SOS: SHARING ONLINE STORIES

by

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ABSTRACT

Social network sites (Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, etc.) provide opportunities to millions of users to share themselves with an online global community. Youth enter adolescence eager to explore and experiment with the world as they learn about and negotiate through identity forming and decision-making. Youth use social network sites as a tool to develop their public and private selves. As guides for youth, teachers need to integrate social network sites into their classroom practices to facilitate and aid adolescent development and formal learning. This study employs grounded theory methodology and a focus group of nine thirteen and fourteen year-old research participants to discuss and investigate adolescent use of social network sites to better understand how they make decisions, share, and learn on these websites. These learnings around adolescent social network site use are then applied to my own teaching practice to establish and organize a new strategy for the introduction of social network sites to teaching. The exploration and research generates three fundamental categories – *choosing*, *sharing*, and *learning*. *Choosing*, *sharing*, and *learning* are synthesized and demonstrate that sharing on social network sites influences adolescent identity forming, decision-making, and informal and formal learning.

PREFACE

SOS: Sharing Online Stories is based on research conducted by Dr. Karen Meyer and
Brett Cameron. This study, especially the work included in chapter 4, includes research
based on responses from a small group of secondary school students. The UBC
Behavioural Research Ethics Board granted approval of this research on March 18, 2012.
The certificate number for this approval is H12-00583. The Surrey School District
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The process of becoming a Masters of Arts candidate is an interesting and exciting journey. Parts of this thesis were conceived or written in VESTA office, the BC Ferries, friends' houses, my classroom, UBC, and my home office. However, it is not the spaces that I have been that mean the most; it is the people that have guided and supported me along this journey that contributed the most to this thesis and myself.

Dr. Karen Meyer has been integral to my success. At each significant moment, she has been the calm and guiding voice that showed me that everything would work. At every important deadline, she gave me the much-needed confidence to take those final steps. I greatly appreciate her knowledge, her support, her encouragement, and her care.

Dr. Marina Milner-Bolotin and Dr. Munir Vellani offered fresh perspectives, intriguing questions, and amazing insight into how to better my practices, my investigation, and by the end, myself. For their assistance and hard work, I am very grateful.

The warm hearts and kind words of my parents have always encouraged me to achieve more than I ever thought was possible. I will always be indebted to them for everything they have done.

Finally, I am eternally grateful for the care, understanding, encouragement, and love of my wife, Julia. Your tender words, gentle kiss, and reassuring (and beautiful) smile always motivate me to be a better person. I am forever beholden to you.

For Julia
and bc

PROLOGUE

In October 2011 a poster was stapled to the wall across from my classroom. The large, child-created text declared, "SAY NO TO FACEBOOK!" Listed below this declaration were dangers and risks associated with immature and ill-informed use of social network sites (SNS). I thought to myself that the intentions of this poster are good. I do not want my students to become victims of an online predator or malicious gossip; however, boldly stating not to use a popular website will not prevent problems from arising. In fact, I had more SNS-related problems in my classroom this year than I have in my previous six years of teaching. I know the poster did not cause those problems, but I also know that adolescent SNS use is increasing and that audacious posters like these and their simple warnings do not work.

As a consistent and conscientious SNS user in my personal life, I reflect upon my own teaching strategies and how SNS can be integrated into my practices. To inform my teaching, I have taken this research opportunity at UBC to study adolescent SNS use to better understand the choices youth make when sharing online and how they learn about SNS and use SNS to help their formal education.

CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

Debate about the use of social network sites (SNS) is complex and polarizing. The debate

can also be hypocritical. People fear losing their privacy. Others champion the potential

to be reunited with lost friends. Youth crave the public attention. Parents fear their

children will become prey to vicious online predators. Hundreds of millions of unique

visitors log into social network sites (GO-Gulf, 2012). Despite the controversies over the

uses of social network sites, real or imagined, youth will use these sites in their daily lives

and these sites will influence traits these youth will have as adults. Instead of fighting the

integration of SNS into our lives, educators, parents, and other influential adults should

embrace the potential of this technology and learn how to use it to educate and guide

youth to become more responsible, accountable, open, creative, aware, and honest adults.

