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Filtered Identities: A Digitally Active Mid-Adolescent's Identity Construction in Social Networking Spaces

Tara M. Campbell
Georgia State University

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ACCEPTANCE

This dissertation, FILTERED IDENTITIES: A DIGITALLY ACTIVE MID-ADOLESCENT'S IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION IN SOCIAL NETWORKING SPACES, by TARA CAMPBELL, was prepared under the direction of the candidate's Dissertation Advisory Committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree, Doctor of Philosophy, in the College of Education, Georgia State University. The Dissertation Advisory Committee and the student's Department Chairperson, as representatives of the faculty, certify that this dissertation has met all standards of excellence and scholarship as determined by the faculty.

Ewa McGrail, Ph.D.

Committee Chair

Nadia Behizadeh, Ph.D.

Committee Member

Amy Seely Flint, Ph.D.

Committee Member

Ann Kruger, Ph.D.

Committee Member

Michelle Zoss, Ph.D.

Committee Member

Date

Gertrude Tinker Sachs, Ph.D.

Chairperson, Department of Middle and Secondary Education

Paul A. Alberto, Ph.D.

Dean

College of Education

AUTHOR'S STATEMENT

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Tara Campbell

NAME

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Tara Campbell
Department of Middle and Secondary Education
College of Education
Georgia State University
Atlanta, GA 30303

The director of this dissertation is:

Ewa McGrail, Ph.D.
Department of Middle and Secondary Education
College of Education
Georgia State University
Atlanta, GA 30303

CURRICULUM VITAE

Tara Campbell

Education

- 2015 Ph.D. Teaching and Learning/Language and Literacy, Georgia State University
- 2007 Ed.S. Curriculum and Instruction, Piedmont University
- 2001 M.A. Early Childhood Education, Piedmont University
- 1992 B.A. Middle Grades Education, Mercer University

Professional Experience

- August 1992- August 2013 Teacher, Douglas County School System
- June 2011-July 2011 Teaching Assistant (Content Literacy), Georgia State University
- August 2013-Present K-12 English Language Arts Specialist, Douglas County School System
- August 2014-Present Reading Endorsement Instructor, Douglas County School System

Publications

- Flint, A., Anderson, N., Allen, E., Campbell, T., Fraser, A., Hilaski, D... & Thornton, N. (2013). More than graphs and scripted programs: teachers navigating the educational policy terrain. In P.L. Thomas (Ed.), *Becoming and being a teacher*. (pp. 175-188). New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- Campbell, T. (2012). Strategies to support students in world making. *Language Arts*, 90(1), 15.
- Flint, A., Anderson, N., Allen, E., Campbell, T., Fraser, A., Hilaski, D., . . . Thornton, N. (2011). When policies collide with conviction. *The Language Arts Journal of Michigan*, 26(1), 13-17.

Presentations

Campbell, T. and Sowerbrower, K. (2012, November) *Integrating Common Core Standards into Middle and High School Classrooms* Presentation at Annual Convention of the National Council of Teacher of English, Las Vegas, NV.

Campbell, T. (2012, March) *Content Literacy* Presentation to Dr. Michelle Ruble's Content Literacy Class, Mercer University, Douglasville, GA.

Campbell, T. and Sowerbrower, K. (2012, January) *Prequals-3g*, Webinar presented for Georgia State University at www.globalconversationsindoctoralpreparations.com

Flint, A., Anderson, N., Allen, E., Campbell, T., Fraser, A., Hilaski, D., James, L., Rodriguez, S., & Thornton, N. (2011, November) *When Policies Collide with Conviction* Paper presentation at Annual Convention of the National Council of Teachers of English, Chicago, IL.

Campbell, T. (2008, June) *The 5 C's of Gifted Instruction* at Gifted Endorsement Series, Douglasville, GA.

Campbell, T. & Leatherman, J. (2007, June) *Differentiation* at Gifted Endorsement Series, Douglasville, GA.

Professional Service

Member: NCTE, IRA, ALAN, AUA

2013, Young Adult Literature Reviewer, ALAN Online

2013, Peer Reviewer, Language Arts Journal of Michigan

2013, Moderator, Global Conversations in Literacy Research webinar featuring Dr. Julia Davies

2010, Volunteer, National conference for National Association for Gifted Children National Conference

2008-2009, Content Review Panel for Teacher Preparation Programs in GA

Filtered Identities: A Digitally Active Mid-Adolescent's Identity Construction in Social Networking Spaces

By

TARA CAMPBELL

Under the Direction of Ewa McGrail, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

Teens, including young teens, are using digital tools, including social networking sites at a rapidly growing pace (Madden, Lenhart, & Duggan, 2013). However, few studies have addressed the social networking practices of young teens. In this study, I attempted to address a gap in the current literature by investigating the online identity construction of a 14 year-old female who avidly participated on social networking sites. The purpose of this study was to examine a mid-adolescent's use of social networking and what this use might reveal about her identity construction. The following questions guided the research:

- What are a mid-adolescent's thoughts as she decides what to post on social networking sites to represent herself?
- What do the tools and social practices she uses reveal about her online identity construction?
- What kinds of identities does she present on social networking sites?

This study was grounded in a sociocultural understanding of language, particularly that language and thought are culturally derived (Vygotsky, 1986) constructs that shape and are shaped by human activity (Cole, 2003; Wertsch, 1991). Through a sociocultural view of identity, I recognized that identity is a social construct in which mid-adolescents often experience conflict (Harter, 2012) as they try to integrate a fragmented, or “kaleidoscopic” (p. 94) sense of self into a cohesive sense of self.

I used a qualitative single case study design (Merriam, 2009) to investigate the social networking practices of the participant. Data collection included semi-structured interviews; think-aloud verbal protocols while using social networking sites; informal phone or instant messaging interactions between the participant and researcher; participant and researcher journals; and participant’s posts to social networking sites. Using a systematic recursive qualitative method (LeCompte, 2000) informed by Saldaña’s (2009) coding recommendations, I found that the participant adhered to perceived online social conventions and used a variety of digital literacy tools to present socially acceptable filtered identities across three Social Networking Sites (SNS). Findings suggest that a mid-adolescent would benefit from opportunities to use digital communication skills in school to present an academic identity in school-related online spaces.

Keywords: Online Social Networking, Identity, Digital Communication, New Literacies, Facebook, Instagram, Ask.fm, Sociocultural Research, Qualitative Research, Social Networking Sites, Identity Construction, Mid-adolescence, Adolescence

FILTERED IDENTITIES: A DIGITALLY ACTIVE MID-ADOLESCENT'S IDENTITY
CONSTRUCTION IN SOCIAL NETWORKING SPACES

by

TARA CAMPBELL

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in

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in

The Department of Middle and Secondary Education

in

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It is difficult to narrow the field of those who have made this project possible to one that can be addressed in a few words. This difficulty lies partly in the fact that it is hard to determine just when the work on this project began. Perhaps it started two years ago when I decided to study this particular topic. Or perhaps it started five years ago when I applied to the doctoral program in the field of Teaching and Learning at Georgia State University. In my view, it has no concrete beginning. No deed is accomplished out of context from time and space. I acknowledge that understanding here as I express my deep appreciation for those who have had the most recent and, to me, most evident impact on my life and my ability to finish this study:

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES.....	v
LIST OF FIGURES.....	vi
1 INTRODUCTION.....	1
Phenomenon to be Studied.....	5
Theoretical Perspective.....	11
Overview of Study.....	19
Definitions.....	20
2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	22
Classic Views of Identity.....	22
Identity in Online Spaces.....	29
Summary.....	53
3 METHODOLOGY.....	55
Research Design.....	55
Participant.....	57
Setting.....	61
Data Collection.....	63
Data Analysis.....	74
Ethical Concerns and Quality Control.....	94
4 FINDINGS.....	111
Audience Matters.....	112
Adherence to Self-Perceived Social Conventions and Participation in Trends.....	151
Digital Literacy Tools Shape Practice and Identity Presentation.....	159

TABLE OF CONTENTS, CONT'D

	Socially Acceptable Filtered Identities Across SNS.....	173
	Summary.....	194
5	DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS.....	196
	The Complex Cultural Environment of Online SN Tools.....	196
	Perceived Audience Mediates a Filtered Identity Presentation.....	207
	Social Acceptable Filtered Identities Across SNS.....	215
	Implications for Practice.....	221
	Implications for Future Research.....	226
	Final Thoughts.....	228
	REFERENCES.....	230

LIST OF TABLES

Table		Page
1	Data Used to Answer Research Questions.....	64
2	Application of Tenets of Theoretical Framework in Analysis.....	75
3	Description of Categories.....	85
4	Application of Merriam’s Suggestions for Quality.....	108
5	Project Timeline.....	110
6	Types of Questions to Which Trinka Responded on Ask.fm June-August 2014.....	131
7	Trinka’s Facebook Posts by Number of Likes June-August 2014.....	135
8	Trinka’s Instagram Posts by Number of Likes June-August 2014.....	138
9	Trinka’s Inspirational Quotes by Visual Content.....	148
10	Unwritten Rules of Social Networking.....	152
11	Trinka’s Facebook Audiences – all have offline connections.....	176
12	Trinka’s Instagram Audiences.....	179
13	Trinka’s Posts about High School across SNS.....	192

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure		Page
1	Theoretical Framework: Language-Text-Self Connections.....	11
2	Number of Posts Made to Instagram January-June 2014.....	62
3	The Logic of Data Analysis.....	76
4	Early Coding Sample.....	79
5	Instagram Attribute Table for June Posts.....	86
6	Creating Patterns.....	88
7	Posts Sorted by Audience.....	89
8	Early Attempt at Thesis.....	90
9	Later Thesis Attempt.....	92
10	Data Analysis Process.....	94
11	Trinka’s Facebook Audiences.....	116
12	Trinka’s Instagram Audiences.....	120
13	Skating Rink and Amusement Park Posts.....	122
14	Selfies for Friends.....	123
15	Selfie for Self.....	125
16	Jam Skating Pose.....	127
17	Leap on Beach.....	133
18	Most Liked Post.....	140
19	Trinka’s Compliments.....	141
20	Dance Turn Video.....	143
21	Be True to Who You Are Selfie.....	149
22	RIP Oscar.....	155

LIST OF FIGURES, CONT'D

Figure		Page
23	Father's Day Post.....	161
24	Serious Selfie.....	164
25	it's okay not to be okay.....	165
26	Dancing to Relieve Pain.....	166
27	Filtered Identity.....	174
28	Filtered Identity – Facebook.....	175
29	Filtered Identity – Instagram.....	178
30	Inspirational Selfie.....	183
31	Back Walkover.....	184
32	Comicon.....	185
33	Filtered Identity – Ask.fm.....	189
34	Saying Goodbye to Oscar.....	194

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Today's teens have grown up in a dramatically different world than teens from just a decade ago. As of 2011, 95 percent of US teens use the Internet, and 80 percent of these online teens use social networking sites (Madden, Lenhart, Duggan, Cortesi, & Gasser, 2013). Digital communication and social networking sites such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter have revolutionized the way many people communicate, stay in touch with the world, and pass the time. The use of such sites is nearly ubiquitous with teens, and has increased dramatically over the past six years, especially among younger teens (Lenhart, Ling, Campbell, & Purcell, 2010). With young teens constantly texting, posting and tweeting, many adults may assume that it is just all in good fun or they may just think of it as wasting time without looking hard at what teens are actually doing in social networking spaces (Barnett, 2009; Berson & Berson, 2006; Notley, 2009). However, the impact of this digital revolution cannot be underestimated; as people change their environment, they also change themselves (Cole, 2003; Wertsch, 1991). Vygotsky (1986) emphasized that human communication processes give rise to particular ways of thinking, and Wertsch (1991) furthered this idea, explaining that human action, which arises in cultural contexts, is tied to thought processes. The teens of 2014, the year of this study, were engaged in communication practices and activities that were quite different from teens from any decade prior, using text messaging and a myriad of social networking sites to communicate with friends (Lenhart et al., 2010). Vygotsky's (1986) and Wertsch's (1991) assertions about the interconnectedness of human action and thought suggest that teens' digital practices are shaping teens as they themselves shape the practices. Teens aren't just growing up in a different world,

teens themselves are different as they engage in new ways of communicating. To understand *how* they are different, more research is needed.

Some researchers have expressed concerns about what these changes might mean (Bauerlein, 2008; Turkle, 2011). Drawing upon a number of national surveys and standardized test data from several instruments including the National Assessment of Educational Progress, Bauerlein (2008) claimed, “Instead of opening young American minds to the stores of civilization and science and politics, technology has contracted their horizon to themselves, to the social scene around them” (p. 10). Others are more optimistic about the changes; for example, Tapscott (2009), who has studied media and social change since the 1970s, admitted that some concern may be warranted, but stated that “overall the kids are alright” (p. 6) and suggested that other generations can learn from the now under-40 population that he nicknamed the “net generation” (p. 6). Similarly, Prensky (2011a, 2011b), suggests that today’s teens, whom he calls “digital natives (2011a, p. 4), think differently; their brains, he argues are physiologically different (2011b), and rather than lament over the changes, those of us over 40, “digital immigrants” (2011a, p. 4) need to accept them. Particularly, he calls for dramatic changes in how we educate “digital natives”, pointing out that the institution of public education has resisted change, stubbornly expecting children to conform to ways of thinking foreign to them.

In my experience as a public middle school teacher, I have witnessed how slow the education community has been to react to the changes in the world and in the very students we teach. This failure to adapt to an increasingly digital world and the cultural changes that have ensued has been, in part because of a lack of resources; public schools have historically lagged behind in regard to technology integration and this remains true today with schools often lacking up-to-date computers, tablets, proper bandwidth and the like (Reiser, 2012). However, educators

cannot blame our limitations solely on funding. Even when digital tools are available, teachers express reluctance to bring young people's new literacies into their classrooms, dismissing them with comments like, "that's just something that they do," or "it doesn't count," or "that's just computer games" (Burke, 2009, p. 37).

When digital tools are used, their use is often limited to traditionally valued literacy skills - new ways of doing old things; Burke (2009) noted that school use of digital tools is limited to word processing, visual lectures through PowerPoint, and using the Internet as an encyclopedia even though "through their many digital engagements, youth are developing very sophisticated skills" that greatly exceed those required in the classroom (p. 35). Rowsell (2009) studied three adults' use of Facebook and found that online social networking requires a host of sophisticated literacy skills including mediating online identities. She argued that online social networking deserves a place in classrooms and that students' evaluation of their own digital literacy practices is a way to access their funds of knowledge (Moll, 2000), making school more relevant and opening the door to further literacy learning. Yet, this is not typically happening. In my experience and according to research, teachers do not often see the value in their students' digital literacies. Sometimes, they are reluctant to use new technologies because they do not feel skilled in digital tool use themselves (Burke, 2009); other times, teachers feel that the "old" ways are superior and dismiss teens' digital lives as something to pursue in their spare time, or even as a waste of time altogether (Chandler-Olcott & Lewis, 2010). I would argue, along with Prensky (2011a, 2011b) and others (Burke, 2009; Rowsell, 2009) that schools must adapt and that to do so means, in part, understanding the digital worlds of the young people we teach.

Researchers have been working to develop such an understanding; a growing body of literature shows that teens are using online social networking as a tool in identity construction

(boyd, 2007; Davis, 2012; Greenfield, 2004; Livingstone, 2008). boyd (2007) found that teens from age 13-17 and young adults used MySpace to create digital bodies, essentially writing themselves into being. Davis (2012) found that her 13-18 year old participants' Facebook use promoted identity development processes but that the "unique features of computer-mediated communication shape[d] adolescents' experiences of these processes in distinct ways" (p. 1527). Livingstone's (2008) work with 13-16 year-old online social networkers showed that teens were balancing the risks (though they did not usually consider them risks) and affordances of social networking to represent themselves in ways that varied by age and gender. Greenfield (2004) found that, while children and teens were creating their own cybercultures online, often adults were largely unaware of them and that when adults were not involved, there were potentially negative developmental effects: disinhibition in sexuality, aggression, and troubled race relations; early sexual priming; and models for racism, negative attitudes towards women, and homophobia.

While researchers (boyd, 2007; Davis, 2012; Greenfield, 2004; Livingstone, 2008; Subrahmanyam, Greenfield, & Tynes, 2004) seem to agree that young people are shaping the very nature of their own development processes, more research is needed to understand exactly how. As my literature review will show, the current research base fails to investigate what young people are actually thinking when they are participating in social networking. Additionally, previous research has either focused on older teens and young adults or they have combined young teens with older teens in their research. There is little research that investigates the role of social networking in the identity work of young adolescents in particular. More research is needed to fill this gap since young teens are taking up the use of these powerful digital tools during a phase of life that, for many, is marked by identity confusion (Erikson,

1959/1980; Harter, 2012; Kroger, 2006) and, according to Harter (2012), a fragmented self-concept she calls the “kaleidoscopic self” (p. 96). Harter (2012), who takes a psychosocial perspective, believes that the self is both cognitively and socially formed. Therefore, while she believes that cognitive development tends to occur in a particular order, she also recognizes that one’s social and cultural worlds will shape development. Whereas no two people will develop in the same way, around the age of 14, for many, the self becomes more differentiated, potentially leading to inner conflict about who one’s “real” self is; Harter calls this stage mid-adolescence. This is a crucial time in a young person’s life, yet little research has explored digital identity construction of mid-adolescents.

With teen use of social networking steadily climbing (Lenhart et al., 2010), it is incumbent upon educators, parents, and policy makers to educate ourselves regarding this use and reach an understanding of its significance in the lives of mid-adolescents. While one study cannot possibly fill the gap of information needed about mid-adolescents’ online identity construction, I hope that this study can be a starting place for more. The purpose of this study was to examine a mid-adolescent’s use of social networking and what this use might reveal about her identity construction.

Phenomenon to be Studied

Social networking has increased to the point of ubiquity for teens in the United States. According to the Pew Internet and American Life Project (2012), as of 2011, 95% of teens were using the Internet with social networking the most popular activity (80%), followed by getting information (62%); buying things (48%); sharing personally created content (38%); video chat (37%); looking up fitness information (31%); recording/uploading videos (27%); remixing content (21%); looking up hard-to-talk-about health information (17%); using Twitter (16%);

personal blogging (14%); streaming content for others to watch (13%); and visiting virtual worlds (8%). The 80% of teens using social networking represents a dramatic increase over the 55% of teens using online social networking just three years earlier in 2007 (Lenhart et al., 2010). The extreme popularity of social networking sites (SNS) among teens warrants research into what teens are doing on these sites as they construct identities in those spaces.

For many teens, online activities occur on mobile phones with 78% of U.S. teens owning phones, 47% of those being smartphones (Madden, Lenhart, & Duggan, 2013). Teens with mobile phones have their friends and family readily available, and they take advantage of it; 63% of teens use text messaging daily. These digitally and textually active teens make up a diverse group, demographically speaking. According to Lenhart (2010) and her colleagues, teens over 14 are more likely to use SNS than those under 14, in part because social networking sites (SNS) require users to be at least 13. Usage gaps among various groups seem to be closing and/or shifting. For example, teens from lower income families are more likely to use social networking than teens from wealthier households, a change from earlier polls which showed no difference in income of SNS users. The gender gap is closing; whereas in 2006, girls were more likely to use SNS than boys, in the 2010 poll (Lenhart, Purcell, et al.), there was no difference. Text messaging also increased for boys and black teens (by a median of 20 texts per day) between 2009 and 2011, though older girls (14-17) remained the most prolific texters with a median of 100 texts per day. One constant across demographics is that SNS usage among teens is increasing.

Clearly, teens are using digital tools, particularly social networking sites and text messaging quite frequently. What exactly are teens doing in these spaces? Research has shown that teens use text messaging to enhance and maintain their existing relationships (Clarke, 2009;

Davis, 2012; Lenhart & Madden, 2007; Lewis & Fabos, 2005; Pettigrew, 2009; Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008; Thurlow, 2003). Research suggests that text messages carry aspects of the creator's social self; the characteristics of text messages reflect social identities (Lewis & Fabos, 2005), personality (Holtgraves, 2011), gender (Tossell et al., 2012), and share some features with talk (Haas & Takayoshi, 2011; Thurlow, 2003) including the way that people construct themselves in "diatext" with others (Cortini, Mininni, & Manuti, 2004). Additionally, researchers (Turner, Abrams, Katic, & Jeta, 2014) found that "digitalk" (p. 157) across social networking sites, instant messages and text messages is conventionalized according to communities of practice and audience.

However, teens are not just performing offline activity in a digital forum. There are complex relationships among offline and online practices. For example, some research suggests that personality characteristics, like shyness or narcissism influence online activity (Chan, 2011; Mehdizadeh, 2010; Ong et al., 2010). Other studies have considered how the features of particular online environments, like ease of posting pictures or the stated purpose of the site, impact the ways in which users interact and present themselves (Reich, 2010; Schwämmlein & Wodzicki, 2012; Zhao, Grasmuck, & Martin, 2008). There is also evidence of teens constructing identity on social networking sites (boyd, 2007; Davis, 2012; Greenfield, 2008; Greenfield, 2004; Livingstone, 1998, 2008; Subrahmanyam, Greenfield, & Tynes, 2004; Subrahmanyam, Smahel, & Greenfield, 2006; Turkle, 1995; Turkle, 2011; Zhao, Grasmuck, & Martin, 2008). All of this research has contributed to the conversation about identity construction, while still leaving room for further exploration, particularly in terms of mid-adolescent SNS use. I will present these studies in further detail in the next chapter.

Not all researchers are comfortable with the implications of teens' digital practices; some, (Berson & Berson, 2006; Greenfield, 2004) have expressed concern about the general lack of understanding into issues of teen identity in cyberspace claiming that we must do more to educate ourselves so that we might educate teens about the ramifications of online behavior. Barnett (2009), for example, claimed that a new conception of real versus virtual is in order if we are to grasp the concept of the adolescent self in a digital age:

This passing from spaces once defined by the real/virtual binary, but conceived more precisely here as movement across the seamless fractal locations of self in late capitalist culture, requires educational researchers and contemporary practitioners to reconceptualize our ways of knowing and representing adolescent identity as it is created concurrently in real and virtual spaces. (p. 201)

According to Barnett, because adolescents are being positioned and positioning themselves as products in a consumer culture, our old understandings of real and fake are irrelevant in trying to understand adolescents of today. He also stated that in the digital age, social networking makes teen identity construction visible to us like never before, and that we must take advantage of the opportunity to shed our old ways of understanding identity and learn about the teens we seek to instruct and guide.

In *Life on the Screen*, Turkle (1995) noted that, when it comes to technology, "it is our children who are leading the way, and adults who are anxiously trailing behind" (p. 10). She expressed concern that the face of human identity is changing altogether. Though at the time she wrote this, she still expressed optimism that we could figure it out and somehow channel our use of technology, her concern grew throughout the years. More recently, in *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*, Turkle (2011) wrote, "These days,

insecure in our relationships and anxious about intimacy, we look to technology for ways to be in relationships and protect ourselves from them at the same time” (loc. 150). Turkle found that social media asks us to oversimplify ourselves and then, once we have done so, we feel the need to conform to the oversimplified picture we have created. With their lives now organized on digital display, adolescents may require a new kind of guidance and awareness as they navigate their changing social roles and transition to adulthood. They may need new kinds of practical advice as well.

Berson and Berson (2006) called for a better awareness of what teens are doing online so that we might protect them from creating digital identities that could hinder their future success. They referred to the collection of digital information about an individual as a “digital dossier” that when collected by someone else results in an “unauthorized digital biography” of the person. According to Berson and Berson (2006), teens are largely unaware that they are writing their own unauthorized digital biographies and are not, because of their age, completely able to grasp the possible ramifications of the identities they construct online. They suggested that people exercise more control over their personal information on the Internet and that we need to provide young people instruction in how they might manage their digital identities.

As an educator, I must argue that education can play a role in this phenomenon. Unfortunately, as of now, most teens are not getting much, if any instruction on how to manage their online lives (Berson & Berson, 2006; Greenfield, 2004), and teachers, parents, and policy-makers are largely ignoring the wealth of literacy practices that teens are developing as they use digital tools (Notley, 2009). While some teachers have incorporated digital literacies into their classrooms (Buckingham & Willett, 2006; Hagood, 2012; Hagood, Alvermann, & Heron-Hruby, 2010; Holbrook, 2011; King & O'Brian, 2005; Teng, 2012), others are reluctant to bring these

“new” digital tools into the learning environment (Chandler-Olcott & Lewis, 2010; Reiser, 2012). Teachers’ feelings about digital literacies are mixed and sometimes contradictory. A recent poll of Advanced Placement and National Writing Project teachers (Purcell, Buchanan, & Friedrich, 2013) showed that most (78%) of them felt that digital technologies foster creative expression, but 68% of them expressed concern about digital tools, saying that they make students more likely to take short cuts and not put effort into their writing. Teachers were quite divided on digital tools’ effects on grammar with 40% saying that digital tools make students *more* likely to use poor spelling and grammar while 38% said that digital tools make students *less* likely to do so (emphasis mine). Regardless of how educators feel about digital tools, though, students are using them. Bringing such tools, including social networking, into the open in school could benefit teachers and students (Notley, 2009). School would be more relevant to students if it were to recognize and value teens’ own literacy practices, including digitally-mediated social ones (Notley, 2009).

Clearly, there are varying ideas about what adolescents are doing online and what changes in human development, if any, are happening before our eyes. Research must continue to evolve along with cultural practices, including digital ones. The teen social world is drastically different from the worlds of their predecessors to whom they look for guidance. If we are to understand how communication, friendship and identity building are playing out in the lives of our teens, we must ask questions and develop rigorous studies to build new knowledge for parents and educators. The purpose of this study was to examine such questions for a mid-adolescent girl.

Theoretical Perspective

Before we denigrate (Bauerlein, 2008; Berson & Berson, 2006; Turkle, 2011) or elevate (boyd, 2007; Jacobs, 2008; Notley, 2009) youths' use of SNS, we must first understand how and why they use it and how it is affecting who they become. With that in mind, I grounded my work in what I believe to be true about the nature of human language, text, and self for a theoretical base. In particular, my study was informed by a socio-cultural view of language, text, and self; Figure 1 shows that both the creator of a SN message (self) and message itself (text) are mediated by the tools and practices (language) humans take up. In this section, I describe what is meant by language, text, and self through sociocultural lens and how these understandings enabled me to learn about a mid-adolescent through her social networking practices.

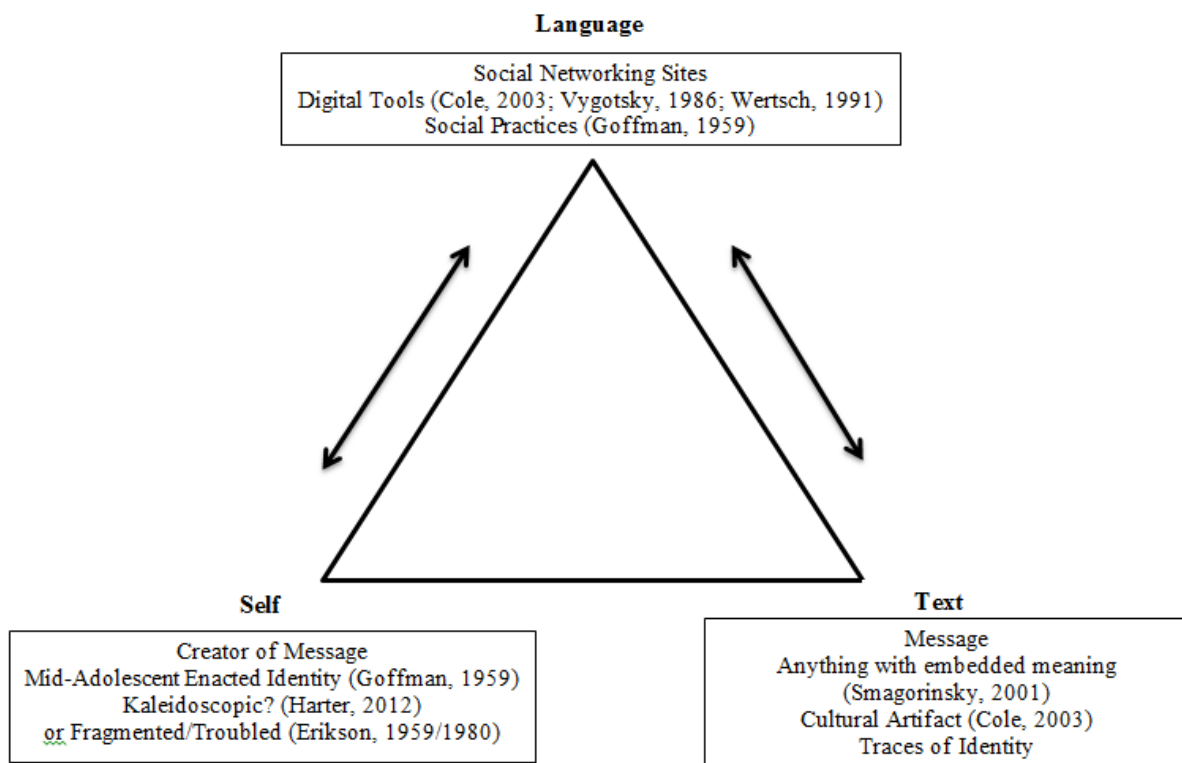


Figure 1. Theoretical Framework: Language-Text-Self Relationship

Language

Language is at the top of Figure 1, representing that the tools of interaction mediate the messages that are produced in language as well as the messengers themselves. Language and thought interact, changing how people think, therefore changing them (Vygotsky, 1986). For an understanding of how language and thought interact, I draw upon the work of Lev Vygotsky (1986). While his research took place long before digital tools were invented, his understanding of the interaction of human thought and language are still relevant. He understood that human communication, arising through social action, influences how people think. Applied to this study, this concept illuminates the reciprocal relationship between language and humans; as the new ways of communication are shaped by humans, they are also shaping humans themselves (Figure 1). Vygotsky (1986) argued that language plays a central role in human development, but rather than occurring in rigid, linear stages, speech and thought develop socially, as culturally-mediated action. According to Vygotsky (1986), all speech and thought has social origins, and the types of activity in which people engage come to bear upon their thought processes. It is not merely social interaction itself that influences development and ultimately ways of understanding the world; the types of actions undertaken as the social interactions take place are important as well. This understanding of the significance of means of interaction was important to my study because it allowed me to see digitally mediated interaction as mediating, not only a communicative act but also the development of its users. In other words, the tools and practices used on SNS mediate the messages produced there and the people who create them.

A related concept that is central to a socio-cultural understanding of language is the concept of mediated activity. Wertsch (1991) explained that human action “typically employs ‘mediational means’ such as tools and language and that these mediational means shape the

action in essential ways” (p. 12) , pointing out that the action and mediational means are so connected that when identifying who is performing an action, it would be appropriate to identify both the individual and the mediational means. In other words, language development is not a predetermined set of processes that will occur in the same way in every person. And the way that one communicates (the mediational means) is highly interconnected with the one who communicates and necessarily shapes the message. Therefore, digital means of communicating shape and are shaped by those who employ them. In this study, I understood social networking practices as mediational means that shaped and were shaped by acts of communication and the identity development of mid-adolescent who participated in them. By studying the practices of a mid-adolescent SNS user, I was able to learn about how those practices are shaping her identity.

Cole’s (2003) notion of artifacts was also helpful in establishing the significance of a teen’s social networking practices. Cole defines artifacts as mediational tools that are used by social groups and passed down and modified from one generation to the next giving them a clearly historical orientation even as their use is grounded in present activity. According to Cole’s (2003) definition, artifacts do not merely include physical objects, as the common use of the word might imply, but may also include the ideal (2003, p. 117); language, therefore, is an artifact of human culture. Culture, according to Cole (2003), includes “the entire pool of artifacts accumulated by the social group in the course of its historical experience” (p. 110) and language is one of these artifacts. This understanding allowed me to see digitally mediated messages produced by a mid-adolescent online social networker and the social practices they revealed as artifacts that also revealed traces of her identity (Figure 1).

In a socio-cultural view, drawn from a host of philosophers and researchers (Cole, 2003; Dewey, 1910, 1916; erickson, 2004; John-Steiner, 1997; Kutz, 1997; Smagorinsky, 2001;

Vygotsky, 1986; Wertsch, 1991), one cannot understate the influence of the mediational means on human activity. When viewed through a socio-cultural lens, it becomes clear that as a mediator of social activity, social networking shapes and is shaped by the young teens who are using it.

Text

From a socio-cultural perspective, a text might be thought of as anything intended to carry meaning (Cole, 2003; Smagorinsky, 2001; Wertsch, 1991) and as shown in Figure 1, mediated by the tools used to create it. A socio-cultural view of text allowed me to view a teen's online social networking practices as literacy practices worthy of educational research because those practices resulted in texts. Smagorinsky (2001; Smagorinsky & O'Donnell-Allen, 1998) embraces a broad view of what counts as language and represented thought. Smagorinsky (2001) conceives of signs and tools as both the product and producer of culture, similar to Cole's (2003) understanding of the historical collective of artifacts as culture itself. The signs that people take up, what they mean and how people employ them are mediated by and mediate the culture in which they are embedded. A sign is anything intended to mean something; a sign can be an image, word, letter, gesture, facial expression, and so forth. Furthermore, for Smagorinsky, a text is any configuration of signs, including all potential modalities like body language, print, image, and digital creations. Viewed as such, the residual traces of teen social networking practices and teens' articulated understandings of those practices are texts and can be studied as artifacts that can help us understand them.

Self

From a socio-cultural perspective (Harter, 2012), the *self* is not a predestined inner identity that one must find. Rather it is a conception that is formed and reformed throughout

one's life as a result of interactions with the environment. As an early writer about identity which he conceived as a social construction, Erikson (1959/1980) was dissatisfied with Freud's overly negative and deterministic view of what society does to a person. Rather, Erikson believed that identity and society influenced one another and that understanding the relationship between the individual and his/her environment at various life stages could help us develop a "healthy personality" (p. 53). He conceived of adolescence as a time during which young people experience the crisis of "identity versus identity diffusion" (p. 94), postulating that older children and teens are trying to reach a state in which one feels a certain continuity of self, an integration of previous stages in which "meaningful identification led to a successful alignment of the individual's *basic drives* with his *endowment* and his opportunities" (p. 94). One way that teens piece together their own identities is in choosing friends and aligning with or positioning themselves as different from others. Adolescents' social lives are crucial as they attempt to define themselves. According to Erikson (1959/1980), the formation of cliques and in-group/out-group mentality commonly associated with the teen years is a psychological defense against identity diffusion. This notion was important to my study because, in a digitally mediated world, teens use SNS to form these groups and to define themselves.

Whereas Erikson viewed adolescence as the stage occurring with the onset of puberty through adulthood, other scholars have elaborated on his theories subdividing adolescence and the conflicts experienced in the teen years (Harter, 2012; Kroger, 2006). Harter (2012) sees the self as cognitively and socially formed, taking a psychosocial view. While believing that there are certain continuous, cognitive stages that come to bear upon one another, like Erikson, Harter does not see these stages as deterministic lock-step eras through which everyone will pass in the same manner. Rather, she adopts a socio-cultural view that recognizes how interactions with

others and cultural norms/values are as responsible for shaping development of the self as are the cognitive factors. Harter (2012) builds on some of Erikson's (1959/1980) ideas and, as a result of her observations, subdivides adolescence into three stages through which Western adolescents are likely to pass.

Harter (2012) defines early adolescence (often occurring between the age 11-13) as a stage in which the self becomes more differentiated; the ability to think abstractly allows the early adolescent to integrate self traits into higher order concepts. For example, someone can identify that he is smart because he can solve problems, does well on tests, and reads books identified for older children. However, early adolescents compartmentalize these traits and are not as able as mid- and late- adolescents to notice and therefore reflect on abstractions that are seemingly conflicting (hard worker at school, but lazy at home). This inability may protect the young adolescent from distress over such contradictions. Early adolescents are very preoccupied with what other people think, including peers (Erikson, 1959/1980; Harter, 2012; Kroger, 2006). Social comparison, which increases in school and other settings at this age, amplifies this concern. Today, with much of this social comparison taking place online, young teens have permanent representations of themselves and others to compare and contrast infinitum.

Middle adolescence (usually age 14-16), according to Harter (2012), brings with it the ability to recognize conflicting abstractions about the self, and this causes a great deal of uncertainty and stress. Differences in self-expression and feelings are common across different contexts; middle adolescents are able to recognize them but are unable to resolve them so they become very concerned with discerning which self is the true self. The result is what Harter calls the "kaleidoscopic self" (p. 96). Youth in this stage may mirror what they believe others see in them and will also project their own weaknesses and self-doubts onto others. Concerns about

what others' think often permeate their daily routines. All of these issues can cause self-esteem to suffer during this time. This understanding allowed me to think through how a 14 year old participant presented herself online and whether these digitally mediated constructions-of-self reinforced or helped to resolve such conflicts.

In this study, I focused on a young girl in Harter's mid-adolescent stage. Harter's notion of the mid-adolescent kaleidoscopic self provided a framework through which to view the participant's constructions of self in social networking spaces. Investigating what an adolescent was thinking about as she decided what to post online can give me an inside view of some of the pieces that make up a teen's kaleidoscopic self and helped me see how a kaleidoscopic self looks in digital spaces.

Whereas his work did not apply specifically to adolescents, Goffman's (1959) theory of identity as performance seems salient to some aspects of teen behavior and also provided a helpful lens through which to view teen digital practices. For Goffman, social interactions involve a series of presentations in which people attempt, either consciously or subconsciously to influence the impression they are making on others. Any performance must necessarily take place in a setting Goffman terms a "front" which is "the expressive equipment of a standard kind intentionally or unwittingly employed by the individual during his performance" (p. 32). Though Goffman must have assumed interactions would take place face-to-face, the notions of performance and front is useful in modern disembodied settings as well. In *Identity in Cyberspace*, Miller and Arnold (2009) used Goffman's (1959) construct of identity to consider how it might play out in online spaces suggesting that time spent offline can be viewed as back regions for the online enactment of self. For example, the time spent writing and revising a text message before hitting send would be back region for the actual presentation (sending the

message). In doing so, they found that people were presenting their hoped-for possible selves rather than their “real” selves.

Goffman also made the point that “a given social front tends to become institutionalized in terms of the abstract stereotyped expectations to which it gives rise, and tends to take on a meaning and stability apart from the specific tasks which happen at the time to be performed in its name” becoming “a collective representation and a fact in its own right” (p. 37). Could this be true of digital “fronts” as well? If so, what roles do adolescents adopt as they “perform” identity in those fronts? Goffman’s understanding of identity enactment helped me to think about how an adolescent worked to present particular selves for particular audiences as she constructed her identity online. Figure 1 shows how the self might be viewed as mediating and being mediated by the digital tools (social practices and tools) used when creating messages (texts) in social networking spaces.

From these socio-cultural perspectives, there were several key understandings that were useful as I researched a teen’s digital social worlds. They were:

- Language and thought are culturally derived (Vygotsky, 1986) ; the tools that mediate human activity shape and are shaped by the humans who employ them (Cole, 2003; Wertsch, 1991).
- Language is a complex system of signs that are not limited to words and configurations of words; texts therefore are not limited to the printed word but include any configuration of signs (Smagorinsky, 2001).
- The conception of self is cognitively and culturally derived and is always in flux (Erikson, 1959/1980; Harter, 2012); during mid-adolescence, when abstractions of the

self are detected, but not well-integrated, a kaleidoscopic sense of self often emerges (Harter, 2012); and the self is often enacted through social performance (Goffman, 1959). If one accepts that language, thought, and identity (sense of self) are all culturally derived and are mediated by tools, including SNS (Figure 1), then to understand identity construction requires a deep examination of the reciprocal relationships among thought, identity, tools, and social practices. This understanding suggests a need to study the literacy practices of students as a means to gain insight into how they think; they also inform the idea that the signs people exchange and the tools with which they exchange them are meaningful and reveal something about the users. Therefore, students' online practices are salient signifiers of their growing thought processes and identity constructions.

Overview of Study

The purpose of this study was to examine a mid-adolescent's use of social networking and what this use might reveal about her identity construction. The following questions guided my study:

- What are a mid-adolescent's thoughts as she decides what to post on social networking sites to represent herself?
- What do the tools and social practices she uses reveal about her online identity construction?
- What kinds of identities does she present on social networking sites?

The participant, who is a member of my family, was a 14 year old girl who frequently represented herself and communicated with others on social networking sites. This was both a convenience and typical single-case study sample (Merriam, 2009). Whereas it was convenient that I had access to this participant, I chose her because she was a typical example of the

phenomenon I was studying. While one person may not be representative of a population, in the statistical sense, because of my access to her and her avid use of social networking, I was able to learn about her online self-representation through a process of in-depth data collection and analysis. As Denzin and Lincoln (2005) point out, what can be learned from a certain case may be more important than representativeness.

Data sources included semi-structured interviews conducted in person; verbal think-aloud protocols; the participant's posts to social networking sites; text messaging and email interaction between the participant and the researcher throughout the study; and a reflective journal kept by the researcher. Throughout the data collection and analysis, I kept the participant informed about my thinking to allow her to clarify my ideas and help co-construct meaning about her identity construction in online spaces. I analyzed the data by combining LeCompte's (2000) suggestions for data analysis with Johnny Saldaña's (2009) coding suggestions. To assist me with visual data from the participant's online posts, I drew upon Albers' (2013) Visual Discourse Analysis (VDA).

Definitions

Following is a list of terms I will use throughout this report and how I understand each one:

- Identity - as informed by several thinkers, a construct of the self that can be formed in various ways and develop in loose stages (Harter, 2012; Kroger, 2006), which will vary depending on one's social environment and can change over time and be purposefully presented (Goffman, 1959) to suit one's purposes
- Kaleidoscopic self (Harter, 2012) – a fragmented sense of self that may occur during mid-adolescence, possibly causing a great deal of uncertainty and stress as one tries to discern what is the true self.

- Mid-adolescent – as understood by Harter (2012), a stage through which many Western teens pass in which they recognize their own contrasting traits and struggle (perhaps) to integrate these contrasting ideas (smart v. forgetful, for example) into a cohesive sense of self. Youth in this stage will mirror what they believe others see in them and will also project their own weaknesses and self-doubts onto other
- Social Networking Site (SNS) – a broad-based term for any online site on which people connect with, communicate with, and create content for others (for example, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter)

As teens have shaped the very nature of their own development through their prolific use of digital media, researchers have been asking questions about this relatively new phenomenon. In the next chapter, I will review the research that speaks specifically to adolescent identity enactment in online social networking spaces.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

I pointed out in the previous chapter that 80% of teens online use social networking sites (SNS) daily; they use SNS more than any other online activity (Lenhart, 2012). Jenkins (2006) describes today's world as a participatory culture, which he defines as "culture in which fans and other consumers are invited to actively participate in the creation and circulation of new content" (p. 331). Rather than passively receiving media messages as in past decades, in the digital world, adolescents have the opportunity to take an active role in producing media. As young people participate in their online worlds, they are not just producing media, but they are creating themselves (boyd, 2007; Davies & Merchant, 2009; Livingstone, 2008). In this chapter, I will present a growing body of literature that investigates how human identity plays out in online spaces (e.g., Reich, 2010; Zhao, 2008; Alvermann et al., 2012; Clarke, 2009; Turkle, 2011); this review will reveal that the mid-adolescent online social networker remains largely unaddressed and that methodologies have not captured mid-adolescents' in-the-moment thinking as they create and post content online.

First, I will summarize how seminal research has characterized identity construction while noting the implications these studies may have for identity construction in online spaces as well as the gaps these studies have when applied in those spaces. Then, I will review recent research about the digital practices of teens while addressing what this growing body of literature suggests about the nature of identity construction in online spaces and what it fails to address.

Classic Views of Identity

In the previous chapter, I explained that classic psychoanalytic and human development theorist Erik Erikson (1959/1980) believed that a "healthy personality" (p. 53) is one in which

some sense of a unified self develops as a person passes through various stages. He conceived of these stages as inner conflicts that are, either resolved, resulting in a step toward a healthy personality, or not resolved, resulting in any number of psychosocial problems. Adolescents, according to Erikson (1959/1980) experience “identity versus identity diffusion” (p. 94), a stage in which they struggle with wanting to know who they really are. Colloquially, we might say that a young person is “finding him/herself”. Social forces come to bear upon this struggle as adolescents can become very concerned with how members of the peer group view them (Erikson, 1959/1980; Harter, 2012).

Contemporary psychology researcher Harter (2012), like Erikson, recognizes the social forces at play in construction of the self. She takes a psychosocial view which sees the self as being cognitively and socially formed; this view holds that there are certain continuous, cognitive stages that come to bear upon one another, but rather than being deterministic lock-step eras through which everyone will pass in the same manner, they are stages in which interactions with others and cultural norms/values are responsible for shaping the development of the self and how one emerges from each stage. Both Erikson (1959/1980) and Harter (2012) have argued that humans need the sense of an authentic self and suggest that failure to accomplish certain tasks in each developmental stage can result in obstacles to that goal. For example, adolescents recognize and become concerned with what Harter (2012) calls “false-self behavior...[agonizing] over which [is] their true self, the real me” (p. 114). If adolescents are not able to eventually reconcile their multiple selves into a perceived unified whole, they could experience any number of pitfalls including low self-esteem; depression; inability to forge meaningful relationships; narcissism, or antisocial behavior.

Harter (2012) and Erikson (1950/1980) both claim that adult behavior is important to an adolescent's development of a healthy self. Adults can create problems by giving unwarranted praise (Erikson, 1959/1980) and by being overly concerned with inflating adolescents' self-esteem (Harter 2012). Additionally, the inability to live up to unrealistic goals of adults and those perceived by society at large can be damaging to the teen's personality development. Harter (2012) specifically points to the larger unrealistic goals people often set for themselves based on media images, which is a bigger concern in the 21st century than it was when Erikson (1959/1980) developed his theory (Dill, 2009). Dill's (2009) research about the impact of media on children's development supports Harter's (2012) claims, showing how the proliferation of media has resulted in a reduction of time spent socializing with others and is linked to a host of developmental issues including increased self-consciousness and reduced feeling of self-worth. I wondered how this developmental concern with what others think and the danger of unrealistic goals is impacted by the digital revolution and the vast amount of time adolescents spend in online social spaces. While Erikson could not have conceived of the future of identity construction in online spaces, Harter (2012) has yet to address how her theories are impacted by adolescents' immersion in digital spaces.

