a kind of personal relationship that is subjectively experienced and can also be socially recognized as "close". The "closeness" indicated by intimacy is to a certain extent reciprocal and can have several dimensions: emotional, informational, and physical, although they can be interconnected and complement each other. In reference to the use of the word intimacy as a euphemism for sex, that especially male participants referred to, we should clarify that people can be intimate without having sex, and that sexual contact can occur without intimacy, as Jamieson (2011) observed. In addition, some participants related to intimacy as exclusive and dependent on trust. As we can see, the exclusivity and dependence on trust were common to privacy and intimacy definitions.

Intimacy has traditionally been shared and experienced in the private sphere. However, intimacy can be experienced in private or in public, although the commonly accepted rules of sociability seek to preserve intimacy in the private realm. In contemporary society, intimate lives can be represented and articulated in public areas (e.g., reality shows, the camgirl phenomenon, social media presence updated with intimate information). The public nature and extent of these practices of intimacy in the context of the media seems to contradict the secrecy and exclusivity that traditionally have defined intimacy. The shift with social media is the facility to publish information previously defined as private, and this is fostered by social media platforms architecture. Scholars (e.g., David, 2010; Miller, 2010; Papacharissi & Gibson, 2011; Trepte & Reinecke, 2011; Turkle, 2011; John, 2013; Van Dijck, 2013; Brake, 2014) argue that social media have normalized public exposure, contributing to the mobilization of traditional boundaries between private and public realms. These authors highlight that social media companies have consciously participated in the transformation of social norms to encourage users to reveal more personal information under the imperative of "sharing" in order to monetize it for advertising purposes. In fact, in this study most participants used the word "sharing" in order to specify self-disclosure through social media.

Public intimacy practices through social media have characteristics provided by the publicity of the medium and its networked structure, which can be encompassed within the concept of "networked intimacy". However, it is important to recognize that people usually only make a small part of their inner thoughts and feelings public. Although intimacy in public gets high visibility for its disruptive nature, in this study it was not a widespread practice among participants, in line with the research conducted by some scholars (e.g., Hogan, 2010; Brandtzæg et al., 2010; Thompson, 2010; Young & Quan-Haase, 2013; Gürses & Díaz, 2013), which showed that users tend to disclose only superficial information on their social media profiles to keep their social privacy. Most participants considered these expressions of intimacy in public to be inappropriate. There are also theories in terms of what is normatively acceptable to disclose or not at different stages of the development of a relationship, and in relation to the kind of relationships kept with others (e.g., Cohen, 2012; Joinson et al., 2012). Thus, some participants have not untagged themselves from intimate pictures posted by partners (e.g., kissing), implying that they accept that level of

public intimate disclosure with their significant others, but they reported not allowing that kind of intimate disclosure with people outside of their intimate circle. Most participants referred to Facebook when discussing the topic of intimacy in public through social media. No participant mentioned CouchSurfing in this context, only one participant commented about the use of references to convey intimacy in public, but in a concealed way, what boyd and Marwick (2011) labeled "social steganography" (2011, p. 22). A few participants referred to Badoo within this debate, mainly in relation to sexy selfies.

Participants had uploaded a number of pictures to their profiles to represent themselves on the network, but the kinds of pictures they choose to upload onto each platform were varied. Photographs were identified as the main vehicle for experiencing intimacy in public through social media. Obviously, when interacting through social media, it is not possible to experience physical intimacy, and therefore intimate interaction is based on sharing/exchanging text and pictures, both of which are often displayed in public (especially pictures). Visual public intimacy appeared as an emergent topic, especially in the context of Facebook. Pictures revealing sexual orientation and relationship status, and pictures with children were policed, as participants considered those topics intimate and they believed that they should not be disclosed in the public realm. Most participants claimed to not post intimate information on Facebook because they wanted to protect their privacy, and because they considered that intimacy loses its status when it is advertised.

After an initial phase of experimentation with the use of social media, and the publicity they allow, it seems that participants have learned and internalized social norms that govern different social media platforms, wherein users generally do not reveal intimate information. Some participants explained that they used to publish more intimate information in the past, but they had stopped revealing intimate information since they did not consider it appropriate to publish it any more. Despite growing debates towards a more public disclosure of intimacy, in my study, participants preferred to communicate in private to negotiate intimate relationships or disclose intimate topics. In fact, most participants considered public intimacy to be anti-normative, since they considered that intimacy should remain in the private realm. Thus, participants preferred to use the chat feature rather than public means of

communication (e.g., references, the wall) to talk about their intimate issues, and tended to have private configurations on most of the social media platforms they used, especially on Facebook since it is the platform they used more often and where they disclosed more intimate information (e.g., pictures with family and lovers).

Defining what is considered intimate is a subjective matter, and it is further complicated when the interaction is through social media. There are certain types of personal information that people often expect to keep private. Sexual orientation and relationship status were the topics participants identified more often as intimate when interacting through social media. Other topics that participants considered intimate in the context of social media interaction included: sexual content, alcohol intake, political and religious beliefs, and emotions. The expectations of which information should remain private also varied from one platform to another; therefore the decision to publish intimate information was contextual. These findings resonate with the concept of *contextual integrity* discussed by Nissenbaum (2010). Thus, participants who considered their sexual orientation to be intimate disclosed this information on Badoo but not on Facebook or CouchSurfing, the reason being that on these platforms they did not consider it relevant while on Badoo it was necessary to achieve the goal of meeting a potential (sexual) partner. LGTB participants were especially concerned about the revelation of their sexual orientation because of the possibility to reach unintended audiences.

In reference to relationship status, it was identified as an intimate topic by some participants, and half of them still disclosed their relationship status on Badoo, CouchSurfing or Facebook. On Badoo all participants appeared as single, since they were searching for new relationships, despite two of them being in a relationship. CouchSurfing participants who lived with their partners considered important to disclose it in their CouchSurfing profiles because potential guests should know that they would be hosted by both members of the couple. On Facebook, preventing gossip about their private life was the main motivation that led participants to conceal this information, more than their own perception of the topic as being intimate or not. Thus, a participant's decision to disclose sexual orientation and relationship status on Badoo, CouchSurfing and Facebook was mainly led by what was needed or sociably

desirable on each platform rather than by their consideration of these topics as being intimate or not.

Another emergent topic was in relation to sexual double standards. Some participants commented that other users upload what may be considered sensual pictures (e.g., pictures in a bikini or with revealing clothes). These "sexy pictures", which foreground the body and face in aesthetically pleasing and demonstrative ways were especially prevalent on Badoo because it is a hook-up platform designed for match-making. Most participants did not include sexy pictures in their Badoo or CouchSurfing profiles. Nevertheless, some male participants had pictures portraying them in a bathing suit on the beach on Facebook, but they did not consider these to be intimate and were not concerned about their distribution. As explained earlier, it seems that context affects the interpretation of the pictures, since they were taken in a public space. A few male participants commented on how female Badoo users engage in self-sexualization (Burns, 2015), a practice that they consider *cheapens* them. These participants expressed their lack of interest in female users who upload sexy pictures because they did not seem intellectual or because they did not seem "respectable". In the same vein, since female users are often victims of slut-shaming, in this study, the female participants reported keeping their sexy selfies to a minimum, especially on Facebook, due to the wider audiences they interact with through this platform.

Despite Badoo being a dating/hook-up platform, where sexy pictures might be considered normative by some users, most participants agreed that they would never upload those kinds of pictures neither on Badoo or Facebook, since they considered that they could damage their reputation (especially in the case of women), and would attract a type of audience they are not interested in. Thus, participants engaged in self-censorship because, since overtly sexy photos were observed with disdain, they wanted to prevent external judgment. The management of self-representation is an ongoing task that does not finish with self-monitoring. In the case of Facebook, the co-construction of one's identity by friends implies a further negotiation of the publication of the content that users consider to be suitable to appear in their profiles. In sum, it is a calculated assemblage of personal information disclosure, location and place of disclosure, people and audiences involved in the disclosure, and type of

relationship developed, among other qualities, that shape and dictate what is shared and what is not in the development of intimate relations.

Trust was identified as a prerequisite for revealing personal information, and hence, to build intimacy through social media. In the context of online interaction between strangers, the lack of co-presence complicates the development of trust, as some scholars have argued (e.g., Vincent & Fortunati, 2009; Wessels, 2012; Ess, 2014). Participants mainly used Badoo and CouchSurfing to create new friendships and to find (sexual) partners. In order to foster a safe environment social media platforms where the interaction is among strangers have increasingly incorporated reputation and verification systems, or implement "real name policies" to try to certificate users' identity in order to provide a trustworthy and safe environment for the creation of new relationships.

In the case of Badoo some female participants reported that they had received unpleasant messages through the chat feature, some of these being sexist comments. Badoo took into account this issue, and permits blocking other users in order to avoid receiving unwanted messages. The platform has also recently implemented a technical restriction to prevent users from contacting a person more than twice without receiving a reply. These measures are designed to protect users from online harassment. Also, when the interaction moves offline, users may face sexual harassment or robbery. There were mainly female participants who had experienced these kinds of problems as a result of interacting with people they had met through Badoo. These bad experiences led to some participants to be very careful in the selection of the people they wanted to interact with. For safety reasons, Badoo (2015) encourages users to conceal their full names and information that could identify them to protect themselves. A certain level of anonymity may also help users to open up when interacting online. At the same time, this level of anonymity fosters misbehaviour and makes it difficult to identify offenders. Despite the reputation and verification systems that Badoo provides, issues of authenticity were expressed in reference to fake or deceptive profiles (particularly in relation to uploading pictures where the users were younger), which led half of the participants to affirm that they could not find genuine people on the platform. The ease with which one can create other false social media accounts makes this system ineffective as a verification tool.

Moreover, there were complaints about Badoo's bad business practices as a source of mistrust (e.g., intrusive and misleading ways of recruiting new users or hidden renovation of monthly subscriptions).