An Introduction to Important Terms and Sites

SOS: Sharing Online Stories combines the SNS and adolescence, with respect to my

position as an educator. SNS and adolescence can be vague; therefore, a few brief but

important definitions and descriptions are beneficial.

danah boyd[1] and Nicole Ellison (2007) define Social Network Sites as:

> Web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public
>
> profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom

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[1] boyd purposefully writes in her name in all lower case letters for personal and political
reasons. (boyd, d., 2011)

they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. (p. 211)

The Oxford English Dictionary (Oxford English Dictionary, 2012) defines adolescence as:

The period following the onset of puberty during which a young person develops from a child into an adult, the condition or state of being adolescent.

Developmental psychologist Erik Erikson (1959) characterizes adolescence as a time for adolescents to explore and shape identity before becoming adults. And technically, Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, and Zickuhr's study (2010) on adolescent social media use defines adolescence as young people of ages of twelve to seventeen years old.

There are five SNS websites that are most prominently referred to in this study. These websites can all be classified as SNS but are also different in their purposes. Description of these sites is also beneficial.

Facebook is the largest SNS with over 900 million users (Hachman, 2012). It defines itself by its mission:

To give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected. (Facebook, 2012)

And its overview:

Millions of people use Facebook every day to keep up with friends, upload an unlimited number of photos, share links and videos, and learn more about the people they meet. (Facebook, 2012)

People use Facebook to connect with friends, both old and new, and share moments of their lives with them. On Facebook, people have the ability to share snippets of their lives through "status updates" and "wall posts." The combination of social connection and personal sharing constitutes most of Facebook's functionality.

Twitter defines itself as:

> A real time information network that connects you to the latest, ideas, opinions, and news about what you find interesting. (Twitter, 2012)

Twitter users "tweet" or write updates or ideas in 140 characters or fewer. Twitter users subscribe to "follow" updates from friends, companies, athletes, or celebrities. Twitter users create a network of people by "following" others they find interesting and by being "followed" by others that find them interesting. Tweets can include, but are not limited to: links to other websites, pictures, personal opinions, casual observances, life events, and self-promotion.

Tumblr is a blogging website that provides a platform for its users to "post text, photos, quotes, links, music, and videos from your browser, phone, desktop, email or wherever you happen to be" (Tumblr, 2012). Tumblr is a blogging website that integrates common aspects of SNS, such as connecting and associating with other users and commenting on specific updates or posts. Tumblr also allows for users to be creative with their pages by giving them control over all creative aspects, such as color, font choice, and HTML coding (Tumblr, 2012).

YouTube is a video-sharing website, which "allows billions of people to discover, watch, and share originally-created videos" (YouTube, 2010). Although primarily used for watching or sharing videos, YouTube's additional features allow it to blur the line between non-SNS and SNS. The SNS aspects of YouTube include "a forum for people to connect, inform, and inspire others across the globe" (YouTube, 2010). YouTube users can essentially create profile pages, called "channels", connect with and follow other users, and post comments and messages to uploaded videos and other YouTube users.

Figure 1.1 - Edmodo[2]

Edmodo is a SNS created for formal education settings. Edmodo defines itself as "a secure, social learning platform for teachers, students, schools, and districts" (Edmodo, 2012). Edmodo combines aspects of SNS, such as profiles, posting, and social connections, with educational tools, such as quiz programs and school calendars. Edmodo tries to link the potential and attractiveness of SNS with a secure, educational grounding.

These five SNS comprise the most-discussed and explored sites in this study. Facebook is the benchmark website and is most commonly used by the research participants investigated in this study. Twitter, Tumblr, and YouTube are websites that fill niches, provide additional platforms for exploration and experimentation, and captivate other student interests.

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[2] Edmodo logos and screenshots are included with permission from Edmodo.com

Table 1.1 – SNS Descriptions

SNS	SNS Description	Website
Facebook	Through "wall posts" and "status updates, users share moments of their lives with a user-selected group of "friends".	www.facebook.com
Twitter	In 140 characters or fewer, Twitter users upload personal thoughts, ideas, opinions, or descriptions of their activities.	www.twitter.com
Tumblr	Tumblr is a blogging website that allows users to comment on, post to, or follow specific Tumblr accounts.	www.tumblr.com
YouTube	YouTube is a video-sharing website. Users may create personal profile pages, called "channels", comment on videos, and follow other YouTube users.	www.youtube.com
edmodo	Edmodo is an SNS created for formal educational settings. Teachers create class profiles for students to join, post comments and questions to, and share their work.	www.edmodo.com

An Introduction to SOS: Sharing Online Stories

This study investigates the use of SNS and their role in the development of adolescent identity forming, decision-making, and learning.