One way that Harter (2012) has expanded on Erikson's (1959/1980) theory has been to develop a more detailed and nuanced explanation of how a construction of self occurs and the various concerns associated with identity development. One such expansion is a subdivision of the stages of identity construction; whereas Erikson's (1959/1980) "identity versus identity diffusion" encompassed a time roughly associated with puberty to adulthood, Harter (2012) describes three phases of adolescence: early, middle, and late. Early adolescence, roughly ages 11-13, is a stage in which the self becomes more differentiated, and new cognitive abilities allow

him to apply abstract descriptions to himself. For example, someone can identify that he is smart because he can solve problems, does well on tests, and reads books identified for older children. However, early adolescents compartmentalize these traits and do not often notice and/or reflect on abstractions that are seemingly conflicting (hard worker at school, but lazy at home). This inability to recognize such contradictions may protect the young adolescent from distress (Harter, 2012).

Middle adolescence (ages 14-16), which is the stage of interest in my study, brings with it the ability to recognize conflicting abstractions about the self, and this may cause a great deal of uncertainty and stress (Harter, 2012). Differences in self-expression and feelings are common across different contexts; middle adolescents are able to recognize them but unable to resolve them so they become very concerned with discerning which self is the true self. The result is what Harter calls the “kaleidoscopic self” (p. 96) or what Erikson (1950/1980) would have called “identity diffusion”. Youth in this stage will mirror what they believe others see in them and will also project their own weaknesses and self-doubts onto others (Harter, 2012). Concerns about what others think permeate their daily routines, and all of these issues can cause a mid-adolescent’s self-esteem to suffer as s/he attempts to develop a sense of a unified (Erikson, 1959/1980) or a true (Harter, 2012) self. Late adolescence (ages 17-19) is marked by self-representations that “reflect personal beliefs, values, and moral standards that have become the internalized standards of others...directly constructed from their own experiences...and a greater sense of agency” (p. 119). Having internalized these representations, late adolescents do not attribute their traits and values to parents or other socially forming factors from whence they most likely originated. Teens in this stage, unlike those in mid-adolescence, are able to integrate seemingly contrasting abstractions about the self into a whole picture of one who is able to adapt

across different contexts. Self-esteem generally improves in late adolescence as young people are better able to discount the importance of their weaknesses while noting their strengths instead. Social factors that may help are greater levels of autonomy and choice typically afforded older teens. The peer group is still important, but in this stage many young people find their niche and become less concerned with what everyone else thinks. It is important to find out just how these developmental issues contemporary teens' online practices are shaping one another; as such, this study investigated if a mid-adolescent girl's online identity reflected a kaleidoscopic or diffused sense of self and what that self was like.

The social nature of online digital practices was of particular importance to this study. Adolescents are very concerned with what others think of them, particularly the peer group. Harter (2012) claimed that adolescents' concern with what others think leads to "the first serious effort at impression management" (p. 311). Impression management is a construct of identity that Goffman (1959) wrote about in elaborate detail, arguing that humans perform identity, and as such, must constantly monitor how others perceive them, adjusting their behavior to achieve the desired impression. Whereas his work did not apply specifically to adolescents, Goffman's (1959) theory of identity as performance is salient to some aspects of teen behavior. While Harter (2012) did not conceive of self as being mainly enacted on a stage, as did Goffman (1959), they both note that identity construction includes social interaction in which people attempt, either consciously or subconsciously to influence the impression they are making on others, and according to Harter (2012), this effort begins with adolescence.

As people align themselves with one group, they are also positioning themselves as different from others; this can create a clique-type mentality that popular culture often associates with teenagers (Erikson, 1959/1980; Harter, 2012). Erikson (1959/1980) wrote about cliques

and the in-group/out-group mentality commonly associated with the teen years as a psychological defense against identity diffusion. While not condoning the intolerance to those who are not part of a particular in-group that so many adolescents display, Erikson called for understanding on the part of adults, writing

... It is difficult to be tolerant if deep down you are not quite sure if you are a man (or a woman), that you will ever grow together again and be attractive, that you will be able to master your drives, that you really know who you are, that you know who you want to be, that you know what you look like to others, and that you will know how to make the right decisions without, once for all, committing yourself to the wrong friend, sexual partner, leader, career (p. 98).

Now that such adolescent intolerances are so often quite public (Barnett, 2009; Berson & Berson, 2006), adult reaction to them may be even more important. While understanding of this intolerance that young people can exhibit may be in order (to a degree) as Erikson (1959/1980) suggested, concern for those who are the brunt of intolerance may be heightened in light of the speed and reach that digital tools afford today's young people.

Were Goffman (1959) still alive, he might conceive of digital spaces as new kinds of stages on which people perform, and though he could not have imagined it, his dramaturgical theory was a useful lens through which to consider a mid-adolescent's digital practices. Adolescents' social lives are crucial as they attempt to define themselves (Erikson, 1959/1980; Harter, 2012), and contemporary adolescents' social lives are, at least partly, taking place online. According to Goffman (1959), any performance (social interaction) must necessarily take place in a setting which he terms a "front" or "the expressive equipment of a standard kind intentionally or unwittingly employed by the individual during his performance" (p. 32). As I

suggested in the first chapter, Goffman's (1959) constructs of performance and front are useful in modern disembodied settings, like social networking sites. In Miller and Aronold's (2009) study of college students' Facebook posts, they found that the online social networking afforded their participants time in the back regions (Goffman, 1959) to construct their performances and allowed them to present polished versions of themselves that approximated what they believed they could be. Goffman (1959) also suggested that social fronts take on meanings of their own, giving rise to particular behaviors. In the current study, I attempted to discover some of the ways digital practices among adolescents have become institutionalized and what roles a mid-adolescent adopts as she prepared and presented her social networking posts and her resulting presentations of self.

While Goffman's (1959) work provides an interesting frame for attempting to understand identity enactment in digital spaces, a framework that takes into account the specific developmental and social issues of the adolescent is also needed to construct knowledge more salient to those interested in adolescent identity as it plays out in digital spaces.

Erikson's (1959/1980) view that teens are experiencing a crisis which necessitates their establishing autonomy from parents as they work desperately for peer approval is a lens through which social networking, text messaging, and other digital practices can be understood, but, viewed in isolation from more contemporary theory, it lacks the complexity needed to understand the nuanced developmental differences among young people.

It is also important to note that some researchers (Sarigianides, Lewis & Petrone, 2015) have problematized the construct of adolescence arguing that dominant perspectives of youth not only unfairly imply that young people will have troubled times as teens, but that these perspectives also understand young people "as 'becoming' and valued for their promise and

potential, yet rarely for who they are now” (p. 14). While the trouble that Harter (2012) and Erikson (1950/1980) have noted may not be inevitable for everyone and may occur, in part because adolescents are acting out the expectations of society (Sarigianides, Lewis & Petrone, 2015), the truth remains that some patterns of behavior seem to hold true for teens and young people. In this study, I considered Trinkka’s identity in terms of Harter’s (2012) construct of mid-adolescence and the possibility of a kaleidoscopic self. I also stayed mindful of Trinkka as a human right now, not just one who is “becoming,” and I remained open to whatever the data would show me about her online identity.

Though she did not directly address the implications of the Internet on the construction of self, Harter’s (2012) stages provide a more appropriate backdrop for research into teens’ social practices online; at least, her explanations of early and mid-adolescence raise questions about teens’ use of digital media. For example, among girls, the age group (14-17) that includes the most frequent text messengers, averaging 100 messages a day (Lenhart, Ling, Campbell, & Purcell, 2010) coincides with mid-adolescence. This is not just a coincidence; it insinuates something important about mid-adolescent girls’ development. Mid-adolescents’ frequent use of digital tools raises questions about the nature of these digital practices and what roles might they play in identity formation. In this study, I attempted to address some of these unanswered questions.

Identity in Online Spaces

A growing body of research speaks to how identity unfolds in digital spaces (Alvermann et al., 2012; boyd, 2007; Clarke, 2009; Davis & Gardner, 2013; Livingstone, 2008; Reich, 2010; Turkle, 2011). Specifically, it has demonstrated ways that one’s personality can mediate how social networking is used (Chan, 2011; Mehdizadeh, 2010; Ong et al., 2010); how the various

features of social networking mediate ways in which people use it (Reich, 2010; Schwämmlein & Wodzicki, 2012; Zhao et al., 2008); online and offline worlds of users interact in complex ways (Alvermann et al., 2012; Barnett, 2009; boyd, 2007; Clarke, 2009; Davies & Merchant, 2009; Greenfield & Yan, 2006; Greenfield et al., 2006; Livingstone, 2008; Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008); and that there may be a dark side to digital spaces as online identity construction brings a particular set of concerns we have yet to fully understand (Barnett, 2009; Bauerlein, 2008; Berson & Berson, 2006; Carr, 2010; Davis & Gardner, 2013; Turkle, 1995, 2011). The studies cited above that contribute to these four overarching themes have added to the conversation around online identity construction; however, none of them attended directly to the nature of mid-adolescent identity construction in digital spaces in ways that explicitly and richly speak to what a mid-adolescent is thinking when she creates content on social networking sites; what kinds of practices she uses when she constructs identity online; and what her online identity looks like. Next I will summarize the current research around the four themes I have identified, explaining what they have contributed in regard to these themes as well as a gap they leave which I have attempted to address in the current study.

Personality Mediates the Use of Social Networking

Social networking sites have developed, in part as a way for users to present themselves. For example, the profile page on Facebook, offers users an opportunity to enter information about their likes and dislikes, favorite songs and movies, political leaning, sexual orientation and other self-defining attributes. From a Goffmanian perspective (1959), a social networking site is a virtual stage upon which to present one's self in whatever way s/he wishes others to see it. Some researchers have studied activity on social networking sites with the perspective that users' personalities mediate their use of SNS (Chan, 2011; Mehdizadeh, 2010; Ong et al., 2010). These

studies tend to look at SNS as a place for self-presentation, especially among users with narcissistic tendencies (Mehdizadeh, 2010; Ong et al., 2010).

For example, Ong and her colleagues (2010) and Mehdizadeh (2010) both conducted correlative studies in which they found that narcissism, as measured on participant questionnaires, predicted higher self-ratings of pictures (Ong, 2010); higher numbers of status updates (Ong, 2010); and higher numbers of self-promoting content (Mehdizadeh, 2010) on Facebook. These findings make sense from both a Goffmanian (1959) and Eriksonian (1959/1980) perspectives, but these researchers did not consider more recent views of identity development (Harter, 2012). These studies do speak to impression management (Goffman, 1959) as participants rated as narcissistic were managing a seemingly inflated impression of themselves online. These findings also make sense from Erikson's (1959/1980) perspective that individuals experience various crises as they attempt to arrive at an integrated unified sense of self and from Harter's (2012) understanding that humans need the perception of an inner, true self. According to both Erikson (1959/1980) and Harter (2012), narcissism in older adolescents and adults may signal that an earlier crisis or developmental milestone has not been resolved. Neither of the studies in this section, however, addresses the particular issues that development at particular ages might entail or consider that the very nature of human identity is always in flux as a sociocultural or even a psychosocial (Harter, 2012) perspective suggests.

Ong and her colleagues (2010), whose participants ranged in age from 12-18, concluded that adolescents with higher narcissism levels “appear to self-generate content on SNS to self-regulate their inflated self-views” (p. 184). However, both Erikson (1959/1980) and neo-Eriksonian (Harter, 2011) perspectives imply that younger adolescents are typically overly concerned with others' perceptions of them, leading them to behave in narcissistic ways that

often abate in later adolescence. While the continual posting for audiences among adolescents may seem narcissistic, according to Harter (2011), children and adolescents construct their identities largely as a result of how others see them. From this perspective, performances, including those on social networking sites can be viewed as a means of soliciting feedback in a necessary step toward the formation of an integrated self-concept. More research is needed to identify what types seemingly narcissistic behavior may be normative at various stages of development.

Mehizadeh's (2010) participants were all college students, but her study did not address the sociocultural implications of identity development and how today's college students may be inherently different than those from previous eras. Additionally, she positioned her participants as a commodity in today's capitalistic culture. She concluded that her study has "implications in marketing and advertisements in online communities. For example, it can be used to sell products that enhance physical attractiveness, a feature that is desired by narcissists..." (p. 363). While this may be a viable use for her study, research that considers the needs and perspectives of the participants rather than using them to serve someone else's desire for capital is also needed. My study considered the perspective of the participant in an effort to better understand her and perhaps others like her.

Narcissism is not the only trait that researchers have found to influence online behavior. Chan (2011) found that shyness and sociability, to some degree, were associated with the synchronicity of online communication. The results showed a positive correlation between shyness and use of asynchronous CMC, but it also showed a positive correlation between shyness and instant messaging (though not for online chat). Similarly, sociability was a predictor of use of email, social networking sites, and instant messaging but not for online chat. Chan

concluded that shyness and sociability are distinct traits that mediate the use of CMC in distinct ways, calling for research that examines the patterns of use among people with high levels of shyness or sociability without first operationalizing the various CMC modes as this study did.

While it is interesting that individuals who report narcissistic views on narcissism questionnaires would manifest narcissistic traits on a social networking sites, and that shy or sociable people will use CMC in distinct ways, it is not particularly surprising. These studies leave me wondering about the reciprocal nature of influence in terms of the tools people use and the people themselves. For example, some, like Keen (2011) have charged that the unprecedented ability to put oneself on public display makes people more narcissistic. From my theoretical perspective, people shape and are shaped by their use of tools (Cole, 2003), including digital ones. These studies do not address the interactive nature of human culture and tool use (Cole, 2003; Vygotsky, 1986; Wertsch, 1991) and they also only used participants in the young adult age group. The studies cited in this section view personality traits as fixed attributes that play out in online settings. They raise questions about the reciprocal nature of influence between tool and user, and they do not generalize to other age groups, like mid-adolescents. The next section addresses how factors external to the users themselves shape online identity presentation.

The Nature of Online Spaces Mediates Online Presentation

Like the studies summarized in the previous section, the research in this section speaks to self-presentation online (Reich, 2010; Schwämmlein & Wodzicki, 2012; Zhao et al., 2008). However, instead of viewing one's personality as a mediating factor in how one uses online social networking, the studies in this section investigate the ways various types of online spaces mediate the ways their inhabitants present themselves there. The studies in this section show how external factors in online environments, shape users and their identities (Reich, 2010;

Schwämmlein & Wodzicki, 2012; Zhao et al., 2008). For example, the description of the purpose of the site can affect how users interact (Schwämmlein & Wodzicki, 2012), and the digital affordances of online social networking seem to elicit a presentation of self that is more visual than verbal (Zhao et al., 2008). The studies in this section advance the conversation of identity online while still leaving a gap in terms of mid-adolescence and also in terms of a more nuanced understanding of how identity construction occurs online.

In three separate studies, Reich (2010); Schwämmlein and Wodzicki (2012); and Zhao and his colleagues (2008) all found that certain types of online environments elicited certain types of online behaviors. Reich (2010) and Schwämmlein and Wodzicki (2012) were particularly interested in the concept of community online. Reich (2010) investigated whether or not so-called online communities shared the characteristics of communities in the psychological sense; psychological communities, according to Reich (2010) must fulfill four psychological needs: membership, influence, fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection. After reviewing interview transcripts of focus groups including 394 high school and college students, she found little evidence that her participants' use of SNS was representative of the psychological definition of community, concluding that teens' uses of SNS "support networked individualism rather than reflect a sense of community" (p. 703). Reich's study shows how community online may be different than community offline, but it does not address the idea that the very concept of community, like any concept, is in flux and will change as human activity changes (Cole, 2003; Wertsch, 1991). Whereas Reich (2010) concluded that online communities are not really communities at all, Schwämmlein and Wodzicki (2012) identified different types of online communities and found that the type of online community seems to influence users' activity there.

To investigate how users might present themselves differently in different types of online communities, Schwämmlein and Wodzicki (2012) set up two cooking websites, one that was presented as a way to make friends and foster relationships with other people who cook, and another that was presented as a means to share recipes resulting in a large recipe database. Participants were all in their 20s or 30s and were unaware of the purpose of the study or which type of community their assigned site was meant to emulate. They found that participants assigned to the common-bond community (one to make like-minded friends) were more likely to share personal (off-topic) information in their profiles than those assigned to the common-identity community (one to create a database). Additionally, participants assigned to the common bond community were more likely to choose contact goals (interpersonal) than those assigned to the common identity community, but participants' self-set goals (set before being assigned to one of the two websites) were dominant over the type of community in terms of the type of information shared on the profile. The researchers concluded that the type of community impacted users' self-presentation and goals, but that self-set goals are also important factors in self-presentation (Schwämmlein & Wodzicki, 2012). This study shows how different types of communities are developing online and shaping behavior there, but it does not address the importance of identity in shaping (and being shaped by) online activity (Cole, 2003; Wertsch, 1991). An understanding of identity can inform the investigation of online presentation in new ways.

Both Reich's (2010) and Schwämmlein and Wodzicki's (2012) studies suggest that more research is needed to understand online networks and how they support (or do not support) the development of a strong sense of self the way that psychological communities do (Erikson, 1959/1980; Harter, 2012) and how/why one chooses to present oneself in various online spaces.

Both studies incorporated a wide age range of participants, making it impossible to draw any conclusions about the influence of the participants' stage in identity development on their ways of participating online.

Zhao, Grasmuck, and Martin (2008), on the contrary, studied the Facebook profiles of 63 college students in the Northeastern United States, seeking to understand how the participants were constructing their identity in a nonymous (known) online environment. They identified three main themes implicit in the users' self-presentation: popularity, well-roundedness; and thoughtfulness (in the sense of being deep thinkers). They concluded that the participants were presenting "hoped-for possible selves", presenting "highly socially desirable identities individuals aspire to have offline but have not yet been able to embody for one reason or another" (Zhao et al., 2008, p. 1830). They also noted that the Facebook environment fostered more implicit than explicit self-presentation; for example, participants were more likely to represent their identities through pictures and identification with particular aspects of pop culture than to explicitly describe themselves. This study has unexplored implications for how we think about the concept of identity.

Through a dramaturgical (Goffman, 1959) lens, one might say that the participants were managing their impressions of others in the front (setting) of the Facebook profile, but how might the virtual space of Facebook change the idea of a front and the manner in which impressions can be managed? From an Eriksonian (1959/1980) lens, many of the participants in this study should have reached a phase in which they are less concerned about what others think; have a (relative to earlier stages) strong self-esteem; and are on the way to a reasonably integrated sense of self. If this is true, then it seems that their online images would be more realistic. Whereas Erikson (1959/1980) might have said these individuals were exhibiting signs

of an unresolved identity versus identity diffusion crisis, Harter (2012), in her more nuanced understanding of contemporary identity construction would say that these participants are in the stage of “emerging adulthood” and are still working integrating their selves into a perceived unified whole. She also addresses the strong link between perceived physical appearance and self-esteem. Since most of the participants in this study (Zhao et al., 2008) were using implicit (mostly photographs) content to represent themselves, this particular research might speak more to the link between physical appearance and self-esteem than to identity construction of a particular age group. Regardless, it raises questions about classic identity theory; what, from it is relevant in digital spaces; and what might not be relevant.

The studies in this section all focused largely on a one-way directionality of influence - how particular features of the digital environment influenced online behavior. Cole (2003) believes that one’s environment or culture and one’s thought processes shape one another. These studies isolate the effect of a particular medium on certain activity but fail to address the complexity of the relationship between the environment (community, in their cases) and the individual. They also seem to view the concepts of community and identity in a fixed sense without addressing how online environments are changing not only behavior but the very nature of who we are; these studies call for new understandings of how we conceptualize constructs like community and identity. Additionally, however important the space and the artifacts (technologies) might be in influencing users, the users themselves are key agents in how they employ digital tools to present themselves (Alvermann et al., 2012; boyd, 2007; Clarke, 2009; Livingstone, 2008). The studies in this section have not addressed this complex interaction, nor do they address the digitally active mid-adolescents who were of interest to my study. In the next section, I will review studies that focus, in particular on online identity construction of mid-

or late- adolescents (Harter, 2012) and that generally position adolescent users of online spaces as active purposeful agents in their identity construction.

Online and Offline Worlds Interact in Complex Ways

The previous two sections showed how users' personality traits can predict their activity in online spaces and how the spaces themselves can influence how users present their identities. These are useful concepts in helping us understand the nature of online social interaction. However, none of these previous studies (Chan, 2011; Mehdizadeh, 2010; Ong et al., 2010; Reich, 2010; Schwämmlein & Wodzicki, 2012; Zhao et al., 2008) positioned teens at the center or considered their perspectives. Studies that center on the interactions among mediating factors rather than isolating pre-determined traits or focusing on the technology itself can deepen our understanding on how teens are using digital tools. The studies in this section attend better to the complexity of the interaction of online and offline worlds while still leaving important questions about mid-adolescents unanswered.

The qualitative research in this section places teens and their online practices at the center of their investigations, and collectively, they point to teens' online practices as largely an identity constructing activity (Alvermann et al., 2012; Barnett, 2009; boyd, 2007; Clarke, 2009; Davies & Merchant, 2009; Subrahmanyam et al., 2006). The themes of these studies connect and overlap in various ways, and there are a number of ways they could be organized. Here I present three major themes in the teen-centered research of their online identity construction: Extending Offline Worlds; Teens Use Digital Tools to Mediate Identity; and the Darker Side of Digital. Throughout these themes, varying constructs of online identity are interwoven as well as the notion of digital affordances as tools that shape and are shaped by their users.

Extending offline worlds. Qualitative research is showing, in line with Jenkins' (2006) notion of convergence, that teen's online and offline worlds overlap and that, seemingly, in most cases, online identities are informed by offline identities (Alvermann et al., 2012; boyd, 2007; Clarke, 2009; Davis, 2012; Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008; Subrahmanyam et al., 2004). The studies in this section all used qualitative methods to study teens' activity and identity presentation in online spaces, ultimately viewing teen participation in online social networking spaces as an enhancement of their offline worlds rather than a negative force like others fear (Bauerlein, 2008; Berson & Berson, 2006; Turkle, 2011).

boyd (2007), Clarke (2009), Davis (2012), and Subrahmanyam and Greenfield (2008) all cited connecting with friends as their teen participants' primary use of SNS. Clarke (2009) was particularly upbeat about her participants' use of SNS, pointing out that they were able to maintain friendships that would have dissolved in the pre-digital age because of geographical limitations. boyd (2007) stated that "[w]hile many adults find value in socializing with strangers, teenagers are more focused on socializing with people they knew personally and celebrities that they adore" (p. 5). She did point out, however, that offline worlds are not merely replicated online; online spaces open up the offline worlds of teens for integration of new and varied networks of "friends" and new cultural content. This recognition validates a sociocultural perspective by recognizing the fluctuating nature of concepts. The word, friend, has taken on multiple meanings in the digital age.

Similarly, the concept of identity development is shifting. As teens extend themselves into online spaces, they shape their identities in new ways. boyd (2007) and Clarke (2009) noticed that the participants in their studies presented parts of themselves that they felt would be seen positively by others. Clarke's (2009) participants exaggerated their positive characteristics,

while Clarke (2009) and Subrahmanyam and Greenfield (2008) noted that, even though teens were not usually assuming outright false identities, they would often pretend to be older.

Alvermann and her colleagues (2012) also found evidence of teens extending their offline selves online in varying ways. They investigated the online social networking practices of five high school students, finding that the students' online and offline social networks "worked reciprocally" (189). Dana, who was an avid shopper offline, used digital tools to research purchases, finding the best deals before she would buy. As a musician, Brad used Internet tools and networking to advance his skills. Godspeed, a devout Christian, used the Internet to look for images that represented his beliefs.

Like the previous researchers (boyd, 2007; Clarke, 2009; Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008), Alvermann, et al. (2012) also noted that teens' online worlds are not a replica of their offline ones. Their participants used multiple sites for multiple identities. For example, Brad maintained one site where he presented himself as a musician for potentially professional purposes, one to which his girlfriend had access, and another where he experimented with music mixing with other like-minded music mixers. These different spaces gave Brad opportunities for varying types of social action with different purposes. According to Alvermann and her colleagues (2012), these affordances went beyond those of offline worlds, giving the students the opportunity to "carve out identities for themselves that might otherwise have gone untapped and unnoticed" (p. 189). This stance positions teens as active participants in their own identity construction, which is a shift from developmental perspectives, even sociocultural ones (Erikson, 1959/1980; Harter, 2012), which seem to position teens more as passively being shaped by rather than shaping their own identities. Clarke (2009) noted this as well, stating that "...the digital world gives young adolescents a sense of agency and encourages them to take responsibility for

their own development” (p. 22). Though I used a sociocultural developmental perspective of identity for my study, like these researchers, I remained mindful that these concepts are always shifting as human culture and activity is forever changing (Cole, 2003; Wertsch, 1991).

The affordances of digital spaces present teens with many choices for building their online identities while also presenting them with challenge as their online and offline worlds overlap and perhaps, collide. As teens decide what identity to portray online, they must consider their offline words. boyd (2007) conceives of the online space as a web of “networked publics” in which one must imagine a varied audience that includes friends, parents, and strangers. This creates a dilemma for teens in which they must continually manage the impression (Goffman, 1959) they are making on a variety of groups. As boyd put it, “How can they be simultaneously cool to their peers and acceptable to their parents?” (p. 17). This is an important question, and I would add, how do the youngest teens, mid-adolescents who are using social networking sites so frequently, navigate these issues as they attempt to create a cohesive sense of self (Erikson, 1959/1980; Harter, 2012; Kroger, 2006)?

None of these studies are able to answer this question. Most studies on adolescent online practices included a range of ages that included participants up to 18 years old (Alvermann et al., 2012; boyd, 2007; Davis, 2012; Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008; Subrahmanyam et al., 2004) without disaggregating data by subgroups of adolescence. Clarke’s (2009) study, on the contrary starts to fill a gap in the literature by addressing early adolescents (age 10-14). However, her study still does not specifically address online identity construction of the mid-adolescent in particular because she includes children as young as ten. Additionally, her study, while qualitatively very rich, still does not incorporate the in-the-moment-of-posting data that might reveal yet another layer to an understanding of how mid-adolescent identity is constructed

online. It was my intent to add to the conversation by focusing on a mid-adolescent, in particular, and incorporating her in-the-moment thinking as she used SNS.

The studies in this section have revealed a very strong on/offline connection among teens' social worlds. Despite this clear overlap, it does not make sense to argue that identity construction (or anything) will play out in exactly the same way in those two spaces. The next section summarizes how some of these same researchers and others have addressed more explicitly the ways in which teens use the particular affordances of online spaces as they work out their identities.

Teens use digital tools to mediate identity. There are differences in the affordances of social networking interaction (online worlds) and face-to-face interaction (offline worlds); social networking allows for more careful deliberation of self-production than face-to-face interaction (Alvermann et al., 2012; Davis & Gardner, 2013; Turkle, 2011). This may be why what is presented online is more often an aspirational or ideal self than the actual self (Zhao et al., 2008). With adolescents, the continuity of an actual self has not usually been realized (Erikson, 1959/1980; Harter, 2012; Kroger, 2006); however, according to some (Alvermann et al., 2012; boyd, 2007; Davies & Merchant, 2009; Livingstone, 2008), the Internet might be an ideal place for adolescents to experiment with self-presentation. The research I will discuss in this section suggests that the combination of teens' heightened need for self-experimentation and the myriad of possibility for such offered by online spaces is most likely the reason teens are so drawn to social networking. They show that teens use digital tools to create texts that form and present their identities.

The features of instant messaging (IM) that are associated with many online social networks provide a distinct set of opportunities and risks which adolescent users must navigate

as they construct their online identities (Davis, 2012; Lewis & Fabos, 2005). Davis (2012) and Lewis and Fabos (2005) found that the teens actively use instant messaging features with Lewis and Fabos making the point that teens are not being “duped” (p. 482) by technology but are using it with a purpose. They found that their 13-17 year old participants’ practices were performative and multi-voiced, employing the features of both speech and print. While not referencing him, Lewis and Fabos’ study reflects Goffman’s (1959) view of identity as performance and how this performance looks in digital spaces, in particular.

In her interview study of 13-18 year old Bermuda students, Davis (2012) found that her participants used instant messaging features associated with many SNS to foster a sense of belonging through self-disclosure. As adolescents separate from parents, gravitating toward peers, partly in search of a sense of self, a sense of belonging with the peer group becomes critical (Erikson, 1959/1980; Harter, 2012; Kroger, 2006). An important piece in fostering a sense of belonging, which will ultimately lead to the ability to engage in intimate friendships, is self-disclosure (Davis, 2012). Davis (2013) found that online communications whether by texting, Facebook, or instant messaging support these two key adolescent processes. Her participants found that it was easier to talk about serious matters in text than face-to-face.

Other researchers have focused on the self-presentation affordances of social networking site profiles (boyd, 2007; Greenfield, 2008; Livingstone, 2008) boyd (2007), Livingstone (2008), and Greenfield (2008) found that participants use affordances of profile creation to represent themselves online. boyd (2007) conceived of teen presentation online as identity production in which young people must continually choose which identity to portray, referring to their online profiles on the site as “digital bodies” on which teens would “write themselves into being” (p. 13). Like boyd, Greenfield (2008) studied MySpace, calling it “a tool in identity

construction” (p. 4). She found that self-presentation on MySpace encompassed personal, social, and gender identity. Livingstone (2008) also noted gender and age differences in profile creation. She noted in particular that the younger seemed to favor more decorative displays and changed them more frequently, whereas older participant preferred a plainer design and did not place much importance on the self-expression aspects afforded by the various social networking sites.

Some of Livingstone’s (2008) participants talked about how their profile designs changed over time. Livingstone explained this as a shift in lifestyle; she explained lifestyle as a collection of cultural signs that, in part, are appropriated to represent the self. Her study represents an understanding that identity is inherently cultural (Cole, 2003) and that the signs people choose to use have meanings that are inherently cultural (Smagorinsky, 2001). Her participants were using the digital tools to mediate their identities, presenting themselves in terms of lifestyles they wished to portray. Whereas she set out to study what she thought was a narrow age range (13-16), instead she found these marked differences; this recognition that different age groups were using SNS in distinct ways suggests the need for research that isolates participants in terms of identity development.

danah boyd (2007) found that identity construction online is distinctly different, calling online social groups “networked publics” (p. 120) with particular characteristics which serve as both affordances teens purposefully use and constraints they must navigate as they actively construct their online identities. She identified the following characteristics of networked publics:

1. Persistence – online communication is permanent, allowing for asynchronous communication, but extends the existence of speech acts indefinitely

2. Searchability – it is easy to find one’s conversations and/or “digital body”
3. Replicability – it is easy to copy speech acts verbatim, making it impossible to distinguish an original from a copy
4. Invisible audiences – whereas, in person, one can see the audience(s) and their reactions, online one must imagine the audience and can only guess their reactions (p. 126).

The participants in boyd’s (2007) study were using the affordances and navigating the challenges of networked publics to actively manage their online identities. She suggested that rather than attempting to regulate teens’ online activity, adults might learn from their experiences. My study was, in part, an answer to boyd’s call, an attempt to learn more about the nature of a mid-adolescent’s online identity construction from her experiences and with her assistance.

What boyd refers to as networked publics, Ede and Lunsford (2009) still refer to as audience, but they have addressed the new complexity of the old concepts of audience addressed and audience invoked. While they still find these concepts useful, they call for more exploration into what digital authorship does to the concept of audience including issues such as collaboration and authorship. McGrail and McGrail (2014) conducted a study that sought to do just that in which they investigated the invoked and addressed audiences of a group of fifth grade bloggers. They found that the young bloggers were more likely to respond to distant audiences than their own teachers and peers and that they invoked audiences differently based on the roles they defined for themselves and the audiences. They conclude that, in the world of new literacies, students need opportunities to interact with real audiences and to learn about the needs of a variety of potential audiences.

Whereas boyd (2007) collectively deemed the online audience as networked publics and some have analyzed the nuances of invoked/addressed audiences (Lunsford & Ede, 2009; McGrail & McGrail, 2014), others (Turner et al., 2014) found that teens use variations of online ways of communicating they call “digitalk” (p. 160) to tailor their voice to the intended audience. Teens in Turner’s study adopted conventions of digitalk that would present the desired image according to the setting; for example, on social networking posts, they were more likely to use the conventions of Standard Written English (SWE) so as not to appear “uneducated”; however, in text messages or instant messages, they were more likely to use conventions not associated with SWE, such as extra vowels or extra consonants, in order to add personal voice and/or associate with a particular peer group. Similarly, Drouin (2011) found a positive correlation between text messaging frequency and conventional literacy skills; however, he found a negative relationship between what he called textese in certain contexts (social networking sites and emails to professors) and literacy as measured by reading accuracy. Clearly, more research is needed to flesh out the interaction between digitally inspired literacy skills and conventional ones.

Like boyd’s (2007) and Turner’s (2014), Livingstone’s (2008) participants were also actively using the various features of online SNS to represent themselves. She noted that strategies for representing the self varied widely and that the represented self was the one embedded in the peer group rather than the “private ‘I’ known best by oneself” (p. 400). She also concluded that, as selves are constituted through interaction with others, “self-actualization increasingly includes a careful negotiation between the opportunities (for identity, intimacy, sociability) and risks (regarding privacy, misunderstanding, abuse) afforded by internet-mediated communication” (p. 407). In other words, teens largely seemed to be making use of the

affordances of the SNS features while navigating the risks, though few teens in her study talked much about the risks explicitly. Livingstone's (2008) work reflects a growing understanding that the concept of self will look different online.

Likewise, Davies and Merchant (2009) suggest that a new construct of identity may be in order. They refer to identity as being performed, similar to Goffman (1959), or enacted online, emphasizing the importance of the cultural artifact, arguing that social activity online is organized around certain "objects" (p. 21). For example, photographs, videos, and memes are produced and reproduced online and then are perceived as holding meaning by those who share, discuss, or alter them. This meshes well with my understanding of artifacts, drawn from Michael Cole (2003). From Cole's perspective, the entire collective of online objects and the practices used to create them are an artifact of the culture which gave rise to their production. Drawing upon several of their own research studies in which they investigated such online artifacts, Davies and Merchant (2009) found that individuals are empowered by the affordances of the Internet to move in and out of different identities and that the young, in particular, are "quick to seize opportunities to explore the boundaries of possibility for the taking on of different kinds of 'transient' identities" (p. 21). They conclude that a holistic individual identity may be a cultural construction that is no longer relevant, favoring instead a multiple identity view. This multiple identity view may have salience for this study as I consider how (or whether) Harter's (2012) notion of the mid-adolescent kaleidoscopic self plays out in online settings.

Considering how much identity work is made visible in digital spaces, Greenfield and Yan (2006) see the Internet as an important space for developmental research, viewing it as "a new social environment in which universal adolescent issues of identity, sexuality, and a sense of self-worth are played out in a virtual world that is both old and new" (p. 392). They point out

that youth are co-constructing their social environments rather than being passively affected them. Drawing upon Vygotsky (1986), they view the Internet as a cultural tool kit which can be used in a variety of ways. That is why it is important to study teens at different stages of development so that we might understand how these new environments are shaping development of its users as they in turn shape the environments.

This section has focused on affordances of digital tools in identity construction, with particular emphasis on young people. However, as frequently noted, very few studies (Clarke, 2009) have looked at younger teens in particular, though it is recognized that identity development looks different in mid-adolescents than in older teens (Harter, 2012; Kroger, 2006). While some of these studies have incorporated the teens' voices (Alvermann et al., 2012; boyd, 2007; Clarke, 2009; Davis, 2012; Davis & Gardner, 2013; Livingstone, 2008), only one (Lewis & Fabos, 2005) used a methodology that explicitly incorporated teens' in-the-moment thinking, and it looked only at instant messaging. Research must be ongoing and must adapt to new technologies. The current study is a partial step toward filling this gap and building on previous work by narrowing the scope to a mid-adolescent and by incorporating analysis of her online posting and her in-the-moment thinking as she posted.

The studies presented so far have focused largely on the positive affordances of teens' digital worlds. However, online spaces are not free from their own unique sets of problems. On the contrary, there are risks involved in teens' digital activities. In this last section, I will share some research that suggests the need for concern about what is happening as teens live their lives in digital spaces.

The darker side of digital. Whereas many researchers frame digital youth practices in a positive light, as purposeful and creative (boyd, 2007; Clarke, 2009; Lewis & Fabos, 2005;

Livingstone, 2008), others have expressed concerns about what their nearly incessant use of these tools might mean (Barnett, 2009; Bauerlein, 2008; Berson & Berson, 2006; Carr, 2010; Davis & Gardner, 2013; Turkle, 1995, 2011).

Facilitated by his work as a teacher, administrator, and dorm parent in a college preparatory school, Barnett (2009) interviewed “nearly a dozen students and parents negatively affected in unanticipated ways by behavior reproduced and made public through technology” (p. 202). He concluded that the real/fake binary in terms of identity is no longer applicable in trying to understand young people in the digital age. Instead, he advocates an understanding of identity as “assemblage” as teens assemble their identities online. Through this understanding, he sees teens as confused about others’ reactions to their various representations. For example, one of his participants was upset at the negative attention a particular online photograph received, claiming that adults didn’t understand how those pictures did not represent their “real” selves. Classic and neo-classic identity theory would suggest that young people have “diffused” (Erikson, 1959/1980, p. 94) or “kaleidoscopic” (Harter, 2012, p. 103) senses of self anyway and have not yet learned how to nor should they be expected to integrate these disparities into a whole true self. However, Erikson (1959/1980) wrote his theory decades before the digital revolution and Harter’s (2012) portrait of identity construction did not directly speak to it. Research that directly investigates aspects of classic theory in digital spaces is needed to reach conclusions about the relevance of those theories in online worlds. While some researchers are calling for new constructs of identity (Barnett, 2009; Davies & Merchant, 2009; Davis & Gardner, 2013), research that builds upon classic theory (Erikson, 1959/1980; Goffman, 1959; Harter, 2012) may reveal ways in which classic constructs of identity are and are not applicable for today’s youth in digital settings.

While Barnett (2009) advocates viewing identity as assemblage, Katie Davis and Howard Gardner (2013) term youth identity as the “packaged self” (p. 66) and youth themselves as the “app generation” (p. 16). Drawing upon their own past research and experiences and interviews with Davis’s younger sister, Molly, the researchers sought to understand what distinguishes the digitally immersed youth of today from other generations. They considered how technology, information, medium and human psychology interact. According to Davis and Gardner (2013), the proliferation of apps has created a way of thinking in which “efficiency, automaticity, impersonality can and should trump individual goals, will, faith...succinctly, technology re-creates human psychology” (p. 268). The app generation, they find, must continually portray a positive, up-beat image.

Just like an app icon, young people feel the need to package themselves in a way that minimizes the focus on the inner life and on any kind of struggles. This observation is similar to Zhao, Grasmuck and Martin’s (2008) findings that their college-age participants mainly presented their hoped-for (but not yet realized) selves online. Whereas Zhao, Grasmuck, and Martin did not read anything sinister into this, viewing it as a way of envisioning what one might become, Davis and Gardner (2013) are concerned, finding that young people are afraid to take risks. Sherry Turkle (1995, 2011) shares these concerns and has warned readers of the potential dangers of lives lived digitally. Her research, which has included participant observation in a number of online settings and numerous interviews, has caused her concern about the quality of relationships and the nature of identity. Turkle (2011) claims that “These days, insecure in our relationships and anxious about intimacy, we look to technology for ways to be in relationships and protect ourselves from them at the same time” (loc. 150). She points out that the fact that every mistake, every misstep is documented publicly makes identity formation very stressful.

The researchers are not the only ones expressing these concerns. Their participants have, too. Molly, Davis and Gardner's (2013) 13-year old participant, recognizes and has grown weary of the constant polishing and packaging, stating that "On Facebook, people are more concerned with making it look like they're living rather than actually living" (p. 244). Turkle (2011) interviewed an 18 year old male, Brad, who discussed what he saw as problems with self-presentation on Facebook:

You have to know everything you put up will be perused very carefully. And that makes it necessary for you to obsess over what you do put up and how you portray yourself...And when you have to think that much about what you come across as, that's just another way that...you're thinking of yourself in a bad way (p. 184).

Turkle summed up Brad's concerns explaining that social media asks us to oversimplify ourselves and then, once we have done so, we feel the need to conform to the oversimplified picture we have created. Psychologists have recognized and articulated how adolescents can be overly concerned with what others think (Erikson, 1959/1980; Harter, 2012; Kroger, 2006). Perhaps what Molly and Brad are complaining about is the online manifestation of adolescent identity issues that are made more public on digital networks.

According to Barnett (2009), through their online behavior, today's teens are crying out for attention and help, and since identity construction is now made visible in digital spaces, adults have the tools to understand. Such understanding, he claims, "will lead to curricular advancements that may contribute to the habits of mind and conscience necessary for maintaining personal dignity and avoiding the least desirable trappings of consumer culture" (p. 208). Barnett calls for concern and for action among researchers. He sounds the warning bells claiming that

Unlike children from the turn of the last century, young people today are not forced to operate the machinery driving this phase of capitalism. Yet, that machinery drives their social lives just as it drives global commerce. The effects are not self-evident. Their fingers are not cut. Their bodies are not battered. Their clothes and faces are not stained with coal dust. Be certain, however, our attention is needed all the same. Listen carefully and you will hear them calling: —those pictures are not really me. Look closely and you will see their terminal identity (p. 208).

He may have a point; a study I previously shared (Mehdizadeh, 2010) advocated that her own research about how narcissism is manifested online be used to “sell products that enhance physical attractiveness, a feature that is desired by narcissists...” (p. 363). The knowledge that adolescents are increasingly presenting themselves online so frequently as they are defining themselves, strongly implies the need for ongoing teen-centered research into digital identity construction.

Berson and Berson (2006) are also fearful of the consequences for unwitting teens who make public so much of their lives on social networking sites. They call for a better awareness of what teens are doing online so that we might protect them from creating digital identities that could hinder their future success. As I mentioned in the first chapter, they refer to the collection of digital information about an individual as a “digital dossier” that when collected by someone else results in an “unauthorized digital biography” of the person. Ede and Lunsford (2009) also pointed to what they called “forgotten audiences” in which young people are not aware or mindful of the unexpected and/or unwanted audiences who may read their online work. Berson and Berson (2006) do not think that young people are able to understand that the content they continually post online becomes, in effect, digital stories of their lives, portions of which they

may wish later were not so public. They suggest that people exercise more control over their personal information on the Internet and that adults need to provide young people instruction in how they might manage their digital identities.

While I do not necessarily share some of the more alarmist perspectives of these researchers who see the darker side of digital, I agree with their call for more research about how teens are creating their identities online and what kinds of identities they are creating. Young people look to adults for guidance, and as the world dramatically changes, so should the guidance educators and parents provide.

Summary

The current literature reveals ways in which online spaces and identity construction shape one another (Chan, 2011; Mehdizadeh, 2010; Ong et al., 2010; Reich, 2010; Schwämmlein & Wodzicki, 2012; Zhao et al., 2008). A growing body of work approaches the topic of digital identity with an understanding of the complex nature of the interaction among the uses of various digital tools and identity construction (Alvermann et al., 2012; boyd, 2007; Clarke, 2009; Davies & Merchant, 2009; Davis, 2012; Davis & Gardner, 2013; Greenfield et al., 2006; Livingstone, 2008; Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008). They suggest that while online worlds are, in part, an extension of offline worlds; that teens use online affordances as tools in constructing and presenting their identities which may not resemble traditional notions of a fixed and stable identity (boyd, 2007; Davies & Merchant, 2009); and that there may be need for concern regarding teens' online self-presentation (Barnett, 2009; Berson & Berson, 2006; Davis & Gardner, 2013; Turkle, 2011). However, the current research virtually ignores the mid-adolescent even though 14 marks the age at which digital networking becomes a daily, almost momentary, activity for many American teens (Lenhart, 2010). Additionally, younger and older

teens experience distinctly different identity construction issues (Harter, 2012; Kroger, 2006), yet most studies focus on older teens or combine all teens into one group. For mid-adolescents in the early 2000's, the convergence of the new digital age with their own stage in life, a time in which they are experimenting with and building their identities, has enormous implications. More research is continually needed, particularly to help understand this group of young people as they attempt to integrate their potentially kaleidoscopic selves (Harter, 2012) in spaces that they are helping to reinvent as they participate in them (Jenkins, 2006). In the next chapter, I will detail the methodology I used to address this gap in the literature as I learned about the digital identity-building practices of a mid-adolescent girl.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to examine a mid-adolescent's use of social networking and what this use might reveal about her identity construction. The study was guided by the following questions: (1) What are a mid-adolescent's thoughts as she decides what to post on social networking sites to represent herself? (2) What do the tools and social practices she uses reveal about her online identity construction? and (3) What kinds of identities does she present on social networking sites? In this chapter, I will detail the methods I used as I explored these questions. I begin with an overview of the research design; then, a description of the participant and the setting; next, a detailed explanation of data collection and analysis procedures; and finally an explanation of how I addressed ethical concerns and a discussion of the limitations of the study.

Research Design

I used a qualitative case study design drawing upon the work of several qualitative researchers (Albers, 2013; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2008; Flyvbjerg, 2011; Hilden & Pressley, 2011; LeCompte, 2000; Merriam, 2009; Pahl & Rowsell, 2013; Roulston, 2010; Saldaña, 2009) to learn about a mid-adolescent's identity construction in social networking spaces. Qualitative research is consistent with a socio-cultural perspective (Crotty, 1998). Since I view knowledge as a social construction, I chose methods that allowed me to incorporate the participant's perspectives of her social networking practices to help me understand them. My research questions required in-depth investigation of social practice in context; multiple data sources; and thick description. According to Bogdan and Biklen (2007), qualitative research is naturalistic, descriptive, concerned with process, inductive, and concerned with meaning. To

meet these criteria for qualitative research, I collected detailed descriptive data about my participant's social networking practices as she helped me learn about her digital identities and her thinking as she created them.

Single case study design allowed for an in-depth investigation using multiple data sources. Flyvbjerg (2011) defends case study as a valuable research tool, arguing that the context specific knowledge is more valuable than the general and that the use of a single example is often underestimated. He explains that the closeness of case study to real life and the detail inherent in it are "important for the development of a nuanced view of reality, including the view that human behavior cannot be meaningfully understood as simply the rule-governed acts found at the lowest levels of the learning process" (p. 303). I was interested in producing just such a nuanced view of my participant's social networking practices, one that represents as closely as possible her experienced reality in those spaces as they are embedded in all of the other spaces she inhabits.