In the case of CouchSurfing, the main concerns were related to safety; in particular, these concerns were formulated by female participants in relation to sexual harassment in the hospitality exchange experience. In CouchSurfing, the reputation system, composed of a public display of references, was deemed more useful in developing trust than verification systems, where real identity and address are checked. In general, participants did not value the verification system in respect to it generating trust and safety among users, contradicting CouchSurfing's theory about the benefits of this paid service, and relied mainly on reputation systems to decide whom to trust. Despite initial safety concerns to use CouchSurfing for hospitality exchange, some participants reported to have lost the fear through practice as a result of learning to read profiles, especially references, although participants tended not to leave bad references in order to avoid receiving a bad reference in return. Some participants pointed to private feedback, as in the case of "Secret Comments" on Badoo, to make the CouchSurfing reputation system more safe and accurate, a system that, in fact, CouchSurfing incorporated in November 2015. In addition, CouchSurfing has recently implemented a "real name policy" where new users are expected to disclose their real name.

It is clear that although social media platforms provide tools to generate trust and safety among users, and their architecture fosters users' disclosure of personal information, users may operate in these platforms in many different ways, that is, users are creative in their choices (Rybas & Gajjala, 2007), and exercise power (Baym, 2010), as my study also shows. Participants had many different privacy configurations, and their use of verification and reputation systems was diverse. Some participants were verified (to support the CouchSurfing servicerather than because they believed in this feature as an effective safety measure) while others did not want to spend money or give away more personal data to verify their Badoo or CouchSurfing accounts. In relation to reputation systems, CouchSurfing participants often collaborated on this system by writing references about people they had met

offline, and they also carefully read them in their decision making process about the person to host or being hosted by.

In reference to privacy concerns, participants were more concerned about their social privacy (e.g., in relation to family members or friends) than about their institutional privacy (e.g. commercial or governmental monitoring). When discussing social media data mining, most participants accepted the trade-off of data mining for free access to the service. Despite claims made by scholars about the exploitative nature of social media platforms and the lack of transparency about data mining (e.g., Van Dijck, 2013; Fuchs, 2014), most participants expressed their knowledge about customized advertising, and the fairness of exchanging their navigation data for connectivity. Thus, as Jenkins et al. (2013) point out, the problem is not the presence of business models in social media environments, but the bad practices within them. In addition, most participants did not find problematic the intervention of money in the creation of new relationships, as they consider it a good investment in case of a positive outcome. In the case of Badoo, some of participants even recognized that they had interiorized the logics of the market and engaged in self-marketing strategies, since they were aware that the selection of the best pictures and smart descriptions would attract potential (sexual) partners.

In recent years the practice of courtship and flirting has increasingly moved online (e.g., Ardvisson, 2006; Rosenfeld & Thomas, 2010; Smith & Duggan, 2013). The convergence of the ubiquitous presence of smartphones with mobile applications for dating, such as Tinder, Badoo, Grindr, Meetic or PlentyOfFish, that allow users to geolocalize people nearby is boosting this phenomenon. The immediacy and growing visuality are key to enabling the success of these applications. Dating/hook-up platforms are beneficial as long as they help combating loneliness. Although the use of social media for meeting new people is increasingly becoming a common practice, as Hine (2015) observes, creating intimate relationships online is still stigmatised. There is a certain stigma attached to the use of dating sites, since users are often perceived as lacking social skills to meet people offline, to be only interested on sex or to be desperate (e.g., Donn & Dherman, 2002; Peris et al., 2002; Anderson, 2005). In this study male participants seemed to have major concerns in this respect.

In addition, most participants who used dating/hook-up platforms did not seem very pleased with the results. Many complained of the lack of response from women, the "poor quality" of the people who create a profile on these sites, and about the presence of fake profiles. Almost all participants generally agreed that female users seek a lasting relationship while men seek sex, and these different expectations produce mutual dissatisfaction. I believe that some women also want sex, but they think they cannot express it openly for fear of being stigmatized. As commented earlier, the findings seem to suggest that the patriarchal gender roles have not changed but are simply reproduced online because participants take their social/cultural assumptions online with them. The persistence of sexist double standards is the real problem in the whole dating scenario both online and offline. As Giddens (1992) points out, the myth "Men want sex, women want love" has to be reconfigured in contemporary society (1992, p. 66). Badoo itself is not misogynist, society is. There are clearly sexual double standards operating in society, which are accentuated in these dating/hook-up sites, such as Badoo. Many men do not want to engage in serious romantic relationships with women they consider libertine, so they only seek short relationships or sex in these platforms.

In my study, half of the participants were expats. They used Badoo and CouchSurfing to meet new people because they wanted to enrich their social and intimate life, as they did not know too many people in the area. CouchSurfing appeared to be more effective for finding a partner or dating than Badoo, although dating is not the purpose for which the service is designed. The fact that the traveller (surfer) was accepted by the host through a request for accommodation, who previously evaluated the profile of the potential host (which usually includes references to other users have left), means the relationship starts from an initial mutual liking. Then, from that starting point, friendship or a romantic or casual sexual relationship may develop. There are also numerous meetings organized by CouchSurfing members where users socialize in their local area, that passing travellers also attend, which are a common place for amorous encounters to occur. In fact, in my study there were two couples that had met through CouchSurfing. Most of those interviewed reported having found a partner in the past or have had an affair with another CouchSurfing user, either through the hospitality exchange or in meetings.

Nevertheless the experiences more highly valued by participants were the creation of friendships through both Badoo and CouchSurfing. In some occasions participants went on dates with people they met on Badoo, which ended up in a long-term friendship rather than a romantic relationship. In the case of CouchSurfing, many friendships were created, especially among local users who regularly attend CouchSurfing weekly meetings. Participants also valued the instant social life available through CouchSurfing when travelling. In this study participants showed acceptance of ephemeral ways of association as meaningful experiences. Social media platforms appear as valid tools, mediums, or places to find new relationships, especially friendships, although most of them end up being short-term. In general, participants highlighted that those intimate relationships created through social media, although sometimes ephemeral and transient, were meaningful.

9.3. Implications for society

The main privacy concern identified in this research was related to social privacy. Therefore, intimacy protection laws should protect social privacy online. The recent scandal around the Ashley Madison hack is revealing; the dating site, designed to facilitate adultery, was hacked and personal information about users and employees was made public. This event raises questions about users' social privacy and intimacy, and, more importantly, how to protect this type of information. For this reason, the intimacy protection laws need to be adapted and properly applied online. There are a number of companies, such as Google, Reddit, Twitter and Microsoft who had implemented policies in order to remove revenge porn (as requested) from their sites. I think this is not enough, but social media platforms should check that there is consent from all people involved in a sexually explicit image or video circulating online. In addition, more work needs to be done in relation to policies that protect social privacy in general, not only sexually explicit information.

Another debate revolves around the collection of users' data by large companies of social media platforms, such as Facebook or Twitter, to monetize this information by serving them customized advertising. My study suggests that more work needs to be done to raise awareness about the workings of social media data mining, and to simplify privacy policies and terms of use, but especially to prevent social media companies' "bad practices", such as misleading direct marketing tactics, assuring that

a social media platform will never have advertising and including it later on, hiding monthly renewals by default in premium services' payment options, and so on. Thus, advertisement laws have to be properly applied online, and consumer associations should have more power to gather users' complains. By the same token, users should have more information about where to complain in case they have a problem with a service provided by social media platforms. Consumer advice organisations should be more involved in monitoring bad practices from social media companies.

Stigma for using social media to meet strangers online seemed to not affect most participants, nevertheless, there were a range of authenticity and safety issues that participants reported to have experienced themselves or which they were concerned about, such as deceptive self-presentation, online harassment, sexual advances, robbery, and identity theft. These issues contributed to the lack of trust in other users, and for this reason I argue that social media platforms where people interact with strangers should implement better safety measures and policies to punish bad practices (e.g. misrepresentation) and harassers. Badoo and CouchSurfing have advanced in this sense, by incorporating secret references in order to improve the reliability of their reputation systems. Nevertheless, more efforts can be done to improve the verification systems, like having to scan one's ID or passport in order to verify one's identity, like Airbnb (2015b) does.

9.4. Further research directions

The international sample included in this study, as explained in chapter 4, although it shows the kinds of users that participate in social media platforms where the interaction is among strangers, does not allow analysis of cultural differences between Spain and the UK. It would be interesting to conduct a comparative study between Spain and the UK where all the participants were Spanish and British in order to be able to observe cultural differences, if any. The following research questions could be considered: What are the differences between Spanish and British users in relation to intimacy practices mediated through social media? For instance, how many long lasting relationships start online in each country? Is there a difference in relation to social stigma for meeting new people online in each country? In relation to cultural differences, I consider it also interesting to analyse intimacy practices facilitated by social media in understudied countries, such as African or Eastern European countries,

since most research about intimacy practices has been conducted in the US (e.g., Baym 2010; boyd, 2014), EU (e.g., Livingstone, 2008; DeRidder, 2013) or Australia (e.g., Henry-Waring & Barraket, 2008; Lambert, 2013).

It would be also interesting to investigate the efficacy of online dating. The studies conducted by Ardvisson (2006), and Smith and Duggan (2013) are some of the few examples of research conducted in this area. In particular, I would find it compelling to compare free services vs. paid services, to evaluate to what extent premium/paid services are worth paying for. For instance, a future research project could compare the efficiency of premium services through a large-scale study of paying users of premium services vs. non-paying users on Badoo, or other dating/hook-up platforms. This type of study could answer the following research questions: What is the difference in effectiveness between paid dating/hook-up services and free services? How many relationships have been created on paid services vs. free services? What is the difference in relation to users' satisfaction?

Future research may analyse how intimacy is negotiated through ephemeral social media platforms, such as Snapchat. Since Snapchat is an app mainly used by youngsters, it would be interesting to see whether they keep using this app when they grow older or whether they move their social media interaction to other platforms. Thus, a long-term research project could identify changes in social media practices within personal relationships across the life-span. A similar project could conduct a parallel study about intimacy practices through social media that includes all age groups, from teenagers to the elderly. Research questions within this study may include: What are the motivations to use ephemeral social media apps, such as Snapchat to negotiate intimate relationships? Do youngsters continue using these apps when they grow older? What are the differences on social media practices across the life span? Why do people use different social media platforms at different age-rank?

This study gathers social media users' perspectives. Despite much critical theory research about the role of social media platforms as agents of mediation and users' exploitation (e.g., Ghel, 2013; Macinelli, 2013; Van Dijck, 2013), at the moment research about social media designers' views in the context of intimacy practices has not been conducted. It would be interesting to observe the decision making process of

the incorporation of new features within social media companies. Thus, gathering designers' and executives' views about why they create new features to make users to behave in a certain way would be essential to have a bigger picture of the social media environment and the intimacy practices that take place within it. Studies looking at the production side of social media could answer the following inquiries: Why do designers create particular features on social media platforms? Do users engage in the kinds of practices the designer expected from the features they designed?