A significant aspect of SNS is the recording and publishing of personal events. These stories can be trivial and insignificant, such as pondering what to buy in a fast food restaurant, or they can be demonstrative and immensely personal, like a student bemoaning the sorrow of a breakup. SNS also provides an abundance of choices for sharing. Youth can post videos, create a podcast, share links to other sites that encompass their own thoughts, upload pictures, write a blog, or chat with friends. How do adolescents make decisions about how, what, and where to share their online narratives?

SNS are obviously social machines. They are driven by social connections; therefore adolescent sharing is motivated by their socialization. However, the intricacy of adolescent development and the complexity of SNS combine to create a variety of pressures that determine what and how youth share online. Who and what influence their decisions to share online?

Teaching about SNS is practiced very little in formal education settings. In my experience, few teachers communicate about the dangers and risks of SNS, and this usually happens after a negative experience among students surfaces. Even fewer teachers incorporate SNS in their classroom practices. Despite the absence of direct lessons, youth are successfully using SNS in their daily lives and developing an expert

level of knowledge about various aspects of SNS. Without direct instruction from parents and educators, how do they learn to share online?

In this study I describe adolescent participation on SNS. I document student views related to their choices and decision-making about sharing on SNS. I analyze the methods students employ to learn about SNS. I also investigate the influences that shape the students online decisions. I also apply these explorations to my own teaching practices and describe how I plan to integrate SNS use in my classroom.

To explore these areas, this study benefits from the opinions, examples, thoughts, and ideas of students in early adolescence. Before beginning this research, I first obtained approval to implement this research from both UBC Ethics Review Board and the Surrey School District. After acquiring approval from UBC and the Surrey School District, I used personal and professional connections at a local secondary school to recruit students that met the study's inclusion criteria. A large group of students were recruited, from which nine students were selected to participate in this study based on the completion of their letters of consent. The students completed one survey and participated in three full group discussions and one smaller group discussion based on three case studies. These group discussions benefitted both the students and I. I gained valuable insights into how youth use SNS and the students developed a better understanding of the effects of posting and sharing online. Together we discovered that SNS can be beneficial to adolescent development and can be positively integrated into formal educational settings.

Research on adolescent SNS use deliberates between the positive and negative aspects of SNS. A variety of studies (boyd & Ellison, 2007; Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010) describe the history of SNS, it popularity, and its potential. Although the risks and dangers of SNS use are apparent and important to include, recent research is moving away from scare tactics and is promoting moderate and guided SNS use. Research on SNS helps define the themes of this study, such as choosing, sharing, storytelling, and learning. There are many studies that link and observe beneficial connections between adolescent identity development and SNS. Current research also demonstrates that much of the adolescent action on SNS is not unique to this generation and similar action could be observed at drive-ins and shopping malls in previous generations; however, adjustments to adult expectations and guidance must be made to accommodate the creation of SNS as a new adolescent space. As research continues to demonstrate that SNS is vital in adolescents' lives, the research also illustrates that SNS can be beneficial in formal educational settings. Current research provides a solid foundation for this study.

To develop this study, grounded theory methodology is used to prepare, organize, and facilitate the data collection process. Grounded theory is a practical method for working with youth in early adolescence. The use of grounded theory allows this study to adapt and grow to fit the responses of the research participants. Case study, a social research method that examines "one or more examples of current social phenomenon, utilizing a variety of sources of data" (Jupp, p. 20) is also used in smaller group discussions to elicit more personal thoughts about how these youth apply their decision-making to their SNS choices and sharing in their daily lives. This study is able to explore many different

concepts because of the application of grounded theory. Data collection included a continual chain of discussing, recording, transcribing, coding, reevaluating, analyzing, comparing, rewriting, reorganizing, and beginning the process again for another discussion session. This process of exploration leads to three major categories – choosing, sharing, and learning. Investigating these three categories also protects student privacy and confidentiality by extracting the students' general thoughts and non-specific examples without evoking stories that would make the research participants identifiable. This study does not fixate on only specifics, such as language or using SNS to connect with family, but it does integrate the broader concepts of choosing, sharing, and learning within formal education. One important goal of this study is to observe adolescent use of SNS to apply to formal education settings; therefore focusing the research on one small aspect would not allow the broader application of SNS in a general classroom environment.