Merriam (2009) writes that "by concentrating on a single phenomenon or entity (the case), the researcher aims to uncover the interaction of significant factors characteristic of the phenomenon...case study is a design particularly suited to situations in which it is impossible to separate the phenomenon's variables from their context" (p. 43). According to Vygotsky (1986), language is culturally derived and arises from social practice (Cole, 2003; Wertsch, 1991). As such, I view participation on SNS as a social practice that cannot be understood separate from its cultural context. In order to understand my participant's social networking practices, I needed to investigate them in the context of her everyday life as she experiences it. Single case study afforded me the opportunity to thoroughly investigate my participant's social networking practices as part of her life, collecting rich data from multiple sources so that I might

contextualize rather than decontextualize her use of social networking. Data sources included five in-the-moment verbal protocols, adapted from Hilden and Pressley (2011), from the participant as she used social networking; interview data from five interviews totaling seven hours; the 109 social networking posts created and posted by the participant during the three month data collection period; 165 text messages exchanged between the participant and me; one journal entry created by the participant sent to me as an email; and a reflective journal kept by me including 5 researcher memos. All of these data were treated as texts (Smagorinsky, 2001), which inherently shape and are shaped by their creator (Cole, 2003; Wertsch, 1991), and were able to reveal things about her identity development (Pahl & Rowsell, 2013). I will describe these sources in more detail later in this chapter.

According to Merriam (2009), the most defining characteristic of case study research lies in “delimiting the object of study” (p. 40), in the *boundedness* of the case. Next, I will define the boundaries for this investigation as I describe the participant.

Participant

One way that this case was bound is stage of human development. My interest for this study was in the mid-adolescent stage of development. Harter (2012) defines mid-adolescence as a phase during which there is a dramatic rise in detection of opposing self-attributes and resulting inner conflict about how these opposing attributes can coexist in oneself; this stage loosely coincides with the age range of 14-16. According to Harter (2012), the conflicts presented during this stage can lead an adolescent to experience a “kaleidoscopic self” (p. 96), one that is fragmented and difficult to integrate. I have seen evidence of Harter’s description of mid-adolescence as a middle school teacher. I noticed that my eighth grade students (most of whom were 14), as opposed to the sixth and seventh grade students, were more likely to express

deep concern about their own conflicting behaviors and would frequently talk about not wanting to be “fake” and not liking people whom they perceived as “fake.” This concern with people being fake or real reflects the conflicts that some mid-adolescents experience when they notice contrasting attributes in themselves or others (Harter, 2012). For example, a girl may speak kindly about others in front of teachers and then gossip about others when the teachers are not listening; unable to resolve how she can assume different roles in different situations, she may doubt herself as a kind person and she may wonder in which context she is being fake or real. In this study, the participant, Trinka expressed disdain for people who failed to credit others when reposting their online content, while at the same time, during the entire data collection period, she never once credited others for content she had borrowed and reposted. While I recognize that development is context-specific and that no two people will progress through any set of developmental stages in precisely the same way, I still found that my own observations were consistent with Harter’s theory of mid-adolescence and the likelihood that these characteristics will emerge between the ages of 14 and 16.

Another important boundary for this case concerned the use of social networking. Since I was interested in online identity construction and what a mid-adolescent’s digital identities are like, I chose a participant who was using social networking frequently to represent herself. Additionally, since I intended to co-construct data with my participant, I needed someone who had the potential to be forthcoming in an interview setting; a willingness to participate in verbal protocols, reflective journaling, and ongoing interaction with me through phone and/or instant messaging; and willingness for me to analyze her social networking content.

Whereas there are potentially a rather large number of mid-adolescents who frequently use social networking to represent themselves (Madden, Lenhart, & Duggan, 2013), finding one

that had the time and willingness to allow a researcher such intimate access to her social life and to commit to the work involved would have been difficult or even impossible. For this reason, I selected a family member to recruit for this study. Mine was a combination of purposeful and convenience sampling (Merriam, 2009). It was purposeful in that this family member represented the phenomenon under investigation. She was 14 years old at the time of data collection; exhibited the characteristics of someone in the mid-adolescent stage of development (which I will discuss further later in this section); and frequently used social networking to represent herself to her friends and others. It was also an example of convenience sampling in that, as a family member, I already had considerable access to the participant's digital worlds as well as an established relationship of trust. Whereas studying a family member was not without its challenges, which I will discuss in a later section, benefits for this study outweighed those challenges.

Data collection took place during the months of June-August of 2014. The participant, Trinka (all proper nouns are fictional) was a 14-year-old Caucasian female who had just finished the eighth grade in a suburban public middle school about 25 miles from a major Southeastern city in the U.S. She was an honor roll student who played the tuba in the 8th grade band at her middle school and had already been selected to play in the advanced band as a freshman in her upcoming ninth grade year. Though middle school sports had been cut in her school system due to funding, the high school boosters funded a middle school football program for which she was a cheerleader during the fall of her 8th grade year. Trinka also took dance lessons in a nearby county several nights a week, and had just been selected as a member of the competition dance team for the 2014-15 school year. She also spent nearly every Friday night at a skating rink with her friends. Trinka was also a fan of teen pop culture including books by John Green (2012), the

television show, *Heroes* (Semel, 2006), and the band, One Direction (Horan et al., 2013). She had several dogs and a chinchilla as pets all which were important parts of her life, and she had an affinity for comic books, particularly those featuring superheroes, which she shared with her uncle who took her to Comicon and Dragoncon, two popular comic book conventions.

Trinka's parents were working class, both having completed some college. They were divorced so Trinka and her 18-year-old sister spent every other week with each parent, both of whom live in the same county. Trinka's parents worked together with the help of grandparents to facilitate all of Trinka's extra-curricular activities. Trinka's and her sister's educations were important to both parents; good grades were expected, and both daughters were expected to go to college. During data collection, Trinka's sister moved to a small city about 40 miles north to attend a private college with the intention of becoming a medical doctor. Trinka had not yet chosen a career but had mentioned that being a band director would be fun.

Important to this study and a factor in why I chose her, she exhibited some of the characteristics that Harter (2012) notes about mid-adolescents. She exhibited concern with her appearance through careful attention to detail (which types of clothes she wears and her hair, for example); she was concerned with her friends' behavior and with whom to align herself; and held herself and others to very high standards of behavior consistent with those she believed were reflective of a good person. The latter tendency signaled the real/fake concern that often characterizes a mid-adolescent who *wants* to feel a unified sense of self (though she may not) and also demands this continuous predictable real-self behavior in others (Harter, 2012).

As a researcher, what fascinated me about Trinka and was of interest to this study was her avid and varied use of online social networking which makes her representative of a mid-adolescent in terms of the statistics previously indicated. I became interested in mid-adolescents'

use of social networking as a middle school teacher, and I often spoke to my students about their use of social media. However, as their teacher, ethical considerations regarding the teacher/student relationship prevented my direct access to their digital worlds. Meanwhile, as a family member with access to Trinkka's digital worlds of Facebook and Instagram, I began to notice that her use of social networking was expanding and evolving. While I knew there would be ethical considerations with studying family members (discussed further in a later section), my access to her SNS provided an opportunity for which the benefits would outweigh the risks. With Instagram as her social network of choice, she posted numerous pictures that represented herself in a variety of ways with captions that alluded to her thoughts and desires. She also posted pictures of her own writing and artwork. As her frequency and creative use of social networking rose along with my own interest in mid-adolescents' online identity construction, my attention turned gradually to Trinkka as a case typical of other mid-adolescents (Harter, 2012) and to whom I had easy access. Working together on this project, she and I learned about how she was using social networking to construct identity and reached a deeper understanding of the digital identities she was creating. The timing of my interest in the social networking phenomenon among mid-adolescents; the onset of my dissertation project; and Trinkka's age and use of social networking were not merely convenient. They were serendipitous.

Setting

Data collection for this project took place during the summer of 2014 in Jackson (fictitious name), a mid-sized Southeastern U.S. suburb near a major Southeastern city. Jackson, which is its county's seat, had a population of 11,500 as of the time of this study, according to the city website. The city website boasted that Jackson has a "charm of simpler times, with a vibrant and friendly community." The area surrounding the city includes several major stores for

clothing and sporting goods which attract shoppers throughout their county and from nearby counties. Trinka had just finished her last year of middle school (eighth grade) which she completed at Jackson Middle School, located in the city limits of Jackson. According the National Center for Educational Statistics, as of the 2010-2011 school year, Jackson Middle School (fictitious name) had a racially diverse student body of 670 students including 29.9 percent black; 55.4 percent white; 10 percent Hispanic; 3.7 percent multiracial; and less than one percent Asian or Pacific Islander. 60.3 percent of the student population qualified for free or reduced lunch.

It is important to note that, because data collection occurred, for the most part, during the summer, Trinka's online activity was different than it had been during the school year. After the first month of data collection, I noticed that she was not posting as frequently as she had in the previous months when I was making the decision to recruit her for the study. I was curious about this so I decided to ask her about it. Since most of Trinka's online social networking took place on Instagram, I used it as an example. I counted her number of Instagram posts during the months of January through June and made a graph (Figure 2) which showed that she had posted

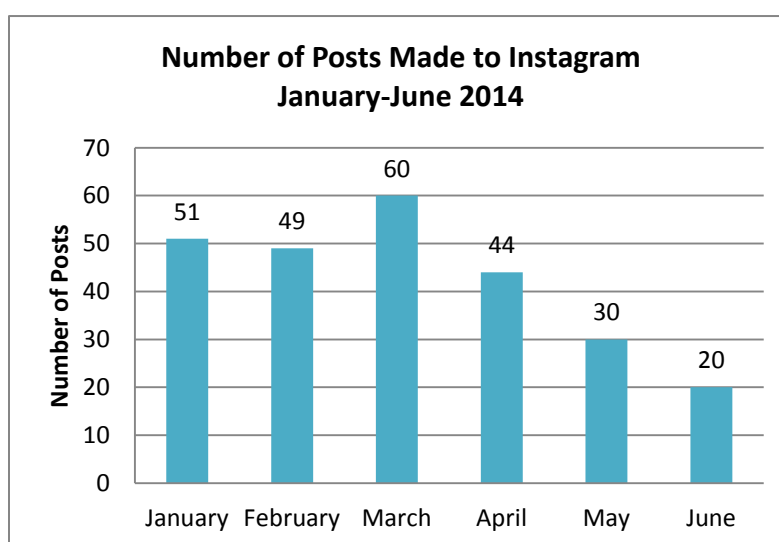


Figure 2. Number of Posts Made to Instagram January-June 2014

about half as often as in the previous months. I showed her the graph and asked her if she knew why her activity had changed. She explained that school keeps everyone busy and that there is more to post about during the school year. “When summer hits, I’m like, what do I post about now?” she explained. I decided to use Trinkka’s drop in frequency to my advantage. Whereas I had planned to strategically choose posts that I imagined might help answer my research questions; instead I was able to analyze all of Trinkka’s posts during the data collection period.

It is also important to note that the summer during which data collection occurred was the summer between Trinkka’s 8th and 9th grade year; in Jackson, high school begins with the 9th grade so the timing of this study coincided with a time of anticipated change for Trinkka. Not surprisingly, the changes that Trinkka was experiencing affected her online presentation and were evident there; these relationships are discussed in detail in upcoming chapters.

Additionally, participation in this study created a new kind of relationship between us; I will discuss this further in the researcher role section. All of these environmental factors impacted Trinkka’s life therefore impacting both her posting and her development. Understanding all of this, as I discuss the findings in chapter four and interpret them in chapter five, I will continue to contextualize Trinkka’s online presentation. Of course, environmental factors would affect the participant and, of course, the data no matter when the study occurred; in a qualitative study like mine, the charge is not to control environmental factors but to adequately report them and to situate the data within and among them.

Data Collection

In qualitative research, it is important to collect multiple forms of data in order to capture the complexity of social phenomena (Creswell, 2008). To understand how the participant constructed identity in social networking spaces, I collected six types of data: semi-structured

interviews; verbal protocol recordings; participants' posts to social networking sites; text messaging interactions between participant and researcher; participant journal; and researcher journal. See Table 1 for an alignment showing which forms of data were used to answer each research question.

Table 1.

<i>Data Used to Answer Research Questions</i>	
Research Question	Data
What are a mid-adolescent's thoughts as she decides what to post on social networking sites to represent herself?	Interviews Verbal Protocol Phone/IM Interactions between Participant and Researcher Participant Journal
What do the tools and social practices she uses reveal about her online identity construction?	Interviews Verbal Protocols Participant's Posts to SNS Phone/IM Interactions between Participant and Researcher Participant Journal Researcher Journal
What kinds of identities does she present on social networking sites?	Interviews Verbal Protocols Participant's Posts to SNS Participant Journal

Next, I discuss in detail, the steps that I took to collect the data.

Interview Data

The participant and I engaged in five semi-structured face-to-face interviews (Roulston, 2010) totaling seven hours. I started the first interview by addressing ethical concerns which I will detail in a later section. Then, I engaged Trinkka in a conversation about her social networking practices. Believing that knowledge is co-constructed by participants in social settings, I used a constructionist conception of the interview (Roulston, 2010). Rather than viewing interview data as reports, I conceived of them as "accounts" that were co-constructed by

interviewer and the interviewee (p. 60). I used three open-ended questions to guide the conversation, following up with “probes” to encourage Trinka to elaborate or clarify her responses (p. 14). For our first interview, we met at her grandmother’s house on the back porch. Trinka’s grandmother was not within earshot. In that first interview, the questions I used to guide the conversation were:

1. Tell me about the social networking sites you use the most and what you like about them.
2. What kinds of things do you usually post?
3. Why do you post [those things]?

Throughout the 30 minute initial interview, after I asked each guiding question, I followed up with probes to find out more about what Trinka was posting, what she was thinking as she posted, and why she posted those things. I concluded the initial interview with an explanation of the verbal protocol (discussed later) and an invitation to keep a reflective journal.

Trinka and I engaged in four more interviews after the initial one. All interviews except for the third one took place at Trinka’s grandmother’s home; the third interview took place at the home she shared with her mother with her mother present but out of earshot. The purpose of the follow-up interviews was to construct, along with Trinka, knowledge about how she was representing herself in social networking spaces. Each time, I invited her to discuss the posts about which she had completed verbal protocols (when she had completed some) as well as other posts about which I had questions. I also discussed with her themes that were emerging in the data. Continuing to operate with a constructionist view of the interview, I asked open-ended questions that were intended to begin a conversation in which the participant and I were then

able to co-construct knowledge about how she was using social networking tools to construct her identity. The following questions were used as a starting place for each follow-up interview:

1. Tell me about the posts that you recorded your thoughts about?
2. What do you like (or not like) about these?
3. Who did you think would look at the post, and what did you want them to think about you when they saw it?
4. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about how you use or how you feel about social networking?

The first three follow-up interviews occurred about three weeks apart and lasted about 90 minutes each; the fifth and final interview that took place after I had written a first draft of the data collection chapter and lasted two hours. The fifth interview was structured as a type of member checking in which I clarified any assumptions I had made during data analysis and sought understanding about inconsistencies that had arisen in the data. These inconsistencies are discussed further in chapter four.

In between the interviews, I encouraged Trinkka to record and send audio about what she is posting on social networking sites; write journals about her social networking; and interact with me through instant messaging or phone. Next I will explain the verbal protocol in more detail.

Verbal Protocol

Since I was interested in learning about identity construction, in part through what a mid-adolescent was thinking as she made decisions about if and what to post online, reports of what Trinkka was thinking in the moment of posting were of interest to this study. I used Hilden and Pressley's (2011) recommendations for verbal protocol. According to Hilden and Pressley

(2011), people are rather effective at reporting what is in their working memory, and because little is stored there, “it is possible in a comment or two to get out what is in one’s mind” (p. 427). Verbal protocols of reading have contributed a wealth of knowledge to the literacy community about the mental processes of both strong and struggling readers (Cote & Goldman, 2008; Hilden & Pressley, 2011). Considering the success that researchers have experienced using verbal protocols to study literacy (Hilden & Pressley, 2011), I believed they had the potential to help build knowledge about mental processes during digital composition as well. Even though most of these studies have been performed with older children and adults, there is evidence that children as young as eight are capable of reporting the contents of their working memory (Hilden & Pressley, 2011). Based on this knowledge and my own experience with middle school students, I included this method because I believed my participant would be capable of performing the verbal protocol for this study.

In Hilden and Pressley’s (2011) model, little direction is provided to the participant so as to not influence their thinking; they are asked to simply “think aloud” (p. 436). Even though my participant was composing (SNS posts) rather than reading, I gave her the same directions, asking that she just “think aloud” about what she was posting, why she was posting it, and to whom was she posting.

Trinka learned how collection of verbal protocol would work at the end of the initial interview. I initially invited her to choose at least one weeknight and one day each weekend during which to record her thoughts as she is making a decision to post something on a social networking site. I asked her to, whenever she was about to post something on a social networking site, use the voice memo software readily available on her smartphone to record brief commentary (several sentences) stating her thoughts about:

1. what she is posting;
2. why she is posting it;
3. to whom is she posting?

I also ensured that she had voice memo software on her phone. After verifying that she did, she recorded a short sentence as a test and emailed it to me so that we would know the process could be successful.

Though I originally believed that Trinka would need to limit her verbal protocols to a particular day of the week, when she only sent one audio message during the two weeks between the first and second interview, I decided to encourage her to record a verbal protocol at any time she felt comfortable doing so, not to limit it to a particular day of the week. This tactic did not necessarily produce a higher volume as she recorded four more audio messages throughout data collection, roughly one every two weeks. These messages were an average length of 25 seconds long; in them, Trinka thought aloud about what she was posting, why, how, and to whom.

The verbal protocols, while few, added an additional layer to my developing understanding of how Trinka was constructing her identity in social networking spaces. They also served to verify themes that emerged in analysis of interview transcripts and social networking posts. In between interviews, I also encouraged Trinka to use a journal if she had additional thoughts she wanted to share about her social networking and identity construction.

Participant Journal

I encouraged the participant to use a journal to record her thoughts and insights about her social networking posts and activities. Journals kept by participants can be a valuable source of information and analyzed as artifacts that offer insight into the participants' worlds (Merriam, 2009). I invited my participant to consider writing about any posts to which she had placed

considerable thought or at which she looked back on after posting and had reactions. I also suggested posts and topics for her to write about in the journal and asked her to expand on ideas she had brought up in interviews. For example, after the first interview, when Trinka had not written anything in her journal, I suggested that she write about selfies, since she had much to say about them in our interview that day. On another occasion, I suggested that she jot down her thoughts about stereotypes in her journal. I encouraged her to use whatever format she preferred whether it be paper and pencil or typed and emailed. It was my hope that these suggestions and the opportunity for her to reflect on them might elicit Trinka's ideas about her identity construction.

I intended to use the journal to add layers of insight to other types of data as well as to triangulate data and/or assist with member checking which will be discussed later (Merriam, 2009). As it turned out, Trinka only opted to complete one journal entry. While I had hoped for more and still believe that this piece would have provided deeper insight into Trinka's thought process, I opted not to push her too strongly. This study relied on Trinka's willing participation; while she agreed to participate, she also understood that her participation was voluntary throughout the process. Had I insisted too strongly on certain pieces of data, I might have given the impression that participation was coerced rather than voluntary. I will discuss this dilemma further in the section on ethical concerns.

However, in spite of the aforementioned limitations, the one journal entry that Trinka produced was helpful; it served as a text that inherently reflects the creator and the cultural context within which it was created (Cole, 2003; Wertsch, 1991). In this one entry, she addressed four themes that occurred throughout the data: photo editing, being "normal" (her words), the absence of her academic self on SNS, and the stigma associated with taking selfies.

While the journal did not raise any new issues, it served as an additional piece that underscored the importance of these particular topics in explaining Trinka's online identity presentation and was a valuable piece of data, limited quantity notwithstanding.

Posts to Social Networking Sites

Pahl and Roswell (2013) argue that "literacy is embedded in 'things', that is, objects, artifacts, the 'stuff' of life" (loc. 3751) and that attention to the everyday objects in children's lives enable us see patterns and ways of being. They call this object-embedded literacy "artifactual literacy" and the traces of cultural meaning found in them as "sedimented identities in texts" (loc. 3813). Like Vasquez (2013), I see digital texts as objects and as artifactual literacies. This understanding allowed me to view my participant's posts on social networking sites as artifacts within which I could find evidence of her sedimented identities.

Since I was already connected to Trinka on the social networking sites, Instagram and Facebook, I was able to see any posts that she made to the "public", that is, the collective public of her networked friends on the various sites, and regarded them all as data. Viewed in concert with verbal protocol and interview data, I was able to see some of the ways she was constructing identity in social networking spaces, what her digital identity was like and if it manifested evidence of Harter's (2012) kaleidoscopic self.

As I was constructing the methodology for this study, I was aware that my potential participant was posting quite frequently on social networking sites. In an effort to ensure that the data is rich and manageable, I created procedures for deciding which posts to use. As her online "friend", I was able to see all of Trinka's posts; I looked briefly through them daily to stay aware of the types of posts she was creating. I had originally planned to choose particular days on which to collect posts for analysis based upon which days might elicit the widest possible variety

of posting opportunities (i.e., skating rink days, extracurricular activities, or time-at-home). In addition to collecting posts on the selected days, I was going to remain alert for and save posts that spoke to my research questions (e.g., posts on the thought process, the use of artifacts, or identity representations and negotiation) and the thematic threads that emerged as a result of analyzing other data (interview transcripts, journals, verbal protocol transcripts, and other interactions with the participant). Selecting which posts to collect was to be, in part, a component of analysis. However, before our initial interview, I already noted a drop in the number of Trinkka's posts as I mentioned earlier in the section on setting. Because of this, instead of analyzing selected posts for two months as originally planned, I collected all of Trinkka's social networking posts for a period of three months. I believe that this may have worked to my advantage; since I did not have to make choices about which posts to analyze, I believe I was able to create a more complete picture of Trinkka's online identity practices over a three month period.

During our first interview in June 2015, I asked Trinkka which social networking sites she used; she told me that she had an Instagram and Facebook. I asked her if she had a Twitter account and she told me that she did at one point but had deleted it because she never used it. I immediately began collecting Trinkka's Facebook and Instagram posts daily after that interview. Facebook is an online social networking space in which users connect with others by becoming Facebook "friends". Users create a profile, post status updates, pictures, and videos for their online Facebook connections to view. When viewing content, users can click the "like" button or leave comments. Instagram is an online social networking site on which users leave visual posts (often photographs) with or without captions. People connect on Instagram by choosing to

“follow” accounts of others. The posts of whomever one follows appear on one’s feed. As with Facebook, when viewing content, viewers may click the “like” button or leave comments.

To collect the Facebook and Instagram posts, I opened them on my laptop, used the snipping tool to cut out Trinkka’s posts, making sure to include images as well as alphabetic texts associated with each, and saved them by date and associated social networking site. I also imported them to NVivo (2014) for data analysis.

In between the first and second interview, I noticed that Trinkka had a link on her Instagram profile to a site called Ask.fm. I followed the link and found that Ask.fm was another social networking site. On Ask.fm, users may ask questions to other users who had the choice to answer the questions or not. Ask.fm differs markedly from Facebook and Instagram in two respects. The first is that users do not initiate their own content, but instead answer questions that others have posed. The other main distinction is that on Ask.fm, when users ask a question, they do so anonymously; the questioners are not even identified by a user name. Upon discovering Trinkka’s Ask.fm account, I began collecting her “posts” (answers to questions) there as well and continued to do so throughout the three month data collection period.

Throughout data collection, Trinkka posted a total of 109 times: 22 to Facebook, 49 to Instagram, and 38 to Ask.fm. All posts were collected and analyzed as data. In between interviews as I collected and analyzed Trinkka’s posts to SNS, I interacted with her via text messages. I treated these interactions as data.

Text Messages

Throughout data collection, as I viewed the participant’s posts and listened to her audio messages, I also interacted with her about them. Since I knew that Trinkka sent text messages on her phone frequently, I used that medium to initiate interactions with her about her posts and/or

audio messages. I also invited her to send me messages or call me if she had any thoughts she wanted to share about her social networking activities and how (or if) they were projecting her identity, but she did not initiate any such interactions. Throughout the three month data collection period, Trinka and I exchanged 165 text messages about her social networking activity. I copied the text messages into a Word document which I uploaded to NVivo (2014) and analyzed. The text message interactions served as a form of member checking (Merriam, 2009) as I analyzed other forms of data.

Although I had expected the journal to be a rich source of data and had moderate expectations of the value of text messaging with the participant, the reverse was true. While the messages were typically short (25 words or less), Trinka answered my queries with nearly lightning speed but with candor and thoughtfulness. For example, she and I discussed the word, filtered versus modified to describe her online identity:

Trinka: Filtered sounds more like pulling all the bad stuff out. Modified I think is a better word because it just means a few things are left out

Tara: I think modified sounds like changed so I want to check and see if you mean modified as in "changed".

Trinka: No. I would mean it as a few things are slightly different. Like how I'm less sarcastic on Instagram compared to real life.

This exchange allowed me to settle on the word "filtered" even though Trinka would not have chosen it. Because of this conversation, I did not feel the word misrepresented what is happening on SNS. Like Beddows (2008) noted, new modes of communication open up new methodological possibilities that may not always pan out as the researcher expects. Trinka was more comfortable sharing in the quick back-and-forth manner afforded by text messaging rather

than writing in-depth lengthy journals as I had expected. The final form of data was the researcher journal.

Researcher Journal

Bogdan and Biklen (2007) recommend that a researcher keep memos summarizing what might be emerging, stating that they “provide a time to reflect on issues raised in the setting and how they relate to larger theoretical, methodological, and substantive issues” (p. 165). To this end, throughout data collection and analysis, I kept a reflective journal that served as a space to organize my thoughts and explore questions and ideas as they developed. To facilitate analysis of the journal itself I kept it digitally in NVivo (2014) using the “memo” feature so that the text could be easily maintained, searched, copied and/or pasted. As analysis and collection occurred simultaneously in this study, journaling helped me sort out questions about developing codes and their meanings and was a place to explore how the incoming data was helping to answer my research questions. The journal was also a place for me to continually revisit my own role in the research process and to bracket biases. Next I will discuss the data analysis procedures.

Data Analysis

My approach to data analysis was informed by the three tenets of my theoretical perspective. See Table 2 for a reference to how my theoretical perspective informed my thinking throughout the analysis. By viewing language and thought as culturally derived (Vygotsky, 1986) and human activity and tools as mediating human development (Cole, 2003; Wertsch, 1991), I was able to see SN practices and digital tools as means that shaped and were shaped by Trinka as she used them. Secondly, viewing language as a sign system in which signs are not only comprised as printed words but anything intended to carry meaning (Smagorinsky, 2001), I was able to view all data, including the visual data, as texts. Finally, by recognizing that the self

develops through an interaction between cognitive and cultural factors (Erikson, 1959/1980); Harter, 2012) and that a kaleidoscopic, or fragmented sense of self often emerges during mid-adolescence, I was able to see her identity as influenced by both her stage in cognitive development and cultural factors; I was also able to be alert to ways her identity might look different within and across contexts.

Table 2.

Application of Tenets of Theoretical Framework in Analysis

Tenet of Theoretical Framework	Application in Analysis
Language and thought are culturally derived (Vygotsky, 1986) ; the tools that mediate human activity shape and are shaped by the humans who employ them (Cole, 2003; Wertsch, 1991).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Viewing SN practices as language acts using digital tools which shape and are being shaped by my participant. • Paying attention to participant's actions and use of digital tools
Language is a system of signs not limited to words; texts therefore are not limited to the printed word but include any configuration of signs (Smagorinsky, 2001).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyzing all data, including visual data, as texts
The conception of self is cognitively and culturally derived and is always in flux (Erikson, 1959/1980; Harter, 2012); during mid-adolescence, a kaleidoscopic sense of self often emerges (Harter, 2012).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding that my participant's identity is culturally derived; in flux and likely to look different across time or across forms of data. • Paying attention to evidence (or lack thereof) of a kaleidoscopic sense of self

According to Merriam (2009), data analysis is “the process of making sense out of the data...and involves consolidating, reducing, and interpreting...it is the process of meaning making” (p. 175). She emphasizes the importance of analyzing data as it is collected, claiming that qualitative research is inherently inductive. As she suggests, I began transcribing and analyzing data from the first interview. During the early phase of data collection, analysis was primarily inductive as I searched the data for bits of information that might inform my research

questions. The process became gradually more deductive as I constructed concepts which I explored through the ongoing data collection and analysis. Below is Figure 3, a graphic I adapted from Merriam's (2009, p. 184) depiction of the logic of data analysis:

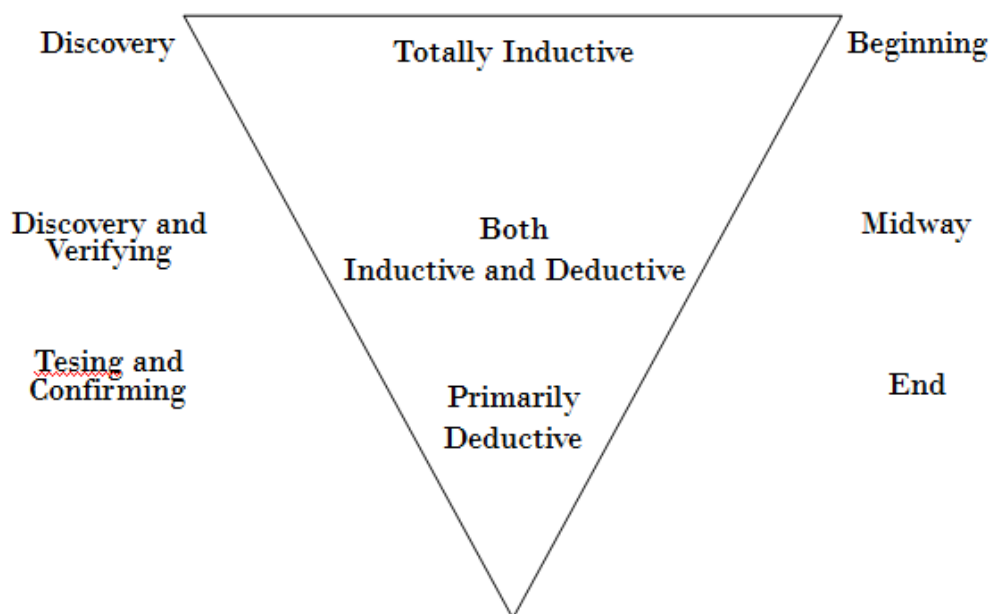


Figure 3. The Logic of Data Analysis

Staying cognizant of the inductive and deductive nature of qualitative analysis, I analyzed the data on an ongoing basis by recursively moving through the five steps recommended by LeCompte (2000): tidying up, finding items, creating stable lists of items, creating patterns, and assembling structures. Within these steps, I also drew upon Johnny Saldaña's (2009) *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* for guidance in handling the data.

Tidying Up

LeCompte (2000) stresses the importance of organizing data as the first step of analysis. Her specific recommendations relate more to paper data. A large portion of my data was digital, so I adapted the following methods as my means of "tidying up". As data were collected, I saved it in folders in my Dropbox account. The folders were named by the format of the data they

contained (verbal protocols, interviews, and so on). Each piece of data was named for the date that it was created. I also transcribed interviews within a week of conducting them and saved them along with the audio files. All data was also uploaded to NVivo for analysis.

To collect the social networking posts, I used the snipping tool on my laptop computer to cut out images of them. They were saved in the same manner as other data. For some posts, there were too many comments to view the entire post at once on the computer. In this case, I snipped the post in pieces, pasted them all into a Word document where I could piece them together as one, and saved the new item as a picture, adding it to the collection with the other posts.

As LeCompte (2000) suggests, I used the tidying up phase as an opportunity to “identify any holes or missing data chunks by determining if data were actually collected to answer each research question” (p. 148). This helped guide my efforts throughout data collection. One way in which tidying up assisted me was actually near the end of my analysis. I had identified themes and was working on assembling structures (both of which are discussed in more detail below) when I realized that I needed to see all of Trinkia’s Facebook and Instagram images at once. In a return to the tidying up phase, despite my desire to use as little paper as possible, I printed small (about 6”X4”) images of all of Trinkia’s posts and labeled them with some of the key codes that had emerged. Tidying up was not just a step I completed at the beginning of analysis but rather was an ongoing process that proved crucial to managing the data and the emerging patterns in them.

Finding Items

Items are the pieces of data that are coded, counted and sorted (LeCompte, 2000). I frequently (at least once a week) attended to recent data, looking for items of significance and

labeling the bits with initial codes that seem to represent them. I followed Saldaña's (2009) recommendations for initial coding, incorporating both descriptive and process coding. According to Saldaña, initial coding is an open-ended approach that serves as an opportunity for a researcher to "reflect deeply on the contents and the nuances of the data" (p. 81). It is suited for studies with a variety of data sources like mine. During initial coding, the researcher carefully reflects on the data, comparing the various bits and noting and coding what seems important. As I studied the data, I was alert to anything that might help answer my research questions. In particular, I paid attention to items that spoke to my participant's thoughts as she constructed identity online; items that revealed her online practices as she constructed identity; and items that revealed what her digital identity was like. As Merriam (2009) suggests, I made note of (coded) any bit of data that "[struck me] as potentially useful" (p. 178). Another useful feature of initial coding is that it can incorporate other methods that might prove useful. For this study, both descriptive and process coding were incorporated into the initial coding phase, both of which are open-ended methods, useful for qualitative studies with a variety of data sources (Saldaña, 2009).

With descriptive coding, the researcher labels bits of data with short words or phrases, usually nouns. By doing this, I was able to see what was actually there, to inventory and categorize the data. In particular, descriptive coding helped me to see the details that made up Trinka's digital identity as well as the tools she employed in identity construction. Figure 4 shows an example of some early codes which were mostly labeling the items that I saw in Trinka's SN posts and also coding them when she mentioned them in the other modes of data collection. During this phase in coding, I paid most attention to *what* was present in Trinka's posting; for example, this process enabled me to see that she posted (and spoke) frequently about

Name	Sources	References
Books, Movies, TV	7	23
Brands	1	2
Cheer	1	1
Clothing	1	12
Comics	8	23
Captain America	4	10
Dance	21	50
Dazzlers	7	7
Displaying Something Cool	4	9
Displaying Something Cute	1	1
Drawing	1	2
Famous People	5	16
Chris Evans	1	1
Milo V.	4	5
Sam Wolf	1	1

Figure 4 Early Coding Sample

dance, comics, and other forms of media that she enjoyed.

As it proved so helpful in describing Trinka's identity and also in identifying the tools she used, I used descriptive codes throughout data analysis. However, I knew that labels alone would not get at her thoughts and the social practices. I reflected on this in an early memo, struggling with the knowledge that I needed to push deeper, but not quite sure where to start:

Right now, I am labeling clothing, facial expression, body language (though I think this needs a second look), "costars", and general topics related to Emily's posts (like comics or dance). These labels should end up being helpful in describing her digital identity. I am looking forward to actually talking to her about the posts though. I know that her insights will help me understand her posts more than I am right now. I am wondering how people study internet posts without talking to the creators of them- it actually feels a little empty without the person behind the posts physically there explaining them.

After this reflection, I realized that I needed to start process coding, and that the upcoming interview would provide direction. Since Trinka was not sending many verbal protocols or journals, the interviews and follow-up texts were crucial in helping me move forward in analysis as I was still collecting data.

When process coding, the researcher attends to both observable and conceptual action, using gerunds to code the important bits of data (Saldaña, 2009). By incorporating process codes with descriptive codes, my analysis was able to yield an understanding of *what* (descriptive) is there as well as *how* (process) it got there. As noted earlier, during early cycles of this recursive process, coding was largely inductive, becoming more deductive near the end when categories had been developed and bits of data could be examined for their relevance to them. Process coding proved to be the method that would help me create categories. As I attempted to incorporate process codes into my analysis, writing researcher memos helped me to refine these codes and to gradually incorporate process coding in my analysis:

[As I was reviewing the posts and codes I had applied to them], I realized that many of my nouns (descriptive codes) suggest particular process codes. For example, the list of codes under "Activities/Likes" are all nouns, dance, comics, food, etc..., but by posting pictures of things she enjoyed doing and things she likes she is doing something. But what?

It was at this point that I realized that the descriptive codes could be grouped by what they suggested about Trinka's processes. So I began to combine the descriptive codes into categories which were labeled with gerunds to indicate the processes that were suggested by the various items that were present in the data. Once I had some processes identified, process coding came a bit easier with particular processes nearly leaping off out of the data. For example, I realized that

Trinka was *presenting* certain parts of herself; this was revealed throughout and across modes of data. I also realized through interviews, the participant journal entry, and my observation of what was missing from her posts, that she was also *filtering* certain parts of herself. Once I identified several major processes in the data, gradually, I began to find that nearly all of the descriptive codes, even the new ones that appeared, fell into one of these. A description of these categories appears in the next section on creating stable lists of items.

While I used these methods (initial, descriptive, process coding) to analyze all data, for the participant's posted pictures, memes (which I think of as an image that is copied with or without being altered and then reused in sometimes varying ways by various people) and any other visual data, I also incorporated Albers' (2013) recommendations for visual discourse analysis (VDA) to facilitate my understanding of it. According to Albers (2013), VDA "offers insights into the beliefs, thoughts, and practices of the textmaker that otherwise lay hidden as 'art'" (loc. 2148). Whether or not one conceives of visual posts to SNS as "art", I believed that their construction, like that of other visual texts would offer insight into the identity of the creator. There are four guiding principles of VDA. Here I describe each one and an example of how it guided my understanding of visual data:

- Language is reflexive. This coincides with my understanding that language and thought are culturally derived (Vygotsky, 1986) and that language shapes and is shaped by those who use it (Cole, 2003; Wertsch, 1991). This understanding enabled me to see the tools Trinka used as the language of social networking, recognizing that the posts she created were shaped by her and, indirectly, by others and by the expectations presented by the particular forum (Facebook, Instagram, Ask.fm). For example, I saw Trinka's decision to use particular filters when editing photographs to

post, as using the language of Instagram; her use of visual presentation tools was as much an act of language as was any decision to accompany a photo with certain alphabetic text.

- Images are created in a given context as part of a larger conversation. This complements my belief that digital practices are social ones. The images created on SNS had particular meanings that must be contextualized to be understood. It was important for me to understand the larger context in which Trinka created her social networking posts. This context included what was going on in her life at the time (transitioning to high school for example) as well as an understanding of the cultural context in which her posts were created (one in which the transition to high school is an important coming-of-age type event, for example).
- Language is composed of different social languages, and the images children create will carry messages “that society has defined and have become an accepted part of the social collective” (loc. 2143). This understanding helped me to understand how my participant’s identity construction both reflected and, at times, countered prevailing societal norms. This understanding proved key in that Trinka, herself was quite explicit about her desire to appear positive and socially acceptable in her identity presentation. I was mindful that Trinka’s images, and the resulted self she was creating, carried traces of social norms, the conformity to which varied across social networking sites.
- There are cueing systems (structural, semantic, artistic, tactile, and visual) that provide information about how children are constructing meaning. Attending to these cueing systems as I analyzed participant’s SN posts enabled me to understand the

practices she drew upon as she created her digital identity. For example, by realizing the importance of the focal point of images, I was able to realize that the focal point of most of Trinkka's posted images to Instagram was herself even when other people, pets and items were part of the image.

Keeping Albers' (2012) suggestions for VDA in mind throughout the entire analysis process allowed me to better understand Trinkka's online identity and the tools she used to create it.

Creating Stable Sets of Items

Once finding items (coding) has begun, LeCompte's (2000) next step is to create stable lists. Merriam (2009) calls this *category construction* and compares it to sorting items in a grocery store. Saldaña (2009)'s explanation of "focused coding" (p. 155) was useful to me during this phase. The purpose of focused coding is to create categories of items that are identified in initial coding. As I reread coded data, I looked for items that seem to go together, creating and naming lists. These lists were provisional, open to resorting and renaming as new data came in and new items were discovered.

As I collected new data and continued the cyclical analysis process, I developed categories that appeared to represent my participant's thoughts as she constructed digital identities through social networking; the social practices and tools she used; and the digital identities themselves. As I mentioned earlier, I realized through researcher journaling, that I was favoring descriptive codes over process codes. As I went back through the data, I realized that many of the descriptive codes could be clustered together under a process name that they implied. For example, the descriptive codes, athletic ability, craziness, and helpfulness (along with many others) could be clustered together under the process code (which also served as a category) of presenting self. In this manner, much of the process coding was also focused coding

in which I created categories. In some cases, there were categories within categories. For example, the category of modifying self is also a sub-category of attending to feedback. Table 3 shows the final list of categories, a description of each, and some examples of codes that made up each category. These lists of related items developed and became more stable throughout the project as I continually analyzed new data. Whereas new items were fitting more readily into categories near the end of data collection/analysis, I recognize that the major constructs of interest to this study: identity, language, and text were and are in a continual state of change. These categories represented an emerging picture of Trinka's online identity construction at that time and would undoubtedly change were I to repeat this study.

As I grouped most of the descriptive codes under process codes, I noticed that some of the initial descriptive codes did not fit within the process I had identified. As I reflected on this, I realized that the codes that did not seem to fit into any one category were inevitably what might be better described as *attributes* of the posts themselves. For example, I was labeling the "cast" Trinka's online post as friends, family, pets, and so on. I was labeling the way she had fixed her hair as straight, curly, braided, un-fixed, and so on. All of these details were components of her online presentation and could have been lumped together under *presentation of self*, but there were so many details that I knew I would never see any patterns in them if I did not treat these types of labels, the actual *stuff* that was in her posts, differently. I used the attribute feature in NVivo (2014) to create the following attributes of online posts: Cast, Setting, Number of Likes, Number of Comments, Costume, Hair, and Audience (as identified by Trinka). I chose the drama-related attribute labels as recognition that the data were showing that Trinka was performing her identities in the Goffmanian (1959) sense.

Table 3

Description of Categories

Category	Description	Examples of Associated Codes
Attending to Feedback	Codes within this category suggested Trinkka's attention to feedback from her perceived audiences.	Number of likes Number of followers Compliments Well Wishes Constructive Criticism
Filtering Self	Codes and sub-categories within this category suggested how Trinkka filters (or leaves out) aspects of self when posting online.	Negative feelings and opinions Embarrassing things Unattractive Overly nerdy Fake Personal Information School success Doesn't define me
Presenting Self	Codes and sub-categories within this category suggested how Trinkka presents herself online and what she chooses to include when posting on SNS.	Athletic ability Creativity Intelligence Pursuits and Preferences Physical Appearance Friendliness Helpfulness
Managing Audience	Codes and sub-categories within this category suggested ways that Trinkka manages her online audiences.	Perceived anonymity Family Offline friends People with similar interests People who are not weird Monitoring
Using Tools	Codes and sub-categories within this category related to the tools that Trinkka used as she presented herself on SNS.	Photo-editing Captions Emoticons Hash tags Framing Initialisms Multiple-letter word endings

Once these attributes were set up in NVivo, I was able to define characteristics for each attribute so I used the codes I had applied as the characteristics. For example, under the attribute, audience, I entered offline (close) friends, everyone, no one, and specified group of friends (later narrowed to skating friends, dance friends, and comic friends). Figure 5 shows a table of Instagram post attributes for the month of June. This set-up proved very useful, as once organized, I only had to click in a cell, and a drop down menu with the associated characteristics would appear for me to choose the appropriate one.

	A : Cast	B : Setting	C : Number ...	D : Number ...	E : Costume	F : Hair	G : Audience
1 : 6-1	Self and Famous Pe	Outing	101-125	16-20	Casual Everyday	Down and Straight	A Specified Group of Friend
2 : 6-11a	Food	Car	51-75	1-5	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	All Offline Friends
3 : 6-11b	Self and Pets	Car	76-100	0	Casual Everyday	Side Braid Fixed	Everyone in my SN
4 : 6-12	Self Only	Skating Rink	76-100	6-10	Casual Everyday	Down Not Fixed	A Specified Group of Friend
5 : 6-14	Self and Friends	Unassigned	76-100	0	Dance	Bun	Everyone in my SN
6 : 6-16	Not Applicable	Beach	76-100	1-5	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	No one in particular
7 : 6-17	Self Only	Beach	101-125	0	Swim	Bun	All Offline Friends
8 : 6-18	Pets Only	Home	76-100	1-5	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Everyone in my SN
9 : 6-2 Together	Pets Only	Home	101-125	1-5	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Unassigned
10 : 6-22	Self Only	Not Applicable	76-100	1-5	Not Applicable	Side Braid Fixed	No one in particular
11 : 6-24	Self Only	Dance Studio	76-100	1-5	Dance	Bun	A Specified Group of Friend
12 : 6-26	Self and Friends	Outing	76-100	0	Casual Everyday	Side Braid Fixed	All Offline Friends
13 : 6-27	Self and Friends	School - Event	101-125	1-5	Dress	Down and Curly	All Offline Friends
14 : 6-28	Self and Pets	Home	101-125	6-10	Casual Everyday	Not Applicable	No one in particular
15 : 6-3	Self Only	Home	126-150	11-15	Casual Everyday	Down Not Fixed	A Specified Group of Friend
16 : 6-4	Self and Friends	Friend's Home	101-125	1-5	Swim	Ponytail	A Specified Group of Friend
17 : 6-5	Self Only	Home	126-150	11-15	Casual Everyday	Down and Beach Waves	All Offline Friends
18 : 6-8a	Meme	Not Applicable	51-75	1-5	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	A Specified Group of Friend
19 : 6-8b	Self and Friends	Unassigned	101-125	1-5	Unassigned	Unassigned	All Offline Friends
20 : 6-9	Self Only	Home	126-150	16-20	Casual Everyday	Down and Beach Waves	No one in particular

Figure 5. Instagram Attribute Table for June Posts

Creating the stable lists of items which were the major categories expressed as process codes and these attribute tables proved very helpful as I moved on to the next step, creating patterns.

Creating Patterns

After creating stable lists of items, LeCompte (2000) recommends looking for patterns. Whereas collecting data and finding items “involves taking things apart and identifying their

constituent parts...locating patterns involves reassembling them in ways that begin to resemble a coherent explanation or description of the...phenomenon under study” (p. 150). LeCompte uses assembling a puzzle as a metaphor for qualitative inquiry; the previous step (creating stable sets of items) would be the stage in which you sort similar puzzle pieces together, and this stage would be like assembling the sets that go together. For example, if the puzzle involves birds in a sky, here you would connect the birds to the sky having noted that they go together.