In relation to intimacy practices and sexual orientation, a comparative study of the most used hook-up apps among heterosexual, gay and lesbian users would shed light about different concepts and practices of (sexual) intimacy in the function of sexual orientation, if any. Thus, a comparative analysis of the use of Tinder (mainly heterosexual), Grinder (homosexual), and Brenda (lesbian) apps would be highly interesting to explore how sexual orientation affects digital mediated intimacy practices. This type of comparative study could explore whether there are any differences on social media (sexual) intimacy practices in relation to sexual orientation, and in particular, how hook-ups are negotiated on Tinder, Grinder and Brenda.

Finally, another topic that this study did not cover was in relation to the end of intimate relationships. It would very useful to explore the negotiation of the end of friendships or romantic relationships on social media. "Defriend" is a concept that appears in the Oxford English Dictionary (2015b). Apart from the popular research conducted by Illiana Gherson (2010) about breaking up using social media, there is little research about the process of negotiating former intimate relationships through social media interaction. A research project that focuses on how people negotiate the end of close relationships through social media could answer these questions: What is the role of social media platforms to negotiate a break up or the end of a friendship? Do users defriend their former partners and friends, restrict the content they can see, or keep them in the platform in the same way than when their relationship was intimate?

This study sheds light to understand intimacy practices mediated by social media platforms, with a special focus on the creation of new relationships. Nevertheless there are still a number of interesting topics to investigate in relation to intimacy in the age

of social media. The potential studies suggested in this section are only a glimpse of the vast amount of research that is yet to be conducted.

9.5. Concluding remarks

Intimacy on social media may occur within existing relationships, or people can use specific social media platforms to find like-minded people, friends, or (sexual) partners. In this research project I have used Facebook as a case study to discuss intimacy within existing relationships, since it is the most used social media platform to interact with ongoing personal relationships. On the other hand, I have used Badoo and CouchSurfing as examples of social media platforms that enable users to meet new people and find different kinds of (intimate) relationships. Thus, we can observe that intimacy can be experienced when interacting through the platforms, or as a result of the social media interaction in embodied encounters. When interacting online, the findings suggest that users prefer to communicate in private to be intimate. It seems that after an initial period of adaptation to the use of social media where there was a trend towards intensive self-disclosure, users have learnt to curate their self-(re)presentation and self-police their disclosures. This self-monitoring was especially acute in relation to gender, where female users tended to police their pictures in order to look sexy but not *cheap*. Patriarchal double standards were observed on social media interaction, particularly in the context of courtship and flirting through Badoo. Most participants claimed that men usually started the conversations and women just chose among the men who had contacted them.

Social media platforms offer new ways to meet people, which may often result in just acquaintances but, at the same time, can facilitate the creation of intimate relationships, e.g., friends, partners, or hook-ups. The process of moving the interaction offline is much more difficult in the case of Badoo than on CouchSurfing. Safety concerns, the lack of identity cues, and different gender expectations were some of the reasons identified as the cause for the low level of dates encountered among Badoo users. Although a few participants decided to stop using Badoo after bad experiences using the platform, many participants kept trying to meet interesting people. The hope for finding intimacy in the net, a "special" friend or partner, remains in participants' imaginaries, otherwise they would stop using these kinds of social media platforms. This does not imply that participants do not try to find meaningful

relationships through other channels. Platforms such as Badoo and CouhcSurfing, which are designed to connect with strangers, do not represent a massive change or a deep transformation in traditional intimacy practices, since it is clear that patriarchal gender roles are reproduced online, but they are just other tools that people use in their search for intimacy.

As advantages of using these platforms, some participants valued the convenience of meeting people without leaving home or spending money on drinks that dating platforms provided. Others mentioned the possibility of applying filters to choose potential friends or partners with similar interests. This focus on agency and freedom to create new relationships through social media runs away from nostalgic perspectives where the erosion of strong ties within the local community is seen as negative and driving to isolation (e.g., Putman, 2000). It seems that friendship is increasingly valued within intimate relationships, which in many instances substitutes family relationships. As most participants were single and did not have children, they may use social media to find other kinds of meaningful associations, either long-lasting or transient. Ephemeral associations, such as hospitality exchange experiences, or short-term friendships when travelling, were equally valued as positive and meaningful experiences in their lives. These shared "here and now" experiences, although fleeting and transient, still involve forms of intimacy.

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Appendix A
Participant Information Sheet

Participant Information Sheet

Intimacy in the Age of Social Media

Cristina Miguel Martos, Institute of Communications Studies, University of Leeds

About the Research Project:

Since social media exploded onto the media landscape, numerous scholars have been quick to comment on the way in which these tools of sociability and communication have radically transformed existing notions and experiences of privacy and intimacy. There is still a lot to investigate about the types of personal interactions generated through Social Networking Sites (SNSs). It is important to explore the intimacy practices fostered by the use of these new technologies in order to help define characteristics of contemporary society. The starting definition of intimacy will be "the inner thoughts, the feelings that individuals usually share within meaningful relationships (parental, friendship, couple or sexual) based on love, liking or care". This research explores and maps intimacy practices through social media in Spain and the UK, using a multi-site case study composed of the SNSs CouchSurfing and Badoo. Another theoretical aim is to explore the concept of intimacy in relation to social media, and to evaluate if intimacy online can still be called intimacy. Other secondary objectives will be to understand why people use SNS for being intimate, and to explore if there are age or gender differences related to intimacy and privacy practices through social media. It addresses the following research questions:

• How do social media communication practices shape intimacy?

• To what extent can intimacy in social media still be called intimacy?

• In what range and types of social media intimacy practices do individuals engage?

• To what extent do people experience the same level of intimacy online than offline?

• What, if any, age differences exist in engagement in social media intimacy practices?

• What, if any, gender differences exist in the engagement in social media intimacy practices?

• What kind of strategies people use to manage their privacy online?

By agreeing to participate in the research, you will allow me to analyse your CouchSurfing and Badoo profile(s). You can also agree with:

• Allow me to follow you on Facebook and analyse your Facebook profile

• Participate in (1-2 hours) in depth semi-structured face-to-face interview

• Record some of your conversations through the chat with other users (always if the other person express in writing her consent with that recording) and allow me to analyze them

The interviews will be conducted in a public place, such as a coffee shop or another place to your choice. Digital data will be stored in a password-protected computer, and paper data in a cupboard with key that I only have access to. Audio recordings of interviews will be transcript as soon as possible and destroyed after their transcription.

Appendix B
Participant Consent

Intimacy in the Age of Social Media

Cristina Miguel Martos, Institute of Communications Studies, University of Leeds

Tick the box if you agree with the statement to the left

1   I confirm that I have read and understand the information above, ☐ explaining the research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project.

2   I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to ☐ withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline.

3   I understand that my responses will be kept strictly anonymous. I ☐ understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in the publications that result from the research.

4   I understand that my full responses will be kept confidential and I agree ☐ for the data collected from me to be used in future research.

5   I agree to take part in the above research project

_____   _____   _____

Name of participant   Date   Signature

(*or legal representative*)

_____   _____   _____

Name of person taking consent   Date   Signature/researcher

Appendix C

Pre-interview Information Sheet

INTIMACY IN THE AGE OF SOCIAL MEDIA: PRE-INTERVIEW INFORMATION SHEET I

Participant number:	
ABOUT YOU Please tell us a little bit about yourself.	
1. Name:	
2. Age:	
3. Gender:	
4. Level of studies:	- school only - trade/technical - college/university - master - PhD
5. Employment status (tick one):	- employed - self-employed - student - unemployed - other:
If employed:	
6. Job title:	
7. How long employed there:	
If a student:	
8. Programme of study:	
9. Year of study:	
10. Country of origin:	
11. Mother tongue:	
12. Ethnicity:	- White - Mixed/multiple ethnics groups - Asian /Asian British - Black/ African / Caribbean / Black British - Other ethnic group
13. Languages you speak:	

14. Marital status:	
If single:	
15. Are you in a relationship:	
16. Sexual orientation:	- heterosexual - homosexual - bisexual - transexual
17. Religion:	
18. Alcohol intake:	- never - occasionally - socially - regularly
19. Political beliefs:	- right - left
20. Do you consider any of the questions I above as 'intimate' information? (indicate number):	
21. Which of this information do you share in your CS/Badoo profile? (indicate number):	
22. And in your Facebook profile? (indicate number):	

Appendix D
Interview Questions

How did you first hear about Badoo?

Have you used another dating site before?

1. What are the motivations which lead people to use SNSs for intimacy practices?

a) How did you first hear about CouchSurfing/Badoo?

b) Why did you join? (e.g. following advice from a friend, to try something new, to meet new people, to flirt, to find a sexual partner?)

c) Have you used another hospitality exchange/dating site before?

If yes: Which?

If not: Why not?

e) How did you feel the first time you used CS/Badoo?

f) What (if any) changes or improvements would you like to see made in CS/Badoo?

g) Would you recommend to a friend to join?

If yes: Why?

If not: Why not?

h) If CS/Badoo closed, what (if anything) else would you do?

2. Definitions of privacy/intimacy online/offline

a) What is your definition of privacy?

b.1) What do you think is intimate? can you give me an example...

b.2) What is your definition of intimacy?

c.1) Do you ever think about privacy online?

c.2) How would you define privacy on social media?

d.1) Have you ever thought about intimacy online?

d.2) How would you define intimacy on social media?

3. Intimacy in public/private realms

b) Do you think that kissing in a public place is intimate?

a) Do you consider that the information that you publish on social media is public or private?

c) Do you consider that posting personal feelings on your profile on CS/Badoo or in your wall on Facebook is intimate?

4. In what range and types of social media intimacy practices do individuals engage?

a) What do you use CS/Badoo for? (Friendship, looking for a couple, looking for one-night stand, learning languages, meeting people from other cultures…?)

b) Have you made friends through CS/Badoo? How many? How long were you knowing each other until you become friends?

c) Have you ever found a partner through CS/Badoo? How many? How long were you knowing each other until you become a couple?

d) Have you ever found a one night stand through CS/Badoo? How many?