In the present study, I did this by looking within Trinkka’s SN posts, attempting to identify how they fit within the five categories described in Table 3. Managing audience, in particular was a theme that permeated the data, but I needed to know more specifically, for whom she was posting particular types of things and why. To do this, I found it helpful to list all of Trinkka’s posts for Instagram and Facebook where there were identifiable and distinct audiences invoked as identified by Trinkka. Figure 6 shows an example of this process. In the middle of the page, in blue, I listed the dates of the posts and wrote the invoked audience for each next to the date. Then, on the computer, I looked at the posts that were labeled for each group and noted their similarities. I also used the attribute tables discussed in the previous section to aid this this process. Around the edge of the page on Figure 6, I noted the patterns that appeared in the data as I looked at the posts across audience, attribute and visual content.

Saldaña’s (2009) description of axial coding was also useful for this stage of analysis. Axial coding is reassembling data that has been split during earlier phases of analysis, noting how particular categories fit together and under what circumstances, creating sub-categories linked to the larger categories through conditional statements. As my categories became more

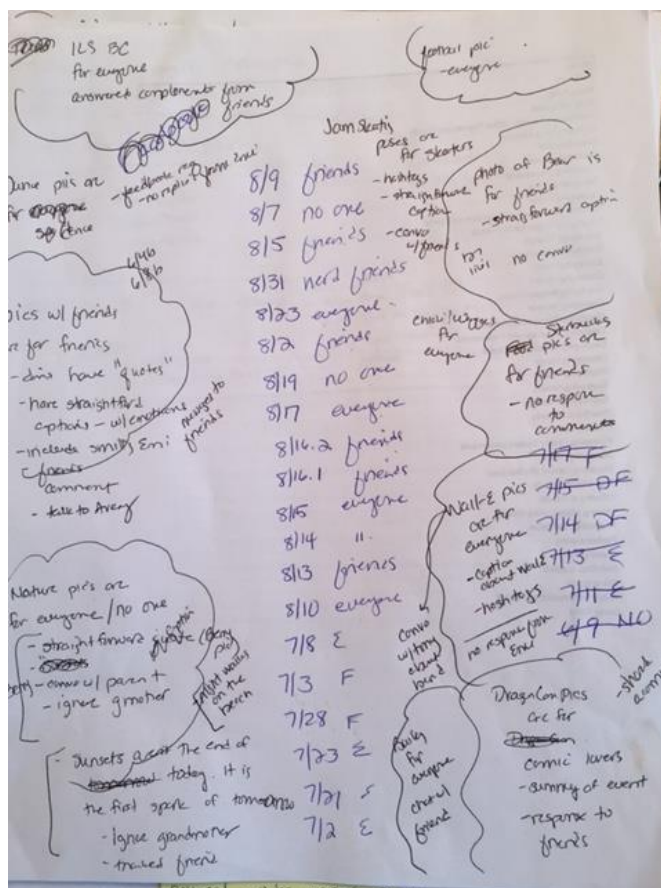


Figure 6. Creating Patterns

stable, I began exploring patterns through inductive thinking that were facilitated through ongoing journaling. I also used the different data sources, in part, as a means of triangulating the emerging patterns.

As noted earlier, repeatedly returning to “tidying up” also helped in each phase of analysis. The early start at creating patterns as seen in Figure 6 helped at first, but as I tried to articulate what I was seeing, I felt I needed something more concrete. Specifically, I wanted to see the labels, attributes, and the posts themselves all at once. To accomplish this, I returned to tidying up by printing and labeling all of Trinka’s posts to Facebook and Instagram. I labeled the posts by audience, date, and number of likes. As I looked for patterns, I found it helpful to physically sort the printed and labeled social networking posts so that I could actually see the

patterns (and inconsistencies) that were emerging from coding. Figure 7 is a photograph of how I laid out Trinka's SN posts sorted by audience. This particular sorting exercise showed, for example, that pictures containing Trinka and her friends were intended for her friends (unless they contained dance content and then they were intended for the dance community).



Figure 7. Posts Sorted by Audience

Assembling Structures

Following LeCompte (2000), once patterns are apparent, finally, the researcher assembles them into a structure that represents the phenomenon under study. I approached this stage in several ways: experimenting with early drafts of the findings chapter, sketching diagrams, and drafting a statement that would describe how the categories fit together. During the data collection period, I was enrolled in writing seminar. While I knew that any draft of findings at this early stage would be incomplete, I used the opportunity to draft an early version of my findings so that I could flesh out my thinking as I was collecting/analyzing data and receive feedback from other scholars. These early drafts were like elaborate researcher memos which I had the opportunity to share and discuss with others (who all were PhD students or candidates

and one professor). During this process I was able to refine my thinking and to better support my findings with more rigorous data analysis.

Constructing these early drafts also involved attempting to write a statement that answered the research question, included all major themes (categories) in the data, and explained how they were related. Figure 8 is a photograph of one of these early attempts. This statement (written along the left hand side of the folder), “She uses an elaborate set of digital literacy practices and unwritten rules to influence others and create a socially acceptable censored self,” was a starting place for assembling structures. I arrived at this early statement by jotting and underlining a key word from each of my research questions and then noting what I had learned so far about each one. The keywords were thoughts, tools and social practices, and identity.

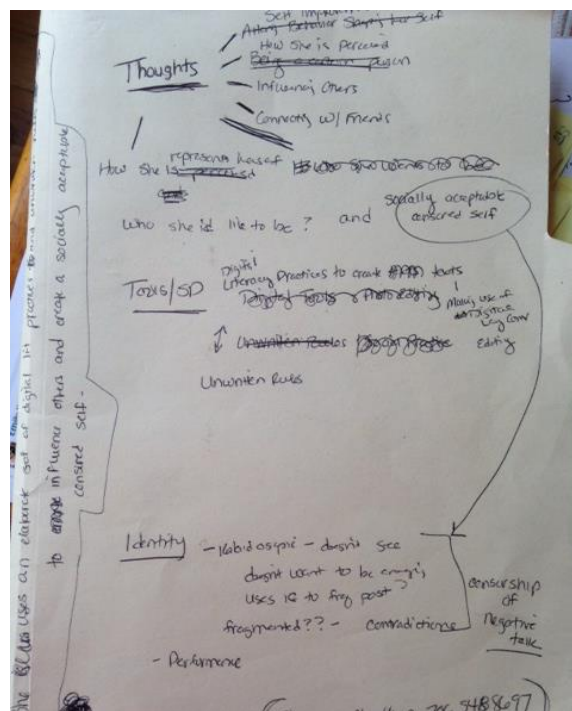


Figure 8. Early Attempt at Thesis

I had recognized at this point that she thought a great deal about others as she posted, but I had yet, at this point, to identify these others as “audience”. I had also seen evidence of her use of tools and her desire to follow the social rules of the SNS she used so I realized that was

important. Finally, for identity, I recognized her practice on SNS as performance, and I was starting to notice that certain things about herself were absent, or censored from online spaces, but I had yet to find that her identity was essentially fragmented across sites. After I sketched out these ideas, even though I knew that I would continue to expand and eventually refine my thinking, I used this folder to hold my notes and ideas as I continued data collection. This simple graphic on the outside of my analysis folder helped me to stay focused on the main topics I sought to explain.

As I collected and analyzed more data, I was able to refine this statement into one that best represents what all of the data show. I did this in part through journaling. Researcher journaling proved helpful throughout data analysis and was instrumental in this phase. It was while journaling that I realized the word “filtered” would best capture not only the process through which Trinka constructed her identity but her online identity itself. On that day, I wrote:

I asked Trinka one day why she put some things on (like dance and band) but not others (like making good grades or doing a really good project for school). She said that school was something you had to do - it's expected. Even though you don't HAVE to make good grades, it is expected by parents and teachers. Dance, band and the other activities she displays on SN are choices. I wasn't sure about that. I thought she didn't want to admit that making good grades might not be part of the public online identity she was crafting (or perhaps filtering?) YES!!!! Filtering. Her online identity is a filtered one. Both literally and figuratively. She uses photo editing software to filter many photos (the literal filtering) and she also carefully filters what she puts on SN, leaving much out and using literal filters on what gets in. The result is a filtered identity. I like that so much better than some of the other representations I have read about (hoped for/possible selves (Zhao

et al., 2008) for example, sounds like it is not a true picture) Trinkka's self-representation online is not false or even something hoped for (as if it isn't true yet) - it is all true, just not whole. It's filtered. **BREAKTHROUGH!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!**

Once I decided to explore Trinkka's identity as "filtered", another exercise that helped me to assemble the structures that would represent Trinkka's online identity construction was to sketch diagrams that might show which parts of her self were caught in the filter so-to-speak and which were presented. I also reworked my thesis statement, a verbal assemblage of the structure (LeCompte, 2000) that I believed represented what I had learned while completing this project.

Figure 9 is an example of how I created this statement. I labeled sticky notes with gerund

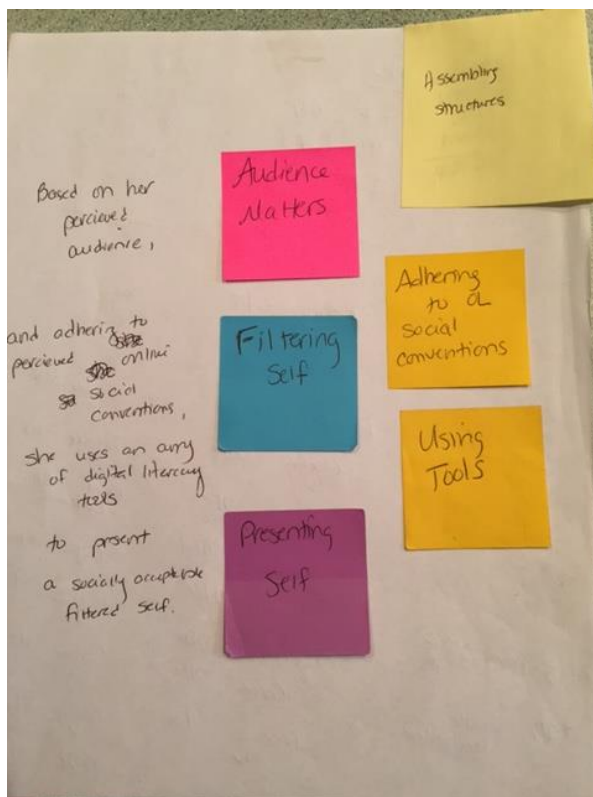


Figure 9. Later Thesis Attempt

phrases (except for audience matters which, for some reason, at this point, I was unable to form a gerund phrase for) that were derived from the major categories I had identified. I moved these phrases around while trying to make a sentence out of them in my head. When I had mentally

constructed a sentence that combined these ideas in a way that represented the data, I wrote the pieces of the sentence on the left hand side. This exercise produced the sentence, “Based on her perceived audience and adhering to perceived online social conventions, she uses an array of digital literacy tools to present a socially acceptable filtered self.”

The result of all of these efforts culminated in a “picture” of what Trinkka’s social networking practices and digital identities “look like” (see Figure 27). The final description, presented in chapter four, reveals what my participant’s online identities are like and what practices she uses to create them. Even though assembling structures is listed as the last step, it is important to note again that these five steps did not occur in a strictly linear fashion. Rather, the process was a recursive cycle in which the first few steps occurred numerous times as data were collected with more thought to assembling structures gradually increasing as the project progressed. Figure 10 is a diagram showing how, even though these stages did occur in a particular order, there was overlap between and among them. Also, the arrows show how I returned to earlier stages and repeated the process as necessary to create the stable categories that revealed patterns and fit together in the end.

Throughout the data analysis process I used NVivo (2014) as a data management tool. I did the conceptual work (coding and assembling structures) by maintaining a close connection with the data; continually asking myself how the data might help to answer my research questions; and thoughtfully considering what I could learn from the data through memo writing. I created the final representation of the data as a result of what I learned, and I chose to represent it with a filter metaphor only after the data pointed to that as a reasonable construct.

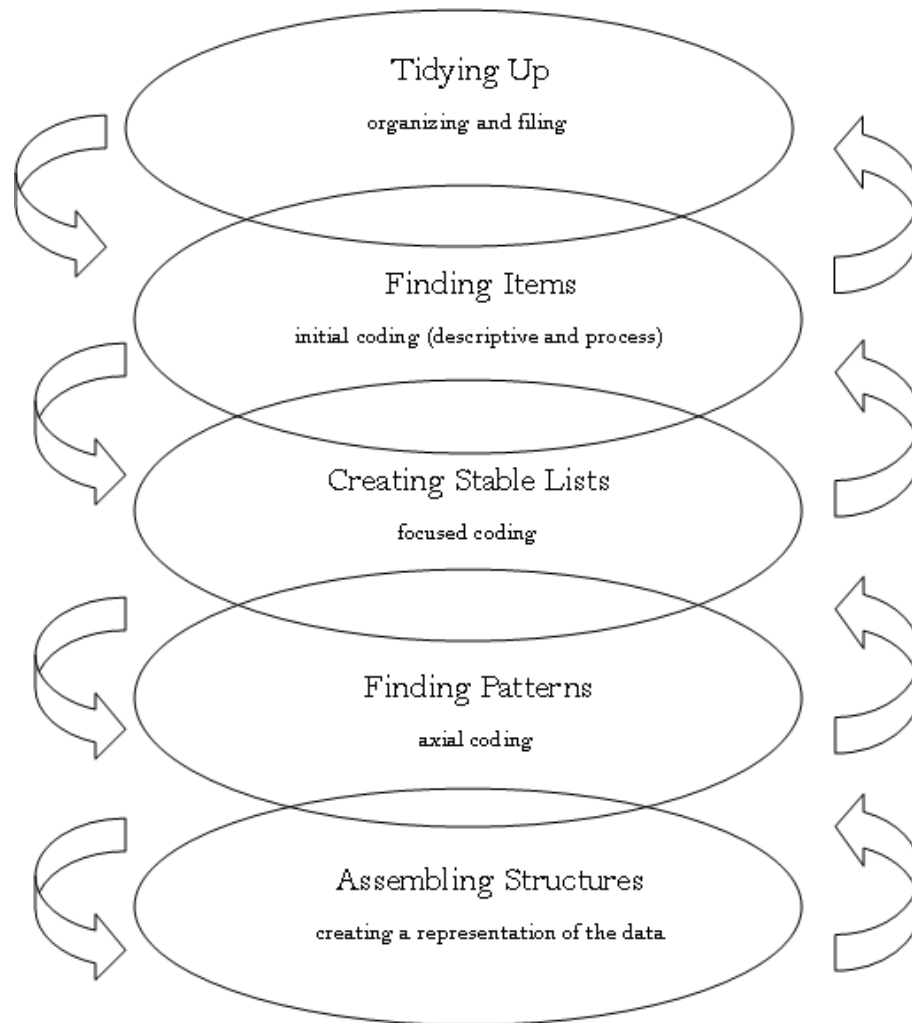


Figure 10. Data Analysis Process

Ethical Concerns and Quality Control

Qualitative research is inherently messy and “ambiguous” (Merriam, 2009, p. 17), because a researcher is investigating real people in real environments, giving up the control associated with experimental methods. For me, this messiness was not to be avoided; fear of this messiness can cause a researcher to ignore data that she does not expect or that does not seem to fit nicely with the rest of the data. Fear of messiness could also lead a researcher to fail to enter the field, holding back, or even opting for other methods altogether. I believe that instead of fearing messiness, to do qualitative research, one must anticipate it and be prepared to deal with it. In this section, I will explain how I dealt with the potential problems of this project by

defining my role; having a plan for dealing with ethical concerns; and how I strived to ensure quality. While I deal with these topics separately, it is important to note that there is considerable overlap among them; quality, in qualitative research, is largely concerned with ethics (Merriam, 2009), which is inherently tied to the researcher's role.

Researcher's Role

In this study I navigated roles that placed me as both an insider and an outsider (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011) to the participant's worlds. As a fellow social media enthusiast and a family member, I was an insider to Trinkka's worlds. I had known her since birth; I was her "friend" on Facebook and Instagram; and we attended many of the same family functions, about 10 per year. I believe that my insider status to Trinkka's life was, largely, a benefit. She and I already had a positive relationship built on mutual trust and care. This established relationship was an asset as throughout the study; I regarded Trinkka as a co-researcher, valuing her perspectives. In our interactions, I shared my thinking with her and sought her input on my developing understandings, inviting her to share her own as we built an understanding of her social networking practices together. For example, she was very helpful in identifying the importance of audience and naming her intended for audience for every post she made during the study. Our regard for one another made the project a joint effort and an enjoyable one.

This insider position did pose some challenges. When recruiting Trinkka for the study, I did not want her to feel that she had to participate in the study to please me or to give me certain data that she perceived I wanted. In an effort to avoid these pitfalls, I assured her from the beginning and throughout that her participation was voluntary and that, rather than having expectations, I was interested in where the data would lead us in our thinking. I explained this to her when asking her to sign an assent letter (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011). Of course, no matter

what I say to her, I recognize that her posting habits were shaped by the experience of participating in this study as they would be shaped by any experience. By maintaining an open line of communication and respect for Trinkka's perspective, I did my best to ensure that she was comfortable with the data collection methods, analysis, and findings. One way that I assured her comfort with the process was by inviting her participation in various data collection methods and not pressuring her. For example, I invited her to keep a journal. When she did not show interest (by not writing anything), I invited her again to try journaling. She then only wrote one journal in the form of an email that briefly addressed several topics in our previous interview. I realized she was not interested in writing in a journal, and I dropped the subject. Pressuring her to write journal entries she had no interest in creating would have been forcing her to manufacture data that might not be accurate and could have potentially damaged our relationship of trust.

Likewise, I had hoped she would make numerous verbal protocol messages, and she only made five. I thanked her for the ones she sent and followed up with an invitation to send more. While the messages she sent were helpful, and I would have like to have more, I would not have wanted her to feel forced to do so; therefore, I settled for what she gave me. Our interviews were rich and she helped me greatly throughout all five 1-2 hour conversations. Had I pushed her for journals and verbal protocols she did not want to construct, our rapport might have been affected and the interviews unable to yield the rich and nuanced data that they did.

I recognized from the start that by doing research with a family member, the nature of our relationship might (and most likely would) change. Before the project began, our relationship was characterized by mutual admiration, respect, and fondness, though we were not particularly close. She occasionally texted me when she had a homework question (one of the perks of having a teacher in the family!), but we did not talk on the phone or text one another on a regular

basis. We talked to one another at family events and stayed aware of life events through online social networking and other family members. Working on this project did bring us closer in some ways; we have more to talk about now because I know her better from closely analyzing her online identity; but overall, we share the same fondness without particular closeness that we had before the project began.

Though I was an insider to Trinkka's worlds in several ways, there were also factors that placed me in an outsider position: I was 45 years old whereas Trinkka was 14; we lived 30 miles apart so we were not in the same community and did not know the same people outside of family; and perhaps most salient to this study, she had grown up participating in digital worlds, whereas they had only been available to me as adult. As an outsider in these ways, I depended on Trinkka to help me understand her digital worlds of social networking as a mid-adolescent. Though I was already connected to her on social networking sites, I rarely engaged actively with her in these spaces. I sporadically "liked" posts that she made on Instagram, but I did not make comments or engage in conversations with her as a result of the posts. While I did not change my level of activity on her posts, I did take a more active role in her digital worlds by asking her about them through text messaging in interviews, and I listened to her verbal protocol messages and read her one reflective journal entry. In these ways, I asked her to allow me a greater level of intimacy with her digital worlds and the social worlds they overlapped with. Frequent contact with Trinkka and a respectful appreciation for her perspectives helped me to co-construct, along with her, what I hope is a meaningful and credible portrait of her social networking practices and identities. Along with an understanding of my insider/outsider status and respect for Trinkka's perspectives, I aimed to assure quality through careful attention to ethics.

Ethical Concerns

Some basic ethical concerns with any study include explaining the purpose to participants, promises and reciprocity, risk assessment, confidentiality, informed consent, and data access and ownership (Creswell, 2008). I explained the purpose of the study to Trinkka and her parents; because I considered her a co-investigator and valued her perspectives, she was fully aware of the researcher questions and my thinking as the study progressed. She understood that there was no payment for her participation. I did not anticipate significant risk with her participation in the study, but she might possibly regret revealing some things to me in future, so I discussed that possibility with her. She and both of her parents signed informed assent/consent documents that explained the purpose of the study and the data collection methods along with potential risks of involvement. Additionally, Trinkka understood that I would maintain access to the data beyond the study and may write other reports based on future analysis. If I do so, I will seek her input as I did for this study.

There are ethical concerns that are particular to Internet research, and even though my data sources included some non-Internet modes, all of my data arose from what had taken place on the Internet on Trinkka's social networking sites. As such, I drew upon suggestions from those writing about Internet research to deal with potential ethical concerns in this study. Beddows (2008) identified several concerns that arose in her own Internet research, several of which are applicable to this project.

One potential pitfall Beddows (2008) pointed out concerned modes of communication. According to Beddows (2008), a researcher must be mindful of the potential effects of computer mediation on communication with participants. For example, in her study about fan fiction writing, she intended to interview participants by phone believing that it would be more

conducive for “capturing rich, qualitative data” (p. 128). However, her participants felt uncomfortable with that so she next planned to use Internet chat via their fan fiction forum instead, only to find that the forum did not support chat. She finally had to settle for the private message feature within the forum which is similar to email. I intended to be creative with the affordances of the Internet in how I communicated with Trinkka, but I was also prepared to accept its limitations and realize that Trinkka may prefer other modes of communication. I was receptive to whatever communication methods were available to us and remained mindful of her preferences. As I mentioned earlier, she did not seem to be altogether comfortable or interested in journals (she sent one entry) or verbal protocols (she sent five audio messages), but she was happy to talk in person and to text so I capitalized on those preferences by not pushing the others.

Another ethical issue that many researchers have encountered with Internet-based research is the blurring of public and private spaces (Beddows, 2008; Berson & Berson, 2006; Jenkins, 2006; Livingstone, 2008; McKee & Proter, 2009; Wesler, Smith, Fisher, & Gleave, 2008). According to McKee and Porter (2009), thinking of the private/public dichotomy is not sufficient for Internet research; they suggest viewing the issue as an intersection between two lines – one that represents a private/public continuum and another that represents a sensitive versus non-sensitive information continuum. Researchers have discovered that even if information is not password protected and able to be publicly viewed, that does not indicate that the author considers the information public domain and fair game for researchers (Beddows, 2008; McKee & Porter, 2009). I discovered the need to consider this as I analyzed Trinkka’s posts and stumbled upon her Ask.fm account as I previously discussed. Though Trinkka’s Ask.fm account is linked to her Instagram account and accessible to anyone who is connected with her

on Instagram, she had not mentioned it to me in our first interview when I asked her which sites she used. Thinking about the blurriness of the lines between public and private and recognizing that Trinka may not have thought of her Ask.fm as “public”, I informed her in our second interview that I discovered it and that it was informing my understanding of her online identity. She, then, engaged with me in looking at Ask.fm as another form of data and one that would add another dimension to our understanding of her social networking practices.

Even though she signed assent and was aware that I would potentially use any and all content from her online social networking, I also recognized that the content of some posts may feel more “private” than others because of their content even though they were all “publicly” accessed by all of her digital “friends”. Keeping this in mind, while I collected and coded all posts across Facebook, Instagram, and Ask.fm and considered them in assembling structures, in the final report, I purposely avoided quoting from posts that I knew might be sensitive or that Trinka would not want made any more “public.” The only posts in this category were ones from Ask.fm, and they included references to personal family issues and comments about potential boyfriends.

I also saw the comments that her friends made to her posts, and while they were “public” in the sense that they could reasonably expect any online “friend” of Trinka’s to see the comments, they may have considered them “private” in that they were only visible to circles of connected friends or the nature of their content may have made them seem more “private”. While, as a researcher, I had the ability to “lurk” (Beddows, 2008, p. 134), observing but not participating in online interactions, I did not take advantage of this ability. When I chose to use comment threads in the final write-up, I pixelated the user name and profile picture, and I did not use any comments that could identify the commenter. Seeking permission to use these

comments would not have been feasible in many cases as not all of Trinkka's online "friends" were known to her in offline spaces.

Realizing that no matter how many ethical safeguards I put into place, unanticipated issues were likely to arise. For these, I drew upon the framework suggested by McKee and Porter (2009). They offer a rhetorical case-based framework to guide ethical considerations for Internet-based research. They call for rhetorical casuistry in solving ethical dilemmas, describing their view of rhetoric as "the 2400-year-old art of argument and persuasion, involving dialogic interaction between participants with differing views" (p. 12). Casuistry is a way of questioning behaviors and norms from a stance of what is morally right; McKee and Porter (2009) conceive of it as an important form of reasoning about difficult moral questions. The gist of their framework is that researchers must dialogue with all stakeholders involved in a project to arrive at ethical decisions:

The individual researchers should not make ethical decisions in isolation, or even only under consultation with other researchers but should include in ethical deliberations a number of audiences – regulatory boards, fellow researchers, and importantly those affected by research decisions (the authors and/or participants being studied (p. 15).

As I was collecting and analyzing data, as mentioned earlier, I was a little disheartened that Trinkka had not taken up the participant journal writing. I thought that suggesting topics or different formats (like illustrating or writing poetry) might help. However, I was not sure that this fit within my methodological framework that had been approved by The Georgia State University Institutional Review Board. Relying upon McKee and Porter's (2009) advice, I consulted my advisor as I was conducting this work under her guidance and her name would be on the final product along with mine. Her (McGrail, 2014) response confirmed that my situation

was “tricky” (her word) and that I might be telling her what I wanted to hear by suggesting formats and topics much like a teacher would. She reminded me to adopt the researcher role rather than the teacher role. This exchange was helpful; after reviewing my methodology as written which stated that I might suggest posts which she could write about and reading Dr. McGrail’s response, I decided to suggest some topics that had arisen from our discussion that day. In that way, I was not assigning her work like a teacher would, nor was I asking her to give me information that I expected to learn; I was merely encouraging her to take up journaling and offering advice as to how that might be done.

At another point during data collection and analysis data, I discovered a process that Harter (2012) used with participants in her study to demonstrate adolescents’ kaleidoscopic self. I wanted to try something similar with Trinkka, questioning her about her characteristics within and across SNS, but I was not sure that my methodology allowed for this. To handle this, rather than just thinking about it on my own, I consulted my advisor, sending her the following email:

I want to ask my participant to describe herself across different social networking sites in the same way that Harter asked adolescents to describe themselves across different settings. After she names the traits, I would ask her to identify the ones that are contradictory and the ones that are a source of conflict. This would help me to refine my explanation of her online identity as representing a kaleidoscopic one or not (in Harter's terms).

This particular query was not part of my original methodology, but I don't think it falls outside the line of questioning I outlined as it relates to her identity in digital spaces. Do you see a problem with me doing this as part of an interview?

Tara

Dr. McGrail (2014) responded:

Dear Tara,

Thank you for the inquiry. You can ask your participant to describe herself across different social networking sites and then ask a few follow up questions if necessary. One thing to keep in mind is not to lead or suggest the direction of her response. This is because you want to find out what she thinks for herself and how she explains her thinking, weather it represents or does not a kaleidoscopic identity construct.

This exchange validated that this line of questioning would not fall outside my planned methodology, and I was careful not to lead Trinka throughout this discussion. I did not talk to her about kaleidoscopic selves or what I was trying to confirm/refute. Taking the time to talk with Dr. McGrail and consider the issue together ensured I stayed within the ethical boundaries of the study.

Quality

Merriam (2009) suggests nine strategies for enhancing the rigor and, therefore the trustworthiness, of a study. Here, I will explain how I drew upon each of her suggestions to ensure the quality of this project: triangulation; member checks; adequate engagement in data collection; researcher's position or reflexivity; peer review; audit trail; rich, thick descriptions; and maximum variation.

For triangulation, I used multiple data collection methods to confirm findings. Participant journal (though limited); interviews; ongoing interactions with Trinka via text messaging; participant's posts; her verbal protocol messages; and my journal all informed one another and confirmed findings. Member checks also helped confirm final understandings; throughout the study and more intensively near the end, I shared my understandings with the

participant and make adjustments or write explanations as a result of her input. I participated in a writing seminar during data collection and analysis during which a professor and three other doctoral students or candidates read and commented on my developing understandings, pointing out where more data were needed to substantiate claims and asking questions about the claims to elicit clarification on my part. Additionally two fellow doctoral candidates and my advisor engaged in discussions with me along the way and read the findings, holding me accountable for supporting claims with data and elaborating thoroughly on any inconsistencies. One area that every reader identified as needing elaboration, was my original representation of Trinkka's identity as a filtered one. This feedback was invaluable as the concept of filtered identity was, to me, the main finding of the entire project. Originally, I used one diagram (Figure 27) and generic explanation of filtered identity across three SNS to represent the findings. Based on feedback from the writing group and others, I created four filter diagrams (Figures 28, 29, 33, and 32) so that I included not on the generic representation of a filtered identity (Figure 27), but ones that were specific to Trinkka's identity across the three SNS she inhabited (Figures 28, 29, and 33). The early feedback from the writing seminar also sent me back to the data again and again to better support claims; as I spent more time with the data, not only was I able to better support claims, I was able to refine my thinking (as shown in Figure 9, Later Thesis Attempt in section on assembling structures).

Adequate engagement in data collection is also important to ensure that results are credible (Merriam, 2009). There are no set rules for how long one must spend in the field or how much data to collect, but the "rule of thumb is that data and findings must feel saturated" (Merriam, 2009, p. 219); in other words, once I began to seeing and hearing the same things over and over and no more information was surfacing, that was enough. Whereas I did experience

this point, especially in the final interview when Trinka and I discussed the findings at length, including explaining inconsistencies, since Trinka (as is any human) is still developing and changing, one might expect to continually find new data; it would be unreasonable to expect her online identity presentation to remain stable. However, in going back over the data collected from that period of time, summer 2014, I did my best to produce a report that presents a complete and nuanced view into her online identity presentation for that time.

Reflexivity, or attention to researcher position, is important to the credibility of a qualitative study (Merriam, 2009). I have already demonstrated this when discussing the researcher role in the study. My participant was a family member; as discussed earlier, I used the researcher journal and conversations with trusted colleagues to identify potential biases that existed or developed as a result of my relationship with the participant. For example, I had a lengthy conversation with a fellow doctoral student who had read my findings chapter. She pointed out that Trinka seemed somewhat one-dimensional (my word), and I realized that I may have been inadvertently leaving out information that may have painted Trinka in a negative light. This conversation led to another look at the data and revision of the findings that presented a more nuanced understanding of Trinka's online practices.

As well as being aware of my role as an insider/outsider and the benefits and challenges therein, I also recognized other dispositions and assumptions that influenced this study. I am a digital revolution enthusiast; that is to say that I enjoy owning and using the latest technological tools and usually see technological advancements in a positive light. This perspective may trace back to my college days when I would call my mother in tears the night before a paper was due, pleading with her to type it for me; I was an inadequate and impatient typist whereas my mother was highly skilled. Fortunately, she was usually willing to help, but how long could I expect my

mother to type my papers for me? Then, my friend introduced me to word processing. My academic life was forever changed! If I had to compose this piece of writing on a typewriter instead of a word processing program, I honestly doubt that I would even try.

So, I make use of and enjoy digital tools and advancements. When others are bemoaning teens' enormous attraction to anything on their smartphones (Clay, 2009; Novotney, 2012), I usually point out the positives and rarely subscribe to fatalist views that technology is ruining our ability to think (Carr, 2010), write (Dillon, 2008; Lee, 2002), or maintain a relationship (Hart, 2010; Novotney, 2012). I have realized this about myself and made a point to bracket my enthusiasm and carefully examine my own use of digital tools, noting when it might be taking away from something else important in my life. (Ignoring the friend in front of me for a Facebook notification, for example). Just as I have become more thoughtful in my use of digital tools, during this study, I bracketed my enthusiasm for social networking, keeping an open mind to the data, not thinking of it in terms of good or bad, but just looking at what they were.

There was also peer review of my work as Merriam (2009) recommends. In addition to the review of my dissertation committee members, as noted earlier, sought input from fellow doctoral students along the way to look at some of the raw data and "assess whether the findings are plausible" based upon them. Discussing my work with other researchers helped to keep me open to other perspectives of what the data meant.

Many people are familiar with the concept of reliability in research as the belief that one would obtain the same results if the study were to be replicated (Merriam, 2009). In qualitative studies, one would not necessarily expect to be able to replicate the study; data are collected in context of real everyday human interaction where the researcher is not interested in trying to control variables. In qualitative studies, reliability, or perhaps more appropriate, credibility is

based largely on whether findings are consistent with the data (Merriam, 2009). To establish this credibility, a researcher should leave an audit trail which “describes in detail how data were collected, how categories were derived, and how decisions were made throughout the inquiry” (Merriam, 2009, p. 223). I kept this in the form of the reflective journal I discussed earlier; in this journal as well as early drafts of the findings chapter, I kept a running record of my reflections, questions, and decisions as I collected and analyzed the data.

Many scholars have been taught to judge the quality of a research study, partly, by its generalizability, the idea that the results apply to the entire population represented by the participants (Merriam, 2009). In quantitative studies, this is usually achieved through statistical sampling, and the larger the sample, the more generalizable the results are believed to be. In qualitative research, however, it is believed that studying the particular is a way to understand the general; the researcher’s role is to provide enough description such that the reader can make decisions regarding the generalizability, or how the results might be “transferred” (Merriam, 2009, p. 227) to another setting. I accomplish this through “rich, thick description” which refers to “a description of the setting and participants of the study, as well as a detailed description of the findings with adequate evidence presented in the form of quotes from participant interviews, field notes, and documents” (p. 227). Chapter four contains many quotes and actual posts from Trinka’s SNS which are detailed and contextualized so that a reader might make adequate decisions about how this particular case might generalize (or not) to other settings.

The final suggestion Merriam offers for assuring quality in a qualitative research study is maximum variation which refers to purposefully seeking diversity in sample selection. This strategy is not applicable in single case study design; as an alternative to variation, Merriam offers the “typical sample” (p. 228) in which one selects a case that is typical of the larger

population of interest. That is what I have done in the case of Trinka. She was a typical case in that she was a 14 year old female who used social networking to interact with others and create digital representations of herself. With the rich description I tried to provide of her in this chapter and chapter four as well as the previous discussion of data collection and analysis methods, a reader will be able to make decisions regarding how the results might transfer to other cases.

Table 4 below shows Merriam's eight suggestions and how they applied in my study.

Table 4

Application of Merriam's Suggestions for Quality

Strategy	My Study
Triangulation	Multiple data collection methods
Member checks	Consulted with Trinka throughout and near the end about potential findings, incorporating her input
Adequate engagement in data collection	Data collection continued until a point of <i>saturation</i> was reached
Researcher's position	Insider/outsider who remained respectful of Trinka's perspective; bracketed enthusiasm for social networking, remained open to the data
Peer review	Dissertation committee; discussion with colleagues throughout; fellow writing seminar students and professor
Audit trail	Reflective journal detailing data collection and analysis methods throughout
Rich, thick descriptions	Reflective journal and findings drew upon detailed descriptions of participant, setting, and analysis
Maximum variation or typicality sampling	Typicality sampling of mid-adolescent online social networking user

Limitations

It is important to note potential limitations of any study. Generalizability is potential limitation of any qualitative study and perhaps more so in the choice of single case study design (Merriam, 2009). Generalizability, as noted earlier will lie with the reader and rely on my ability to provide adequate detail. I have made assumptions about Trinka's typicality based on her age,

gender, and use of social networking that were previously discussed; whereas these features made her “typical” in terms of the phenomenon under study, other characteristics may limit her typicality to certain groups. For example, she was a Caucasian girl from a working class family with certain “middle class” values such as a belief in education and hard work. All of the features that are particular to this case will limit the generalizability of the study. Other studies are necessary to continue the conversation about online identity presentation; for example, more case studies of young people who differ from Trinka in terms of race, gender, socio-economic status, and geographic location would create a more complete picture of how young people represent themselves online.

Additionally, the time frame in which this study was completed limit its findings. While I was able to immerse myself in Trinka’s digital worlds for three months, had I followed her for six months or longer, a different picture may emerge. Not only was the amount of time a factor in findings, but the timing itself was. This study took place, for the most part, over the summer which probably results in a very particular picture of identity presentation that would be enhanced by collecting data during the school year. Studies that occur during other times of the year or long-term ethnographic studies would add to the findings of the current project.

Finally, Trinka’s reluctance to participate in some of the data collection methods (journal and verbal protocol) have created a certain kind of understanding that might have been different if these pieces had been richer in this study. Studies that enhance the use of verbal protocols or other new methods of data collection (like the text messaging in this study) will add new layers to the growing body of research on identity in online spaces. More implications for future research will be addressed in the final chapter.

Timeline

Data collection for this study took place during the summer of 2015 with analysis, member checking, and writing the report continuing on after that. Table 5 is a timeline showing when the various stages of the project were completed.

Table 5
Project Timeline

Month	Data Collection	Data Analysis	Member Checking	Write Report	Defend Dissertation
June 2014	X	X	X		
July 2014	X	X	X		
Aug. 2014	X	X	X		
Sept. 2014		X	X	X	
Oct. 2014		X	X	X	
Nov. 2014		X	X	X	
Dec. 2014				X	
Jan. 2015				X	
April 2015					X

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

...my true identity is the same on all [social networking sites], but it's just kind of a lot ... I KNOW definitely a lot of it is WHO sees it... ~Trinka, during our second interview

Trinka, the fourteen year old participant in this study, expressed to me that when it comes to identity and what is shown to others, it is often *who* (emphasis mine) those others are that really matters. Since I already knew Trinka before this study and was already friends with her on social networking sites, I began with a potentially large data set and ideas about what it all could mean. However, interaction with Trinka during the study has revealed much more than I ever could have learned through studying her posts to social networking sites on my own. From the first interview, she worked earnestly to answer my questions and help me understand her social networking worlds. As I sat across from Trinka during the first interview, I was struck by the responsibility of my task to represent her adequately and fairly. We faced one another over her grandmother's patio table on a screened-in porch, the birds chirping, cicadas humming, and Trinka, with her long blonde hair pulled back casually, her face, clear of make-up, freckles dotting her nose, looked at me seriously, making eye contact as we talked. She opened up her thoughts about what she does and doesn't post and why. We met five times altogether, each conversation revealing a little more about who she is in social networking spaces, and how and why she presents those identities. I have talked with her about my findings, accepted her feedback, and hope that I have produced a final product that is true to her perspective as well as mine. In this chapter, I will present what I have learned about Trinka and her identity construction in social networking spaces.

The following questions guided my inquiry:

- What are a mid-adolescent's thoughts as she decides what to post on social networking sites to represent herself?
- What do the tools and social practices she uses reveal about her online identity construction?
- What kinds of identities does she present on social networking sites?

Data analysis showed that, based on her perceived audience, Trinkka adhered to her self-perceived online social conventions and used a variety of digital literacy tools to present socially acceptable filtered identities across three social networking sites: Facebook, Instagram, and Ask.fm. Trinkka's identities were filtered in a technical sense as she used tools (some of which are actually called filters) to present a certain image; they were also filtered in the sense that she chose which traits to present across SNS. Four important themes in the data led to this understanding: audience matters; adherence to perceived social conventions and participation in trends shapes her practice and the identity she presents; digital literacy tools shape the identity she presents; and the resulting identities that she presents across social networking sites are socially acceptable filtered identities. I will explain each of these themes, sharing key pieces of data along the way.

Audience Matters

I begin with audience because "who sees it" in Trinkka's words, permeates most of her activity online and largely affects the resulting identity that she presents. While I treat it here separately, I will continue to readdress audience throughout my discussion of the other major themes as it cannot be separated from most of the online choices Trinkka made.

As Trinkka shared with me what she thinks about when she is posting and creating an online identity, I was struck by what a thoughtful a process it is for her. While some might

believe that much of what teens post online is done carelessly (Burke, 2009) , Trinkka actually puts much thought and intentionality into what she posts and how she represents herself online. Throughout her decision-making about what to post or not post, her audience and how she might be perceived by various audiences is at the fore-front. This chapter started with a quote from Trinkka in which she explained why different self-traits are presented or filtered across her three preferred social networking sites. She pointed out repeatedly to me that “who sees it” is a “big part of it.” Several major subthemes related to audience emerged from the data: Trinkka took steps to manage her audiences across social networking sites, attended to feedback from her audience, desired to have a positive impact on her audience, and wanted to present a socially acceptable presence across three different social networking sites. I will share data related to each of those points in this section. Perhaps the most salient finding related to audience is how her identity is presented differently for different audiences, but I will save that discussion for the section on socially acceptable filtered selves.

Managing Audience

Audience has been recognized as a complex construct (Lunsford & Ede, 2009), not easily explained. The digital revolution is muddying the issue even more; boyd (2007) refers to the social networking audience as “networked publics” emphasizing the connectedness and the public nature of online interaction. Data collection and analysis in this study also points to the importance and complexity of Internet audiences. Trinkka primarily used three different social networking sites: Facebook, Instagram, and Ask.fm. I will explain how she managed her audiences across each one; describe the audiences; and summarize what she posted for the various audiences.

Facebook. Facebook is a popular SNS where users create a profile page on which they may choose to complete certain sections introducing themselves and their interests. Users have high control over who can join their network and who can see what they post there. Trinka only had Facebook “friends” with whom she had an offline connection; this audience included many family members (both parents, her sister, her two first cousins, numerous second cousins, grandparents, aunts, great-aunts, and uncles); family friends of all ages; friends from the three schools she has attended; and friends she has made while participating in activities (dance, skating, cheerleading, and band). At the time of this writing, Trinka had 422 Facebook friends altogether; that may seem like a high number to some, but Trinka explained to me that she exerted tight control over who is in her Facebook network and that she had her account set to “Friends Only” so outsiders could not see her content. She explained how she managed her Facebook audience:

I don't take friend requests from anybody I do not know or never seen before. If they look like ... If I see them and I know I know them from school or I've seen them from school or the skating rink...I usually accept it. And if they start posting stuff or, like, messaging me constantly, I usually unfriend them. If I see stuff, like, on my wall that gets really, like, annoying, I'll probably just hide all their posts.

I asked her if she would describe herself as being careful on Facebook since she gives so much thought to whom she will allow to be part of her Facebook audience, and she explained to me that for Facebook, it is important that she know that person in some way offline:

I'm not really careful; I'm just kind of picky, I guess, because I don't want a bunch of people on my Facebook that I have no idea who they were. Do I really want to talk to them or see what they're doing? ...if I've seen their post on Instagram and I know they're,

like, one of my best friend's friends and I'd, like, maybe talked to them...on the phone with that friend, or, like, met them once in person, you know, I'd probably take the friend request.

She went on to explain that she does not accept a friend request from everyone she knows. She censors who she accepts as a Facebook friend based on the kind of person she perceives him/her to be:

But, like, if there's somebody that I know from school that I know they're not really a good kid, like they do drugs and stuff, which a lot of the time you can probably pick those kids out and it's sad, but I usually don't accept their friend requests, 'cause I don't really see a need to.

Trinka created hundreds of Facebook posts since she joined the network in 2010.

However, to allow for in-depth analysis of posts including lengthy discussions about them with Trinka, I chose a three month period from June-August of 2014 during which to collect posts for this project. During that time, Trinka posted 22 times on Facebook; even though all of her Facebook friends can see her posts, she is sometimes thinking about particular groups when she posts. We talked about each of her 22 posts, and I asked her to define the audience for each one. In doing so, she was identifying the “addressed audience” for her posts which Lunsford and Ede (2009) define partly as the intended audience. This group would represent the actual people toward which Trinka directed the content of her social networking posts. The audience she is imagining might actually be different than the actual people; this imagined audience, which will include stereotypes and roles that people may not actually fulfill is in contrast to the addressed actual people. This distinction and its implications will be addressed further in the discussion chapter.

Figure 11 shows how many times she posted for each of these audiences. She posted most often (9) for “everyone” in her social network followed by 5 posts for “no one in particular”. She posted eight times for specific groups of friends (four for dance friends, three

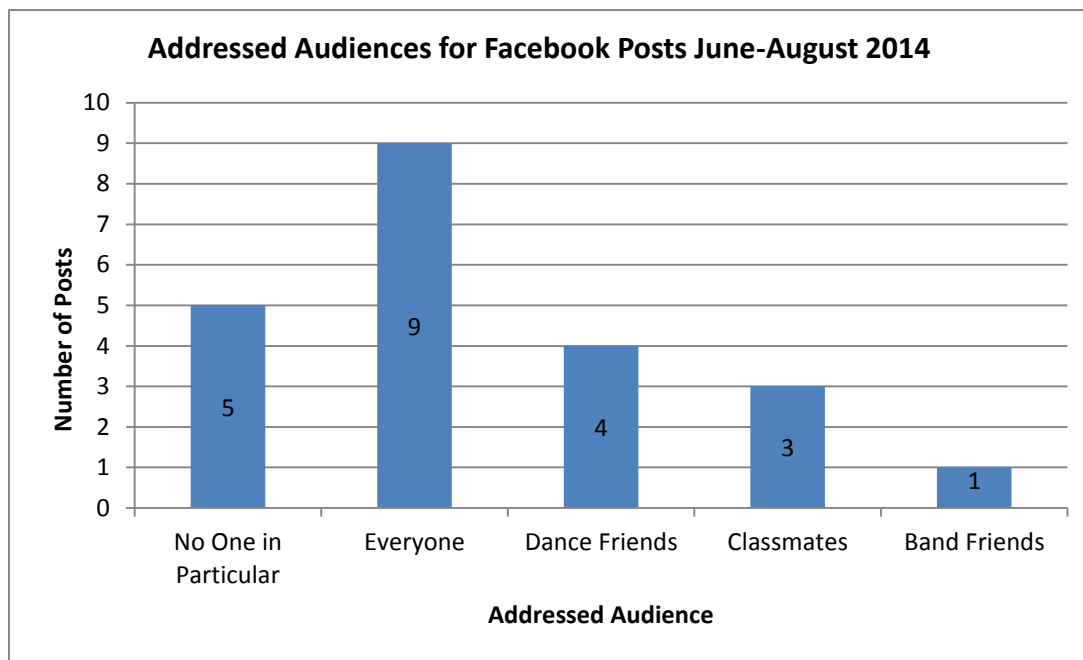


Figure 11. Trinka’s Facebook Audiences

for classmates, and one for band friends). Most (9/23) of Trinka’s Facebook posts were for non-specific audiences she called “no one in particular” or “everyone”. I was unclear about the difference between these two groups so I asked Trinka to differentiate between them for me. She explained that even though she knows that everyone in her Facebook network can see any post, she is not always thinking about that. For her, posting to a target audience of everyone is like saying to everyone in her Facebook network, “Hey everybody, look at this!” On the other hand, when creating the posts that were for no one in particular, she was not thinking of who would see it. She said that the posts that were for no one in particular were really for herself. This audience would correspond with the “Generic You” invoked by McGrail and McGrail’s (2014) fifth grade bloggers who often wrote for a nonspecific audience as well.

Five of Trinka's nine posts that were for everyone were expressions of appreciation for the arts. For example, she posted about two different books that had inspired her, *Perks of Being a Wallflower* (Chbosky, 1999) and *Fault in Our Stars* (Green, 2012), which have both been made into movies; shared a musical tribute for the actor Robin Williams who had recently died; and shared an Under Armor ad with the caption "Under Armor settles whether ballet is a sport...". Three of the "everyone" posts were calls to action: (1) a video of her father dumping ice water on her head for the "ALS Ice Bucket Challenge" a viral social networking phenomenon in which someone posts a video of herself being doused with ice water in order to raise awareness of the disease known as ALS and encouraging others to contribute, (2) an article defending the popularity of the "ALS Ice Bucket Challenge", and (3) a post asking for prayers for her dance instructor who had recently been diagnosed with leukemia. The last "everyone" post was a photo collage of her and her father shared as a Father's Day tribute.

The five posts that were for "no one" or herself, as Trinka described this category, consisted partly of profile changes. Whenever a user changes their profile picture, that event shows up as a "post" on the Facebook feed; two of the five "no one" posts were such changes. The other three were a shared video clip from the Jimmy Fallon show, a brief commentary of her own about how hard it is to stop watching Netflix, and a photo collage and verbal tribute to Trinka's dog, Oscar who had just died. Since it seemed to me that most of her "everyone" posts were about topics of importance and her "no one" posts were of less importance, I was curious about why the tribute to Oscar was for no one. She explained that she was not really posting that for anyone else, but that she was upset, and it helped her to create and post the tribute. It is important to note that the post about Oscar was created for Instagram and through a feature connecting the two sites, was "copied" to Facebook as well. The Instagram user has the option

to send Instagram posts to Facebook or not. During the data collection period, Trinka only copied her Instagram posts to Facebook three times: once here with the Oscar post; a picture of her new point ballet shoes; and a video of her doing the “Ice Bucket Challenge”. Since the Oscar post was intended for “no one”, really for herself, I asked her why post it at all? And why post it in two places? She stated that even though the post wasn’t FOR others, it helped her to know that people would see it.

Only about a third of Trinka’s Facebook posts (8/22) were intended for specific audiences: four for her offline dance friends, three for her classmates at school, and one for friends in the school band. Not surprisingly, the four posts that were for her dance friends were about dance: a picture, reposted from her Instagram account, of her new pointe ballet shoes (reposted from Facebook); a request for a group picture someone had taken in a dance class; a post containing the requested picture; and a shared video of a contestant on the television show, *So You Think You Can Dance?*. Three posts were intended directly for her fellow high school classmates: two were questions about school schedules and who else might be in her classes and one was an article she shared entitled *33 Things Every High School Freshman Should Know*. There was one post during the data collection period intended for her friends from the school band; it was the results of an online survey entitled *I Got Band Geek: Which High School Stereotype Are You?*.

Overall, most of the Facebook posts were directed at “everyone” and most of those were more indicative of Trinka’s personal interests and opinions, including her stance on social issues. Even though the Facebook platform allows for uploading personal photographs and videos, the only pictures she posted there during the data collection period were to change her profile photo twice and her cover photo once and the Oscar re-post from Instagram. The only personal video

she posted was the ice bucket challenge video. The vast majority of her posts were articles or videos shared from other places on the Internet.

Instagram. Instagram is a SNS on which users post images or videos with or without brief captions. “Followers” of someone’s account can see his/her posted images and “like” (click a like button) or post comments below the image. Trinka posted about twice as often to Instagram as she did to Facebook and had a much larger and wider audience there than on Facebook (1901 followers). She does, however, manage her Instagram audience and what the audience sees of her. Users may make their Instagram accounts public or private. Trinka’s was set to public so anyone can choose to “follow” her. However, Trinka exercised the option to block some people from viewing her content once they became a follower. At the time of our first interview, she had 1,801 followers (which increased to 1901 by the conclusion of data collection). That sounded like a huge audience to me so I asked her about this number:

TARA: You have 1801 followers!

TRINKA: Yes.

TARA: - and, I think I know the answer to this (laughs) Um, do you know all those people? (laughs)

TRINKA: No. I usually look at, like how old they look, and if they look older - they might be 17 or 18, I usually block them because it’s kinda’ creepy to a point. And if they’re, like maybe 18-year-olds that are into the same thing – like dancers usually don’t bother me – if they’re into the same things I am, but if they totally look older and don’t have bios or pictures, it’s kinda creepy so I usually block those people.

She did have many followers whom she had never met personally, but she screened them for potential blocking based on their age and whether or not she felt the potential follower had a valid reason (shared interest) to follow her posts. During a subsequent interview, three months later, she repeated almost verbatim, the same explanation of how she controls her Instagram audience. She did admit that she likes the idea that there is a potentially large group of people who can view what she posts. Whereas her Facebook audience included only people known to her offline, her Instagram audience was much wider, including many of the same offline Facebook friends and virtually anyone with an offline connection (classmates, family members, dance teammates) or similar interests (dance, comics, jam skating, Boston terriers, and band) as long as the person did not seem “creepy” (absent bio, no pictures, too old).

Although Trinkin’s posts could be seen by any of her 1901 followers, as with her Facebook posts, there was often a more targeted intended audience. Figure 12 shows the intended audiences for the posts she made during the data collection period. From June-August of 2014, Trinkin posted 47 images and 2 videos to Instagram. Most of the Instagram posts (20)

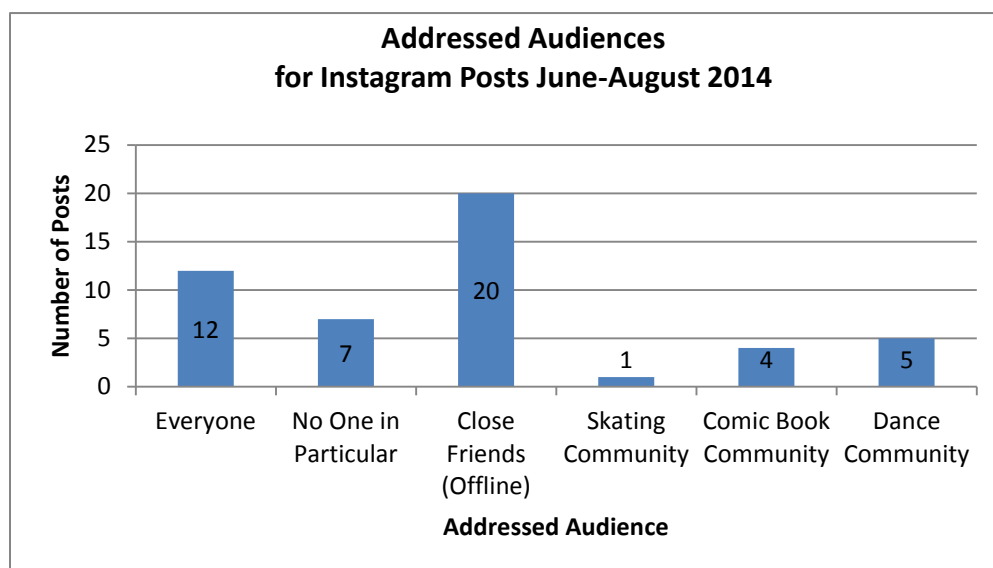


Figure 12. Trinkin’s Instagram Audiences

were intended for her offline close friends, who are mostly classmates but also may include some members of the dance community group. The second largest group of posts (12) was intended for “everyone” which Trinka defined the same way she did “everyone” on Facebook. These were the posts that she said were like, “Hey, look at this!” and were directed toward any and all of her followers. About a quarter of the posts (7) were intended for no one in particular (which she defined as more for herself), and ten were intended for specific groups: members of the dance community (five posts), members of the comic book community (four posts), and members of the skating community (one post).

The 20 posts that were intended for her offline friends, ten were pictures that included herself and her friends; five were selfies (self-taken close-ups of Trinka only); one was a series of pictures of Trinka doing a back walkover on the beach; one featured herself and her very large furry dog, Bear; one was a picture of her chinchilla; one was an image of a Starbucks’ cup in her hand; and one was a edited photo of the characters in the 1985 film *The Breakfast Club*. The ten pictures of herself and her friends were usually of some special event or outing like the eighth grade dance, a trip to an amusement park, or a pool party. Figure 13 shows examples of the images that appeared in posts that were both OF her friends and FOR her friends. The post on the left features Trinka and four of her friends sitting along a bench in a local skating rink. The post on the right includes Trinka and some of her friends at a popular amusement park.

Both posts, as did most of her other posts that were both OF and FOR friends, included straightforward captions that describe the setting for the picture. The first one reads, “Finally got a picture with all my girls at the rink last night” with an emoticon of a face that is laughing and crying at the same time. The caption on the right reads, “Yesterday at Six Flags when we ran into Logan and Logan. Lol.” Whereas most of Trinka’s posts for friends with friends in the



Figure 13. Skating Rink and Amusement Park Posts

picture include straightforward captions like these, two of her pictures of friends were accompanied by praise for them. For example, one post made for “National Best Friend Day” read “Thanks, guys for being good people. Thanks for having my back and not just leaving me behind. You guys are awesome. I love you all.”

Five of Trinkka’s posts for offline friends were “selfies”, defined here as self-taken close-ups of only oneself. About half of all of Trinkka’s Instagram posts were selfies (24/46), but only a fourth of her posts for offline friends (20) were selfies (5). The five selfies that were directed toward friends had a variety of captions: one was a straightforward caption about where she was going that day; one seemed to be a direct statement to her friends (“You’ll never know how much you mean to me.”); and three were the type of captions Trinkka calls “inspirational quotes.” Inspirational quotes only appeared on selfies (no matter whom the audience). The three inspirational quotes directed toward friends read:

- “Happiness does not show up at your door with candy and flowers. It grows from within as long as you tend to it.”
- Trying to be what society wants is pointless. Just be true to who you are.
- Live life like you’re giving up.

While nearly all of Trinka’s selfies included inspirational quotes, these three directed toward friends seemed to offer advice about how to live life. Captioned on selfies (see Figure 14), they seem to speak directly to her friends.

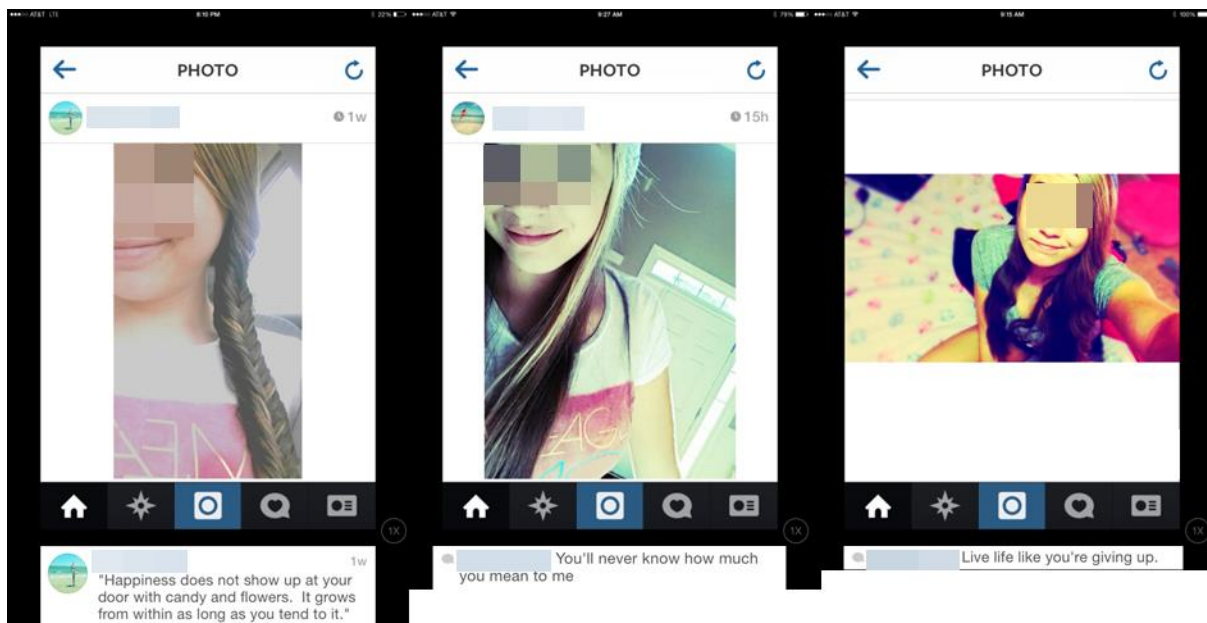


Figure 14. Selfies for Friends

The second largest group of Instagram posts (12) was intended for the audience of everyone which Trinka described as every follower in her Instagram network. These posts shout “Hey, look at this!” according to Trinka. The content of Trinka’s Instagram posts directed at everyone breaks down as follows:

- 3 featuring Trinka’s Boston terrier, Willy
- 3 nature scenes

- 1 featuring Trinkka’s dog, Bailey
- 1 picture of a plate of chicken and waffles
- 1 “throw back Thursday” picture (an old picture) of Trinkka and some of her dance friends
- 1 picture of Trinkka holding sparklers on the Fourth of July
- 1 video of Trinkka being doused with water for the Ice Bucket Challenge, a social media trend started to raise awareness of ALS; and
- 1 picture of Trinkka’s high school football stadium after a winning game

Trinka’s posts for everyone had mostly straightforward captions describing the content of the accompanying image except for one of the nature pictures which included what might be considered one of her inspirational quotes. This post was a picture of a sunset that Trinkka took herself and included the caption, “Sunsets aren’t the end of today. It’s the first spark of tomorrow.” While it bears similarity to the inspirational quotes directed at friends in that it has a hopeful tone, it does not seem to offer direct life advice like the others did.

Seven of Trinkka’s Instagram posts were intended for “no one” which Trinkka defined as being mostly for herself. Four of these posts were selfies. One of the selfies for no one contained the caption, “Summer is a time for sleeping. Excited to know if I made Dazzlers or not tomorrow. Good luck to anyone who tried out! :)” She explained that she was nervous about whether or not she had been accepted to compete in the Dazzlers, the competition dance squad at her dance school and that posting this picture was a way of calming her nerves. The other three selfies for no one contained inspirational quotes:

- No matter what happens tomorrow, stay who you are. (Posted on June 22, a couple of weeks after the end of Trinkka’s eighth grade year)

- You don't need a reason to do everything in your life. Do it because it's fun. Do it because it makes you happy. (Posted on August 7, just after the start of Trinka's ninth grade year)
- The future is a deep and scary place, but sometimes you just have to dive in. (Posted on August 19, two weeks into Trinka's ninth grade year)

I wondered why these quotes were for “no one” when they seemed pretty similar to the inspirational quotes for friends. However, when placed in context, it makes sense that these three posts were for “no one” (herself). Data collection for this project took place during the summer in between Trinka's eighth and ninth grade years and for her first two weeks of high school. Trinka explained to me that when posting the June 22 selfie (Figure 15), she was realizing that some of her friends from middle school were already changing in ways that she had not expected. Much like the post about making the dance team soothed her nerves, the caption in

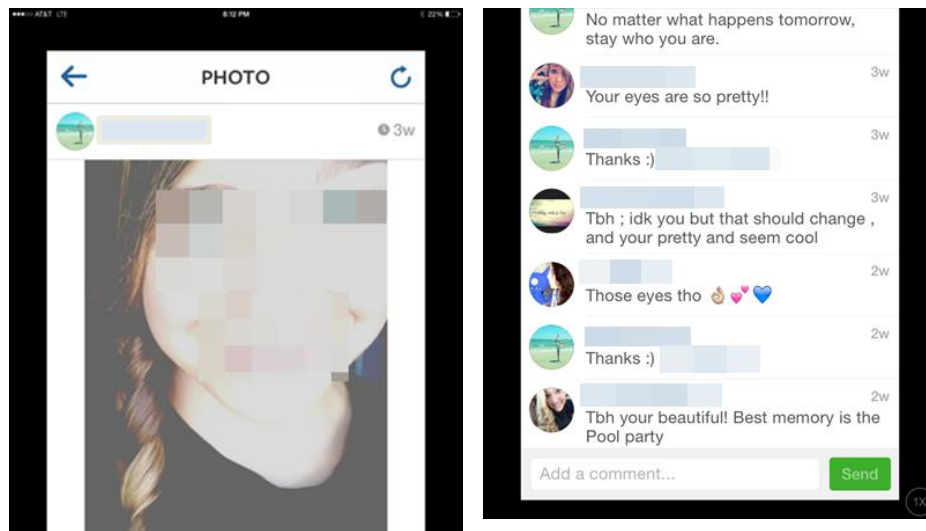


Figure 15. Selfie for Self

Figure 11, “No matter what happens, stay who you are” was a way of expressing, for herself, her fears associated with noticing changes in her friends. As with the bloggers in McGrail and McGrail's (2014) study, the generic audience and expression seem to go hand in hand. The

August 7 selfie was posted on the second day of school after a rather stressful first day of being placed in the wrong classes. She was also, like many ninth grade students, not sure she was going to like high school and feeling very awkward. This post was actually directed to herself, talking herself into jumping in and finding ways to be happy in high school. Finally, the August 19 post which she created two weeks into the school year was like a pat on the back for herself and an expression of what she learned by getting through the first two weeks of high school despite her fear and discomfort.

Ten of Trinkka's Instagram posts were directed toward what she called "specific groups of friends" which we defined more narrowly as the dance community, the comic book community, and the skating community. The five posts that were meant for the dance community included:

- a video of Trinkka doing pirouettes with a caption requesting feedback so she could improve her turns
- a "transformation Tuesday" picture showing a picture of Trinkka at a dance recital four years ago alongside a picture of Trinkka at the dance recital that had just taken place two weeks before
- a picture of her doing a leap with the caption, "I dance not to bring happiness, but to relieve pain."
- a picture of her feet wearing her new pointe ballet shoes, and
- a photo collage of her and several dance friends at the dance studio after rehearsal.

The four posts for comic book community included:

- a picture of her at Dragoncon (a science fiction enthusiast convention) with Milo Ventimiglia, an actor on *Heroes*, a popular science fiction television series,
- a meme featuring characters from *The Avengers*,

- a collage of comic book characters, and
- a collage of pictures of Trinka and the things she purchased at Comicon, a convention for comic book enthusiasts.

The one post (see Figure 16) for the skating community was a picture of Trinka at the skating rink in a jam skating pose.

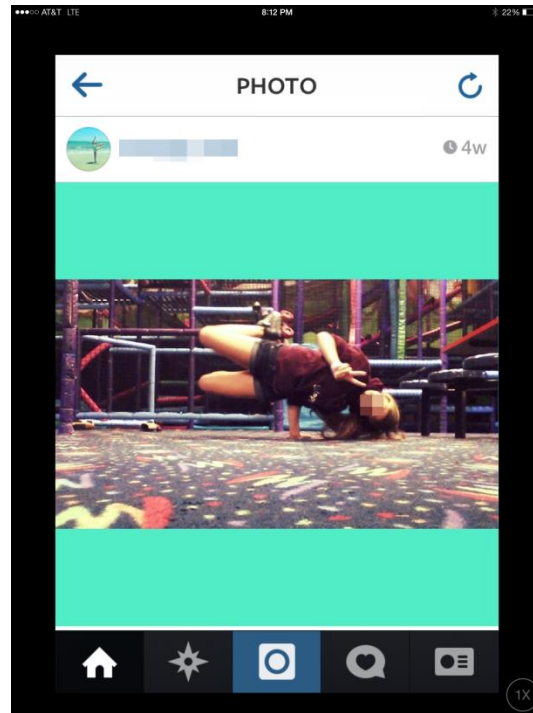


Figure 16. Jam Skating Pose

Trinka’s posts for specific groups of friends, which she defined as the dance, comic, and skating communities, have clear connections to the shared interests of the communities. It is notable that there are several potential audiences on Instagram for whom Trinka does not designate posts (other than the ones created for “everyone”). Trinka has many family members who follow her on Instagram, but none of her posts are directed specifically toward family. Also, Trinka accepts followers who have the shared interest of Boston terriers, but all of her Boston terrier posts are directed at everyone, not just Boston terrier lovers. Also Trinka, who

plays the tuba in the school band and has many band friends, did not post anything related to band during the data collection period. I asked her about this and she said that it was because she doesn't take many pictures in band. She would not elaborate on why she did not take pictures in band when she took them other places in school. At another time, I asked her why she did not post about her academic achievement. She explained that she was able to interact with different people and to highlight different aspects of herself by filtering (my word) those parts of herself:

I think putting creative things on Instagram kind of keeps your status in school NOT a part of who you talk to and who you don't talk to. It's definitely something that changes if you're in school and you're always raising your hand and stuff, a lot of people won't talk to you as much or they will make fun of you because of that. But on Instagram, nobody really knows that and you kind of seem like a different person so people don't really think about that while they're on there.

This desire to present different sides of herself may also be true of why she rarely posts about band.

Trinka's rather large Instagram audience can learn a great deal about her: what she looks like, some of the most important pursuits in her life, and what she believes is important in life (being yourself and pursuing happiness, for example). I will explain more about the identities Trinka presents across her SNS in the section on identity.

Ask.fm. Ask.fm is a site on which anonymous followers ask a question to someone they are following, upon which the person may or may not answer. A conversation may or may or may not ensue. There is no way for a user to block followers on Ask.fm, and often a user does not even know who is asking questions. Users also do not know who might be reading one's

entire transcript. It is important to note that Ask.fm users are anonymous, and anyone can view Ask.fm posts whether one is a registered member or not.

Trinka did not tell me she had an Ask.fm account, but she has a link to it on her Instagram biography so I clicked it. Upon clicking that link, I was able to read all of her Ask.fm posts. Had I not told her I had read the Ask.fm transcript, she would not have known I had done so. I told her that I clicked on the link and found her Ask.fm transcript and read it. She said

I was hoping that you would find it and I wouldn't ... I was really hoping. I'm, like, I bet she'll find the Ask.fm...I'm praying she will because then she'll be, like, more research. And I wanted you to find it like other people would find it and not be, like, hey, here's another social media website.

Even though anyone can find and read anyone else's Ask.fm posts, Trinka perceives a much narrower audience on Ask.fm than what is possible. She explained it as such:

TRINKA:...Ask.fm anybody can see it. But people don't really just come across stuff like that. People usually only follow their friends...

TARA: ...so even though everybody can see Ask.fm because they could click on it from Instagram ...

Trinka:I think part of it is ...

Tara: Who do you mostly think is looking at it?

Trinka:My friends.

Tara: And so that means probably not your family?

Trinka:Yeah

Trinka indicated to me that the people reading her Ask.fm were “people [her] own age”. So, even though the Ask.fm audience is potentially anyone on the Internet, she perceives her

audience there as one of her peers. We talked about how she really just thinks about her friends or other people her age when she answers questions on her Ask.fm account, and I countered:

Tara: Except I found it (laughs).

Trinka: Yeah (laughs) You're doing the project on stalking me (more laughter)

It is notable that, despite Trinka's careful attention to audience, she seemed largely unconcerned about the potentially vast unknown anonymous audience on Ask.fm. Since her Ask.fm account was linked to her Instagram which is full of personal information, and her Ask.fm username is her real name, anyone on Ask could find her Instagram, ask to follow her, and enter two of Trinka's digital worlds with a few clicks. Considering the control the Trinka exercised over her Instagram and Facebook audiences, one might expect that she would be more guarded on a site as open as Ask.fm, but the reverse seemed to be true. Trinka was not daunted by the nature of the Ask.fm audience as evident in the following exchange from one of our face-to-face interviews:

Tara: But on Ask.fm, you're very open and anybody can see that.

Trinka: I don't know why, but it doesn't bother me as much because I feel like that's really who I am and they can ... I don't know who follows me, and I feel like people aren't just following me because they know me. Because they maybe think I'm funny or something, and it's not really like a bunch of pictures of me. It's more of just answers to questions, really.

During the data collection period, Trinka answered 38 questions on Ask.fm. The questions and her answers range from posts about food (she likes to eat Cinnamon rolls) to posts about grappling with death (her grief over her pet's impending death). Table 6 shows the types of questions she answered on Ask.fm. Trinka only defined one audience for her Ask.fm account;

as she answers questions on this SNS, she envisions a large audience of people her own age. In response to requests, she posted several photos of herself and/or her pets, all of which were dramatically less polished than most of the photos her Instagram audience sees. What the Ask.fm audience gets to see of Trinka is more unpredictable than what Instagram and Facebook

Table 6

<i>Types of Questions to Which Trinka Responded on Ask.fm June-August 2014</i>	
<u>Type of Question</u>	<u>Number</u>
Likes (favorite sports brand, foods, etc...)	11
Questions about personality (dream job, how weird are you, etc..)	9
Questions about life, love, friendship (What do people think of you? What is true love?)	8
Request for pictures	3
Feelings (What made you smile today, What do you really want?)	3
Direct compliments	2
Relationship Status (Do you have a boyfriend?)	2

audiences see, as it depends upon what a follower asks in the first place. It also tends to be a more intense, less polished version of Trinka than what Instagram followers see. For example, on Ask.fm, there are two pictures of Trinka sans make-up, hair undone, making funny faces. There are no pictures like this on Facebook or Instagram.

It is also important to note that, even though Trinka perceives the Ask.fm audience as one of peers and presents differently there as a result, she still seems distantly mindful of her family and others who might expect her to behave in particular ways. She revealed this mindfulness when she explained to me that even though she is less guarded on Ask.fm, she is always mindful of online content:

...because, like, if it's something really weird, I'm not going to go out and, like, totally say completely inappropriate stuff, (A) because that's not who I am, and (B) I don't want to, like, I don't know. My friends would probably be, like, what's your problem, are you

okay? Do you need therapy? And I feel, yeah, [my family] can look at on there but I don't really say anything on social media that I wouldn't be okay with my family reading, because that's kind of keeping secrets in a way to me, you know...

I will discuss her varying presentations across social networking sites in the section on identity.

Feedback

The importance of feedback from the audience was a key theme throughout data collection and across all social networking sites. Feedback from significant others as well as feedback from more distant others play an important role in self-definition and self-esteem (Harter, 2012). Online social networking presented Trinka the opportunity to receive a stream of constant feedback from numerous others. Trinka paid attention to the feedback she received on the SNS. All three of the SNS that Trinka inhabited allowed other users to “like” (click a like button) a post. The number of “likes” a post has is displayed and updated in real time. All three SNS also allow users to post comments below the original post. These online interactions are displayed with each post. Generally, the feedback Trinka received (and gave) across all three sites was positive. She told me that occasionally, there might be a negative remark from a member of her online audience, but I never saw any. I asked her how she responded to negative remarks, and she said:

...usually, you can just delete the comment because what people say on the Internet about you, I think doesn't matter much. Because sometimes, you may not even know the person that's saying that...it just doesn't matter to me. If somebody comments something [rude] on my picture, I usually delete it 'cause it doesn't bother me.

This may explain why I did not see any negative feedback on any of Trinka's SNS. She did say that it was very rare for her to receive negative comments which she deems as “bullying”, but

clearly, to her the “audience” who has provided this feedback is mostly likely someone she does not know and therefore their opinion does not matter and can be deleted.

Despite Trinka’s comment that certain opinions do not matter, she admits to attending to the feedback, checking how many likes she gets; who likes things; who has commented on a post; and what the comments were. Next, I will describe the feedback (likes and comments) that Trinka receives on each social networking site in which she participates.

Facebook. Of the three SNS that Trinka most frequently uses, she receives the least amount of feedback on Facebook. It is unclear whether she receives less feedback on Facebook because she posts less frequently there or if she posts less frequently there because she receive less feedback there. However, some of the patterns that emerge in the Instagram data also hold true on Facebook just on a smaller scale. During data collection, Trinka posted 22 times to Facebook. Table 7 shows the content of Trinka’s Facebook posts organized by numbers of “likes”. Most of her Facebook posts only received five or fewer likes from Facebook friends. Most of these posts were either direct questions (which may not really call for “likes” so much as an answer) or shared content from other places on the Internet with the exception of a cover photo change featuring Trinka performing a dance leap on the beach (see Figure 17). This is an

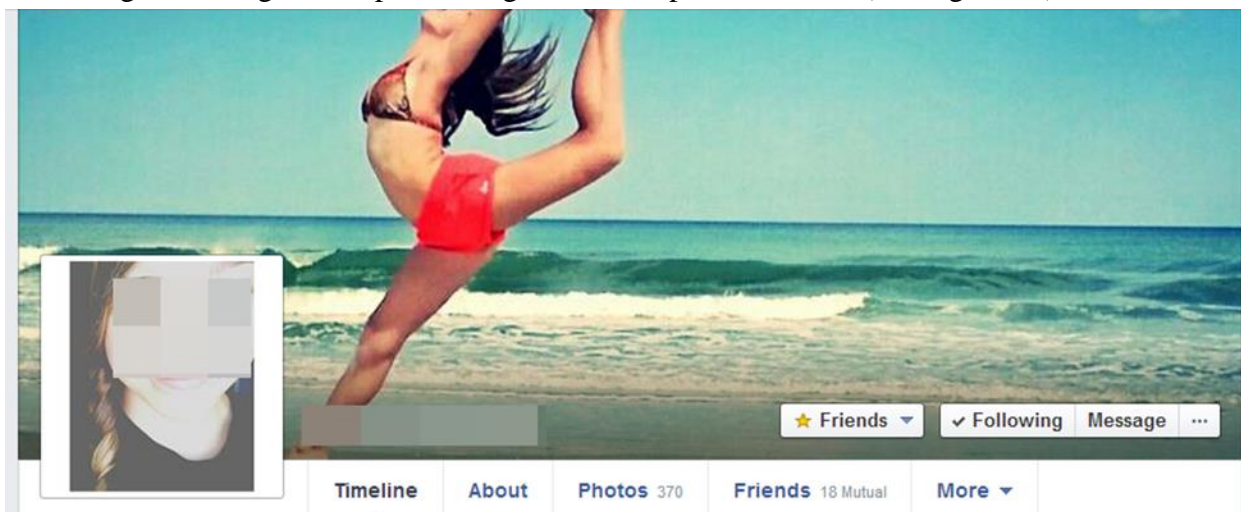


Figure 17. Leap on Beach

anomaly in the data as it will become clear that images of Trinka tend to receive the most likes as well as the most comments from other users.

Trinka received a few more likes (6-10) from posts that were copied over from Instagram or that were related to books/movies that Trinka enjoyed. All of the posts that received 16 or more likes (except for one) included a picture of Trinka. This group of posts includes a picture of Trinka's feet on pointe wearing her new point ballet shoes; a collage of her and her dance friends at a dance class; a photo collage of her and her father as a Father's Day tribute; a photo collage of her and her deceased dog, Oscar, shared from her Instagram account; and two profile picture changes that featured pictures of herself. The one post in this category of likes that did not include a picture of Trinka was a series of comments about how habit-forming it can be to watch a show on Netflix.

Table 7 shows that Facebook posts which are more "liked" by the Facebook audience are ones that Trinka actually created; they are photo collages and/or posts that feature Trinka's image, with the exception of Figure 17. Posts about books and movies received slightly fewer likes than posts of/about Trinka, and posts that are shared content from other places and/or direct questions to her classmates received the fewest likes.

Facebook allows for users to comment below a post so the potential for rich interaction exists in that space. However, there is little interaction (other than the "likes") on Trinka's Facebook account. On fifteen of her posts, no one commented. All types of content were represented in the posts that received no comments (pictures of Trinka, shared content, a direct question to classmates, and a video). Seven of Trinka's Facebook posts had comments, but the interaction was sparse. Trinka only responded to comments on two of these seven post. In one,

Table 7

<i>Trinka's Facebook Posts by Number of Likes June-August 2014</i>		
<u>Number of Likes</u>	<u>Number of Posts</u>	<u>Content</u>
0	2	Question to her friends about school Link to video from a dance contest show
1-5	9	(2) Questions to her school friends One post about how she had successfully curled a friend's hair in preparation to see the movie <i>The Fault in our Stars</i> Shared video from Under Armor showing "why ballet is a sport" Shared video tribute to Robin Williams, a famous actor who had just died Shared video of two actors interviewing one another after inhaling helium A shared quiz result showing that Trinka's social stereotype is "band geek" An article advising high school freshmen of things they should know A shared post asking for prayer for Trinka's dance teacher who had leukemia A cover photo change of her performing a dance leap on the beach
6-10	3	Comment about <i>The Fault in our Stars</i> (book and movie) Comment about enjoying her work on a school project on <i>The Secret Life of Bees</i> Copied post form her Instagram showing her doing the Ice Bucket Challenge
11-15	1	Picture of the members of her dance class who attended a special event, posted as her "cover photo"
16-20	3	Copied post from her Instagram of her feet wearing her new pointe ballet shoes Father's Day tribute to her dad with a photo collage of the two of them Comments about watching Netflix suggesting that it is "addicting"
21-25	1	Copied from Instagram, Tribute to deceased pet, Oscar
26-50	2	Profile picture change – photo collage of Trinka and her dog, Willy Profile picture change – copied Instagram selfie, close-up of Trinka, little make-up, hair twisted to the side

she had asked if anyone had gym the same period as she did. Presumably, she found out that a friend did have gym that period because she then commented “Yayy someone I know! Lol Heather McCoy”. The other post on which Trinka commented was on a profile picture change. Whereas she did not directly copy the post from her Instagram account, she used the same picture as she had in a previous Instagram post (see Figure 15). This particular post also had 34 likes, the second highest number of likes on Facebook. This is the interaction that occurred on this profile picture change:

Female classmate: Flawless or nah?

Trinka: That’s all you

Trinka’s Mom: I made dis!

Trinka: How did I know you were going to say that, [mom]?

Trinka’s Mom: Haha maybe because I say it all the time 😊

Male classmate: You have gorgeous eyes

In this interaction, a female classmate, Trinka’s mother, and a male classmate all complimented her appearance in the photo. Trinka responded to her female classmate by complimenting her in return, a pattern that is more evident on her Instagram account, discussed in the next section. She responded to her mother, differently, almost sarcastically, referring to her mom complimenting her on a regular basis. Interaction with family members is rare across all of Trinka’s social networking sites so this represents an exception to Trinka’s common practice. Finally, Trinka’s decision not to respond to the male classmate is typical and is more evident on Instagram.

Instagram. Trinka receives many likes, positive comments, and positive feedback in the form of smiley face emoticons, heart emoticons, or kissy face emoticons on Instagram. In fact,

the SNS on which Trinka receives the most feedback is Instagram which may be because she probably has the largest audience there or it may be because she posts more frequently on Instagram; I am not sure it's possible to say which comes first in the cause/effect relationship: a larger audience, more feedback, or more frequent posting. I see it as a self-perpetuating feedback loop.

Interestingly, even though Trinka says that she does not really care if people like her posts and that she does not post certain things because of how many people will like them, the data show that posts which contain Trinka's image receive the most number of likes and that she most often posts pictures that contain her image. Table 8 shows brief descriptions of Trinka's Instagram posts organized by number of likes. This table shows that the bulk of Trinka's Instagram posts received between 80-120 likes from other users. These posts include a variety of content including nature pictures, memes, pets and food. Some of these also include Trinka's image though usually with other people or with her pet; only one post with less than 120 likes was a selfie of Trinka only. Conversely, all 13 posts that received more than 120 likes were pictures that included Trinka, and six of them were selfies of Trinka only. The posts that receive the least numbers of likes were meme and nature pictures; they are also among the least frequently posted items.

Trinka gets "notifications" on her phone when someone likes a post, comments on one of her posts, or requests to become a follower. If a user checks her notifications, she can see who has liked, commented, or followed. We were talking about notifications, and I asked Trinka if she checked her notifications often:

Table 8

Trinka's Instagram Posts by Number of Likes June-August 2014

<u>Number of Likes</u>	<u>Number of Posts</u>	<u>Content</u>
80-100	14	(4) nature photos, one of which is accompanied by an inspirational caption and one with the overlay "it's ok not to be ok" (2) memes featuring comic book characters (3) pictures featuring Trinka and her friends picture of Trinka's feet in her new pointe ballet shoes video of Trinka participating in the ALS "Ice Bucket Challenge" picture of Trinka's hand holding a Starbucks cup photo collage of Trinka and her Boston Terrier, Willy selfie in low light, casual clothes, knit hat, caption "You'll never know how much you mean to me."
101-120	22	(7) photo collages of Trinka and her friends, 2 at the skating rink, two at the dance studio, 3 at a variety of places (5) featuring Trinka's pets, two of which included her image (3) pictures of Trinka performing dance leaps or stunts, 2 on the beach (2) selfies accompanied by "inspirational quotes" edited photo of characters in the film, <i>The Breakfast Club</i> picture of Trinka's football stadium after a winning game collage of Trinka and her purchases at Dragon Con picture of a plate with chicken and waffles picture of Trinka holding sparklers, only from her knees to neck visible
121-140	9	(3) selfies, two of which are accompanied by "inspirational" quotes (2) pictures of Trinka performing athletic feats, a dance turn video and a jam skating pose picture of Trinka and a celebrity she met at Comicon side-by-side pictures of Trinka at dance recitals, one recent and one from several years ago picture of Trinka with her dog, Bear selfie of Trinka and a friend at school
141-160	3	(2) selfies accompanied by "inspirational" quotes selfie of Trinka and two friends at school
161-180	1	selfie of Trinka with a caption about where she was going shopping that day

TRINKA: Yeah, I check my notifications. It tells you who likes your pictures or who comments on your pictures, and if somebody starts following you, then you can –

TARA: How often do you check stuff?

TRINKA: I usually check it mostly every day or whenever I post, like after a picture, see who's liking it –

TARA: Mm, hmm

TRINKA: - things like that.

TARA: So, um, so when you're looking at who's liking it, are you looking at who it is or how many? or both?

TRINKA: Both (smiles, Tara laughs). I think most people look at it to see, maybe people like it when I post stuff like this so maybe some people start posting more about it. I usually don't really care how much it is because honestly I just like the fact of knowing that you posted something and a lot of people see it at least. Not everybody likes it, you still have followers that don't like it, but they can still see it, and it kinda has an effect on you, and you feel like you have an impact on those people maybe.

In this exchange, Trinkka seemed unable to express the importance of checking her "likes". In this statement, she began with what she thinks other people do in terms of checking their "likes" and then stated that she did not really care how many likes she got. This seems contradictory since she admits to checking the number of likes almost daily. Also, she posts more frequently the type of posts that gets the most likes, the images of herself. I noticed as well, that she receives very little feedback on Facebook and also posts to Facebook dramatically less often.

I noted earlier that most of Trinka’s Instagram posts include pictures of herself, with half being pictures of ONLY herself. Interestingly, she gets the most number of likes from these photos. Thirteen of her self-only photos received more than 125 likes with seven of those receiving over 150 likes. The only posts that received more than 125 likes were ones that included her image, whether alone or with others. The post that had the most likes across all SNS is shown in Figure 18.

In addition to number of likes, Figure 18 shows some other types of feedback that are typical on Trinka’s Instagram. There are smiley faces with hearts as eyes, and the “OK” sign in

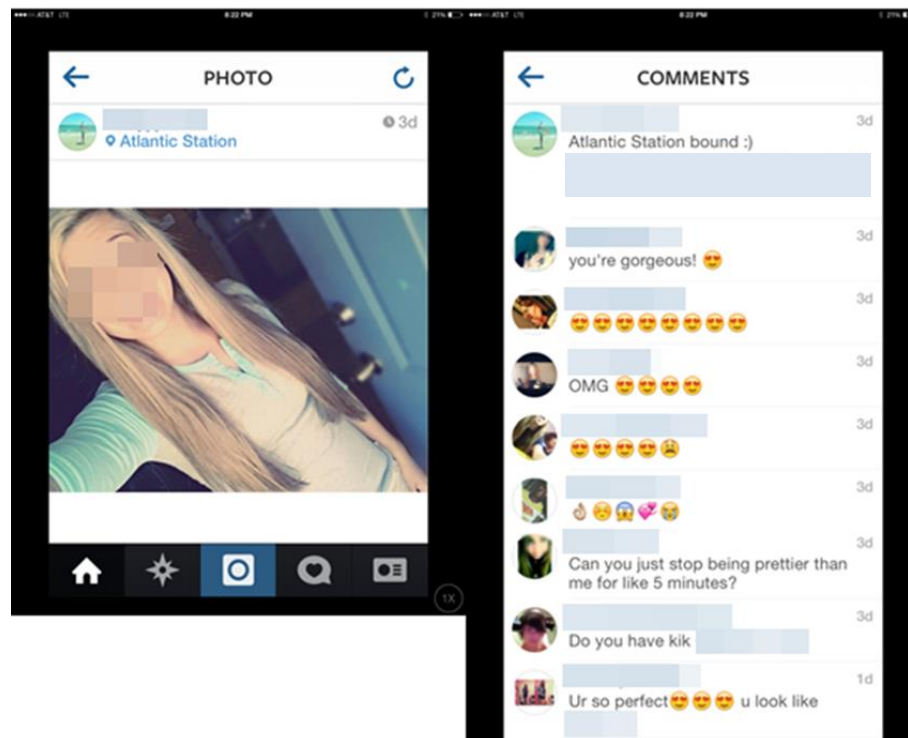


Figure 18. Most Liked Post

addition to solicitations to communicate on other forums (“Do you have a kik”). Feedback is also expressed in straightforward compliments (“Ur so perfect”). Trinka responds to most feedback by commenting “Thanks” with some smiley emoticons though on this particular one

she did not reply. Most of Trinkka’s Instagram posts elicit at least one comment from a follower. Only seven out of her 49 Instagram posts did not have any comments at all. There was no particular pattern to what elicited comments and what did not. The seven posts that had no comments included nearly every type of post Trinkka creates (pet picture, picture of self, beach stunt, football stadium, “throwback” picture of dance friends, friend collage, and a meme).

The majority of comments on Trinkka’s Instagram posts were compliments. Figure 19 represents the items on which Trinkka was complimented. Of the compliments I saw on Trinkka’s

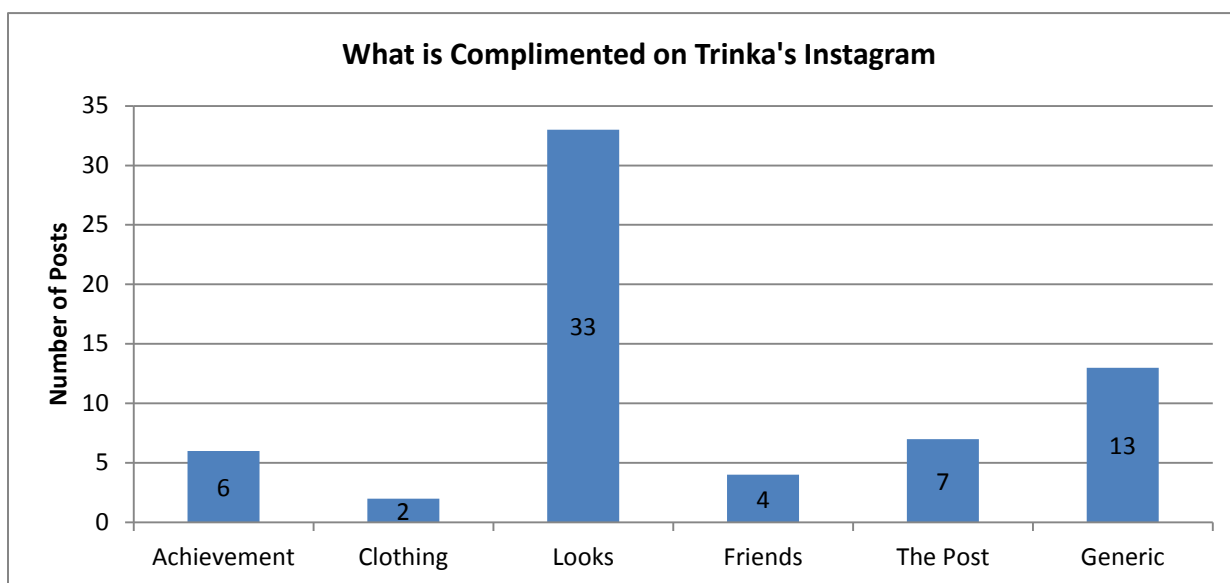


Figure 19. Trinkka’s Compliments

Instagram, she was complimented a comparatively small number of times on her clothing (2), her friends (4), achievement (6), and the post itself (7). Thirteen of the posts were generic compliments (for example, “wow”) some of which were probably compliments on her appearance. She was complimented the most (33 times) on her looks. With so many likes on her selfies and so many compliments on her appearance, it is not surprising that she posts so many pictures of herself.

Of the 42 Instagram posts which had comments, Trinka responded on 23 of them. In those responses, she most frequently thanked a female friend for a compliment (17 times). She only thanked a male friend for compliments twice though she received many compliments from male peers. She also responded to her female friends with a return compliment 10 times and answered 10 direct questions. On four posts, she engaged in a conversation with one particular person in which both people took at least two turns. Three of these conversations were with a male friend whom Trinka was at least acquainted with offline. One of the four conversations was with an adult female who could be considered a member of the community of comic enthusiasts. These are interesting because Trinka rarely engages in conversations on Instagram outside of thanking others for their compliments and she most often ignores the comments from males. I pointed out to her that she usually ignored the boys on Instagram and she agreed; I pointed out these conversations and asked her what was different. She said that she doesn't always respond on Instagram because she may not have time or that sometimes the person might seem "weird", but she did not really explain what was different in these three cases. In one of the conversations the boy complimented her several times, and she thanked him twice. In another conversation, she and the boy, Mark, talked about how he is homeschooled, and in the third conversation, Trinka and Timmy talked about why she decided not to participate in marching band. These last two conversations had no connection to the content of the posts (one was a selfie and another was a photo collage of Trinka and her dog, Willy). Conversely, the conversation with the adult female occurred on a post about Trinka's visit to Comicon.