Can you give me an example of when you did that…?

e) Which has been your best experience using CS/Badoo?

f) Which has been your worse experience using Badoo/CS? Can you give me a more detailed description of what happened?

g.1) At what point would you add a person you have met through CS/Badoo to Facebook? (Until what extent you need to trust that person to add her/him to FB?, if you need to have previously met this person face-to face, if it's a matter of time, or which other factors influence your decision of adding CS/Badoo users on FB)

g.2) When doing so, do you stop communicating with these people through CS/Badoo?

If yes: Why do you prefer moving the interaction to FB?

If no: Why you don't add any people you met through CS/Badoo on FB?

h) What's the main difference between interactions you have through CS/Badoo and FB?

5. What kind of strategies do people use to manage their privacy online?

a.1) Have you changed your privacy settings in Badoo/CS?

a.2) Which kind of configuration do you have?

a.3) Have you changed your privacy settings in FB? Which kind of configuration do you have?

b) Do you accept all friend requests you receive on CS/FB?

6. To what extent do people experience the same level of intimacy online as offline?

a.1) Do you consider that you share intimate information in your Badoo/CS profile?

a.2) And in your FB profile? (e.g. pictures kissing with your partner, pictures with your children).

b.1) Have you experienced intimacy with other users when interacting online through CS/Badoo? (e.g. sharing personal information, reading/writing intimate comments in your/his/her profile, chatting?) Could you give an example?

b.2) And through Facebook? Could you give an example?

c) Do you feel more comfortable sharing intimate information with people face to face or online?

e) Do you feel more comfortable sharing information with people that you know or with people that you don't know?

f) Do you consider the type of relationships you get through CS/Badoo more superficial than the relationships you get offline?

7. What, if any, gender differences exist in engagement in social media intimacy practices?

a.1) Do you have any idea whether there are the same number of male and female users in Badoo/CS?

a.2) What do you think is the reason?

b) Do you think that interacting through this social networking site is safe?

c) Who does usually start the conversations (through the chat on Badoo/through the email on CS)? men or women?

8. Do the devices users use to access the platforms affect their intimacy practices?

a) What kind of devices do you use to access CS/Badoo?

b) Which of these devices do you feel more comfortable with? Why?

c) Are you more likely to do/write different things on different devices?

9. What other topics do you consider important in relation to your personal interaction through the SNS?

a) Is there any topic in relation to this social network that you consider interesting to talk about?

b) Would you like to add something else?

c) Do you have any questions about the research?

Appendix E
Interview sample

<u>John Interview</u>

Interviewer: First of all I would like to know how you first heard about CouchSurfing.

John: It was a friend of mine, a guy I lived with in my second year of university who went travelling all the time. He worked as an academic out in Iran and travelled around Europe. He travelled in Asia, in the Near East and he told me about it and he got me onto it. He met loads of people. It sounded like a lot of fun and sounded like a great way to… Well, first it was just to travel on a budget but then actually I realised it was an enjoyable thing to do in its own right but he introduced me. I didn't join because that would have been in 2004 but I didn't actually join until 2009 mainly because I didn't have somewhere to put anyone up.

Interviewer: So he started in the beginning, beginning, beginning of CouchSurfing?

John: Yes. He would have been a member since the very beginning. I mean again the dates might be wrong. I think it was in my second year of university which would have been 2004/2005.

Interviewer: The idea started in 2003 but they launched the site in 2004.

John: He was there from the start and he told me about it.

Interviewer: So it was a small community at that moment.

John: Yes, absolutely.

Interviewer: When did you join?

John: 2009.

Interviewer: And why?

John: Originally because I think in 2009 I was going to be going travelling around South America and I joined because I thought it would be an interesting way of travelling. In the end I ended up not using it at all, firstly because I was travelling as a single bloke and I think probably if you're a single bloke you needed very good references to get hosts easily, and I didn't have anywhere to put anyone up so I couldn't host people to get good references to make it easy. I thought actually, you know what, I'm just going to stay in hostels which actually in retrospect was a good idea anyway because that's a lot more fun in some ways I think when travelling.

But I joined to go surfing. I actually became active and started using it regularly about this time last year and that was because I bought this apartment. It's something I always thought, oh, yes, I should put people up because I like having people coming to stay and, as I said, I like to go travelling a lot, I always have done. I like going abroad and meeting new people from different cultures, and I thought I've just sunk all of my money into an apartment probably I'm not going to be going traveling that much anymore. Obviously again turned out not to be true because I've just been away for another six weeks. But I thought, well, if I can't go and see the rest of the world I'll invite them to come round and stay and so started hosting people, and also it was to get a positive set of references so if I did want to go away I could do it.

Interviewer: How did you feel the first time that you used CouchSurfing, can you remember?

John: It was very positive I think because I think it was a group of German girls. I think I had these four Germans come to stay. In fact, if you look over your shoulder there you can see a lily, that's my sort of travelling wall. I think if I'm correct that was my first experience, four girls that came over from Germany and they brought me that as their present. Whenever they stayed with anyone they took a bit of this lily they had in their home and so that's there and it was very, very positive. Really, really nice, good fun. Just went out partying with these four German girls for about three days, it was very enjoyable.

Interviewer: So you had four girls here?

John: Yes. No, sorry, they were a group of four, I think I put up two of them and two of them stayed somewhere else. Yes, I had two girls staying here.

Interviewer: If you could make any change in the website of CouchSurfing what would you do?

John: It's the mobile apps that are awful. They're really, really bad to use, for example you can't in the Android app - I use both Android and iPhone, one's work, one's personal - and I think the iPhone app is slightly less bad. For example, in the Android app you can't view messages you can only view requests. You can't accept or decline a request, you can just reply to it. The mobile site seems to be completely random whether you get the mobile or the desktop version when you use it on that if you don't want to use the app, for example, you want to use the website.

It just seems inconsistent. I don't think you can search for people who are looking for a host on the app sometimes and I think that's a real problem. I think the mobile experience is a weak one and I think the way that people use the Internet now is very much based around

mobiles and tablets. I think that CouchSurfing need to do more to invest in that. Now maybe the problem is they don't make any money, I guess it's not a very profitable site. I know they don't have advertising and there's no subscription, I don't know how they do it but I think it is a problem.

Interviewer: Well, I think because many people when travelling they don't use their mobile phone abroad because they don't want to pay roaming. Sometimes they go to Internet cafes, maybe that's the reason why they are not into it that much but they have to think about when you're travelling in your own country. Many people travel in their own countries.

John: Absolutely. Yes, I get requests from people within the UK and I think also now when I go abroad it's true I don't use the mobile data but I might take a tablet or smartphone with me and use it as a Wi-Fi device. So I think they are missing a trick if they don't cater properly to people that use smart devices.

Interviewer: Have you used another hospitality exchange network before like Hospitality Club, Be Welcome?

John: No. I've heard about Hospitality Club only because I had someone stay via CouchSurfing last week who was a long-term user of Hospitality Club and told me about it. She basically said she had just joined CouchSurfing because I she got let down by someone in Hospitality Club. I went to look at it and it was something out of the 1980s, it was appalling in terms of its interface, couldn't search for anyone. So I just thought don't bother with that.

Interviewer: It was first before CouchSurfing actually.

John: It was first, was it?

Interviewer: Yes.

John: I think CouchSurfing seems to have overtaken it though.

Interviewer: Well, it's the most used of all of them by far.

John: Yes, but, no, I've never used any other ones.

Interviewer: Now we are going to move onto about your own definitions of privacy and intimacy. How would you define privacy in general?

John: In terms of how I view my privacy I think it is about maintaining control of my information and who has access to it. It seems a fairly obvious thing to say. Sometimes I care about it, sometimes I don't. I think in terms of my sexual orientation anyone can know that, it's fairly obvious I would imagine after five minutes of talking to me that… I'm not sure that's true actually but I don't consider that to be… although obviously in some ways it's a private thing that I'm straight. I don't feel that's something I need to maintain privacy over.

Interviewer: Maybe if you were gay you would be more protective about your sexual orientation.

John: Maybe I'd feel different, I might do, I don't know, I can only hypothesise. What I'm more concerned about in terms of privacy is data that could be used for identity theft. I mean I've never had that as a problem myself, I've not been targeted because I think I'm relatively careful but I think that is something I'm much, much more concerned about. Frankly, the fact that I like to go out drinking and partying with my friends even in my line of work, so? It's fine, that isn't private.

Interviewer: Do you talk about that at work? Last week I went out and got drunk…

John: I think for me anything that is discernible from just my everyday public life. So the things I do out in public and the street, go out with my friends, be a white heterosexual male, all of those things I don't consider private because I do them publicly. I think that the things that I'm concerned about are things that I do privately. So my sex life that's private, the fact that I'm straight and white is not. Any financial details are private because I don't do it publicly.

Interviewer: Your income is private, for example?

John: My income is private, yes. I mean I don't mind if someone asks me I'll happily tell them but there are grey lines. As I said, my bank details are very definitely private, my income is semi-private, I wouldn't shout about it but if somebody wanted to know it doesn't bother me really, I'll tell you and there are blurred lines. My address: now again my address is that private or public because it's easy to find, it's publicly available but I don't shout about it so that's one. My phone number, same thing but I would keep that as a private thing but semi-private.

So I guess it's about levels of privacy and there are some things, my name is entirely public, certainly my first name entirely public and my bank details entirely private. Everything else sits on a spectrum of between there and I generally would use as a guidance what I do in my personal life, what I do in my non-social media life as a guidance for how public or how private it is.

Interviewer: So you see it as a continuum of different levels?

John: Yes. As I said, the most public is my first name and then my surname and then my date of birth and then there are these other things.

Interviewer: Your date of birth because this is something sensitive for some women, for example?

John: But for me that's public, I'm happy with that. When I say my date of birth I mean 14 December 1984 that's a bit more private but I'm quite relaxed about it. The only thing that bothers me is the revelation of anything that would get me in trouble at work. I won't tell you exactly but if I was caught doing things I shouldn't be doing then that's very much private because I really wouldn't shout about that publicly, not that I do obviously.

Interviewer: What about medical records, for example?

John: I haven't really got any.

Interviewer: If you had any kind of disease?

John: I mean it's difficult for me to say because I've never had an illness, I've barely had a cold. So I've got the perspective of somebody who's got a completely… If you looked at my medical history I think I had grommets and I cracked my head when I was 5 and I twisted my ankles badly when I was 18 and that's basically it.