Not only does Trinka implicitly solicit feedback by merely participating on the site, she also expressly asks for feedback sometimes, giving thought to the feedback she receives and

seeing it as an opportunity to improve or shape herself. Trinkka, like many young teens, has a variety of interests including writing, playing tuba, dancing, and jam skating (break-dancing on skates). She sometimes explicitly asks for her followers to give her feedback on a skill she presents in a post. For example, as shown in Figure 20, she posted a video of herself doing ballet turns, and in the caption, admitted that they need to be cleaner, asking her followers to give her feedback. The followers responded with three compliments and two bits of constructive criticism. She thanked some of the respondents in the middle of the thread. In an interview, she told me that she likes to post pictures of her dance progress to get feedback from others and to

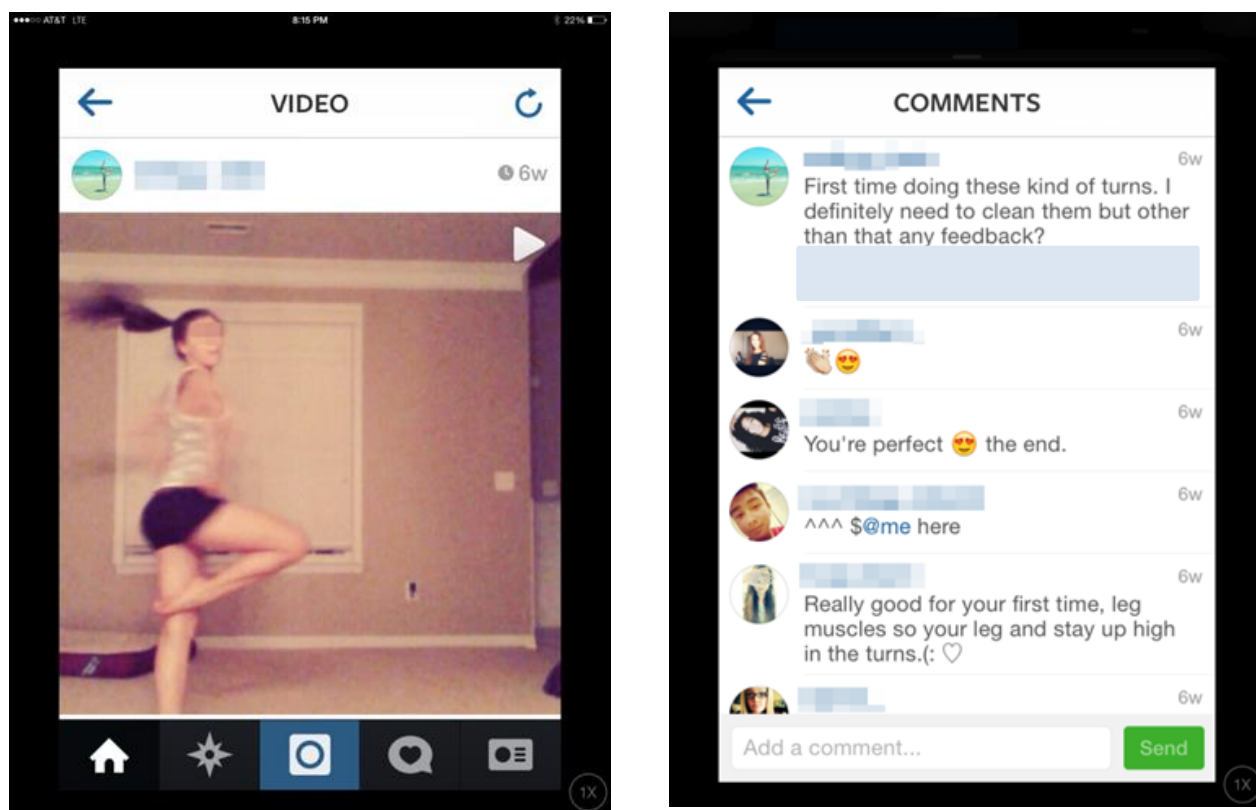


Figure 20. Dance Turn Video

look at her own growth. She also solicits feedback by requesting that her dance pictures be drawn by a user who sketches pictures of people dancing and reposts. Trinkka also posts many

pictures of herself in jam-skating poses, and while she does not explicitly ask for feedback on them, she receives many likes and positive comments.

While Trinka checks Instagram for feedback often, she says that she actively chooses what to attend to and what to ignore. She dislikes what she calls “mean” comments on social networking sites and, though she stated that she does not usually get any mean comments from people, she would delete them if she did:

[If someone said something] like, “Those turns are terrible”. I probably would’ve deleted that one because you constantly are looking through the comments and they’ll start to get to you eventually, and I’ll probably end up deleting that one because I don’t want to constantly see that. I want to focus on things I can get better on, not what it looks like now.

In addition to deciding WHICH feedback she will attend to and which to ignore, Trinka also decides WHOSE feedback to attend to and whose to ignore. She explained that, even though it is human nature to care what others think, that we should really only care what our friends and family think and not worry about people who “don’t matter”, presumably people she doesn’t know outside of Instagram or who want to “bully” people with their “mean” comments.

Ask.fm. On Ask.fm, users ask questions of other users which they may answer or ignore. Answers can include text or images or both. Once a question is answered it appears on the answerers feed and can be “liked” by other users. Ask.fm does not allow for comments on a post. Trinka does not get much feedback on her Ask.fm posts (answers) in terms of “likes”. 21 out of her 38 posts had zero likes. Ten posts had only one like, four had two likes, two had three likes, and one post had five likes. The five likes on that particular post were really intended for Trinka’s answer; in that post, the question was “Like a TBH?” which is an offer to reveal

something true in a statement that begins with tbh (to be honest). Trinkka's answer was "Okay sure" and the likes on this post were presumably for the person to post a "to be honest" statement on Trinkka's feed (which never actually materialized). Even though Trinkka receives a very sparse number of likes on Ask.fm, being asked questions in the first place might be considered a form a validation. In other words, even though she gets few likes, she does receive enough questions from users (about 2-3 per week) to keep her participating on the site, presenting a different side of her identity than what one sees on Facebook and Instagram. I will share more about Trinkka's identity presentation across SNS in a future section.

Feedback matters. Before leaving the discussion of feedback from the audience, it is important to note Trinkka's own cognitive dissonance regarding the importance of peer feedback and how it might shape one's behavior. I asked her if she thought that her posting habits (what types of things she posts and how often) were shaped by the feedback (likes and comments) she receives in those spaces. She said:

Yeah. It's human nature for us to want to fit in but I think it's hard for us to try not to think about them too much, and a side of us does, but more often than not, I try to think of more positive things because sometimes my friends will comment on my picture saying this is a cool picture and things and I try to focus on those that people might think oh, that's a weird picture of her or she doesn't look nice in that picture or she's mean or she's not doing this right.

Trinka also summed up her feelings about this inner struggle on Ask.fm when a user asked, "What do you think people think of you?" She answered, "It doesn't matter. I think we as human beings spend too much time thinking about what other people think rather than what we think about ourselves." Even though she expresses on SNS and in interviews that we should not

worry so much about what others think, she also admits that “we as humans” do this. As Trinka was explaining to me her struggle to ignore negative or “mean” thoughts people might have, she was reminded of a time two years earlier, when, as a sixth grade student, she changed her style of dress as a result of peers’ feedback to her. In this interview excerpt, Trinka explained to me how peer influence caused her to stop wearing tutus over her clothing even though she liked it:

Trinka: I try to think of the more positive things now because I remember in...5th grade, I didn’t care about anything. I wear whatever I wanted to and then I had 6th grade and people are really like talking about how other people thought about other things and how they cared what other people thought and it kind of scared me because I didn’t ... I obviously didn’t have any previous experience with that in elementary school...

Tara: Did that change how you ... what you would wear?

Trinka: Yes. I stopped wearing tutus permanently in public.

Tara: Is that because other people made you not want to wear them?

Trinka: Yeah. I was really upset about that too so I kind of thought wearing those, I also realize that I outgrew them. Maybe other people helped me decide that and some of them for a while, I wore them in 6th grade like once or twice but I think I outgrew those. I think that’s ... I think eventually ...I would’ve figured that out for myself. I think I mean like personality-wise it would have taken me awhile because I like to wear it wherever I want to but people helped me realize that and I kind of ... it’s something where I kind of wish they hadn’t and I wish I could’ve had more fun with it because it kind of hurt my feelings at the time but now I kind of ... I can kind of see where they were coming from.

As Trinka summed up her thoughts, her voice dropped and took on a wistful tone as she admitted that she was both sad that she allowed others’ comments to change her, but at the same time she

“knew where they were coming from” because maybe she had “outgrown” wearing tutus. Even though social networking did not play a role in this event, Trinkka told it as an example and an admission that peer feedback does influence her and that it is “normal” to care what other people think.

Checking likes and comments, and thinking about the number of followers are some of the implicit forms of feedback associated with social networking. Even though Trinkka contradicted herself at times, claiming that what other people think doesn’t matter, the data made it clear that Trinkka thinks about feedback from her audiences as she posts online and crafts not only her digital identity but her offline identity as well.

Desire to Impact Others

I like putting inspirational quotes and captions on there. I just – I REALLY like those a lot. I feel like sometimes they may speak to people, it may give people a better outlook on things...

Trinka had, at the time of data collection 1901 followers on Instagram. As I mentioned earlier, I asked her, somewhat jokingly, if she knew all of those people, and she said no, but she explained that she likes the idea that she has a potential impact on that many people. In the opening quote for this section, Trinkka expressed somewhat passionately how much she likes posting inspirational quotes; during the data collection period, Trinkka posted 10 inspirational quotes. All of them were on Instagram, most of them appeared on selfies and most had a theme about letting go or not worrying, and relatedly, being yourself. Table 9 lists Trinkka’s 10 quotes by visual content. Five of the inspirational quotes on selfies allude following one’s own inclinations without fear, including being oneself (for example “be true to who you are” and “stay who you are”). Trinkka believes that reading these inspirational quotes can impact her followers by giving them a new perspective on the difficult things they may be going through in

Table 9

<i>Trinka's Inspirational Quotes by Visual Content</i>	
<u>Visual Content</u>	<u>Inspirational Quote</u>
Selfie	Trying to be what society wants is pointless. Just be true to who you are. Live life like you're giving up. You don't need a reason to do everything in your life. Do it because it's fun. Do it because it makes you happy. The future is a deep and scary place, but sometimes you just have to dive in. Happiness does not show up at your door with candy and flowers. It grows from within as long as you tend to it. No matter what happens tomorrow, stay who you are. You'll never know how much you mean to me.
Sunset photograph	Sunsets aren't the end of today. It is the first spark of tomorrow. it's okay not to be okay (overlayed on the picture)
Dance leap	I dance not to bring happiness, but to relieve pain.

their lives. The most common theme in Trinka's inspirational quotes is people should be themselves. A common theme of her interview responses and her verbal protocols are that she likes to have an impact on other people.

Trinka also referred to this theme when I asked her about the profile picture she was using at the time. This picture and her comments about it are represented in Figure 21. She told me that she liked the 3-D aspect of it and that her hair and make-up were not fixed. The caption for the picture in Figure 21 reads "Trying to be what society wants is pointless. Just be true to who you are." Seven of Trinka's selfies included similar captions. It is interesting that Trinka's most common inspirational theme is about boldly doing whatever one wants without worrying since she also admits, as discussed previously, that she frequently monitors likes and comments

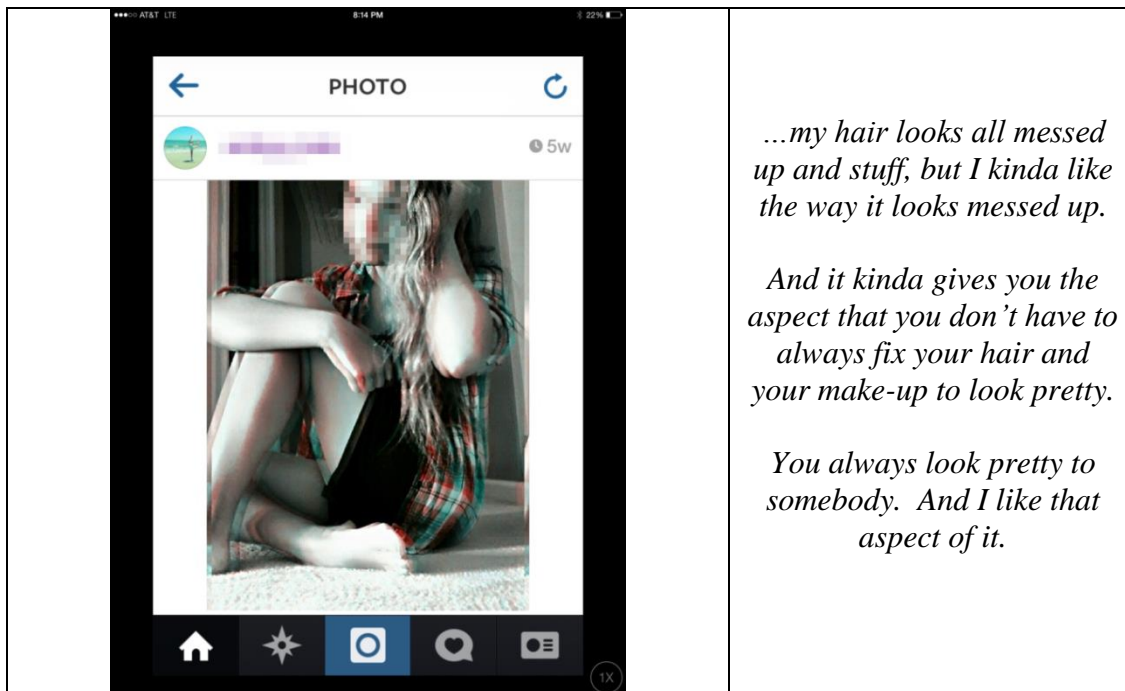


Figure 21. Be True to Who You Are Selfie

from user across SNS. As stated earlier, Trinka said “it’s only human nature to want to fit in”. Still, Trinka seems to believe and wants to convince others that we should limit the importance of others’ opinions of us.

Another way that Trinka believes she is impacting others is posting funny pictures of her Boston terrier, Willy every Wednesday, a day she has designated on Instagram as Willy Wednesday. She told me that Willy always cheers up her day and she thinks he can cheer up others as well. She explained her thinking about why she posts Willy Wednesday pictures in an audio message she made in the moment of posting, “I like to post picture of my dog because I think it might make somebody else's day better, and I think he's cute and I think that other people might enjoy looking at pictures of him” Impacting numerous others whether known or unknown to her represents a large part of what Trinka is thinking as she represents herself online through inspirational quotes, pictures, and captions.

Trinka also feels that some communications are better made public, stating that it is important to say things to one's friends publicly on social media instead of just in a text message:

Trinka: Just saying that you're there for them it really helps them to be able to see that publicly and it's not just a text message.

Tara: Why do you think that helps? For them to see it publicly instead of a text message?

Trinka: I think it helps them because they see that you're not afraid to say it in front of other people instead of just between you and them because some people think that means more to them because other people know about it too, so it will mean more to them in a way.

By making some comments public, Trinka felt that she was impacting her offline friends in a more powerful way.

While Trinka consistently showed that she considers audience, there is one anecdote that reveals how she may not be mindful of potential future audiences. At a family event, the subject of Facebook posting came up, and Trinka said, "Daddy thinks that employers have this program where they can see everything you ever posted on Facebook and that they look at it before they hire you." All of the adults in the room just stared at her for a moment before erupting in a chorus of, "Employers DO look at Facebook!" Trinka just rolled her eyes.

The most salient audience-related theme in this study is how she filters what different audiences can see and, ultimately, how they will see her. This will be discussed in the section on her identities. Trinka gives much thought to her audiences and what they will perceive when they view her posts on SNS; as such, she follows a perceived set of unwritten guidelines that prevent one from "being annoying" (her words). In the next section, I discuss how she adheres to perceived online social conventions as she actively participates on SNS.

Adherence to Self-Perceived Social Conventions and Participation in Trends Shapes Practice and Identity Presentation

Culture, or the accepted social practices of a group has been found to strongly shape one's identity presentation (Goffman, 1959). The same proves true of Trinkka's online practice and the people with whom she is connected in these spaces. The social constraints and affordances that shape Trinkka's online practice can be categorized as unwritten rules, of which there are two main types, and trends. Both unwritten rules and trends are perceived social practices Trinkka considers before posting, and in this way, rules and trends influence her online identity construction. I will discuss the unwritten rules first.

Unwritten Rules

Trinka used some version of the word "annoy" 28 times throughout our interviews. Most of these references were in the context of what one should or should not do in social networking spaces. Being perceived as "weird" is something else that she avoids. The word weird was mentioned 104 times, but that is mainly because it is Trinkka's catch-all word for negative traits. Being overly friendly, creepy, and even annoying would all fall into the category of "weird". To avoid being "annoying" or "weird" online, certain unwritten rules must be followed.

According to Goffman (1959), people will behave in certain ways because of what he called "social tradition" and that many times people are only vaguely aware (if at all) that they are adhering to these. After it became clear through data that certain "social traditions" (p .48) or conventions exist among the members of Trinkka's SNS, I questioned her about them, asking her to help me explicitly define these unwritten rules, as we called them. The rules that Trinkka perceives in social networking spaces are listed on table 10 and explained thereafter.

Table 10

<i>Unwritten Rules of Social Networking</i>	
Don't Overdo It	Do not post too many: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comments • Photos • Selfies • Posts, in general • Similar comments, posts, etc... Do not come across as too friendly (by being guilty of the above list) Do not post overly personal information (mainly problems) Do not post content that is overly negative Do not post content that is overly sad
Maintain Personal Integrity	Do not pretend to be someone else Give credit for the content you get from others

Don't overdo it. The majority of behaviors that Trinka identifies as unacceptable and that she avoids fall into this category. Most “annoying” online behavior is a result of doing something too often or with too much intensity. She explained how she moderates her volume and type of posts:

I try to only post maybe one or two pictures a day because I don't want to blow up somebody's Instagram (*post too much content*), and I want them to be, like, different posts, and I want them to be, like, at least an hour apart because I don't want to, like, blow up somebody's Instagram because I know how annoying that gets...I don't want to have constant selfies everywhere because it annoys me when other people do that. So I try to wait like two or three photos before I do that.

She also referred to her effort to avoid this social gaffe in an audio message she made while posting a photo collage, stating that she was “making a photo collage because [she] didn't want to blow up people's Instagrams”.

In addition to posting too frequently, it is also unadvisable to comment too much: too many times on one post, too many times in general, or too many similar comments. She determined that moderating one's volume of posting and varying one's content is important through conversations with her friends who also dislike people "blowing up their Instagram" as well as examining her own feelings when someone "blows up" her Instagram. She explained that too much posting or commenting can come across as "too friendly" which is "weird". I asked her how someone could be too friendly, and she explained that if you comment too much, people will find that unusual:

I don't want them to think that I'm ... I don't ... like I said, I don't really want to scare them into like, "Oh, I don't want to talk to her, she's kind of out there. She talks to everybody. She comments on everybody's pictures. Maybe she seems annoying or she seems kind of too friendly sometimes."

Trinka also explained to me that when people you don't really know comment too much detail or personal information on your post, that is "irrelevant" and "weird". She gave an example:

maybe ... let's see. I said something about my band concert and someone put like a story on there about they're on the concert and it kind of is just weird because I didn't actually know them. Just sometimes it doesn't seem relevant if you don't know that person that well and it just doesn't kind of makes sense in your head to actually post it. It may have brought back memories but people don't actually usually post on other people's posts about it.

This person was guilty of the social error of "talking" too much on the post of someone he did not really know, perhaps behaving in a manner that might be considered "too friendly" making him seem "weird".

Perhaps on a similar note, users should also avoid posting too much content that could be construed as searching for a romantic partner. She finds it “weird” when people comment to others “Do you have a boyfriend/girlfriend” or post content about wanting a boyfriend or girlfriend. She said that even if she likes someone, she does not want to be “constantly bugging them, ‘Do you want to date me? Do you like me?’” Avoidance of being “weird” is important to the mid-adolescent who is striving to resolve varying identity traits into an acceptable social self (Harter, 2012).

Another pitfall to avoid is posting information that is too personal, particularly personal problems, or similarly, posting content that is too negative or sad. The occasional negative comment is acceptable; for example, when her school system was closed for several days due to snow, she posted “Is this snow ever going to end?” But she tries to be careful about posting too much negative content; just as she doesn’t want to be viewed as too friendly, she also doesn’t want to seem too negative because, as she put it, “That’s not who I am.”

Personal problems and overly sad content should also be avoided. For example, Trinka stated, “You wouldn’t say, like, ‘Oh my parents are getting a divorce’ to, like, 1000 and something strangers.” Sad content, she explained will bring other people down, and as I mentioned previously, she wants to have a positive impact on her social networking audiences. One exception was a post, seen in Figure 22 that she created when her beloved pet had to be euthanized. She saw this post as a tribute to her pet and a way to let her offline friends know that Oscar had died. She regretted that it made others feel sad, and even though she does not regret posting it, she talked about it as an example of why people shouldn’t post content that is too sad.

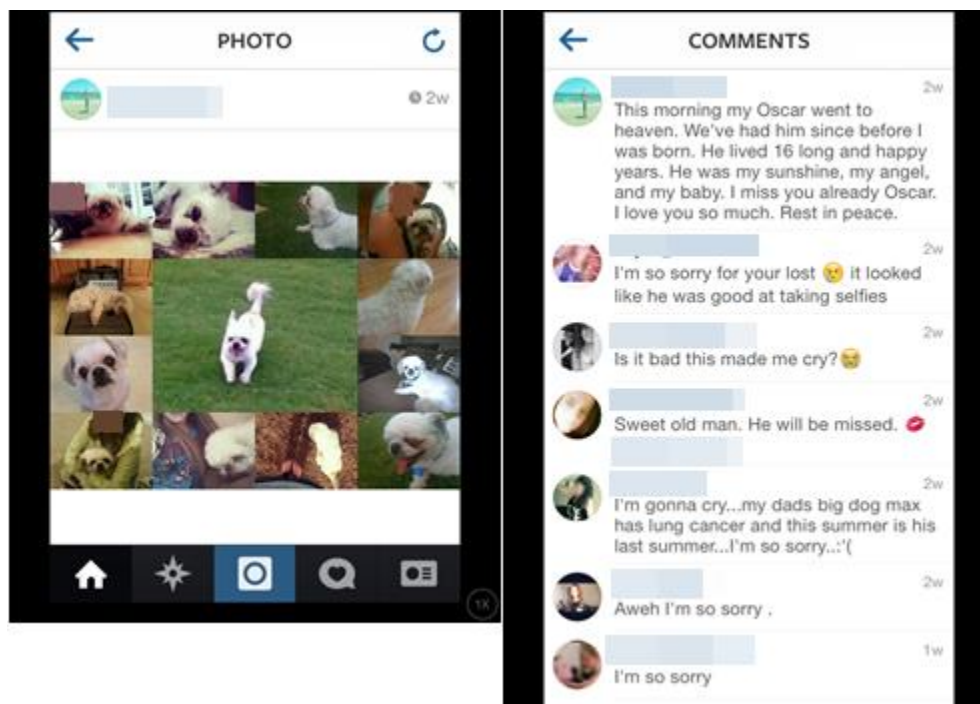


Figure 22. RIP Oscar

It is important to note that throughout our discussions about what not to do on SNS, there were several references about what her audiences would think. She also expressed concern over possibly losing friends. In one interview, Trinka explained to me that posting certain kinds of pictures could give friends the wrong idea and potentially endanger her offline friendships.

Usually I think of things, like my friends, I mean even though they know me, they might start to think that, wow, she's been posting weird things. That maybe she's changing or something and I might lose friends that way.

The concern that Trinka expresses here with how others view her is in stark contrast to the inspirational messages, discussed earlier, that she likes to include on her Instagram posts. When questioned about this contradiction, Trinka explained that it does matter what some people think, like one's family and close friends; we should not care what everyone else thinks. This makes sense; Harter (2009) suggests that global self-esteem is largely mediated by the opinions of

significant others even while the mid-adolescent seeks and responds to the opinions of less significant others.

Maintain personal integrity. Another unwritten rule that Trinka follows is to maintain personal integrity. This came across in two ways: be up front about who you are, and credit others for content that you copy and repost. Trinka told me a story about an offline friend of hers who interacted with and became friends with someone on Instagram to find out that she has used someone else's picture and other identifying elements (name, bio, etc...) as her own. Trinka's friend was devastated to learn that her new Instagram friend was posing as someone else. It was clear to me that, even though falsifying one's identity is not difficult and something that some users do, in Trinka's group of friends it is unacceptable behavior.

Another way that Trinka indicated the importance of personal integrity was to emphasize the importance of citing one's source for borrowed content.

if it's not your pictures say, "I found this on the internet, not actually my picture". Give credit to whoever's picture it is. People most of the time do that. So, like, fan accounts still get pictures off of other people's things, and they'll put them on there and say "Photo credits to----"... You shouldn't take something off the Internet and call it yours...somebody might have worked hard on that idea or picture or whatever and I don't feel like it's right to take somebody else's work or something they might have worked really hard on.

Trinka later went on to describe a time when someone did not give credit to her for borrowing a quote Trinka had just used:

I found a quote under a pic ... I posted that under a picture, and I remember this girl. She liked the picture and then the next day she posted a selfie with the exact

same quote under it and that kind of annoyed me. Actually it really annoyed me. I don't know why, it just did. Maybe because I took the time to find that quote and maybe she just found that on my picture and posted the exact the next day and it just annoyed me.

I noticed that I had not seen any “credits” to others on any of Trinkka’s posts so I asked her about that. She told me that she created all of her own posts and took her own pictures so I asked her about the quotes she found. She told me that sometimes it is “obvious” where a quote came from, like if it’s from a book or song and that other times you cannot figure out who said it because it is just a “random” quote listed somewhere on the Internet. She does not see these as situations that require “credits”. According to Trinkka, if you find something on a follower’s account and use that, then you should give them credit. So, if that person is likely in one’s social network, they should receive credit for a quote or a picture, but if the originator of the quote or picture is far-removed or unknown, then it’s ok not to give credit.

Trinka pays attention to what others consider acceptable online and she reflects on what she thinks is acceptable; this attention to the unwritten rules of SNS contributes to the socially acceptable identities that she presents.

Trends

In addition to unwritten rules, Trinkka participates in social online social conventions that might be described as trends. They are similar to traditions in that the social group tends to willingly participate and that they bond the group together. However, the practices seem too new to call them traditions so I have settled on trends.

Posting memes is a social networking trend. I think of a meme as an image that is copied with or without being altered, and then reused in sometimes varying ways by various people.

Trinka posted only three memes during data collection period. All three of the memes she posted were related to comic book characters, which is one of Trinka's interests. She says that she does not post many memes because she prefers to take her own pictures.

Another social networking trend is the posting of certain pictures on designated days. These include: Man Crush Monday, Transformation Tuesday, Woman Crush Wednesday, Throwback Thursday, and Flashback Friday. Trinka does not post a picture for every one of these days every week. That would be violating the "don't overdo it" rule already discussed. However, during the data collection period, she tended to participate in one of the designated days per week. Over the three months, she posted one Transformation Tuesday, one Woman Crush Wednesday, two Flashback Fridays, and she also posted a collage of herself and her friends on National Best Friend Day. She also participated in the viral Ice Bucket Challenge during the data collection period. She explained that posting can be contagious. If your friends are posting more, you probably will too; if your friends post certain kinds of things, others will emulate that.

She emulated the "designated days" phenomenon by creating one of her own. She has a Boston terrier named Willy whom she finds hilarious. Since she likes the idea of impacting others in a positive way, she likes to share funny pictures of Willy and has created her own designated day, Willy Wednesday. She knows that she has other followers who like Boston terriers and enjoy looking at funny pictures of Willy. In an audio message she recorded as she was creating a Willy Wednesday post, she said:

I am about to post my Willy Wednesday on Instagram which is something I do every week. I post a picture of Willy or a picture of me and Willy, and I've made a photo collage using Pixart, and I like to post picture of my dog because I think it might make

somebody else's day better, and I think he's cute and I think that other people might enjoy looking at pictures of him.

Whether she is attending to unspoken rules, participating in trends, or putting her own spin on one, Trinkka attends to online social conventions so as not to be “annoying” or “weird” and to “make someone’s day better”. Her attention to social practice is part of the socially acceptable identity she presents on SNS.

Digital Literacy Tools Shape Practice and Identity Presentation

Previous research has shown that young people make creative use of digital tools (Jacobs, 2008), and the same is true with my participant. I see digital tools as the use of various literacy practices to mediate meaning in digital spaces. As people use tools to mediate their work, in this case, to present oneself online, one’s online identity mediates and is mediated by the use of digital tools. Trinkka uses digital tools by: crafting visual content; using emoticons; employing flexible use of conventions, creative spelling, and initialisms; and using hash tags to shape her message and also her presented identities. Trinkka’s online posts are artifacts that contain pieces of her sedimented identities (Pahl & Rowsell, 2013); studying the tools she used to create these artifacts will enhance an understanding of the identities she presents across SNS and *how* she presents them.

Crafting Visual Content

Trinka prides herself on her digital photography and photo-editing skills. In each of the audio messages she recorded, she had something to say about editing the photo and why she was doing it that way. In our first interview, she explained that most of her self-only photos were creatively edited and how that is why she usually included an inspirational quote with them:

Trinka: ...because you're being creative editing the pictures. So you want to put something creative with it, not just like "I'm going to the movies guys." With some amazing picture of the sunset or maybe an edited picture of you, or something else. Creativity just kind of fits together like that. You wouldn't want something completely ordinary with it.

Tara: It feels like you're making something like you're doing art.

Trinka: It could be considered art in some forms.

Trinka's creative use of visual content is most evident on Instagram. She only created one post for Facebook that involved editing visual content. That post was a collage of photos presented online as a Father's Day tribute (Figure 23). The focal point of this image is the picture at the top in which Trinka used photo-editing to reverse the face of her father and the face of her dog, Willy. One's eye then travels down to see picture of the two of them side-by-side and smiling at two of Trinka's school events, one at which she won an award for Most Outstanding Brass player for her tuba-playing in the eighth grade band and the other in which she was dressed for her eighth grade formal. The picture to the right is a funny picture edited to look like her father had a bug on his nose and was looking at it. The picture at the bottom is an older picture of Trinka's father looking on as she and her sister worked on a craft. Trinka shows that she values and enjoys her father's sense of humor; it is what stands out most in these images; the images of the two of them show that she recognizes his support for her by standing at her side for two of her events; and the bottom photo shows him as a dad who has been there over time, watching protectively over her and her sister. The caption reads, "Happy Father's Day everyone! My dad is honestly the best. I don't know what I do without him. Love you, daddy! :)" Trinka used photo editing to participate in the trend of posting Father's Day pictures on

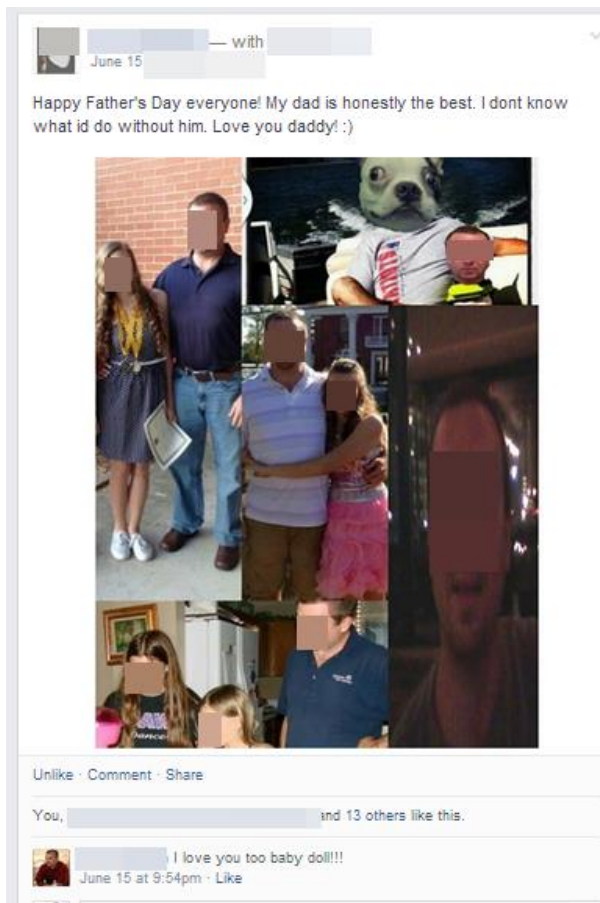


Figure 23. Father's Day Post

Facebook and to present her father as funny, supportive and protective. Trinka most likely broke from her pattern of saving the creative crafting of posts for Instagram because Trinka's dad does not have an Instagram but does have a Facebook.

On Instagram, Trinka usually makes an effort to craft the visual content she posts there. Most of Trinka's selfies, all of which received more than 120 likes from users, were creatively taken or edited. She typically frames her photos so that her face is the focal point of attention, even if others are in the picture. The only exceptions to this are the photos with her dogs in which the dog is the focal point, or they together, make up the focal point. This makes sense in light of Trinka's affection for her pets and her belief that viewing photos of them, especially Willy the terrier, will make other people happy.

Not only is Trinka, herself the focal point of most of her visual Instagram content, but in most of these, she is smiling looking directly at the camera, and is particularly well-groomed, hair perfectly arranged (usually straight), a trace amount of make-up on, and wearing a casual fitted t-shirt from a popular store at the local mall. The image seen in Figure 14 is an example of these signature selfies that Trinka posts. In nearly all of them, she smiles only slightly (perhaps not to overdo it) with her mouth closed. This is probably because she carefully orchestrates the pictures she takes of herself alone. They are a very polished, neat version of herself. In contrast, she is usually smiling openly in pictures with her friends where she may be truly smiling, not just arranging a smile for the camera. She did smile once showing her teeth in a selfie of only herself. This image was seen in her most “liked” Instagram post, Figure 18. In nearly all of the images of herself, Trinka presents herself as clean, well-groomed, wholesome and happy girl – as she put it, “a normal teenage girl”.

Trinka’s carefully arranged and filtered (with photo editing features) images of herself stand in contrast to her expressed belief that people should “stay who [they] are” and not try to be what others expect. I asked her how she explained her polished presence online in light of her belief that it “doesn’t matter what people think” and that everyone is beautiful. This question resulted in one of the only times that Trinka did not have a nearly immediate answer to my questions.

Tara: ...how do you explain the contradiction? Do you really think people should be themselves?

Trinka: [pause]...I think people should be themselves, but it doesn't have to be exactly in the way that people think you should be yourself. I feel like being yourself is less about looks and more of doing what you want to do and how you want to do it.

Tara: This [caption] says, "Be your own kind of beautiful."

Trinka: Yeah, that's ... I think I did delete it. I didn't mean to if I did, because I thought it was hilarious and terrible.

Tara: Let me ask you this. Are looks important?

Trinka: Not really, no. If you're a model and you're going to try and get a modeling job they are, but not really.

Tara: Okay. Just being a researcher now, not being contradictory. They're not important, so why are the vast majority, like 98%, of your Instagram pictures so beautiful, to use a judgmental term, but you know what I mean. If looks aren't important (like it bothered you where you saw an older picture of yourself where your hair wasn't straight and whatever) then why?

Trinka: (pauses and laughs) Honestly, I don't know. I don't know if I have an answer to that one. If that makes any sense.

Tara: That's okay. You don't have to have an answer.

Trinka: I don't have an answer.

Tara: There's not a rule that says you have to have an answer. If you think of one, you can send it to me. I can just put that you were not able to explain that.

Trinka: I do things and I don't know why I do them.

There were a few Instagram posts in which her choice of image and/or captions revealed something more "real" (my word), more complex. In one selfie, shown in Figure 24, she did not smile at all, wore black and white instead of a colorful t-shirt, and filtered the image so that black and white is all one sees (though without making it completely black and white). Her eyes, which are not black, look black in this image, and the caption reads "The future is a deep and

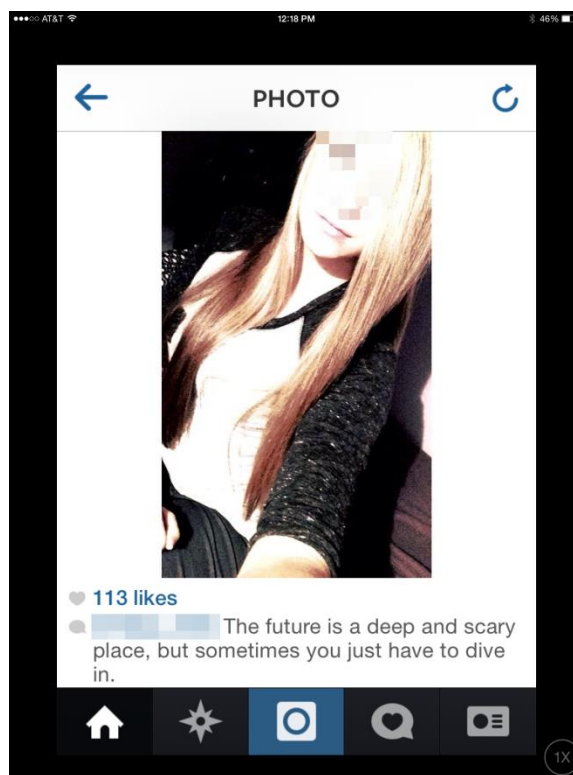


Figure 24. Serious Selfie

scary place, but sometimes you just have to dive in.” Her face is bathed in light which reveals the seriousness on her face which she rarely expressed in this space. Whereas, the caption ended on a bold note (dive in), she expressed in the words “deep and scary”, along with her image, that sometimes life is scary. Images are always produced in a particular context (which may not always be apparent to the viewer), and in fact, this image was posted just a week after she started high school; those who were close to Trinka offline at this time knew that she was very scared to start high school.

Interestingly, just a week before this post, on the first day of high school Trinka edited a sunset photo to read “it’s ok not to be ok”. Whereas the overwhelming majority of Trinka’s inspirational quotes appeared on images of herself, this image (Figure 25) is a picture she had taken of a beach sunset, edited to appear faded so that the words are what stand out. This picture clearly expresses that Trinka was not, at this point, “ok” and that happier times had faded into the

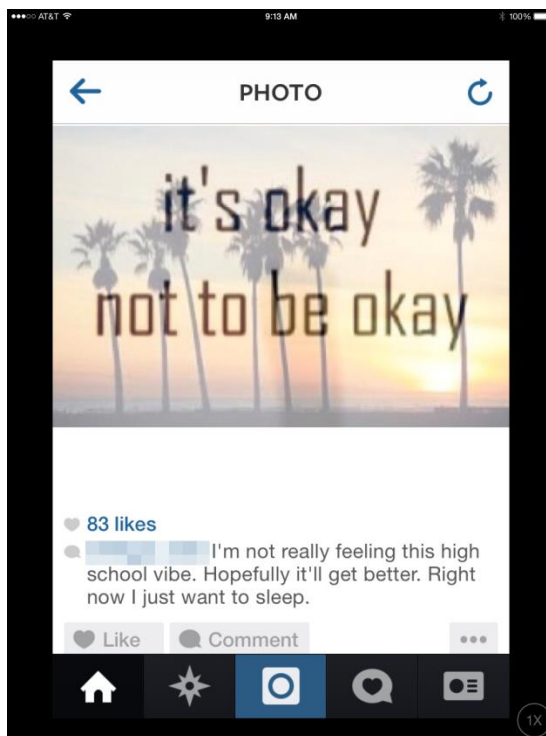


Figure 25. it's okay not to be okay

background. If the image itself did not make her state of mind clear enough, she included below the image, the caption, “I’m not really feeling this high school vibe. Right now I just want to sleep.” I was struck by Trinkka’s straightforward admission at how unhappy she was since her Instagram presence was so decidedly upbeat, and she had talked about the importance of staying positive there. I decided to ask her about it in an interview; I had her account open on my computer, and as I scrolled through her recent posts, discovered that it was no longer there. I asked Trinkka why she deleted it, and she dismissively told me that she just thought she had too many posts. Though she did not say it, I noticed that it was not in keeping with most of her other Instagram images – colorful, bright, smiling images of herself.

Whereas Trinkka used framing techniques to make sure that she was the focus of the posts that include her image, she tended to frame her face so that part of it was not in the picture. Usually the top of her head, and sometimes one eye was outside the frame. This pattern is evident in Figure 10 where, in the first picture, the top of her head and right eye are outside the

stand to be inside the frame, she was also doing a dance leap. She chose this image, with her arms up, toes off the ground, leg lifted, face forward, eyes on the camera and the sun shining from behind almost as if the light were coming straight from her. This strikingly hopeful pose is tempered by the caption, “I dance not to bring happiness but to relieve pain” and her serious and direct expression. Although Trinka frequently identified being positive as an important trait and one that she tried to maintain on SNS, with this caption, she alluded to the fact that neither she, nor her life, were perfect when she said that she dances to relieve pain.

In contrast to the polished and neat way she presents herself in picture of only herself, in pictures of herself and her friends, which are usually photo collages, she is usually smiling largely, and her hair is most often not carefully arranged. The images themselves are neither filtered nor carefully planned. The creative work on these posts happened after the pictures were taken when Trinka arranged them into collages. In these collages, Trinka’s face was still the focal point, but unlike her selfies, she appeared more natural and less “made-up”.

Trinka also crafted two collages of her dog Willy, and in one of her late pet shih Tzu, Oscar. The focal point for one of the Willy collages was Willy lying on the floor and in the other was a picture of Trinka holding Willy in the car and laughing. The focal point of the Oscar collage was a picture of Oscar running in the grass. The Willy collages presented Willy as an amusing pet with an adoring owner.

Ask.fm is not a forum that demands visual content like Instagram which is created for showing images. However, users can post visual content, and Trinka did four times during the data collection period. She posted a picture of Willy in response to the question “something that made you smile”; another picture of Willy wrapped in a blanket as a response to “post a picture of your pet”; a picture of her and an actor who plays Captain America in response to “Which is

the most stylish celebrity?”, and a picture of her lying on the floor with her dog, Oscar in response to “What three things in life you want more than anything else?”. For this section on crafting visual content, what is notable about her Ask.fm pictures is how less “crafted” they were than the Instagram images. There are no collages (though undoubtedly she has them available or could make one), no filters, no apparent editing. She presents Willy as the focal point of the two pictures of him, her own smiling face as the focal point of her picture with Oscar, and the actor in the picture of the two of them at Comicon. I will discuss more about how Trinka’s presence differs across SNS in a later section.

As opposed to the lack of visual crafting on Ask.fm and Facebook, on Instagram, Trinka’s attention to lighting and framing, her use of photo-editing tools (collages, captions, filters), and her carefully selected quotes show that Trinka uses SN as a creative outlet, presenting herself as a thoughtful and creative person in the process.

Emoticons

Like most SNS users, Trinka makes use of emoticons, which started as punctuated ways to express emotion - a colon and close-parentheses as a smiley for example. However, with most smart phones, including Trinka’s, one can use little cartoon-like pictures instead of relying on punctuation to express emotions. Trinka’s and her friends’ phones acquire these cartoon icons from a company called emoji. For my purposes here, I will use the term emoticons and emojis interchangeably.

Trinka used emoticons relatively sparingly on Facebook. In her 22 Facebook posts, 14 did not have any emoticons; five posts had one emoticon each, including three hearts and two smiley faces. Three of the Facebook posts used an option in Facebook to choose from a list of statuses that include little pictures with the status; in one, she chose the “reading a book” status

which is accompanied by a small picture of a book; in another she chose the “watching a movie” status which was accompanied by a clapperboard emoji; and in the third she chose the “feeling accomplished status” which was accompanied by a straight-faced emoticon. For the most part, the posts that she actually wrote included emoticons. The posts that were shared content from the Internet included no emoticons even though Trinka did usually write a brief caption for the shared content. There was no pattern regarding audience and use of emoticons on Facebook; posts for any audience were just as likely to include emoticons as another.

On Facebook, nearly 65% of her posts had no emoticons, but on Instagram, nearly 65% (31/49) had emoticons either in the caption (18) or in a comment (7) or both (6). Trinka used smiley face emoticon most often, followed by the heart symbol. Emoticons were used across content types (selfies, collages, pet images, sunsets, and memes) as well as for all audiences (everyone, various groups of friends, and no one). However, only two of her pictures designated for “no one” included emoticons in the caption; the other five did not have emoticons. Remember that posts for no one, Trinka decided, were really for herself. Emoticons, like the smiley faces and hearts that Trinka uses, are friendly symbols that stand-in as the smile you would see if you were speaking in person; if a post is for no one, this may not be necessary.

Trinka used emoticons thirteen times in responses to others’ comments to her. Six of those were smiley faces accompanying the work, “thanks” in response to a compliment. One was a “kissy” face in response to a compliment from a close friend. Three were in agreement accompanying the words “I know” and “Yeah”. The other three accompanied text referring to a fun event.

On Ask.fm, she used emoticons less frequently. During data collection, she used the smiley face twice in response to a friend who identified herself and complimented Trinka.

Though Trinka did not use emoticons on Ask.fm much during the data collection period, in scrolling to previous months, I noted that she used a smirk :/ and a wink ;) face a few time. This is interesting because she never used a smirk or wink on Instagram or Facebook either during data collection or in the months previous that I saw.

Flexible Use of Conventions/Creative Spelling

Trinka told me that she took pride in using “correct grammar” on SNS. She complained when other people spelled incorrectly and indicated that users would correct one another; she was especially peeved by others’ mixing up homophones (your/you’re or know/no).

...if you spell something wrong, a lot of people will correct you and that gets annoying even though I correct some people on it. ... I saw somebody spell no, like n-o, they spelled it k-n-o-w, and that really got on my nerves. It was like KNOW one wants to blah, blah, blah, blah, blah... I kind of just bit my tongue and laughed at it and screen-shotted it to look at later so I can laugh at it.

While Trinka took care to use “correct grammar” in most of her Facebook and Instagram posts, I noticed that she was much more likely to omit capitalization and punctuation on Ask.fm. I asked her about this and she explained that it related to the audience:

I mean, it's just, like, laid back. Because, then again, my audience is mostly my friends on Ask.fm, I would assume, and a lot of people don't take the time to go be, like, grammar Nazis and correct it.

Her perceived audience of “mostly friends” created a more laid-back atmosphere on Ask.fm which allowed her to relax, slightly, her stance on “correct grammar”. She still made it clear to me that she checked her spelling across all SNS.

Even though Trinka was very concerned with spelling and rarely misspelled words on any SNS, she did occasionally make use of a phenomenon in which many extra letters are added in words. I consider this creative spelling. They are not mistakes, but conscious choices. Her Instagram name makes use of this; on Instagram, her name was trinkaaa_dupree (two extra letters added to her first name). However, during the data collection period, she only did this twice on Instagram in replies to offline friends' comments. On Ask.fm, she did it sixteen times. I asked her about this, and she told me:

...(giggling) it seems more friendly and more, like, girlish and cute. So I put that on there. It's kind of become a habit now. Like, I go through my text messages. I'm, like, why does that word have like five E's on the end of it?

By using the extra letters, Trinka presented herself as what she would call a "normal" girl, girlish and cute. She presented this girlish persona through the use of extra letters 16 times on Ask.fm, twice on Instagram, and never on Facebook.

After she made this comment, I noticed that she also used extra letters in words twice in text messages that she exchanged with me. Since a text message is a more intimate form of communication than Instagram/Facebook, and she *perceived* Ask.fm as more intimate ("mostly [offline] friends"), there is more of a conversational tone in those spaces. This was also evident from the following exchange between us:

Trinka: I know when I use the word, "really," and, like, people are, like, "really?" I'll put, like, seven L's.

Tara: Uh-huh.

Trinka: It's kind of the voice inflection and you're trying to type it.

Tara: Yeah.

Trinka: Because you can't, like, hear what that person's trying to say.

Similarly, she used “haha” frequently on Ask.fm and on her Instagram posts presumably to make up for the facial expression and voice inflection that is missing in online communication.

Another way that Trinka used conventions flexibly was the use of initialisms. Initialisms are abbreviated forms of common online expressions. LOL (laugh out loud) was the initialism that Trinka used most often (18 times across Instagram and Ask.fm), followed by OMG (oh my gosh/god) five times on Ask.fm only, and idk (I don't know) four times on Ask.fm only. She also used bc (because) once on Ask.fm and Ily2 (I love you too) once in a reply to a friend on Instagram. Again, the more conversational tone on Ask.fm and perceived intimacy of the space, for Trinka, lends itself to abbreviated forms of expression and the desire to display more emotion with the help of these tools.

Hash tags are another digital tool that Trinka employed. A hash tag, which looks like a number sign (#) is a way of tagging an item with certain key words for retrieval later and to connect content with the content of others who are posting similar things. She included hash tags on 18 of her Instagram posts and 2 of her Ask.fm posts. Hash tags on 9 of the 20 hash tagged posts were related to three of Trinka's main interests/hobbies: dance (4), comics (3), and skating (2). Three hash tags were related to the place where the photo in the post was taken (a shopping center, amusement park, and her school). Eight posts had hash tags indicating participation in a designated day (Flashback Friday, for example). Whereas many users employ hash tags as a way to indicate one's thoughts about a post rather than an actual key word, most of Trinka's hash tags, when clicked on, will take you to a number of other similar posts. She tended to use hash tags as a way to connect with others and their content rather than a form of expression. Hash tags, Trinka explained to me can help connect you and your photos to others

with similar interests. For example, she enjoyed the fact that a number of people follow her Willy Wednesday hash tag to view her weekly posts of her Boston terrier. Using the hash tag helped her connect with other Boston terrier enthusiasts.

The digital literacy tools that Trinkka used were, in part, a function of which SNS she was on. Her varied use of tools helped her to present different variations of herself across the three different networks. In the next section, I will discuss what her digital identities are like, tying in the previous discussions of audience, social conventions, and digital tools.

Socially Acceptable Filtered Identities Across SNS

People act differently between different groups of people, like, they act different around their family, they act different around their friends, they act different around strangers. And I feel that most of the time I feel like my own self when I'm with my friends..

As Trinkka perceives different audiences across her social networking sites, this perception influences *what* she presents about herself and *how* she presents herself in these various spaces. What she presents in each space is a slightly different (she would say “modified”) filtered identity relative to the audience that Trinkka believes is watching. I choose the word, filtered, in part as a play on words referring to the actual “filters” she uses when editing her visual content as a word representing all of the work she does to present a certain image in each SNS. I also chose the word filtered because I find that the identity she presents across SNS are pieces of her offline self. She is not creating a new self on Facebook, Instagram, or Ask.fm; she is filtering out certain aspects of herself, allowing others to be presented. I asked her if it bothered her that she appeared slightly different from one SNS to the next and she said it did not. This section began with Trinkka’s explanation of why these different identities exist; we are different with different groups of people. Therefore, we will present differently to different audiences online. Figure 27 shows how I represent Trinkka’s filtering process in general. The

fabric of the filter itself is the audience. As Trinka told me, “it’s about who sees it”. Whatever she does not want a particular audience to see or believes they do not care about is caught in the filter. The traits she allows through the filter are presented with the help of digital literacy tools. The result is an identity that is socially acceptable for that particular online setting.

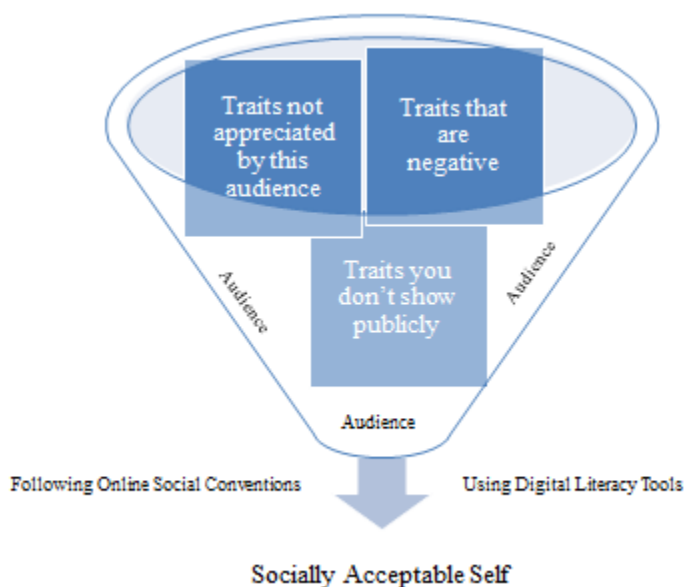


Figure 27. Filtered Identity

The diagram shows that certain traits were not allowed through the filter. For Trinka, in general, the filtered traits tended to be traits that might not be appreciated by the audience Trinka perceived to be watching; traits she perceived as negative; and other traits that one might not show publicly including information that Trinka believed too personal to be shared online. The arrow symbolizes what makes it through the filter and how those traits collectively are a socially acceptable self for that forum. The arrow is flanked by text describing some of the processes that Trinka used to create her socially acceptable self: online social conventions, including the unwritten rules and trends described earlier and the digital tools (crafting visual content, emoticons, creative use of conventions and spelling, initialisms, and hash tags) described in a

previous section. Next, I will describe each identity to show how she filters the identity she presents in the different settings.

Facebook Identity

Figure 28 is a representation of the identity Trinka presented on Facebook. Since Trinka did not post often to Facebook during the data collection period, the identity displayed there was

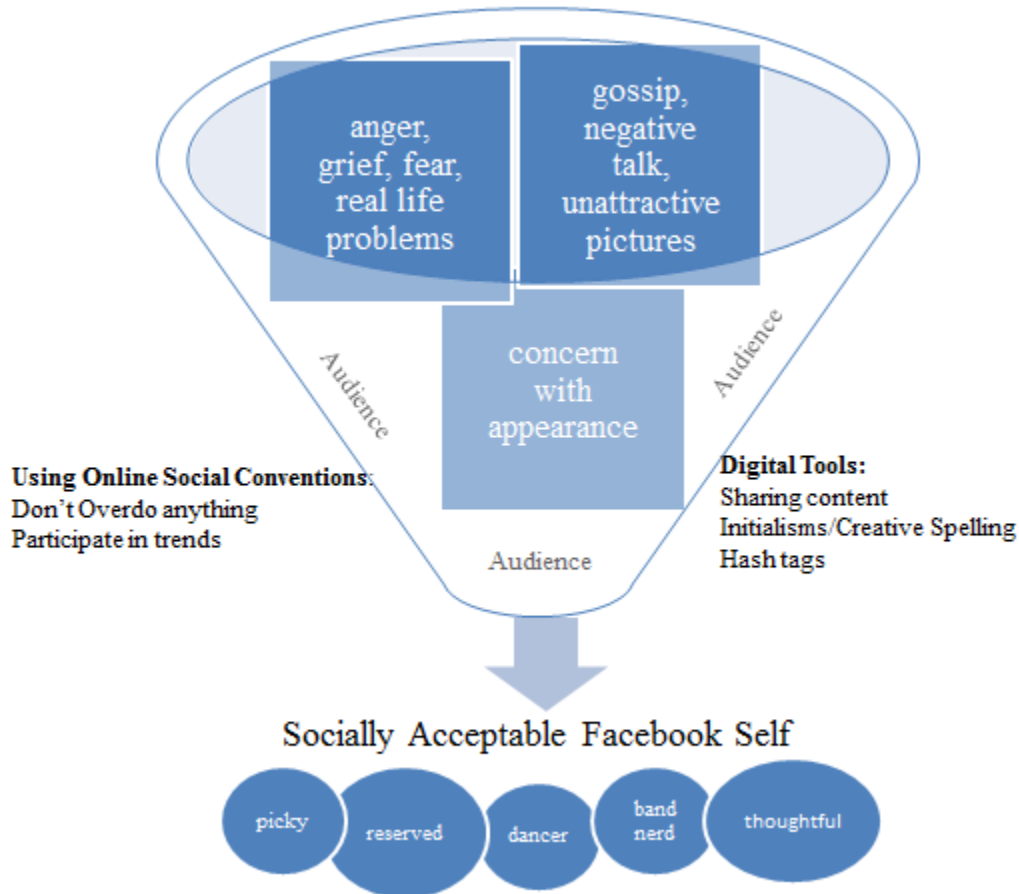


Figure 28. Filtered Identity - Facebook

a rather incomplete version of Trinka. The blue circles show some of the traits and aspects of Trinka and her life that got filtered out and did not appear on Facebook. She did not show strong negative emotion there, avoided negative talk and unattractive pictures. I include “concern with appearance” as something that was not revealed on Facebook because the only selfies she posted there are for profile pictures. I find this interesting because she posted so many on Instagram,

taking criticism from her father who teased her about the number of selfies that she posted. She told me that if her dad were on Instagram, she would probably be more conscious of posting selfies and not take as many.

Even though Facebook allows for a tightly controlled audience, and her friend network there is smaller than Instagram (and possible Ask.fm), her audience there includes a wide range of offline audience groups. Table 11 shows the audiences that make up Trinkka's Facebook friend list.

Table 11

<i>Trinka's Facebook Audience - all have offline connections</i>	
Family	both parents sister two first cousins numerous second cousins grandparents aunts great-aunts uncles
Friends	family friends (all ages) school friends friends from cheerleading friends from dance class friends from the skating rink friends from band

It is important that most of Trinkka's adult family members are her Facebook friends. She explained to me that she is more "herself" around her friends, meaning that she is more "reserved" (her word) around some members of her family and other groups, like strangers. One way that she is more "open" on Facebook is that she is more likely to share information that could lead to her whereabouts on Facebook. For example, when she wanted a particular picture taken in a teacher's classroom, she asked about it on Facebook. The people who would be able

to answer it would see it, but no strangers would. So, in that respect, she is more open on Facebook.

She also shares more directly on Facebook, tagging a certain person, like her mom in posts that she thinks that person will appreciate. From her Facebook, one can tell that dance is an important part of her life. Most of the Facebook posts that she actually created (as opposed to Internet content she found) are of something related to dance, with her Father's Day post and tribute to Oscar as exceptions to this. People might also learn about some of her achievements because her adult family members will post pictures of Trinkka receiving an award or participating in performance, "tagging" Trinkka so that her other Facebook friends will see the posts. Trinkka does not remove these tags and by now doing so, allows her viewers to see them, but I think it is significant to note that she did not actually post most of the pictures and information on Facebook that one can see. When I asked Trinkka to describe her own Facebook identity, she said picky (referring to her relatively small number of friends), random (referring to the various Internet content that she shares), and personal (referring to her willingness to share personally identifying details on FB). What I see from Trinkka's own posting, is a reserved, thoughtful girl who enjoys dance; sees herself as a "band nerd"; and likes to read. Her lack of activity on Facebook leaves a starkly incomplete picture of who Trinkka is offline and in other online spaces. Her Facebook identity is filtered for a small audience that consists largely of family members and offline acquaintances.

Instagram Identity

Trinkka is conscious of the identity she is presenting online. She does not believe it to be in conflict with her offline identity; however, she knows that her digital identity is a filtered one. Figure 29 represents Trinkka's Instagram identity (though she prefers the term, modified), and

that is her intention. The Instagram Trinka is nerdy/quirky, athletic, reserved, attractive, creative, and positive. She presents this identity for her Instagram audience which includes several offline socials groups as well as followers whom she has never met in person who have a shared interest or other reason for following her. Table 12 shows the various groups that make up Trinkka's Instagram audience.

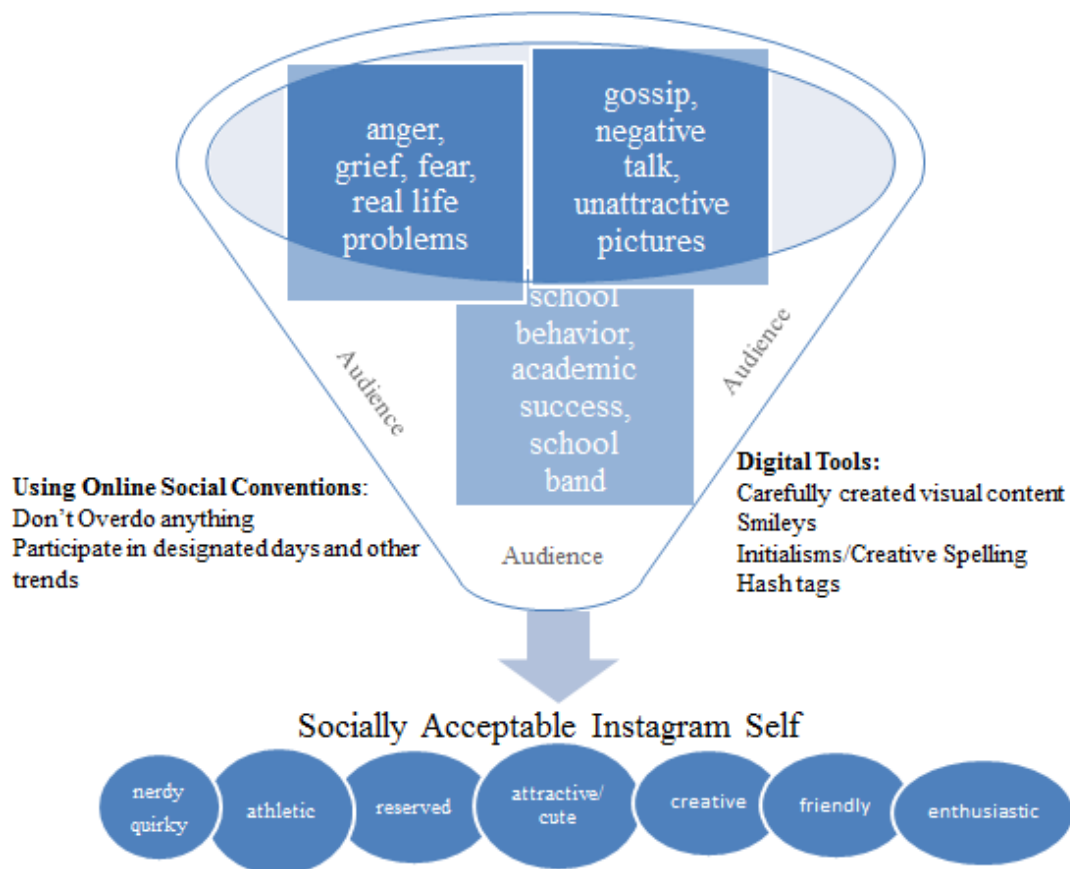


Figure 29. Filtered Identity - Instagram

Table 12

<i>Trinka's Instagram Audiences</i>	
<u>Offline Connection</u>	<u>Online Only</u>
Friends:	Boston Terrier Enthusiasts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Close friends • People she knows from school • Dance Classmates • People she knows from the skating rink • Parents of Friends 	Dancers and Dance Enthusiasts
	Comic Book Enthusiasts
	Skating Enthusiasts
	Friends of Friends
	Other followers who did not look “creepy”
Family:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sibling and first cousins • Mom • Aunt • Grandmother 	

Trinka made it clear to me from the first interview that she pays close attention to what she posts. She thinks about who will see her posts and what they may think about her when they do. When I asked Trinka if she thought about who might see her posts, she had much to say about what she would not post out of concern that she would be wrongly perceived. The following interview excerpt shows that doesn't want to post pictures that are too revealing, have swearing, or have “weird” (i.e. bad) meanings. She also points out that she doesn't want to be perceived as “that” kind of person because that is not who she [really] is.

Yeah, there are pictures that I think maybe they look too revealing to me so I don't usually post those because I think that they could attract the wrong kind of people and it could give people an idea about yourself that you don't want so I don't post those. Those are usually- I usually think about that before I post it. I don't like to post things with swearing or any kind of weird meaning to it – anything that has like bad – because it could give people an idea that could be taken the wrong way and it could give people the

idea that that's the kind of person you are, and I don't like putting that on there because that's definitely not who I am.

As I wrote previously, Trinka was clear that the opinion of some people (offline friends and family) matters more than others (people you do not really know). In contrast, however, when she is deciding what to post, she thinks about the followers who do not really know her:

I also think about people that just follow me that I don't know really well. They might get the wrong idea about me.

In a subsequent interview, I asked her what she meant by that. She explained that she would never want to post anything that could be perceived as "inappropriate" or "vulgar". She said that sometimes she might think of posting a picture or comment that was an "inside joke" among her offline friends but would change her mind about posting it if she thought others might construe a "weird" (i.e. vulgar) meaning from it. At other times, she reported that the opinions of some people, including people who do not really know her, don't matter. The tension between Trinka's profession that people should "not care what society thinks" and her apparent concern with what people think is evident.

In addition to friends and unknown followers, Trinka is also concerned about what her parents see on Instagram. Her mother has an Instagram and follows her; Trinka said that she always wants to respect her parents and, presumably, if she posted revealing pictures, swear words, or anything bad, it would be disrespectful to them:

Then, I think about, like my parents. How would they feel if I posted that? Because definitely I want to respect my parents in every aspect of my life. But, and that's usually who I think about. I think about a lot of aspects before I post something, really.

Trinka also purposefully avoids being negative on Instagram. We were talking about the intentionality behind what she posts and why, in her opinion, it is not “fake” to leave out so much of one’s real self on sites like Instagram. In my experience as a middle school teacher, being “fake” is horrible thing, something adolescent girls rarely admit to themselves but often accuse others of. Harter (2009) also documents this phenomenon, explaining that mid-adolescents project their own fears of presenting false-self behavior onto others. While one might present different parts of oneself in different spaces on the Internet, this is decidedly not fake, according to Trinka. She compared Instagram to a stage on which you might walk out and make a quick comment and then walk off, repeatedly, with each “performance” standing alone, not necessarily relating to any previous ones. Apparently, in this type of brief performance, you would not want others to perceive you as a negative person. She said, “You wouldn’t want to get on stage and say something like, ‘This is terrible weather we’re having,’ and just walk off the stage. That’s what it’s like on Instagram.” Goffman (1959) would call this “stage” a “front” upon which people (actors) will present themselves to others. It is interesting that Trinka would make this comparison since it is Instagram on which her own identity performance is most polished. Then she went on to explain that she does not only want to *seem* less negative, she actually wants to *be* less negative (emphasis mine).

...sometimes we’ll rant on there, but we don’t like complain constantly like some of us do [offline]. I know I complain a lot but I try not to do that on Instagram. It gets annoying, but everybody kind of does that I think in real life to a point. People complain. People say things like oh this weather is getting so annoying. Stuff like that. You don’t put that as every single caption on there on your Instagram...It makes you seem negative.

It gets annoying...I don't want people to think I'm constantly negative because I don't want to be constantly negative.

This exchange is key in my choice of the word “filtered” to describe her online identity as opposed to something like “crafted” or “built”. If I used the term crafted or built or created for her identity, it might imply that she was inventing traits that she never displayed in offline settings or that were not really part of her; it might imply that she were pretending some aspects of her online identity. This is not what the data showed. Trinkka was not inventing traits to present and crafting false online personas; she was presenting what she believes are the appropriate traits to present for the given setting (somewhat public) and audience (large and varied).

Though she filtered negativity and things that might be understood “wrongly” by others, she presented much more on Instagram than she did on Facebook. With a wider audience in terms of shared interests, Instagram was a place to present most of her pursuits and interests including comics, dance, skating, Boston terriers in general, all of her pets (dogs and a chinchilla), and books/movies she likes. With such a large audience, she used hash tags to connect her posts with others that were similar. Her perceived audience for many of her Instagram posts was a particular group (other dancers, for example). These posts were hash tagged so that other dancers can find them.

In addition to showcasing her pursuits and interests, she presented herself as a creative person who had what she believed were profound thoughts about life. She presented this aspect of herself through photo-edited (usually with filters) self-taken photos accompanied by inspirational quotes. These quotes were sometimes from a book or movie, and the common theme was that people should live life without worrying and/or be themselves. Figure 30 is an

example of a self-taken photo that she crafted with tools and accompanied with an inspirational quote. She took the picture from above while lying down with her hair fanned out. She had a slight smile much like the famous Mona Lisa smile. She paid attention to lighting and applied the filter that looked the best to her. As mentioned earlier, her self-only photos received the most likes, and I will add here, the most written compliments.

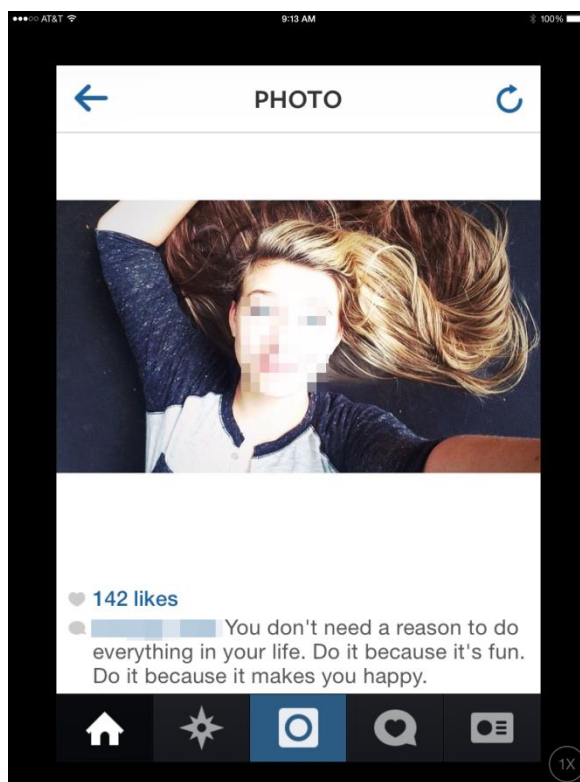


Figure 30. Inspirational Selfie

In addition to showing her creative, thoughtful side, on Instagram, she liked to showcase her athletic ability in dance and skating. Figure 12 (previous) was an example of a “jam skating” pose, and figure 31 (shown below) is a photo collage of Trinkka doing a back walkover on the beach. Whereas, there are numerous pictures of Trinkka performing formidable dance tasks on Instagram, there is only one on Facebook (her cover photo, as of this writing). On Instagram, she has a larger audience of followers who are interested in dance or skating so she feels like

they will be more interested in seeing these posts, and I would add, more likely to provide feedback. These types of posts are always hash tagged so that the interested parties will see them.

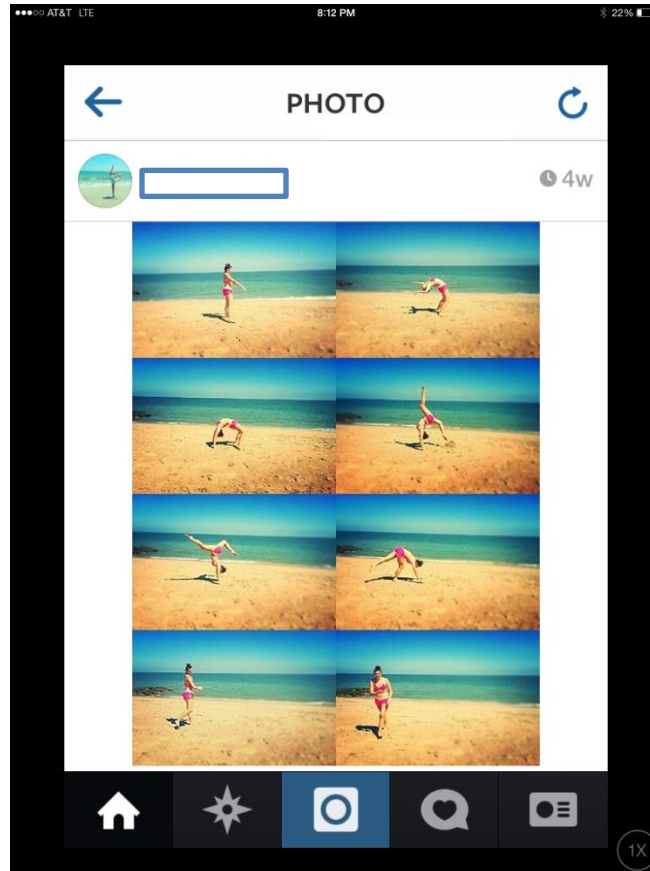


Figure 31. Back Walkover

Trinka also uses Instagram to connect with what she calls her “nerd friends”. For this audience, she posts images related to her affinity for comic books. In Figure 32, she is posing with an actor at the Comicon, an annual comic books lovers’ convention. She has used hash tags to help other comic book enthusiasts see this post. She also used all caps to express her excitement about the event (a rare breach of traditional grammar compared to the rest of the Instagram posts).

I discussed in an earlier section that Trinka does not want to be too negative on SN. She also tries to moderate the online behavior of others. We were talking about negativity and conflict online and she had this to say:

...if I see two people, like, fighting on Instagram, sometimes I'll be, like, hey guys, we're

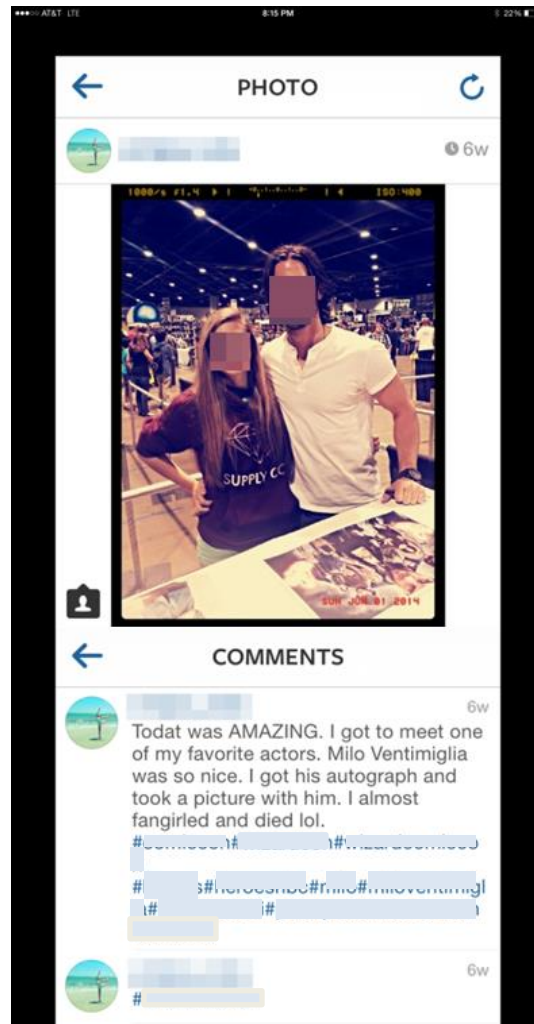


Figure 32. Comicon

all friends here ... One of my friends, she volunteers at a haunted house because she can't legally work there, and somebody was saying that another haunted house was better and she hadn't been to both of them. And I'm, like, maybe you shouldn't judge it because you haven't been there. And maybe we should try to respectfully disagree (laughs), because

they were ... they blocked each other. It was, it was rough, but I try not to jump into contradictory things because it just gets you all wrapped up and gets your blood boiling and not really, not what I feel social media should be about a lot of the time.

During our last interview, Trinka described her own Instagram identity as someone who is creative and quirky, loves music and pets, and is intellectual (thoughtful). Also salient is that the first time I asked Trinka how she would describe her online personality, she said “a normal teenage girl”. Her desire to be “normal” is further evidenced by her the way that she attends so carefully to what she perceives to be “annoying” or “weird”, mostly not overdoing anything. Normal may, in part, mean moderate. She does not want to post too much of any one thing and she also believes that people should moderate what they post, leaving out material that is too negative, too personal, too emotional, or too friendly. Even though her Instagram account revealed much of what she enjoys in life as well as her creative and “intellectual” nature, it is still quite modulated so that she might appear “normal” in this environment.

Maybe a “normal” teenage girl does not show much interest in school. I noticed that there was nothing on Instagram about school work or even band, which I know are important parts of Trinka’s offline identity. She is straight A student and an accomplished tuba player, but those traits are only alluded to on Facebook (one post calling herself a “band nerd” and one post about enjoying a book she was reading for school) and completely absent from Instagram and Ask.fm. I asked her about the absence of her school success on SNS, and she said:

I think not putting like grades and things on Instagram kind of keeps your status in school not a part of who you talk to and not you don't talk to [on Instagram]. It's definitely something that changes if you're in school and you're always raising your hand and stuff, a lot of people won't talk to you as much or they will make fun of you because of that.

But on Instagram, nobody really knows that and you kind of seem like a different person so people don't really think about that while they're on there.

I see this conscious filtering of school-related content on Instagram an opportunity for her to showcase to people other parts of herself that may be ignored in school where she is potentially stereotyped by her academic success. Trinkka was aware of stereotypes and that some of her traits might have boxed her into a category so-to-speak. We talked about stereotypes one day when discussing a post she had made months ago of her hand holding a Starbucks' cup with the caption, "Just being the stereotypical white girl." The topic of selfies entered the conversation about stereotypes as well, and Trinkka explained,

Tara: Does [your sister] make fun of you taking too many selfies? But then you're saying she does the same thing.

Trinka: Mm-hmm, I was like, I have proof that she did the exact same thing. Nobody just really realized it until they got the selfie name.

Tara: So you think the name ... they got the name, and then, so why do you think the selfie has a bad rep?

Trinka: I don't know. I think it's something as a typical white girl would do. But if you've noticed, pretty ... a lot of people do it, pretty much everybody that I know that I follow on Instagram, everybody posts a selfie every once in a while.

Tara: Um, so you mean ... so when you say typical white girl, do you mean that literally like it's a stereotype?

Trinka: It's a stereotype with Starbucks and UGG boots.

In light of the Starbucks and selfies, I asked her if she thought was a "stereotypical white girl". She said, "In a way I think I am, but not *way* typical. I do, I do enjoy Starbucks, but I'm not as

typical as everybody would think.” She went on to explain that her love of dance and interest in comics were not stereotypical. Despite her profession to be seen as “normal”, she seems to not want to be viewed as a stereotype.

Ask.fm Identity

Figure 33 is a representation of Trinka’s Ask.fm identity. On Ask.fm, she does not reveal the polished appearance that she often has in person and that she shows on Instagram. She also leaves academics out of the Ask.fm environment as she does on Instagram. However, on Ask.fm one does not see the vanity of selfies that they see on Instagram. On Ask.fm, she presents much more of the real emotion and some of the negativity that she filters so tightly from Facebook and Instagram.

The Ask.fm audience could potentially be anyone, and it is impossible to know how many people were following (as Ask.fm users) or lurking (like I did), what matters is what Trinka perceived this audience to be. She saw the Ask.fm audience as one that is her own age. She believed that most of the people she was talking to were friends or at least other people who were similar to her and her friends – in other words, she saw the Ask.fm audience as one of peers. There are several interesting differences in the identity that she presented there compared to the one she presented on Instagram.

When I was reading her responses to the questions users had posed to her on Ask.fm, I noticed right away that the Trinka in this space was much less guarded. Whereas, in this forum, what gets presented is constrained in part by the format (Question and Answer), the potential to post images and ideas remains as open as the answerer chooses to be. Though most of her posts in Ask.fm were verbal which is what the forum seems to call for, there were a few pictures.

Regardless of whether she used images to present her identity or words to do so, the Ask.fm Trinkka was much less polished than Instagram Trinkka.

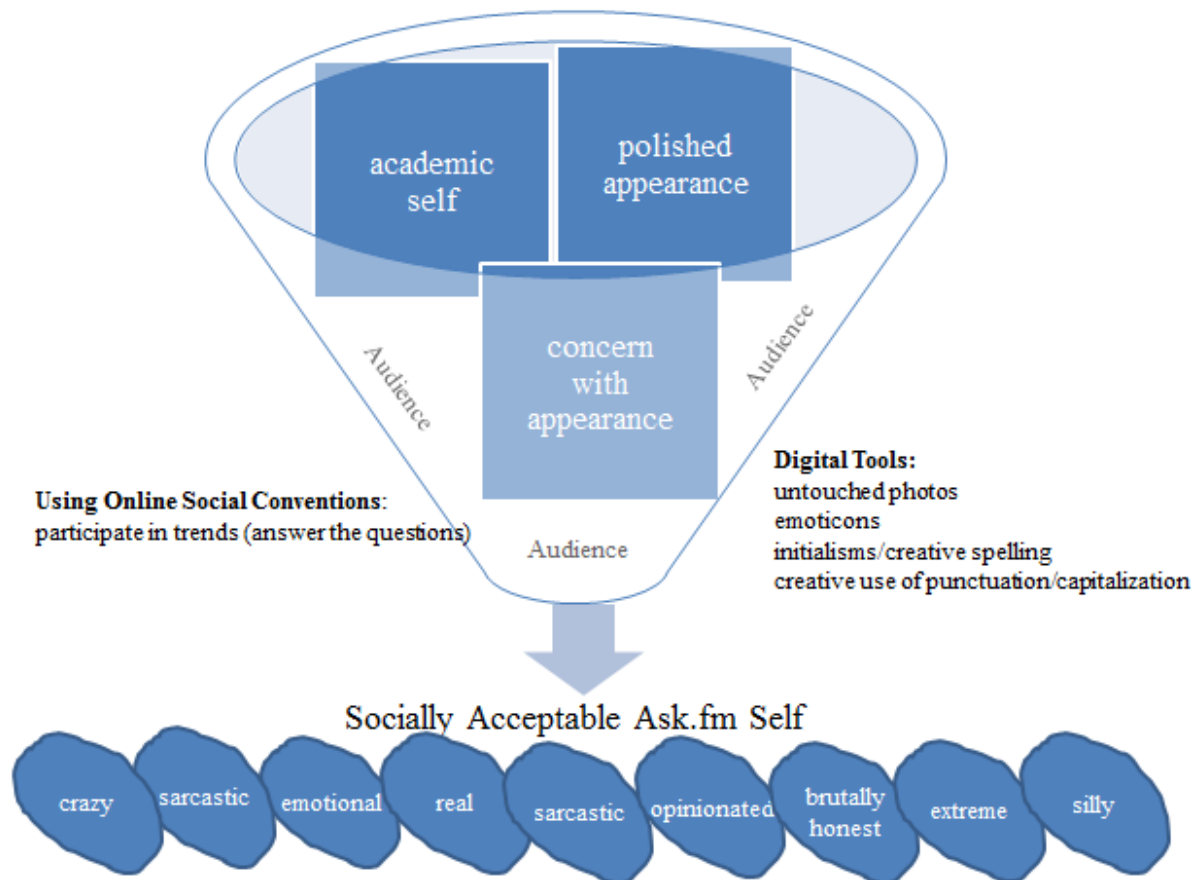


Figure 33. Filtered Identity – Ask.fm

For example, on Instagram, Trinkka likes to post inspirational thoughts about what is important in life. One such post included the caption, “Butterflies can’t see their wings. They can’t see how beautiful they are. But everyone else can.” Another one read “Trying to be what society wants is pointless. Just be true to who you are.” The latter was a caption on a post that she liked because she felt that she looked natural in it and her message was the people are inherently beautiful. However, on Ask.fm, when someone suggested that she post a belly picture

if she thought she was skinny, instead of responding with a thoughtful quote, this is how she responded:

What? Why? (this is gonna be a long rant) There is no point in that. I personally don't like to post pictures of me like that. Also What is the purpose of it? Im perfectly fine the way I am. I don't need me to tell me im skinny, to know that I am. And why does it matter?! So what if im not skinny? The point is I like myself the way I am. Anon, if this is the way you work, meaning like mean that you're beautiful or skinny, then you need help. Beauty isnt about what someone looks like. Next time think before you ask me this type of question. Thanks. Have a great night anon.

I was struck by the straightforward raw anger that Trinkka expressed in this space because it is such stark comparison to the way she would express the same idea on Instagram. We talked about this in one of our interviews.

if you're going to anonymously ask me that, I'm going to go off on you for it. I was, I was really mad about that. My friends knew I was mad. They were mad, too, but...I never figured out who it was...I didn't really want to because it could have ruined a friendship, it could have made me dislike someone even more, so I just left it alone and left it at whatever I put on there.

I asked Trinkka if she thought she expressed herself more aggressively on Ask.fm, and she said:

Yeah, I could agree with that in some ways (laughs), just more of a brutally honest still kind of thing how I kind of just throw what I think out there because ...I feel like it's not going to affect me really. Why not say what I really think instead of sugar-coating stuff, like, when they asked me the stomach picture, that ... I was going to be, like, uh, no. I was going to tell them that that's not right because I feel strongly that people shouldn't

ask girls specifically for stuff like that. That's just wrong. A girl shouldn't have to have people be like, oh, you're so skinny, to feel like they're skinny. They should be able to be, like, yeah, I'm not really fat, I guess, I'm skinny. But a lot of the times it's not how it is anymore. So I voice my opinion in that way and I was definitely confident about that. As we discussed this further, Trinka was explicit about the fact that she will “sugarcoat” opinions more on Instagram than Ask.fm. This was in keeping with her desire to present an appropriate self to the wide audience including members of her adult social groups that was represented on Instagram.

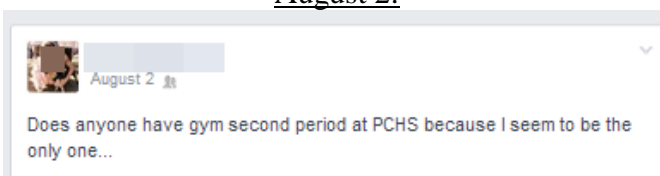
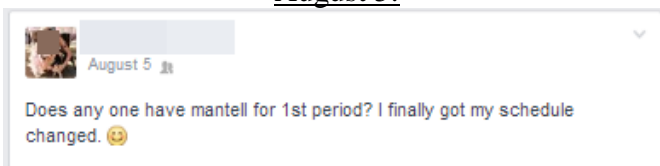
Along with being more assertive with her feelings and more “negative” (when she thinks it is necessary) on Ask.fm, her use of grammatical conventions was less controlled there as well. She was far more likely to ignore capitalization and punctuation as well as to use initialisms and all capital letters when she posted on Ask.fm. In fact, she posted a 91 word response to “What angers you?” that expressed her frustration that Sam Wolff was voted off of American Idol. The all caps meant to represent her anger. None of her posts on Instagram include all caps (except for the one word AMAZING in her post about attending Comicon). She explained her neglect (my word) for conventions on Ask.fm by explaining that the audience was mostly one of her peers and, as such, was more “laid back”.

An example of how Trinka presented herself differently across social networks can be seen by comparing comments and posts she made about starting high school. The content of these posts are shown below in Table 13. On Facebook Trinka took a practical approach, reading and sharing an article about what high school freshman should know and then seeking out friends who might have her schedule. On Instagram, she alluded to being unhappy with high school and stated that she “just want[ed] to go to sleep” a rare show of sadness in this space, but

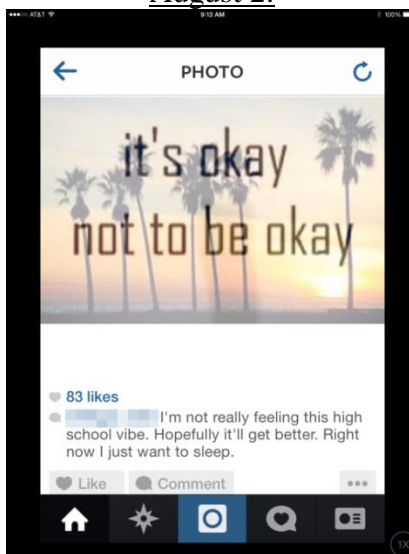
Table 13

Trinka's Posts about High School across SNS

Facebook

July 31:August 2:August 5:

Instagram
(note: this post
was deleted
within days of its
creation)

August 2:

Ask.fm

Early August (date stamps not available on Ask.fm)**thoughts on starting highschool?**

Im slightly terrified. Honestly, I wish I could've stayed in middle school

then, she deleted the whole thing, leaving no trace of her bumpy start in the ninth grade. On Ask.fm, however, she plainly admitted that she was afraid. I will add that she left this post on Ask.fm where it remains as of this writing.

I will share one final example of how Trinka presents differently across SNS. I shared earlier that she posted a photo collage in tribute of Oscar (Figure 18). This same post appeared on Facebook and Instagram with the following caption:

This morning my Oscar went to heaven. We've had him since I was born. He lived 16 long and happy years. He was my sunshine, my angel, and my baby. I miss you already Oscar. I love you so much. Rest in peace.

Contrast that carefully constructed eulogy to what she wrote on Ask.fm asked her just before Oscar passed away, "What three things in life you want more than anyone else?" Her reply follows along with the image shown in figure 34:

Right now I just want one thing. I want Oscar to be happy and live longer and not be sick. And I wish that tomorrow morning he would be absolutely fine and I wouldn't have to put him to sleep tomorrow. I just don't want to lose him even though tomorrow I will. Im bawling my eyes out posting this but its 1:32am and I have no one to talk to about it. I dont want to lose him. I really don't. He means the world to me and we've had him since before I was born. He's 16 and he's had a good life. They say if you love something let it go. So this is our way of saying we love you Oscar. There wont be pain or misery anymore. I love you Oscar. I love you.

When looking at these two posts, only a day apart, it is apparent how much more carefully she filters the identity that she presents on Facebook and Instagram than on Ask.fm where she is presenting to a perceived audience of peers. The photo she posted on FB and IG



Figure 34. Saying Goodbye to Oscar

is a collage, carefully crafted whereas the picture she posted to Ask.fm is not filtered or edited. In her caption for the Instagram post, she expressed that she misses and loves Oscar who is now in heaven, but in the Ask.fm post, she expresses more raw emotion, declaring that she wishes he did not have to be put to sleep (a detail that is also missing from the FB/IG post) and that he would be fine. She also expresses the pain she is feeling when she admits that she is crying and has no one to talk to.

Some of the words that Trinka used to describe her Ask.fm identity are opinionated, passionate, sarcastic, and brutally honest. She did not use any of these words when describing FB Trinka or IG Trinka. What I see on Ask.fm is more laid back, more emotional, and less controlled in the online space where she perceives her audience as one of her peers.

Summary

Social networking, for Trinka was far from mindless activity. Trinka's digital identity was a socially acceptable online one, filtered to fit the audience she perceived was watching, and presenting a portrait of a "normal teenage girl." She thought a great deal about how she used social networking to solicit feedback from others; impact others in a positive way; connect with others who have similar interests; and passionately express her opinions. She just did not do all of these things in the same space. Trinka expressed it quite well:

People act differently between different groups of people, like, they act different around their family, they act different around their friends, they act different around strangers.

And I feel that most of the time I feel like my own self when I'm with my friends because I'm usually doing something really, I don't know, crazy, stupid, funny. I guess, that would describe [it] (laughs).

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study was guided by the following questions:

- What are a mid-adolescent's thoughts as she decides what to post on social networking sites to represent herself?
- What do the tools and social practices she uses reveal about her online identity construction?
- What kinds of identities does she present on social networking sites?

Data collection and analysis revealed two major themes regarding *how* the participant represented herself online as well as a portrait of her online identity. The first theme I will discuss is how the complex cultural environment of online social networking mediated Trinka's online presentation. This section includes discussion of the social practices and tools Trinka took up in online spaces as she presented herself there. The second theme I will discuss is how the audience, as Trinka perceived it, permeated her thoughts as she posted, and impacted *how* she posted and *what* identities she presented. After that, I will discuss what her online identities were like in light of identity theory and how a filtered identity metaphor best represents the data. Finally, I will close with implications for future research and practice.

The Complex Cultural Environment of Online SN

Online social networking sites have been shown to bear some resemblance to the psychological definition of communities while falling short in others (Reich, 2010), being better described as networked individualism (Reich, 2010) or networked publics (boyd, 2007). In the present study, Trinka told me that some of her audiences were better described as communities rather than friends. For example, when identifying audiences, she explained that when she said

“dance friends” or “comic friends” she really meant “dance community” or “comic community”. She meant that she didn’t really know everyone in these groups, but they are a community based on their common interests and desire to share that interest with one another. The data in this study suggest that the notion of community may itself be in flux. Whereas, like Reich (2010) pointed out, online networks do not have all of the components of the traditional psychological definition of community, the fact that Trinkka participated so avidly on SNS, gaining from them a sense of membership and influence, two components of psychological communities, new understanding of how SNS *do* function for their users call for a revised understanding of community. In light of the current inquiry, online social networking sites are complex cultural environments that require careful and deliberate examination. Here, I will explain how social practice and digital tools used on SN make SNS a rich environment for purposeful identity presentation.

Social Practice

According to Goffman (1959), various social contexts constitute social “fronts” (like a doctor’s office, for example), and these fronts are institutionalized with stereotyped expectations for behavior. Social networking sites are social contexts (Pahl & Rowsell, 2013) and as such, may be prone to institutionalized expectations for behavior (Goffman, 1959). Trinkka’s online behavior conformed to the expectations that she perceived to exist in those spaces. In particular, she was concerned with maintaining a pleasant, positive, moderate image. Most of the behaviors she considered to be unacceptable in social networking fronts fell in the category of overdoing something. Since she described herself and her online identities as representing a “normal” teenage girl, one can assume that Trinkka might define normal as “moderate,” and that was the image she projected on Facebook and Instagram. This may reflect the deeply embedded Western

cultural expectation that girls are supposed to be nice (Harter, 2012). In this way, Trinka was building her identity online, in part, as a reflection of cultural expectations for a young girl. By viewing her online posts as artifacts (Cole, 2003), not only of her identity (Pahl & Rowsell, 2013), but also of the social collective (Albers, 2013), I was able to view her posts as representations of herself and of the culture of the SNS and the larger culture in which they were embedded.