Interviewer: Yes, but for example this kind of information that can be used by an insurance company in case you went to have insurance and whatever happened to your ankles or whatever it's like we are going to charge you more because you have a previous problem before…

John: It's difficult for me to answer because I've got nothing to be private about. I think maybe if I had a complicated or sensitive medical history I might feel different. The fact that I don't have a complicated medical history means there's nothing for me to be private about but I can see why someone else might feel differently.

Interviewer: Do you think because you didn't have any problem with maybe an identity theft in the past you are not really concerned about privacy?

John: No, I think because I'm concerned about the privacy of my bank details and maybe there are some things that I should make more private than they are. I'm probably going to be caught out now because you're going to go and look at my Facebook profile and everything will be public. But certainly in the past and I haven't checked it for six months or so but I've always tried to make it so that my levels of privacy are as high as they can be. But Facebook keeps changing it and making everything public again because they're bastards. I really dislike Facebook actually there's something about it that seems really nasty and I only use it because it's…

Interviewer: Why don't you like it?

John: I don't know. I think they seem to have a very *laissez-faire* approach to other people's information and to privacy. There's something about them and Zuckerberg that seems nasty. I'm not sure what I'm basing that on, it just seems a bit unpleasant.

Interviewer: Have you watched the movie?

John: No, I haven't actually. I'm sure a lot of people think that but I don't know what I'm basing it on, I just have quite strong gut instincts. There's something I don't like about it and it seems very much… I'm sure some of the rumours about government involvement have seeped in subconsciously without me realising it.

Interviewer: Do you think that is true?

John: Government funding, completely believable. It wouldn't surprise me at all.

Interviewer: Do you think that they track what people write online?

John: I think that the revelations that have come out recently about Prism and about American surveillance are unbelievably chilling and I think… I mean there was an example just today, I don't know if you saw it, it's not to do with social media but to do with a journalist from *The Guardian* newspaper who was involved in the Prism revelations, having his partner detained at Heathrow Airport for nine hours on completely spurious grounds to intimidate him. I think we are sleepwalking into a situation that we should be really concerned about. I see Facebook as part of that metanarrative.

I think the lovely cosy façade of Farmville and liking things and have lots of friends actually masks something that we should be quite concerned about. I don't really put anything on Facebook in terms of things I post. I very, very rarely put things on there anymore. I just use it to speak to people. I use the Messenger. Yes, I'm wary of it actually.

Interviewer: Are you aware of social media monitoring work?

John: Well, my assumption would be that the NSA operations that are monitoring, what is it they say, 2.6% of internet traffic and only 0.4% of that, I mean these are the statistics that have come out from the NSA. I think something like but a tiny per cent of Internet traffic. I think that's a very, very clever way of masking the fact that they're observing… or basically 95% of Internet traffic, of course, is spam email and video. Now when you say in terms of we're only monitoring 2.6% of Internet traffic that could encompass all conscious email communication and all social media, basically could be 2.6%. Once you take out videos and essentially pornography that's like the vast majority of Internet traffic.

So I think that they probably are and my guess would be monitoring, not monitoring but documenting the vast, vast amounts of what private citizens do online. I don't think necessarily that the Obama

administration is some sort of terrible force that we should be concerned about, my concern is what would happen, the precedents it sets and what happens in the future.

Interviewer: Yes, there is this privacy paradox of what people actually do. Many people claim to be concerned about privacy but then they use apps that maybe -- Have you read the privacy policy of these apps?

John: No, not at all, not a clue.

Interviewer: Do you know what you agree to?

John: Not a clue which, as you said, is the privacy paradox. The thing is, I guess, what I want to know… what I want to know is that the opt-out is available. I wouldn't necessarily take the opt-out because at this point I'm not doing anything in my life that would make me think I don't want to be… I mean at the moment it's a point of principle for me, I don't want to be monitored because as a point of principle I don't think that a government has the right to monitor what I'm doing. I mean it suggests a presumption of guilt and I think that is wrong. I don't think that's how our system operates but the reason at the moment I don't bother reading the privacy policy of that is because I've got nothing that I'm bothered about and it doesn't matter.

What I want to know is that the opt-out is there or that more to the point it's an opt-in. What I find dangerous and concerning is the just assumption that they have a right to know what we're doing even though I'm doing nothing. I'm doing perfectly unembarrassing ordinary things that a young man does. I'm not doing anything that I would be concerned about, even given my profession I'm not doing anything where I think I wouldn't want people to know that. What I want to know is that if I decided that I was going to be taking a career path, because at the moment I'm a general news reporter I don't do anything that frankly is going to piss off anyone that much, probably

piss off a few people but not anyone that I'm fussed about. If I decided I wanted to go into security journalism, if I decided I wanted to go down a different path I would want to know that the opt-outs are there and that's my concern.

Interviewer: For example, do you know how cookies work?

John: Yes, my understanding is it's an individual file that keeps your preferences for a website, that's broadly my understanding. It keeps your preferences and records and the usage information for specific websites. Is that broadly how it works?

Interviewer: Well, basically they are small files that are downloaded to your computer so they are inside your computer. They save information of everything that you search for and Google on any searches. Then they monitor every place you visit so they know after clicking this banner if you went to visit this advertiser or if you have seen one banner they serve you again the same advertisement, or if you have searched a flight to Montreal they are going to serve you with that kind of advertisement. So most of the use of cookies is for advertisement but they can use it for whatever they want.

John: But I don't mind. I mean I'd rather… Now going on the assumption that the Internet isn't free, there's this myth the Internet is free. Of course it's not free we pay for it through being advertised to which I'm okay with that. I don't mind having banner ads, as long as it's not too intrusive I accept that and I guess if I'm going to be advertised to I'd rather I'm offered and told about things that are of interest to me. I don't have a moral objection to advertising. All it is… it's companies providing information and some of it can be pernicious and unpleasant and others can be witty and charming. It's like suggesting you have an objection to television or something, it's all about the type of medium so I don't mind it.

I guess in a way I'd rather, as I said, be given something relevant but what I want to know is if I want to I can click a button that says ban all cookies, stop this, don't monitor anything.

Interviewer: Well, you can ban cookies if you go to your search options, privacy, I'm sure you can delete it then but you have to delete them.

John: Yes, and I do and I clear my history every now again and that's an easy opt-out.

Interviewer: Well, actually if you have to delete them they're still there gathering information.

John: It depends, it's a tricky one, isn't it, because as you say there's a paradox there. I want auto search, I want Google to be able to suggest things, I want all of this advanced functionality but I also don't like the idea of being monitored and of things being done without my consent. Is it possible for one to happen without the other? I don't know.

Interviewer: Will you accept the trade-off?

John: Yes, of course we do. We always accept a trade-off every time you use it whether it is them knowing my preferences and advertising targeted things to me or them saving my usage data and using that for market research. The thing is it's a question of where the balance is struck and where the trade-off is made, and that's my concern - we're going slightly off piste here. My concern is with the arguments that people make around the actions of security agencies in monitoring this stuff. They say if it saves one life and they talk about the threat from international terrorism which I'm sure exists but for me that's not a trade-off worth making. Seriously I'd rather we were a little bit less secure but a little bit more free and if that meant that someone…
I think it's a price worth paying and I think that it was Thomas

Jefferson who said 'a society that is willing to sacrifice a little liberty for a little security deserves neither and will lose both' I think is what he says.

I'm no great libertarian, I'm no great ideologue but I think that we are treading a dangerous path if we are happy to completely sacrifice our personal privacy and freedoms. I don't think it's freedoms. I don't feel what, for example, Prism is doing is impinging on my freedom because I can still do whatever the hell I like, they're not stopping me yet. It's about my privacy and I think that the balance is being struck too far on the side of monitoring and security and not enough on individual rights.

Interviewer: Have you heard about some people who were commenting on some political beliefs on Facebook and these comments have been deleted?

John: Deleted by whom, by Facebook?

Interviewer: Facebook deleted them, I don't know who is behind these deletions but have you heard about these kinds of things?

John: I've heard about all sorts of things like that but the thing is I think there's a misunderstanding that people have that Facebook is not a… that doing something on Facebook or raising on Twitter is not broadcasting. I know very well from my job if I write something and publish it, now whether that is on TV or radio or online that is broadcasting and I have to be within the law. I think there's a lot of people, and this is what the Internet has done, has given a lot of people a lot of power to broadcast without any of that understanding or comprehension that what they're doing is broadcasting.

I'm not saying that you should have to be a professional journalist to broadcast, of course not, but I've gone through a lot of training, a lot of development. I've got a lot of experience of knowing what is legal

and what is not. Now I know that if I defame someone I can go to prison for that, but a lot of people on Twitter don't. Sally Bercow doesn't know seemingly and I think that what's happening now is suddenly the law is catching up with these people. It's the same with incitement of racial hatred, it's the same with causing gross offence, all the things that if I said it on the news I would get in trouble for. People are now realising that you can't just broadcast it on Twitter and get away with it and I think that's right.

As I said, I'm subject to quite strict laws on what I can say, for example during a court case, and that's right because that's necessary for the operation of justice, of somebody getting a fair trial which is an essential thing to our democracy. It would be farcical to have a situation where you couldn't broadcast something on the television but you could say it freely on Twitter and damage somebody's right to a fair trial, for example, and get away with it. I think that people need to realise that, that you are broadcasting and you can't just say whatever the hell you like but that's maybe because I'm used to operating in that environment. I'm used to the idea of having those restrictions upon me, of being conscious of those responsibilities is what I'd say. I'm conscious of my responsibilities as a broadcaster that maybe it doesn't strike me as that odd or unreasonable.

Interviewer: Have you heard this sentence, coming back to what we were saying before about advertisements: 'when something is for free the product is you'?

John: I haven't heard that but, yes, the phrase I've heard is 'there's no such thing as a free lunch'. When it comes down to it, if something is free the product is you. I think that tallies in exactly with what I've said before that if anyone thinks the Internet is free is very misguided, of course it's not. We're being advertised to and therefore in that transactional process the product is the consumer. We're sold as

consumers of advertising in order to pay for the Internet but I'd rather be advertised to than have to pay for anything.

Interviewer: Would you pay for a private version of Facebook, for example £10 a month?

John: No.

Interviewer: Why not?

John: Because I don't like Facebook.

Interviewer: Or another social networking site that you like and you want to keep it private? I mean you are paying for having your information not being monitored.