Just as social contexts embedded in physical spaces have varying expectations for behavior (Goffman, 1959) - a ball game versus a funeral, for example - varying expectations can exist among different social networking sites. Schwämmlein and Wodzicki (2012) found that two cooking websites elicited different types of interaction depending upon the stated purposes for the sites even though the infrastructure and features of the sites were the same. Participants' interactions conformed to the expected purposes of the sites. Likewise, Trinka modified her online behavior according to what she believed were the expectations of the site on which she was interacting. Specifically, she posted what might be considered much more passionate or emotional content on Ask.fm as compared to Facebook and Instagram. While this is in large part due to the audience she perceives there, it is also a function of the nature of the site and the institutionalized expectations there (Goffman, 1959). The anonymity for questioners lends itself to less guarded interactions among participants which has created a space in which Trinka is less reserved than on the more "public" (in that the public is known) spaces of Facebook and Instagram. The fronts of these various online spaces are becoming institutionalized through a combination of their intended purposes and the ways in which users have taken them up.

Another way in which Trinka's behavior resembled the participants in Schwämmlein and Wodzicki's (2012) study is that her own goals were significant in how she participated across

sites. Even though Facebook affordances allow for the posting of personal photos, Trinkka rarely used Facebook to post her own pictures, instead taking it up for the practical exchange of online content and information. Her goals on Facebook mediated how she used it and, more notably, how she did not use it.

While online affordances and the nature of SNS play a role in how they are used, the data in this study and others (Alvermann et al., 2012; boyd, 2007; Davis, 2012; Livingstone, 2008) show that online social networkers' activity in those spaces is certainly far more complex than a simple one-directional explanation might suggest. Social environment and human activity influence human thought processes and development (Vygotsky 1986, Wertsch 1991) just as humans influence their own environments and direct their own activity (Cole, 2003). Trinkka's social networking use is embedded in the larger cultural context of the time and space in which she lives. The larger influence of culture which I see as the whole of human activity and the tools used to carry it out (Cole, 2003) is significant and evident in Trinkka's self-presentation online.

As mentioned earlier, she sees herself as what she calls a "normal" teenage girl and wants to portray her perception of a "normal" teenage girl online. Her concern with being and presenting as "normal" points to the normative adolescent concern with what others think and wanting to fit in (Erikson, 1959/1980; Harter, 2012). As such, she admittedly participates in fads and trends that might be associated with the "typical white girl" as she put it. Whereas these concerns with "normal" and avid participation in trends (for example: selfies, Starbucks, Ice Bucket Challenge) may, on the one hand, indicate a typical adolescent obsession with what others think (Erikson, 1959/1980; Harter, 2012), Trinkka denied being typical, pointing out

proudly, things that, in her opinion are not typical: being a skater, being a dancer, enjoying comics and playing the tuba.

Still, a potentially negative effect of the stereotyped expectations associated with various online SNS is that they hold great potential for reinforcing stereotypes associated with race, religion, sexual orientation, and so on (Turkle, 2012). According to Trinka, taking selfies is part of the stereotype of a young white girl. When Trinka and I were talking about how many selfies she posted, she mentioned that her sister and her father teased her for taking so many. She defended the practice by pointing out that everyone does it and that it fits the stereotype of a “typical white girl.” On the one hand, Trinka argued that “pretty much everybody” posts selfies “every once in a while”, but she also claimed that the “typical white girl” posts selfies (presumably more often) in addition to wearing UGG boots and drinking Starbucks, alluding that the typicality makes it acceptable.

As mentioned previously, during the data collection period, Trinka posted a picture of her hand holding a Starbucks cup with the caption “Starbucks is the best. :),” and another time, before data collection, she posted a picture of a Starbucks cup with the caption “Just being the stereotypical white girl”. Trinka’s explanation for this was that she was making fun of the stereotype and her own participation in it. According to Dill (2009), “visual imagery plays an important role in socialization, specifically how we extract and apply meaning from everyday experience, and therefore in how we construct realities” (p. 95). Trinka’s Starbucks posts, while simultaneously reinforcing and defying stereotypes, were both a result of socialization and a visual agent of socialization as she unwittingly perpetuated the prejudices she claimed to mock.

When I asked Trinka if she thought social networking reinforced or contradicted stereotypes, she explained that both were true. Though she saw herself as making fun of a

stereotype, she was potentially reinforcing it at the same time by creating that post. She may have also been convincing herself to become more like the stereotypes she claimed to deride. Like the participants in Festinger and Carlsmith's (1958) cognitive dissonance experiment, Trinka's public profession of being a "typical white girl" may actually result in a personal belief change, shaping into someone more like the stereotype than she originally was. Despite all of her alignment with (and mocking of) the typecast of the typical, she was quick to point out to me that she posted things that would defy stereotypes like her interest in comics, dance, and skating, which in her opinion did not fit the "typical white girl".

Barnett (2009) would probably say that she was caught up in the consumer culture of the Internet – that she herself had become a commodity, embracing the stereotyped expectations created by social media and in turn helping Starbucks sell their beverages to more white girls. Whereas Trinka may have been inadvertently advertising for Starbucks, her own explanation of why she made the post belies Barnett's (2009) theory that adolescents are being used as pawns in a capitalist culture. Trinka most certainly is *part* of the culture, capitalist or otherwise, in which she is embedded, but unlike the turn-of-the-century child laborers to which Barnett (2009) compares today's teens, the data showed that Trinka was purposeful and thoughtful about what she posted and displayed a tongue-in-cheek awareness of her position in consumer culture.

She may also be part of a subtle, yet effective, resistance to the status quo, countering it as she participates in it (erickson, 2004). Trinka enjoyed participating in some SN trends, like designated days for posting and taking selfies, but she, like any human also put her own spin on them; for instance, the creation of Willy Wednesday is her own way of participating in the posting of certain types of pictures on certain days. As Cole (2003) stated, "...individuals are active agents in their own development but do not act in settings entirely of their own choosing."

The data showed Trinka participating in and influenced by a consumer culture (Barnett, 2009), but it showed her actively and purposefully doing so.

Another social practice that Trinka participated in online was the re-mixing and sharing of content (Jenkins, 2006). Jenkins and others (Lunsford & Ede, 2009) have pointed out that new ways of thinking regarding textual ownership may be in order as a result of the new ways of sharing content afforded by the Internet and digital tools. The tools humans use and the activity in which we engage mediate the very ways in which we think (Cole, 2003; Vygotsky, 1986; Wertsch, 1991); this understanding suggests that those who use digital tools frequently and grow up with the ability to remix and share content with ease will acquire new mental constructs about ownership. This was evident in Trinka's thinking about when it is and is not necessary to credit others for their work. In an interview, she was very adamant that people should credit their sources when creating online content, but I noticed that she never credited any sources for the content she posted even though some of it included quotes from books and movies, and that once she posted a comic copied from somewhere else. She explained that if you know the person who created the content, you should give them credit when reposting, but that if one is far-removed from the creator or cannot identify him/her readily, then credits are not necessary.

Lunsford and Ede (2009) point out that "the deeply participatory nature of electronic forms of communication provides new opportunities for writerly agency, even as it challenges notions of intellectual property that have held sway now for more than three hundred years, leading...to diverse forms of multiple authorship" (p. 48). Henry Jenkins calls ours a "participatory culture [that] contrasts with older notions of passive media spectatorship" in which media producers and consumers "interact with each other according to a new set of rules that none of us fully understands" (p. 3). Trinka's own views capture this complexity and confusion.

Though she expressed passionate disapproval at having her own post reposted without credit, she explained to me that her posts did not require crediting since it was “obvious” where her quotes originated or she was so far removed from the original creator that crediting would be impossible. It is important to point out that, while Trinkka’s views were confusing to me, they made perfect sense to her. Like Lunsford and Ede (2009) point out, “our students are already inhabitants of [the old and new world of authorship] and are increasingly comfortable with new ways of thinking about textual ownership” (p. 50).

Tools

Research has shown that teens use digital tools to mediate their identity (Alvermann et al., 2012; Jacobs, 2008; Livingstone, 2008). The data in the present study confirm this. Trinkka used tools for crafting of visual content, emoticons, creative/flexible use of spelling and conventions, and hash tags to mediate her identities across Facebook, Instagram, and Ask.fm. Here I will discuss two notable issues. First I will explore how her varied use of digital tools, particularly visual photo editing, was instrumental in presenting identities distinctly reflective of mid-adolescent concerns. Then, I will comment on her use of digital tools in light of research on literacy skills.

Trinka, herself was the focal point of the vast majority of her posts that included photographs. This makes sense because the nature of online social networking lends itself to a visual presentation of self (Zhao et al., 2008) and mid-adolescents are highly focused on defining their own identities (Harter, 2013). The fact that physical appearance is highly correlated with self-esteem (Harter, 2012) suggests the importance of understanding *how* young people are using this medium. Trinkka seemed to be using social networking to define varying roles for herself which she represented visually. On Instagram, in particular, she presented herself as what she

called a “normal” teenage girl which meant that she was happy, carefully groomed, attractive, and friendly (but not too friendly). Albers (2013) pointed out that “social activities and social identities get played out” (p. 83) in visual productions; Trinka was playing out the social activities and identities of SN and larger cultural ideals and expectations as she actively presented what she believed to be “normal.”

Trinka told me that she frequently scrolled back through her own SN feeds to see “if she has too many posts”. When looking back at one’s own image so often, perhaps it is important to see an attractive one; does this raise Trinka’s self-esteem? Or, like others (Davis & Gardner, 2013; Turkle, 2011) would suggest, does it create an overly positive image of one’s life and oneself that would be possible to maintain? The Internet affordances of permanence and searchability (boyd, 2007) provide a mid-adolescent a ready catalog of presented selves which may either help them resolve identity confusion (Erikson, 1959/1980) or exacerbate it.

Trinka, herself, seemed to be grappling with these issues on some level as evidenced by her contradictory practices. She presented a polished, happy, attractive image on Instagram that she admittedly used digital tools and affordances to create and capture, but the accompanying captions were often messages about being oneself. This contradiction possibly indicates the struggle of a mid-adolescent to resolve identity confusion (Erikson, 1959/1980) and may also be a reflection of the contradicting messages young people receive every day from media at large (Harter, 2012). When I asked her if looks were important, she stated that they would be important for models. This comment is telling; it shows that she has internalized the larger media’s representation of beauty (Harter, 2012) because she seems to feel that for one to be a model, one must have a certain “look” to be beautiful enough. Trinka’s use of the visual to carefully craft and create her Instagram persona reflects this view as well. When I questioned her

own conflicting messages (polished pretty photos alongside messages about being yourself), the result was one of the very few times that Trinka did not have a ready answer and one of two times in which she failed to produce any answer.

While these observations may seem to indicate that Trinka was overly concerned with appearance, it is important to remember that mid-adolescents are, in part, working out who they are through how they believe others see them (Erikson, 1959/1980; Harter, 2012). This will naturally include the visual; social networking, in part, makes concrete some of the developmental processes that were once invisible to us (Barnett, 2009; Greenfield & Yan, 2006). As mid-adolescents' selves are fragmented, "kaleidoscopic" in nature (Harter, 2012), Trinka's online presentation mirrored this in some ways through the way she appropriates (or does not appropriate) available digital tools. For example, she made use of visual editing to polish and filter her Instagram images, but on Ask.fm, when she did present herself visually, she chose to use unedited images of herself without make-up or carefully fixed hair. While these versions of herself were variable and sometimes contradicting as one would expect when viewing the mid-adolescent through a kaleidoscopic (Harter, 2012) lens, the purposeful way in which Trinka appropriated tools to present those pieces of herself is more in line with Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical theory that people carefully manage the impression they make upon others according to the setting. Additionally, Trinka's fragmented versions of self across SNS may not even be a reflection of a mid-adolescent kaleidoscopic self in Harter's (2012) sense; as others (Davies & Merchant, 2009) have noted, *people* (emphasis mine) purposefully present varying aspects of self online that may be thought of as fragmented or kaleidoscopic. Self is a fluid construction, and the process of constructing self is not confined to the teen years but continues throughout life (Harter, 2012).

Trinka's decision to attend carefully to the visual was just that – a decision. Trinka, while as a mid-adolescent, was unable to articulate *why*, was making deliberate choices as to *how* and *in which spaces* to make use of visual editing and forethought to create what she believed were the appropriate versions of herself for those spaces. It is in this way that her online identity presentation did not suggest identity confusion (Erikson, 1959/1980; Harter, 2012) but instead conscious choices to manage the impression (Goffman, 1959) she made on her various audiences.

In addition to making special use of visual presentation, like other researchers' (Alvermann et al., 2012; Jacobs, 2008; Livingstone, 2008) participants, Trinka made conscious choices in how she used the digital literacy tools. The digitally mediated tools that Trinka used to mediate her messages and identity included: emoticons, creative/flexible use of conventions and spelling, initialisms, and hash tags. As I explained in chapter four, Trinka prided herself on using what she called "correct grammar" on SNS. She saw this, partly as presenting herself as an intelligent person. Her flexible use of and at times, relaxed (my word) stance toward conventions varied across social networking contexts. This shows that Trinka, like other teens (Lewis & Fabos, 2005), was not lacking in knowledge of conventions or literacy skill; rather, it indicates that she had an awareness of the need to vary one's communication style for the context/audience.

Turner and her colleagues (Turner et al., 2014) noted that their participants varied their use of digital tools which they called *digitalk* by the intended audience. The participant in the current study also varied use of "digitalk" by intended audience and the image she believed appropriate to present to those audiences. Whereas Trinka prided herself on correct grammar, she tended to adhere to the conventions of Standard Written English (SWE) on Facebook and

Instagram. The only inherently digital form of communication she regularly used on Facebook and, more often, Instagram was emoticons. Trinka used emoticons across all SNS and for all addressed audiences. She did occasionally use initialisms and add extra letters to words in these two spaces, but this was usually in the comment section under a post; in the comment section, she knew whom, specifically, she was addressing, and it was typically a peer. Initialisms and extra letters were ways to associate with her peers. Greenfield and Yan (2006) suggested that the Internet is a cultural toolkit which can be used in a variety of ways. Trinka employed the various cultural tools in distinct ways that represented the person she was portraying based on the audience and space. Emoticons, initialisms, and extra letters were tools that she used to represent herself as friendly, girlish, or cute (as she put it).

Her choice of self-representation through the cultural tool kit of the Internet was also evident in her decision to disregard the conventions of SWE on Ask.fm far more often than on Facebook or Instagram. As indicated earlier, Trinka invokes an audience of like-minded peers when she is posting on Ask.fm; as such, she relaxes her stance on “correct grammar” there perceiving that her audience will not be one of “grammar Nazis” (her term). However, her stance on correct spelling did not falter; she checked her spelling across all SNS. These deliberate literacy actions speak to her ability to vary her communication style based on her audience and the image she desires to present.

Perceived Audience Mediates a Filtered Identity Presentation

The importance of audience was manifested in the data throughout this project as revealed in thematic coding and explicitly from Trinka herself. In this section, I will discuss the implications of Trinka’s conception of her audiences; how a young person might use online

audiences to define herself; and how response to feedback from audiences resembles Goffman's (1959) construct of impression management.

Audience Invoked, Audience Addressed, Audience Ignored

Audience is a fuzzy concept whether one is speaking of identity presentation (Goffman, 1959) or the audience for which an author composes (Lunsford & Ede, 2009). In this study, the audiences for whom the participant composed were also audiences for whom she was presenting her online identities. Lunsford and Ede (2009) have pointed out that, while the constructs of audience invoked and audience addressed are still useful in a digital world, that new ways of thinking about audience are necessary to better understand how audience plays in to online composition. The audience invoked is the audience that a composer has in mind, including what one believes this audience to be like. The audience addressed refers to the actual real people in the intended group. On the Internet, there is a real and potentially large audience that is neither the one invoked nor the one intended. In Trinkka's case, this represents the audience ignored – the one she dismisses or neglects to fathom.

In the present study, Trinkka made it clear that she had particular audiences in mind when she composed her online social networking posts. For Trinkka, her audience invoked/addressed was usually much narrower than the actual potential group of readers. For example, any post she made on Instagram could be seen by any of her 1801 followers, but 30 out of her 49 posts were intended for specific groups like close offline friends or members of the comic book community which would be much smaller than the entire group of followers to her feed. Trinkka addressed these groups, partly, based on the roles she assigned for them. Like the fifth grade bloggers in McGrail and McGrail's study (2014), the audiences she invoked were, in part, mediated by her anticipated roles. For example, when she posted a picture of herself and some friends in band

class, she invoked an audience of mostly offline friends who would appreciate the fun they appeared to have in band and would either like the post or comment briefly on it. When a person from another school responded with a lengthy story about his own experiences in band, she found the post “irrelevant” and “annoying”. These intruders were part of the very real audience that Trinka often ignored when posting.

When posting online, Trinka seemed difficult time invoking audiences that resemble the actual people being addressed. The audience Trinka invoked when addressing the various groups on SNS were sometimes inaccurate. For example, she assumed that “everyone” in her Instagram audience would be cheered by funny pictures of her Boston terrier, Willy, though it seems unlikely that all 1801 of her followers enjoy pictures of Boston terriers. This distortion of audience, may in part be related to Trinka’s developmental stage; a mid-adolescent’s lack of control over abstraction “can lead to ...confusion in the perceptions of self and other” (Harter, 2012, p. 107). She may have also been associating her larger audience which included people she had never met offline with her offline friends who do, generally, respond positively to her pictures of Will-E.

This online/offline connection is another aspect of online composition that may complicate the nature of audience in SN spaces. As others (Alvermann et al., 2012; boyd, 2007) have demonstrated and as the data show in this study, online and offline audiences overlap considerably. This can be confusing for young people (boyd, 2007) as they consider to whom they are presenting. boyd (2007) noted that her participants might struggle with how to be acceptable to audiences with varying expectations, like peers and parents. Trinka seemed to deal with this through presenting differently across sites while still, according to her, never posting anything of which her parents would disapprove. Although the data show that Trinka gave a

great deal of thought to which audience she addressed, they also suggest that she sometimes ignored or failed to recognize the real people following her on social networking.

Berson and Berson (2006) found that young people do not seem to be aware of the potential future audience for their “digital dossiers” and Lunsford and Ede (2009) similarly suggested that young people often forget about the vast potential audience for their Internet posting. This seems to be true of Trinka as well. Even though she spoke of how carefully she presented herself online so as not to seem “weird” or to disappoint her parents, she did not always remain cognizant of the many and varied people who might read and view her online content. For example, she defined very narrow audiences for many of her Instagram posts even though nearly two thousand followers, most of whom she had never met in person, would potentially see the posts. This phenomenon was most noticeable in her thinking about audience when posting to Ask.fm; she thought of the Ask.fm audience as “people [her] own age” and often as people that she knew even though it is impossible to know who views one’s Ask.fm feed, meaning that virtually anyone on the Internet could be in the Ask.fm audience. Trinka knew, of course that users cannot control or even know who is asking them questions or reading their feed even though it is clear to any asker or lurker (like myself) who Trinka is. As such, she did indicate some level of awareness that her family may at any time see her online content though she rarely addressed them on any SNS when she explained to me that she is always mindful of content and ensuring that her family and offline friends will not think she is behaving in a “weird” manner or “[in need of] therapy.”

Trinka’s hyperawareness of her friends and distant awareness of her family, but her total lack of concern about the unknown audience on Ask.fm confirms Lunsford and Ede’s (2009) suggestion that “many students can easily forget that when they post something on the Web, they

may encounter unwanted audiences” (p. 55). Even though Ask.fm does not afford users any control over their audience or who can ask them questions, in that space, Trinka invokes an audience of peers contained of mostly her friends without much thought to the actual people she is addressing or the potential unwanted audiences (like nosy family members who are also researchers). Mid-adolescent social media users like Trinka, while being quite mindful of audience, may not always understand just who their audiences really are.

In Group/Out Group – Defining Oneself through Others

Teens, in part define themselves by those with whom they choose to associate (Erikson, 1959/1980), which is why the peer group can play a vital role in a young person’s self-image and identity development. Social networking offers nearly endless possibilities for people with whom to connect. This can be very exciting as teens find others whom they perceive are “like them” in some ways with an ease never imagined before (Greenfield & Yan, 2006). Trinka used social media to connect with other people who shared her affinity for dance, Boston terriers, comics, and jam skating. By using hash tags, people in these groups were able to easily view one another’s posts and connect via shared interest. She was also signaling alignment to these groups as she chose her followers; when she accepted followers based on their shared like for Boston terriers or common interest in superheroes, she was not only connecting with others who have the same interest, she was defining herself by associating with those groups. According to Rowsell (2009), young people gravitate to Facebook, and in the case of the present study, other online SNS because it is a “comfortable meeting spot for so many people” (p. 108). Before the Internet and online SNS, young people had a rather limited scope of people with whom to interact – those with whom they would come into contact throughout the course of their daily

lives. Now, they are able to “make themselves as they see fit and carve out a community for themselves” (Rowse, 2009, p. 108).

As young people actively choose their online communities, the process is all rather public since it is visible to all followers of the given SNS. In this way, as the participant of this study selected her audiences by choosing friends and followers and hash-tagging her interests, she was not only connecting to others, she was defining herself by her public association with those groups. Additionally, Trinka told me that some messages to offline friends were more powerful and impactful if they were public because they showed that “you’re not afraid to say it in front of other people.” These public messages are a way of aligning with one another, defining the self in that process. Online social networking offers teens a public and somewhat concrete way to define themselves through association with others.

Young people do not just define themselves through alignment *with* others; they define themselves through the decision *not* to align with particular people/groups (Erikson, 1959/1980). In a social networking environment, this can be accomplished, in part, by not accepting certain people as friends or followers. Trinka used the security features associated with Instagram and Facebook to carefully manage audiences in those spaces, and was somewhat systematic about how she chose “friends” on Facebook and followers on Instagram. Trinka declared that on Facebook she is somewhat “picky” and that she would not accept a friend who might be not be “a good kid”. Trinka used the management features of Facebook and Instagram, in part to define herself as she selected “good kids” as her Facebook friends. On Instagram, she selected followers based on a variety of criteria, one of which included having a common interest and would not accept followers who seemed “weird” or “creepy”. Whereas this selection process may have been, in part, an effort to maintain physical safety, it is important to remember that

Trinka participated on Ask.fm where there was no such control. It is also important to note that on both Facebook and Instagram, one's "friends" or followers can be seen by others on the sites. This makes one's alignment with certain groups rather concrete and highly visible to others. With online social networking, young people have the opportunity to define themselves in very public and deliberate ways.

Impression Management - Responding to Feedback from the Audience

Not only is association with particular groups of importance in defining the self, for teens in particular, acceptance from peer groups is of vital importance in achieving an acceptable (to oneself) identity (Erikson, 1959/1980; Harter, 2012). This is evident in Trinka's monitoring of feedback, particularly on Instagram. She checks her likes, comments and requests to follow every day. Elkind (1967) indicated that adolescents perform for an imaginary audience; they believe themselves to be on a virtual stage with everyone, particularly peers, continually and critically looking on. Goffman (1959) did not relegate identity as enacted for audiences to the adolescent; he believed that everyone constructs identity as performance for others. Harter (2012) pointed out several critiques of Elkind's imaginary audience theory including the suggestion that adolescents do scrutinize one another critically, suggesting that the adolescent peer audience is not imaginary but actually quite real. She also noted that audiences are not only critical, but sometimes favorable.

For Trinka, on social networking sites, her audience is most assuredly real (even if not always accurately identified by Trinka); her frequent checking for feedback in those spaces shows her desire for their approval. Trinka expressed to me that the opinions of her close friends and family are what really matters which may be largely true; Harter (2012) explained that mid-adolescents' internalization of opinions of significant others accounts for global self-esteem.

However, mid-adolescents' relational self-esteem tends to vary widely across contexts as they work toward becoming independent from parents/caregivers (Harter, 2012). So while mid-adolescents' self-esteem may mostly depend on how they internalize the opinions of parents, they spend a great deal of time attending to the opinions of others, exploring who they are apart from their parents (Harter, 2012). So while Trinka verbalizes that only "some people's" opinions matter, her actions reveal her concern with the opinion of her social networking audience.

According to Goffman (1959), people make adjustments to their performances based on feedback, calling this impression management. As Trinka sought feedback from numerous others on social networking sites, she seemed to give each audience what it wanted so-to-speak. Even though she would say that it (the number of likes or comments) didn't matter, she also talked about the importance of presenting a positive image for others, referring to Instagram as a stage upon which you would not walk out for a brief moment declaring that the weather was bad. Whereas I think I can safely assume that Trinka has not read Goffman, she seemed to realize the performative nature of online SNS. Her desire to appear in a positive light to others is also similar to the college age participants in Zhao, Grasmuck and Martin's (2009) study who wanted to be seen as popular, well-rounded, and thoughtful (deep-thinking); their participants, like Trinka, wanted to be viewed by others in a positive light.

Trinka's posting content reveals her attention to feedback from her audience. The most common type of post Trinka made was the selfie; this was also the type of post that received the most likes and elicited the most comments from others. I pointed this out to her, and she seemed surprised, claiming she had not realized that. Maybe she didn't. Or maybe she was managing her impression (Goffman, 1959) on her SN audiences by responding to their feedback. The least frequent type of post she made was the meme; the memes she did post tended to receive fewer

likes than posts that contained her image or the images of friends. She also posted the least number of times to Facebook where she also received very little feedback compared to that which she received on Instagram. These data suggest that she was making adjustments to her online presentation based on the feedback that she received from her audiences. Online social networking allows for carefully practiced impression management. Trinka's varied presentations across SNS showed that she was managing her impression based on what she perceived each group would appreciate, realizing that different audiences would appreciate different aspects of herself.

Socially Acceptable Filtered Identities across SNS

Harter (2012) coined the term "kaleidoscopic self" to represent the complexity of the mid-adolescent's concept of self, having noted that young people in this stage of development report that their attributes and self-esteem vary across relationships and contexts. This has salience for mid-adolescents' self-presentation on SNS. One of the research questions in this study was, "What kinds of identities does [Trinka] present on social networking sites?" I considered identity as performance (Goffman, 1959) and identity confusion (Erikson, 1959/1980) which Harter (2012) characterized as a kaleidoscopic sense of self as I worked with Trinka to understand and describe her online identity. I was also careful to view Trinka as *someone now* (emphasis mine) rather than *becoming someone* (Sarigianides, Lewis & Petrone, 2015). What resulted was a collection of enacted identities that varied across SNS, creating a picture of the some of the fragments in Trinka's own kaleidoscopic self. I consider the resulting online presentation to be filtered versions of Trinka's self, which is, of course, being continually formed and reformed as is any human's (Harter, 2012). However, the data also showed some ways in which Trinka's identity differs from Harter's (2012) construct. In this section, I will

discuss ways in which Trinkka's online identity presentation aligns with the participants in others' (Barnett, 2009; Davies & Merchant, 2009; Davis & Gardner, 2013; Erikson, 1959/1980; Goffman, 1959; Harter, 2012; Turkle, 2011) research and ways that it does not.

Davies and Merchant (2009) suggested that the concept of a holistic individual identity may no longer be relevant since those with an online presence will enact multiple identities. New concepts of identity may need to be considered, but the data in the present study does not necessarily negate the concept of a holistic identity. While Trinkka did present varying filtered fragmented pieces of herself across social networking sites, together those fragments, *along with others not seen on SNS*, made up her entire self at the time. As a mid-adolescent, she was still working out how to integrate conflicting attributes (Harter, 2012), but the fragments seen of her online were just that – fragments of the person I knew as Trinkka, fragments that remained after she filtered herself through the fabric of the invoked audience for the particular space she inhabited at that moment. Perhaps Chad Barnett's (2009) suggestion that we reconsider the virtual v. real binary is pertinent here. The data in this study suggest that an online presentation is *real* just as a physical manifestation of Trinkka is real. The selves she presented online are facets of her whole self, facets she purposefully presents according to the audience and her goals for the interaction.

Like the mid-adolescent participants in Harter's (2012) research, Trinkka was concerned about what others might think of her. This was evident through her varied online identities and her frequent references in our interviews to what others would think if she posted something "bad." Her carefully constructed Instagram identity may be, in part, a function of the more varied audiences she perceived there. Harter (2012) reports that, while global self-esteem (the esteem that tends to remain more constant across contexts) is related to approval of significant

others, relational self-esteem which tends to vary across contexts is more associated with the approval of classmates (distinguishing classmates from close friends). In the digital world, the idea of “classmates” might be extended to include others who are peers of some sort (connected by age, interest, etc...) and are in a position to observe one’s enactment of self. In the current study, one might think of Trinkka’s larger Instagram audience as classmates of sorts, semi-distant others whose approval she sought.

Perhaps in an attempt to garner approval from her peers (Erikson, 1959/1980), Trinkka presented selves (Goffman, 1959) that would be appreciated by the audiences across the three SNS she used. Her Instagram audience was privy to many of the positive characteristics that a large audience might be expected to appreciate. By filtering out negative thoughts and emotions as well as characteristics she thought might be negative, she presented an image that she believed would be palatable to the wide audience there. It is notable that Trinkka’s careful self-filtering contrasted with her explicit statements (in captions on posts and interviews) that people should be themselves and not worry what others or “society” thinks. However, this contradiction makes sense in light of Harter’s (2012) explanation that mid-adolescents will project their own self-doubts, especially concerns about false-self behavior, onto others. As one would expect, as a mid-adolescent, she *was* concerned with what others thought (Erikson, 1959/1980; Harter, 2012) even though she would have *liked* not to be (emphasis mine).

Davis and Gardner (2013) along with their young participant expressed concern that what they call the app generation calls for a constantly upbeat self and that, as a result, people are consistently false online. Trinkka was quite explicit in her effort to be positive, pleasant, and friendly on Facebook and Instagram. She even deleted one of the only posts that might be considered negative. Like one of Rowsell’s (2009) participant’s observed, online social

networking is the “mirror reality...you’re just able to delete things you don’t want to see or think about anymore” (p. 106). While Davis and Gardner (2013) and Turkle (2012) might suggest that the Internet is causing young people to feel they have to present seemingly *falsely* (emphasis mine) positive images, essentially creating false self-portraits online, in Trinkka’s case, it seems that she was learning about the importance of knowing *when* and *where* certain behaviors are socially acceptable to the audiences there. The data in the present study suggest that, rather than being false, she reserved a more open and, therefore, emotionally-charged self for the space in which she feels it was appropriate. For Trinkka, emoting on Instagram would have been akin to a child throwing a temper tantrum in the grocery store; this selective presentation is a form of impression management (Goffman, 1959) in that Trinkka adapts her behavior to what she believes is appropriate for the particular social setting she inhabits.

In an earlier study, Davis (2012) found that the young adolescents in her study used SN to foster a sense of belonging through self-disclosure. Trinkka did that as well in varying ways. On Facebook, she was more likely to disclose preferences by sharing content that reflected them (band, dance, etc...). On Instagram, she disclosed preferences by posting pictures and disclosed her views on life through captions on selfies that she called “inspirational quotes”. On Instagram, she received a great deal of validation for her own image and her preferences through comments and “likes” on her posts. These validations fostered a sense of belonging to certain groups. For example, seeing the likes from other Boston terrier lovers on her Willy posts gave her a sense of connectedness and a feeling that she “made someone’s day better.” On Ask.fm, she was more emotionally raw in her disclosure; when she would “rant” in that space, her friends would talk to her about it (in person) and validate her anger. While Trinkka also had other groups with whom she was able to develop a sense of belonging (school band and dance team, for

example), she also employed the features of social networking and an understanding that different spaces call for different performances (Goffman, 1959) to supplement her offline opportunities for belonging and self-disclosure.

Another way that Trinka used filtered identities was to try out different aspects of herself. Others (Greenfield & Yan, 2006; Turkle, 2005) have noted the potential for experimentation with identity online though these authors have tended to suggest more pretentious displays than what the data about Trinka show. Whereas the potential for falsifying oneself and experimenting with selves vastly different than the ones displayed in face-to-face interaction exists and has been documented by the aforementioned authors, there was no evidence of such practice in this study. Trinka was more like the participants in Alvermann and her colleagues' (2012) study. As noted previously, they found that the college students in their study used social networking to "carve out identities for themselves that might otherwise have gone untapped and unnoticed" (p. 189). For example, she posted pictures of herself accomplishing numerous athletic feats (dance leaps, jam skating poses), in a sense highlighting certain achievements and leaving out others such as academic achievements and, to some extent, her achievements as a tuba player. So, although some of Trinka's online practices may have served to reinforce stereotypes as previously discussed, by highlighting what she felt were, unexpected facets of herself, she was using Instagram to purposely defy what she perceived as the stereotype of an eager student, getting to know and interacting with the people that might not have noticed her otherwise. This might also be considered healthy risk-taking (Livingstone, 2008) behavior on her part.

Some (Davis & Gardner, 2013; Turkle, 2011) have expressed the concern that the time and tools the Internet affords young people to carefully deliberate and craft are making them afraid to take risks. Whereas the affordances of the Internet can be seen as inhibiting one's

willingness to take risks, for some people, it can be a relatively safe space to take risks (Greenfield et al., 2006). On the surface, it may appear that Trinka was avoiding risks via her identity-filtering practices, but another way of looking at it is that she was taking risks by opening the lines of communication to different groups of people she might not otherwise have had the opportunity to befriend. Also, the purposeful way in which she presented herself suggests that she is not filtering her identities out of fear but, rather, in an effort to accomplish particular social goals.

While, to some degree Trinka's varying presentations of self across sites reveal characteristics of Harter's (2012) construct of the kaleidoscopic self, there are ways in which Trinka differs from the portrait of the typical mid-adolescent, as Harter (2012) presents it. For example, Harter's construct is one of frustration and identity *confusion* (emphasis mine), or as Erikson would have said, identity *diffusion* (emphasis mine); however, Trinka did not seem distressed or particularly confused by her varying presentations. Rather, she expressed quite emphatically that people are different with different people and in different settings. Though she did appear flummoxed when I, perhaps unfairly, asked her who the real Trinka was, she did not seem distressed by her inability to produce an answer. She knew and clearly recognized abstractions of her self that varied across contexts but without the angst that Harter (2012) suggests a typical mid-adolescent would experience.

Harter (2012) also notes that males and females with a more masculine orientation move more seamlessly and with more ease across contexts, not worrying about the contradicting selves they adopt. Trinka, however, exhibited, in many ways a traditionally feminine orientation (2012) by trying to be positive and "girlish and cute." This is another way in which the data in this study do not support Harter's (2012) theory for this particular participant. One might suggest

that Trinka could be exhibiting traits of a late adolescent (Harter, 2012) with an improved self-esteem and lack of conflict over contradictions, but the data do not point to this. Other characterizations of late adolescence are an integration of conflicting traits, failure to attribute internalized traits and beliefs to parents or other caregivers, and ability to discount one's weaknesses. Whereas Trinka did not obsess or agonize over her conflicting traits, she did not integrate them either. When I asked her who the real Trinka was, she did not have an answer; also, when I asked her to explain why she took so much care with her looks on her selfies while at the same time expressing that looks should not matter, she did not have an answer. She still recognized her parents as significant in her choices about how to present herself, and she expressed concern about weaknesses, particularly on Ask.fm. So while Trinka is probably in the stage Harter (2012) would consider mid-adolescent, she exhibits fragmentation of self in a purposeful way without distress, even when her presentations are contradictory.

As noted earlier, it is also important to concede that presentation of fragmented selves across SNS is not merely an adolescent phenomenon but something that has been noted with adult participants as well (Davies & Merchant, 2009). Even though Trinka's fragmented identities seem to point to her mid-adolescence (Harter, 2012), it is impossible to know for sure if her fragmentation of selves is developmental or if it is evidence of the fragmentation any human would display across various spaces. It is also impossible to know whether Trinka's experiences are an anomaly or if they are typical of an avid SN mid-adolescent. Trinka's practices are but one girl's experiences; however, what we might learn from a specific case can often be valuable when the data gathered and presented is rich and contextual enough that a reader can choose when and where it might be applied (Merriam, 2009). What I have learned

from studying Trinkka's social networking practices has implications for practice and for future research, which I will discuss next.

Implications for Practice

Trinka's developing understanding of audience reveals that, while she is aware that different audiences exist and that those audiences have different characteristics, she sometimes invokes and/or addresses an audience that is narrower (or altogether different) than the entire potential audience. Trinkka and other mid-adolescents may benefit from a deeper understanding of online audiences. This awareness might benefit them in terms of physical safety, avoiding future problems as a result of unwanted audiences (Berson and Berson, 2006), and becoming more effective communicators (Lunsford & Ede, 2009). She might also fail to realize how information she is posting could affect her in the future (Berson and Berson, 2006). I shared earlier that she did not believe her father when he suggested that employers would search potential employers' social networking sites for information before hiring them. This anecdote suggests that more education about audiences may be in order. A deeper awareness of audience can also make communication more effective (Lunsford & Ede, 2009). As part of literacy instruction, educators may find that incorporating the digital into their discussions of audience may add relevance to the curriculum for students and benefit them in and out of academia. Educators might collect or create varying social networking posts for a real or fictional person and have students talk about which posts they would recommend for various sites (audiences) and why.

Droin (2011) found that, among college students, use of what she called "textese" in certain environments like SNS or emails to professors was negatively correlated with literacy skill (reading accuracy). This negative relationship may indicate that reading ability, as a general

indicator of literacy skill, may be associated with an understanding of audience/perspective. College students who used textese in more public digital environments like SNS may have lacked a recognition of or appreciation for the larger and varied audience in these domains. Trinka is not yet a college student, but she shows a developing understanding of the importance of audience by choosing when to use SWE and when to employ more flexible and relaxed use of conventions though, as discussed earlier, she may still need help in better identifying the *actual* audiences that may be viewing her identity performances.

In order to help students understand audience better, social networking practices should be brought into the schools (Alvermann & Hinchman, 2012; Notley, 2009). The student bloggers in McGrail and McGrail's (2014) study reflected on their audience and tried to adjust their mode of delivery as such. Teachers might incorporate blogging into classroom practices, manipulating the audiences in a way that would lead to insightful discussion about the different types of content and the different ways students might choose to present themselves for the different audiences. Students may even write their own "grammar" guidelines for various SNS and online situations, discussing when to use certain emoticons, initialisms, invented spelling, and flexible use (or lack of use) of punctuation.

Evidence that Trinka was able to present identities that were pointedly filtered for her perceived audiences shows that a mid-adolescent is capable of presenting different aspects of herself with purpose. One classroom implication of this is that mid-adolescents may be taught how to present an academic presence in online spaces. Much of students' future coursework may be completed online, and as such an online academic presence will be necessary for future success. I noted that Trinka deliberately excludes some academic aspect of self from social media; if other students, like Trinka, see social networking as something entirely separate from

school pursuits, and then they are asked to engage intellectually with classmates in a social networking type environment, they may find the task difficult without direct instruction and practice. Teachers might use sites like Edmodo (Borg, O'Hara, & Hutter, 2008) which looks and functions much like Facebook. By using a tool that will be familiar to many young people (Madden, Lenhart, & Duggan, 2013), teachers might harness their familiar literacy practices to teach them about ways to interact with others in the online classroom setting.

When considering the digital tools that Trinka used on SNS, one clear implication that has been noted elsewhere (Alvermann & Hinchman, 2012) is that a mid-adolescent like Trinka would most likely benefit from a bridging of out-of-school digital literacies and in-school traditional literacies. Trinka showed skill in using digital tools including visual photography and photo-editing as well as flexible use of spelling/conventions, hash tags, and emoticons to mediate meaning and represent herself. These skills can be harnessed and leveraged by her classroom teachers to enhance academic literacies. For example, teachers could incorporate visual modalities into students' representation of ideas. They might be asked to include edited photographs in their written work along with captions that explicate the meaning of the pictures. Students might create "Instagram" or "Facebook" accounts for book characters or historical figures so that they might represent their understanding in familiar literacy formats. Hash tags can be used to help students to learn about categorizing information or as a way to consider key words for Internet searches.

Since mid-adolescents are developing in new contexts, some new discussions about how to guide them through this stage in identity development may be in order. As Harter (2012) has noted that mid-adolescents report that their attributes and self-esteem vary across contexts and I have noted that Trinka's self-presentation is one of filtered fragments across SNS, young people

like her may benefit from exploring their multiple selves and why they create them. Students might be asked to explore their presentation across SNS, like the participant in this study, and to reflect on why they present themselves in these ways; such reflection might help adolescents consider ways in which they can purposefully manage their online presence in a way that will help them achieve their goals.

As mid-adolescents try to present socially acceptable selves varying contexts, they may be prone to judge themselves against prevailing stereotypes, reinforcing them (as Trinka may have done even as she tried to break from them). In addition to exploring the presentation of multiple selves, young SN users like the participant in this study would benefit from a better awareness of stereotypes, where they may have originated, and how their online practices can be used to reinforce or contradict them. The current study is a call for critical media study among young people. Morrell and Duncan-Andrade (2005) found that students are able to deconstruct the metanarratives present in media messages and to counter with messages of their own. The participants in their study engaged in an in-depth review of Hip Hop culture; like the participants in that study, students can learn literacy skills necessary for academic success while critiquing the messages that they may actually be perpetuating through their own social networking practices. Teachers might begin by showing students posts like the Starbucks posts in the current study alongside comments like the ones Trinka made about “white girls” and Starbucks, looking critically at how such posts may not only be supplying Starbucks with free advertising but also may reinforce stereotypes. Students might also engage in a study of beauty and how they represent beauty online, perhaps reinforcing the larger media narrative about what is beautiful; then, like the student in Morrell and Duncan-Andrade’s (2005) project did, they could counter with a narrative of their own.

Though the data in this study pointed largely to purposeful action online, Trinkka's inability to recognize her perpetuation of society's construct of beauty may suggest that Barnett (2009) was on the right track in suggesting that young people are not fully aware of the ways in which they are positioned as commodities in consumer culture. This finding suggests that students would benefit from studies in consumerism that incorporate an understanding of the persuasive nature of social media and the propaganda they will encounter there. Students might be encouraged to attend to the ads that appear on their SNS and reflect on why they receive those ads. Such reflection may heighten their awareness that, as potential consumers, they are targets for ad companies and likely to be influenced by them. Greater awareness might increase the likelihood of purposeful action regarding what they choose to present and represent and what ideas they "buy" into, both literally (with money) and figuratively (what they choose to believe).

As with any study, this one raises more questions than it answers. While I hope that it has added to the conversation about the relationship between young people's online social networking practices and identity development, I am aware that many questions remain. Next, I will discuss some implications for future research.

Implications for Future Research

The relationship between identity and online social networking is a complex one (Alvermann et al., 2012; boyd, 2007; Greenfield & Yan, 2006; Livingstone, 2008; Turkle, 2011). More research is continually needed to flesh them out, and even as new research is conducted in the future, ever-changing practices will ensure the need for more. In this study, audience was of great significance; data analysis revealed it to be connected to nearly every other aspect of this project. My work on this project echoes previous scholars' (boyd, 2007; Lunsford & Ede, 2009; McGrail & McGrail, 2014) calls for more research on audience even as they were conducting

theirs. What audiences are young people addressing, invoking, and ignoring when they compose on the Internet? While this study can answer those questions for Trinka during the summer of 2014, more research is needed to see if others have similar experiences. And what interventions can classroom teachers make in their instruction to harness and enhance adolescents' developing understandings of audience?

Trinka's identity seemed to confirm Harter's (2012) construction of a kaleidoscopic self, but unlike some of Harter's research participants, Trinka does not openly express distress over her conflicting selves; on the contrary, she seems completely content with being different in different settings though she may be projecting some of her doubts on others with her contradicting messages about being yourself. Are these observations specific to Trinka or would they hold true for other participants like her? Or participants from different backgrounds or cultural groups? Whereas Trinka's experiences online seem largely positive, particularly in terms of the feedback she receives, others have been subjected to bullying and other negative experiences online (Barnett, 2009; Turkle, 2011). More rich, qualitative research about the range of experiences on SNS is needed.

Also, while the data in the current project seems to suggest that online social networking is a viable place to observe identity development, in what ways might researchers explicitly incorporate online behaviors into their descriptions of the various developmental stages? While the visibility of development online is a treasure trove for researchers, what impact does that visibility have on the young people themselves? Does the space for enactment of multiple selves and visible trail it leaves foster or confuse the fusion of a healthy identity versus identity diffusion (Erikson, 1959/1980)? As language and social practice continually evolve, more

research is needed to understand the implications of new ways of interacting on our concepts of youth and identity development.

Additionally, this project implies the need for refined methodologies in the area of Internet research. Verbal protocols (Hilden & Pressley, 2011) have the potential to add a new dimension and more nuanced understanding of online composition that was not realized in this study. My experience with Trinka suggests that not all young people will be eager to share their thoughts in the moment of posting; perhaps others would. The process of stopping an enjoyable behavior (posting) to fulfill an obligation (recording a verbal protocol) may inhibit a participant from participating in this particular methodology. A researcher may need to recruit participants for studies in which verbal protocol are the only or the main method of data collection; this might result in participants who are more willing to create the audio messages than the participant the present study. Alternately, researchers may need to find another way to access participants' thinking; the current study suggests that text messaging might be a more palatable and engaging method for a mid-adolescent participant to report her thoughts.

This study also suggests that young people may not always wish to record their thoughts in a journal whether on paper or digital, but that text messaging may be a better avenue. I did not necessarily expect text messaging to produce the amount of data that it did. Whereas I intended it as a form of member checking (Merriam, 2009) and it did serve that purpose, it also served to triangulate data and add layers of understanding to developing themes. This implies that text messaging, for some, may be a more palatable and therefore, more productive form of communicating ideas than a participant journal. Future qualitative research might be enhanced by adding text messaging as a data collection method. As language continues to evolve so much

data collection methods so that researcher best captures and represents participants' lived experiences.

Final Thoughts

Social media should be about being yourself and posting about good things in your life and being able to share your interests with people around the world. – Trinkka, via text message to Tara

Trinka's view of online social networking is decidedly upbeat and optimistic. Her self-presentation and use of SNS reflects her stated beliefs. Her online practices also reveal filtered versions of herself that reflect fragments of her identity – fragments that vary in significant ways. Throughout the last six months, I have carefully observed her online activity and spent hours discussing it with her; this task has produced valuable information and leaves me wondering about all of the other mid-adolescents out there and in what ways these new practices are mediating how *they* develop and who *they* are. Social media platforms have powerful affordances enjoyed by the participant in this study and many others. But how much guidance are they receiving in the use of these tools? How much guidance do they need? In the words of Morrell and Duncan-Andrade (2005), "Our students tell us, in their dress, in their actions and in their words that they want to be taught. But, if we listen carefully, they will also tell us what we can use to teach them" (p. 6). We must continue to "listen" to what young people are saying as they participate in online spaces. More research and attention to young people's online social networking activity can yield information and guidance for young people so that they might harness the power of this new space in ways that realize Trinkka's expectations for it and even extend beyond them.

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