John: It depends, would I? Maybe. I might but the reason wouldn't be to stop the monitoring of the data because, as I say, I don't really put anything on Facebook that I'm fussed about. If I want something kept private I don't put it on Facebook.

Interviewer: But the idea is that the particular social networking site will be completely private because you are paying a fee for having all your data private.

John: I guess I also wouldn't trust that it was… I probably wouldn't also trust it was completely private because even if they say, yes, we'll keep it completely private…

Interviewer: For your friends only, of course.

John: Yes, of course. I wouldn't trust that the NSA or other security agencies. If I'm really fussed about something being private I don't do it on the Internet. If I really want to keep something private I'll go

and say it to someone, I'll do it in my bedroom, that's the private stuff. I think you're naïve if you think, or very optimistic at least, if you think the Internet is a good way to do anything private. I think people do things that they wouldn't want other people to see but I don't use the Internet on private things.

Interviewer: Do you think that people have expectations of privacy, for example, because they have their privacy settings to the maximum of privacy and they think that they are safe?

John: Well, I think it depends how you consider privacy. Do you mean privacy that your friends and family and colleagues won't see it? Because I think then, yes, people do expect privacy and can expect privacy because you can set things so no one… If you set your Facebook setting completely private no one's going to see that but that doesn't mean that no one that you'll ever meet will see it, but that doesn't mean it's not going to be monitored by someone.

I guess that in terms of my activities, the things I do on the Internet, there's plenty of stuff I wouldn't want my friends, family and colleagues all seeing but nothing that I think do I think does this matter if this anonymously noticed. Looking at an adult website or something it's just anonymous data that's not particularly problem but obviously you wouldn't want your parents to see it.

Interviewer: Do you use the same computer, for example? Have you heard about this case of this girl who was pregnant and her father was on the home computer and she was searching for things related to being pregnant, and he started to receive a lot of advertisements for pregnant women and he realised that his daughter was pregnant.

John: I have my own devices, I don't generally share a computer. I use a tablet and I broadly don't share computers. At work I share computers, obviously I do, but I certainly wouldn't do anything that I

want kept private on a shared computer. But also I really haven't got anything to keep private, I'm single and straight and I don't have any sort of hidden proclivities that I'm trying to keep secret from the world. So I guess again my considerations are slightly different.

Interviewer: What do you consider intimate?

John: Sex life and anything related to sex I think broadly and that's probably the main thrust of intimate because intimate's a word generally associated with sex and personal relationships. That's broadly in terms of intimacy, I think it is generally sex.

Interviewer: Only sex?

John: What else, my personal life, going out drinking? It's not intimate it's just what I do on an evening. It's not intimate because I clearly do it in public. I come back to my original kind of division of is it something that anyone that lives next door from me could see me do? Yes, it is because all you have to do is sit in the pub across the road and you'll see quite clearly what I like to do with my social life. So that's not really intimate.

Interviewer: What about family?

John: No, not really, it's not intimate. I mean again I haven't got kids. Would I feel differently if I have children? Probably a little bit but only a bit. No, my family life is boringly normal I think, I don't view it as intimate. I think it is my sex and love life is what I would consider intimate.

Interviewer: Also love, not only the sexual part?

John: Well, it's mostly a sex life if I'm really honest about it.

Interviewer: I mean you consider intimate as well, I mean you have a relationship with someone?

John: I was going out with my last girlfriend for a year and a half and I never put my relationship status on Facebook.

Interviewer: So it's intimate for you what you share with your girlfriend?

John: Yes. Actually the main reason I didn't do that is because as you so often see then when the relationship goes from in a relationship to single again you get loads of people bloody knowing about it. I don't want that. It's more the break-up of a relationship is private. I don't want popping up on everyone's timeline John has changed his status from in a relationship to single, and loads will know we've broken up and stuff. People just find out as and when, I don't want to make an issue of these things.

Interviewer: The things that you tell each other, for example, would they be intimate?

John: Some of them.

Interviewer: That's what I wanted to say, apart from saying any of these kind of…

John: Yes, and some of my personal conservations are intimate with people but that's more private than intimate. It's against a scale, isn't it? I mean again I wouldn't view my bank details as intimate, bank details are private. But, yes, I think I would consider intimate to be the subsection of privacy that relates to personal details and to my personal life rather than my business or professional life.

Interviewer: So it also implies relationships with family, sexual partners, girlfriends?

John: Yes. My relationship with my family isn't. Well, I'm very close to them, it's very loving but I don't think of it as intimate I just think of it as my family. The fact that I'm very close to my parents I wouldn't think of that as intimate data I just think of that as I've got a good relationship with my parents. I would quite happily have that broadcast on television whereas I wouldn't quite happily have what I like to get up to in the bedroom on television.

Interviewer: For example, for you kissing in public is intimate?

John: No, not really. Well, it's intimate in that it's an intimate action but I don't mind doing it in public.

Interviewer: Two different things, you don't mind doing it in public or if it's not intimate.

John: Well, it is intimate, of course. You're doing something wrong if kissing someone's not intimate.

Interviewer: We're going to talk a bit about online settings, online places. How would you define privacy in the context of social media because you were saying that for you privacy is all related to your personal information but online in particular?

John: What do I consider to be private?

Interviewer: Yes. You defined privacy before as the control over your personal information, and in particular on social media?

John: Again I think privacy… I think of something that's private is something I wouldn't want to say walking out in the street. Do I think would I be happy to write this on a big sign and hold it above my head as I walk down the street? Aside from the fact I'd look a bit daft would I mind saying that? I probably wouldn't when it came to anything

sexual related or to do with drugs or to do with, shall we say, an over enthusiastic social life. I probably wouldn't want to write on a big board I'm absolutely and massively hangover because I drunk far too much last night and I made a tit of myself. Would I want to write that on a big board? No, probably not, that's private.

So I don't view this differentiation between what is private on social media and what's private in life, it's one of the same thing for me. So privacy and social media again is maintaining some sort of control over who sees what I do. I mean, as I said, it's easy to get bogged down because I think it's an important political issue in what security services and other people can involve but that's sort of slightly abstract. What I'm more concerned about is what friends, family, colleagues can see and what the public in general, anyone who would want to look me especially since I'm in a relatively public person. I'm in a job where I get quite a lot of people randomly messaging me because obviously I'm on television and people see you and think be friends with him and stuff. I get a lot of people doing that so what can those people see? I think that is the same as my privacy out there.

Interviewer: Maybe some years ago there was this big divide between what was online and offline and people talk about virtual and real. I think now people are actually merging what they --

[Interruption - S enters]

John: I actually met S on CouchSurfing.

Interviewer: You met her in CouchSurfing?

John: Yes.

Interviewer: Through hospitality exchange or in a meeting?

John:	Through hospitality exchange, I've never been to a meeting. The thing is, to be honest about it, I've got plenty of friends otherwise I don't need to use CouchSurfing generally to make friends and I don't want to go. I can understand if I've moved to a new city it's a nice way to meet new people but I don't really want to go to social meetings for CouchSurfing because I've got plenty of friends already. It sounds a bit arrogant but I don't need more friends.
Interviewer:	Well, it's normally most of the cities where you go to a meeting most of the people are foreign.
John:	Foreign, yes, which it's not why I would. I do it to host people not to make new friends in the city because there are so many people you can hang out with. But I met S. When I first bought this place she asked to stay here. I couldn't put her up, well I said I could but she'd have to sleep in a building site because I was redoing it all. So she didn't end up staying but we went out for a beer and went to the pub quiz together and stuff and just became mates, and then when the room became available again she took it off me. So that's how I know S. Sorry, where were we?
Interviewer:	Well, I was asking you about privacy online and you said for you it was the same as offline. What about intimacy? For you do you think that it is possible to have intimacy on social media?
John:	Not really. I guess you can have like webcam sex but that's not very intimate that's just wanking in front of a camera.
Interviewer:	For example, if you have a girlfriend and you are chatting with her through Facebook?
John:	That's not intimate. A phone call can be intimate. I guess using Skype could be intimate, but no.

Interviewer: What's the difference between a phone call and chatting on Facebook?

John: Emotion. Seeing someone laugh or hearing someone laugh you can have an emotional reaction to. Someone writing 'LOL' isn't emotional, someone writing 'ROFL' isn't emotional, hearing somebody laughing hysterically is emotional and that's it.

Interviewer: But you are a journalist you know about the power of words. Some people can express very well how they feel in writing.

John: They can and I guess that can be intimate but we're not writing love letters to each other the whole time. It is true, you could write a very, very powerful message. I'm a TV journalist so I know about the power of speech.

Interviewer: Okay, so you are biased.

John: Yes, I'm biased, exactly. I like videos. No, I think it can be. Of course you could write somebody a love letter or a poem and that's intimate in a way. It is intimate but that isn't what I'd use it for. If I want to communicate with someone emotionally on an intimate level if would phone them or I'd see them face-to-face. I like face-to-face and that's why I dislike Facebook. It's like what most people write in Twitter, trite little messages and their opinions on everything. I think there are far too many people that want to tell everyone what they think about things and what they're doing.

I mean I think social media has led to a vast sort of outpouring of egotism, everyone thinks what they're doing is important. I know what I'm doing is important, I just think it's what I'm doing for the day. I don't want to tell people what I'm up to the whole time and I don't want to know what other people are up to the whole time. I want to communicate with people, yes, I don't want to know what

someone's had for dinner every night. I don't want to see photos of people's dinner. This irritates me: since when did it become necessary to take a photo of what you've cooked for dinner every night and put it on Facebook? Unless you've made a spectacular roast goose I don't want to see it.

Interviewer: I read two weeks ago that when you post a picture of your food it tastes better for you because it's something psychological. One colleague gave me the article and it wasn't an academic article, it was in a newspaper but I was like: who wrote this?

John: If you post a photo of your food my first inclination is remove friend. I don't want people that want to show me their food all the time. But, no, I think if I want to be intimate with somebody I'll see them face-to-face. I'd say that generally intimacy is better face-to-face and I don't think until they develop a really serious, clever computer plug-in that's always going to be the case. I think to say, because intimacy is about physical, it's about looking in someone's eyes.

Interviewer: And love letters, for example?

John: I'm not a love letter kind of guy. If you wrote someone a love letter then, yes, of course Facebook is just as good as writing a letter although there's something more charming about a letter. That isn't my personal, that isn't the way that I would be intimate with someone. I want to hold their hand or look into their eyes or be in bed with them.

Interviewer: Have you had the experience of writing letters?

John: No, not really. Again I'm not Britain's most romantic man.

Interviewer: But I mean you are 28 so you more or less grew up with the Internet?

John: I'll tell you a particular circumstance. When I was 8, 20 years ago so 1993, our family won a competition. You know the computer company Compaq? We won a competition to be the Compaq family and so we were the marketing face of Compaq for a couple of years. What they wanted to do was take a family that had never had PCs before, and this is 1993.

Interviewer: So you were 9?

John: I was 8. We had Amstrads and stuff but we hadn't had PCs and they gave us I think four PCs, networked with the Internet and with top of the range everything back in 1993.

Interviewer: So the Internet at that time no one used it.

John: No. This is genuinely true, I remember going to, I think it was cocacola.com, and seeing it unregistered. I remember going to the world's biggest companies and they hadn't bought them at that point. I remember the Internet when it was just a mad, untamed speculation. Unfortunately I was 8 at the time so I didn't do anything about it. I didn't buy cocacola.com.

Interviewer: But what did you do when you were online?

John: I can't remember, used chat rooms and stuff. I can't remember what I did. I remember having it though. I remember we had the Internet when I was 8.

Interviewer: At that point there were like bulletin boards and forums?

John: Yes, it was. I remember the old forums. I don't even remember what we did. I remember searching. Did you even search for things? I don't remember but I think I probably remember the Internet before the BBC websites and before… I remember really, really the beginnings

of the Internet which I'm probably one of the only, in terms of people of my age, I was one of the first people, not in the country but not far off, to use the Internet.

Interviewer: Now I understand why you joined Facebook that early.

John: Sorry, I've gone off on one of my tangents. What was the last question?

Interviewer: Well, we were talking about privacy and intimacy on social media and basically you were saying that for you, you don't consider that you can be intimate on social media.

John: It's not intimate, you can be personal. I mean I'm currently sort of seeing someone and we're just texting. Now texting, of course, is not a form of social media but it's exactly the same, it's a digital text based communication. Now you can be intimate on that but it's not very intimate, it's all sort of brief messages, what are you up to? I'm not expressing my emotions. Maybe I probably wouldn't express my emotions if I saw her face-to-face but I'd certainly be more intimate than I am online.

Interviewer: But only the thing that you are texting that person is like you are showing your interest, do you know what I mean?

John: Yes, I'm showing my interest but that's not intimate that's…

Interviewer: If you text three times a day maybe…

John: Is that intimate? If I show you a selection of recent messages, we'll go through a few. *'Ha, ha, not sure just in work at the moment actually but hopefully not for long, time for a chat later? X'. 'Ha, ha, you're addicted.' 'Yes, definitely, I'll text you when I get back. X' 'Look forward to it. X'.* That's not intimate. I think we're at a sad point in

our world if we think that intimacy is putting an 'X' at the end of text messages that has a smiley face.

Interviewer: Maybe it's not only the content it's also the fact that you are regularly contacting the person?

John: I don't view that as intimacy though, I just view that as regular communication. I mean I text lots of people regularly. I had a long conservation with a mate of mine who's up in Scotland talking about he found some woman's baggage in his back garden and he's been trying to find her but that's not an intimate conservation, that's just a regular conservation. I don't view that as intimacy, I view that as communication.

I'm sure it's possible to be intimate on the internet but not nearly as possible as it is on a sofa.

Interviewer: So for you that you would say that you can be kind of intimate online definitely will be different kind of intimacy or at a lower level than face-to-face?

John: It's a very, very low level intimacy and, let's be honest, if you really want to do something intimate, a few people have been caught out with webcams, you're a bit daft. You probably shouldn't be doing that online. Especially for me, given my job, I probably shouldn't be doing anything like that online, it would be a bad idea. I do have people suggesting it but it would be a foolish mistake.

Interviewer: Now let's talk a bit about what are your motivations for using CouchSurfing. You say that you were basically hosting but from these interactions what are you looking for: friendship, looking for a partner, looking for a one night stand, learning languages, cultural exchange?

John: The honest truth? I've never, ever used CouchSurfing with the intention of sleeping with someone that isn't what I'm interested in. If I can be blunt I don't need to use CouchSurfing. If I want to find someone to sleep with I don't need to use CouchSurfing, I can just go into town and meet someone very, very quickly.

Interviewer: But it did happen to you that you have something with someone?

John: Yes, I've slept with a couple of people that have stayed but that was never my intention, that wasn't why I said, yes, come and stay with me. It may be if someone gets in touch with me and they're a really, really attractive women I'm probably more likely to say yes but that's just the same I'm more likely to say yes if somebody attractive starts talking to me at a bar, just to talk to them. But I'm instinctively attracted to good looking people and good looking women specifically. So, yes, I'm sure it's there subconsciously but I've hosted… if you look at my references basically equal numbers, men, women and groups, so I'm not very much of the view that people that CouchSurfing is not a sex website and that isn't what it's supposed to be therefore that isn't what the mission behind it is, and that's certainly not why I joined up and certainly not why I've ever used it.

The fact that it's happened occasionally isn't for me indicative of the fact that that's what I'm using it for.

Interviewer: So what would you say that you use it for, to make friends?

John: It's just experiences. I like the idea that when people come to this city, come to the city I live, I'm very fond of this city and I like the idea that people that come here have a good experience and have a nice time here. Actually I like meeting people, I like showing them round the city and probably I'm, I don't know, a bit of a show-off and I quite like giving people tours of Leeds. I come back to the original point I made that I like travelling and that mindset and experience and I think

it's sort of a proxy for it. You get a lot of the same sort of emotions that you get from going traveling that you get when you host people CouchSurfing.

Interviewer: So you would say that you are more looking for the cultural exchange, the experience of knowing someone different from your local environment?

John: Yes, and also I think CouchSurfing is a good thing and it's easy for me to put people up, and I think that when I put people up I generally give them a very nice experience. I'll cook for them and I'll show them the city and generally I'm told it's a very good CouchSurfing experience and I quite like that. I like hosting people. I like, in all senses, having people around to my place, I've always done that. I've always been told off by my parents for inviting everyone back home when I'm on a night out and stuff. I like doing that and I guess that's another way of expressing it.

Interviewer: Do you remain friends with some of the people that you have hosted?

John: Yes. I've had people that have come back and, as I say, I live with S now. Not all the time. Sometimes I've hosted people before and they've moved to Leeds and they've wanted to become friends and stay friends and actually I've thought I don't really want to. There was one guy who was a nice guy at first but actually I didn't… I looked after him and I helped him to find an apartment and everything but I realised actually he wasn't my kind of bloke. I took him on a night out and he was a bit weird with girls and I just thought, you know what, I'll help you get set up in the city but you can find your own way, thanks. I don't want to have to be apologising for your weird behaviour.

I don't have a sort of, yes, I must use this to make friends and be friends with anyone from it approach because I don't need to.

Interviewer: What has been your best experience using CouchSurfing so far?

John: Well, on one sense it was actually my only time as a surfer because I became pretty good friends with and ended up having a fling with the girl I went to stay with in Buenos Aires called Maria who was very, very nice. I put a thing up saying coming to Buenos Aires and this incredibly attractive Argentinian woman gets in touch and says, hey, come stay with me. She works as an adviser to the President of Argentina, historian, just got on really, really well, ended up staying with her for three days and then staying in her family home at the Pampas and had a really nice time. That was a lovely experience and that was the first time I surfed myself.

In terms of as a host, a guy called Chris came. He was a German bloke it was very last minute. He basically, hey, I'm really stuck, I've just been slightly kind of screwed around by someone, coming to Leeds, got nowhere to stay. I've also got nowhere, he's German, to watch the Champions' League final, it was Bayern versus Dortmund. I'm a Dortmund fan can I come?, any chance I can stay with you? and we got on like a house on fire, really, really good guy, a really nice bloke, had a really fun night out. We ended up watching the final. So I had a completely random Dortmund fan round to my place to watch the Champions' League final and then went for a night out and that was cool, that was nice. It was good fun and he was doing a tour and he basically came back to Leeds, added an extra stop into his tour on the way back down for Scotland to go for another night out because it was good fun.

The idea that you meet someone for 24 hours and they decide to change their travel plans just to come back and see you again that's no bad thing.

Interviewer: And the worst?

John: There was a girl from Poland who came who basically wouldn't take no for an answer. It was one of those things, if I was a girl hosting and she was a bloke visiting it would have been a bad experience. Luckily I'm 6ft 3ins and not that easy to pin down. I had to tell her to stop like stop touching me and she obviously couldn't understand that I didn't find her attractive or want her to be trying to grab me. I had to say, no, look you've got to stop doing this, stop it. It doesn't bother me, I thought it was quite funny but I could imagine if the genders were reversed it would have been an unpleasant experience. As it happened it's a funny story.

Interviewer: Have you heard about female couchsurfers who had this kind of experience?

John: I've not met anyone. I'm sure it happens but I've never met anyone and obviously I've never been involved in anything like that myself other than that one time. The next morning I was just like, right, see you later then.

Interviewer: Did you ask her to leave?

John: No, I didn't ask her to leave I just didn't suggest that she didn't. I would never kick someone out. Well it depends, I might do but I've never had to, that's as close as I've come to saying. I'd previously said to her I'll give you a tour of the city and stuff but it was just awkward and weird. I don't know what it was, I think she was quite egotistical and assumed that I would fancy her and I didn't fancy her.

Interviewer: Was she pretty?

John: No, not really.

Interviewer: But she thought she was.

John: Yes, she thought she was but she wasn't. She was also a bit annoying. She wasn't my kind of person. Even if she was pretty she was a bit annoying so that was a bit odd but it doesn't bother me.

Interviewer: Do you think that in the case for women mainly using CouchSurfing is safe?

John: I don't think it's really possible for me to say. It's like all things, it's like is crossing the road safe? If you do it safely, then, yes. If you do it with your eyes shut and wander across then, no, it's terribly dangerous and I think CouchSurfing's probably the same. I think you've got to read references carefully. I think you've got to be a good judge of these things and communicate with them beforehand. I think if you go in with your eyes shut and you just host anyone and you don't have a conservation with them beforehand, I think it could be dangerous.

I generally am quite a good judge of these things personally but obviously I'm not a woman. You can tell when I don't trust someone and I've never had any bad experiences other than that one.

Interviewer: Did you hear about this woman here who was raped by CouchSurfer who was hosting her?

John: Yes, I've heard something about that. I heard about someone being raped. What was it?

Interviewer: It was like two or three years ago and the guy is in jail now.

John: I've vaguely heard of that sort of thing but I've not heard of any specific examples.

Interviewer: She was raped here in Leeds. CouchSurfing has these security recommendations for women on their website but I don't know if people really read them. Have you read them?

John: No, but again I'm guessing I'm not really in danger mainly because I host so it's always on my territory and I know that I'm not a threat to anyone because I'm… well, I know I'm not. I probably wouldn't put up a big group of blokes but even then I know where the bread knives are kept, I'll be all right, that's a joke. But I don't need… I use the same safety advice that I use for crossing roads, for wandering the town, doing my job which is use common sense and I think that's all you need to do, use common sense.

Interviewer: How do you think that CouchSurfing could improve security for their users?

John: I wonder if you could do some sort of anonymous flag, maybe there is, if you stay with someone because I bet some people would want to write a negative review. I've only got good references is quite important to me and I know that, for example, with that girl that I had to fight off or to tell to piss off I would have written her a bad reference. But I know if I wrote her a bad reference she'd write me a bad reference. It's like on eBay, you don't leave bad feedback because you know that that person is going do the same to you. I'm not so keen to give her a bad reference I want to get a bad reference myself and so maybe you could have a way of leaving a private bad reference that only the website sees.

Interviewer: Do you use Airbnb? It's basically like CouchSurfing but paying. You can rent your room in the house but you can rent a whole apartment as well and they have that. You can leave a personal reference available or only for the website to see.

John: Yes, because that would be quite useful because I could say don't know if anyone else has had this, but this girl was a bit forward frankly and wouldn't take no for answer, didn't bother me but just worth flagging up and if…

Interviewer: So we were talking about safety, that for you, if you look at the references travelling with CouchSurfing is safe?

John: Yes, I think so, I just use common sense. I host more than I surf, and obviously hosting is pretty safe, I mean, sometimes when I host I'm always in when the other person is in, but there are other people where that I give them the key of my house quite happily because I have my own instinct, my own judgment. There was a girl who stayed last week, she was a German doctor, and I just can tell she was an honest person so I gave her a key, and that's fine. And again: what are they gonna do? Are they going to steal my telly? If they are going to stay here for a week, a strong man, maybe they can sneak my staff... I'd much rather be quite trusting, I'm not the kind of person who cares very much about his staff, don't personally, for me, see any safety concerns with CouchSurfing. I can understand if you are woman travelling by your own that's different.

Interviewer: Have you heard of some people who used to ask for the ID when people arrive?

John: It wouldn't occur to me because, I can understand, but I think, you are going to take part on CouchSurfing you cannot going with that approach. CouchSurfing is based on trust. Be as careful as you can, I guess, but I think if you are going to take part in CouchSurfing and you are going to do there is no point, because you are going to be such a hostile footing, that's hostile... there is not point, if I'm going to take you with suspicion there is no point of taking part, from my point of view, so I would never suggest someone to give me their ID. I just use my judgment, which I trust.

Interviewer: When you meet some people through CouchSurfing then you add them on Facebook?

John: I have done it, yeah, some people, again not everyone, but yeah a lot of people actually, because Facebook is a lot better, as much I dislike Facebook, it's much better means of communication or practical way to speak to people than CouchSurfing. CouchSurfing the francs of the application are awful, or pretty bad anyway.

Interviewer: When you move the interaction to Facebook, you don't use CouchSurfing to communicate with these people anymore?

John: No, I've never. Once I've got a different way, other way, anything than CouchSurfing to communicate with people, I wouldn't use CouchSurfing anymore. Phone me, email me, much better, CouchSurfing is rubbish for that.

Interviewer: Have you changed your privacy settings on CouchSurfing?

John: No, because it's nothing on there that's private. There is nothing I'm *flast* about. What I say there I go travelling. I'll give a quick look now.

Interviewer: If you haven't changed it it's public.

John: In terms of what is on there, there isn't anything there that I'm *flast* about. You see photos of me. Let's go have a look quickly.

Interviewer: Because on Facebook you said you have the highest privacy settings because of your work.

John: Yes.

Interviewer: And do you accept all friends' requests that you receive on Facebook?

John: No, because of my job I get people who I don't know. They see me on the telly and request me as a friend, they are not my friends.

Interviewer: And do you delete people?

John: Only if they post pictures of their meals (That's not actually true). Sometimes if I must find someone annoying, but not really, I have an insidious number of people who are supposed to be friends, most of them I haven't seen them for years. I should delete them, but I don't do it because it doesn't bother me. So I just leave them there. I blocked people occasionally, people who post a lot of shit, and they are always trying to invite you to play Farm Ville and staff like that, I block those people, but you have to do something actively annoying and intrusive to block you.

Interviewer: How do you feel more comfortable: sharing information with people online or offline?

John: Online or offline? I probably would more likely to share it offline, but I don't really drop distinction.

Interviewer: So it can be on the phone, it can be through mail...?

John: No, well, it very much depends, I think, if I'm using a card, it's case by case basis, I've been nervous of using my card in some dodchies websites, or the same to give it to a dodchy phone line or if I had to give it to a dodchy seeming character in a shop who is going to take it to the back. Whereas if I'm using it in Amazon, or I'm using it on Tesco, or if I'm using it over the phone with BT, I feel equally safe with all of these 3 things, so it's much more about context that it is about medium.

Interviewer: And when talking about intimate information, what it's for you intimate (not about your relationships or sexual relationships), in case you have a problem you would like to talk to someone about it, would you feel more comfortable talking to a person that you already know or to a person that doesn't know you at all?

John: It depends what it is, it depends on the context as well. If we are talking about sex, I rather be... if I have got a problem of intimate nature, if I have a lamp that I cannot identify or something, I much rather speak to who is better speak to, so I go to a doctor, I don't mind. I go every time and again, there is not reason, but I do it, I go to the x unit, and I'm completely comfortable personally going there and talking to the nurse. If they want to do an inspection, it doesn't bother me, nothing to hide, nothing to be ashamed of; and at the same time if there was a way of doing it anonymously online: fine, it doesn't bother me, I'm quite relax about these things. It just entirely depends on the subject of the context, it is not possible for me to generalize. If I got an intimate problem I think I wouldn't go to talk to my dad about it or my friends, but generally it doesn't bother me.

Interviewer: Have you heard about this phenomenon of 'strangers in the train', because you are with someone that doesn't know you, you open up more, because you are there in that particular moment, and you are not going to see that person again, you feel more free of talking about your intimate life?

John: Yeah, although I'm a very open person. Maybe I'm abnormal, because if you ask me a question I quite gladly give you an answer, I don't really... I had a wedding last week, and there was an amusing situation where I ended up having sex with someone I definitely, definitely shouldn't have had sex with, and it's perfectly fine for me of talking about that because it's funny. It doesn't bother me, I'm not ashamed about things. I'd quite gladly share over a stranger on the train, or

online or frankly with my parents who already know about it, maybe because it is a funny story. But I don't really broad distinction, maybe... If I wouldn't be happy to say something to a best friend I wouldn't like saying that to a stranger on the train. But I'm quite happy to say everything to most people, frankly.

Interviewer: In your case if you had some problem you would go first to talk to a friend rather than...?

John: It depends, if I have a problem with my love life I talk to a friend, if I have a medical problem I go to talk to an expert, to a doctor, if I had a psychological problem (that I've never had, but in case I had), I would talk to an expert or to a friends, entirely depends of the situation, I would choose the best person based on the context.

Interviewer: So for you everything depends on the context?

John: Yes, everything depends on the context, absolutely. I don't draw distinction between online and offline, or forms of communication, it would entirely be based on what is best upon the context.

Interviewer: And coming back to the conversation we had before about gender... do you thing that in CouchSurfing there are the same number of women than men?

John: I don't know actually. I have no idea. Actually, when you see the numbers of people who request to stay in Leeds, I think they are 50-50%. Maybe 1/3 women, 1/3 men, and 1/3 couples/groups. I don't know, but I would imagine it's pretty much even.

Interviewer: And you were talking about devices before, that you use everything: your mobile phone, the tablet, laptop…

John: I've got a laptop, notebook, a tablet, 2 phones, and a desktop.

Interviewer: And which device you feel more comfortable with?

John: I'd rather use a tablet, if I could use it as my preference, I use a minitablet.

Interviewer: And do you think that you share different kinds of information through different devices?

John: No, I think that if it's online is online.

Interviewer: Well, we are finished. Would you like to add something that maybe I didn't ask you about?

John: No, I think you (we) cover pretty much everything.

Interviewer: And do you have any question about the research?

John: I'll be interested to see what comes out of it, I'm completely relaxed, you can use whatever you like of mine. I think it's an interesting subject. It's fine.

Appendix F

Distribution of Participants

Participant	Gender	Age	Country	CouchSurfing	Badoo	Facebook
Noelia	female	25	UK	x		X
Lulu	female	25	UK	x		X
Caroline	female	26	UK	x		X
Alice	female	28	UK	x		X
Ana	female	35	UK	x	x	X
Sandra	female	39	UK		x	(x)
Isaac	male	26	UK	x	(x)	X
John	male	28	UK	x		x
David	male	30	UK		x	X
Peter	male	32	UK	x		x
Mario	male	36	UK	x		x
Oscar	male	41	UK	x		x
Robert	male	43	UK	x	x	x
Gary	male	43	UK		x	X
Mateo	male	47	UK	x	(x)	x
Vanessa	female	29	Spain	x		x
Patricia	female	31	Spain		x	x
Ivana	female	32	Spain	x	(x)	x
Raquel	female	35	Spain	x	x	x
Sara	female	39	Spain	x		x
Olga	female	40	Spain	x		x
Laura	female	41	Spain		x	x
Gemma	female	42	Spain	x	x	x

Petro	male	28	Spain		x	x
Luis	male	30	Spain	x	x	x
Esteban	male	35	Spain	x		x
Ramon	male	37	Spain		x	X
Viel	male	38	Spain	x	(x)	x
Marc	male	39	Spain		x	x
Cesar	male	44	Spain		x	X

Table 1. Distribution of participants per country and site

* In parenthesis: deleted profiles

**In capitals: profiles not facilitated by participants