The students' responses and the subsequent analysis can be organized into one general theme and three major categories. The theory is that sharing on SNS develops adolescent decision-making, identity forming, and informal and formal learning. The categories are *choosing*, *sharing*, and *learning*. In *choosing*, the students demonstrate that conscious and unconscious decisions are made when choosing specific SNS, their online voice, and their online social connections. These choices help build, determine, and define personal identity and social boundaries. In *sharing*, the students describe the methods, audiences, and variety of posts they contribute to an online community. Their sharing has many different levels, from basic communicating to elaborate storytelling and many unspoken

and spoken rules. Inevitably, this sharing leads to the negotiation of public and private selves and decisions about self-disclosure. In *learning*, the students illustrate the influences that affect their SNS learning and illustrate the awareness of their online presence and permanence. They also disclose the ability for SNS to help their academic lives by providing a platform for friends to connect with each other to share homework help and collaborate on group assignments. The combination of concepts, categories, and theory lead this study to the conclusion that SNS can and should be integrated into classroom environments.

The study of adolescent SNS use is invigorating for my teaching practices. By learning from the nine amazing research participants, I am able to formulate and organize a plan to implement SNS use in my teaching practices. I use the codes, concepts, and categories from this research and apply them to new teaching ideas. This study connects my academic and professional lives. The *choosing*, *sharing*, and *learning* categories transfer into themes that can and will be used in my classroom. This research shows that I do not need to simply adapt my classroom to SNS but I can reinvent my teaching practices to coincide with SNS as a new teaching tool. From this research, my goal for the future is to create an online community of students, teachers, and parents on a common SNS in my school.

The research in this study is triangulated in two different ways. First, the review of literature connects with the analysis of the student responses to create an application of the research to my teaching practices. Specifically, the voices of others (review of

literature) help guide me as a researcher (the student responses and my analysis) to view this study through the eyes of an educator (the application of this research to my teaching practices). Secondly, the data collection and research process are also triangulated. The study elicits responses from students in three different techniques – written survey, large group discussions, and small group discussions focused on case study. The three techniques layer data and provide a variety of perspectives to compare and analyze. Review of literature, data collection, and analysis construct the theory that sharing on SNS is a common and preferred practice for adolescent decision-making, identity forming, and informal and formal learning. Therefore, SNS should be integrated into formal education to employ its potential and guide adolescents towards appropriate and beneficial use.

This study cannot be conclusive because of the ever-changing technology being studied. The students in the research group demonstrate that learning and using SNS is constantly changing; therefore, their thoughts and, by association, my thoughts about SNS will constantly change as well. This study encapsulates the thoughts and ideas of one teacher and nine students at one brief moment in time. I also do not want to think of this thesis as the end of anything; instead, I view this thesis as the beginning of a new teaching style.

CHAPTER 2 – REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This section of the study includes the work of many authors and researchers in this literature review. From my experience many fellow teachers use hearsay to dismiss the importance or use of SNS. This study makes an effort to embrace the work of other researchers to demonstrate the significance of SNS in the lives of adolescents. Within each theme, summaries are used to synthesize and highlight key ideas and concepts. This study wishes to dispel the negative perception of SNS by incorporating these specific examples.

In *Sharing Online Stories*, many different terms and themes arise. These terms and themes shape and characterize this research. Before analysis and description of this research can begin, key terms and themes must be defined.

Definition of Terms

Many of the terms in *Sharing Online Stories* are vague and hold multiple meanings to a variety of people. This section defines each term to observe how these terms relate to the themes of identity, replacement of prior narrative creations, education, and narrative creation.

Social Network Sites.

As mentioned in the introduction, danah boyd and Nicole Ellison (2007) define social network sites (SNS) as:

Web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or

semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other

users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their

list of connections and those made by others within the system. (p. 211)

Network and networking are often used interchangeably. However, as boyd and Ellison

(2007) choose "not to employ the term 'networking'" because networking "emphasizes

relationship initiation, often between strangers" (p. 211), not the actual network of

relationships on the sites, this study will only use the term network as well. SNS include

prominent areas for users to write or present narratives in one or many different methods

to a wider, or sometimes selective, audience. SNS also give opportunities for that

audience to respond to a user in return. Major SNS include, but are not limited to,

Friendster, LinkedIn, MySpace, Hi5, Facebook, YouTube, Flickr, Xanga, Bebo, Twitter,

and Google+ (boyd d., 2007). Although websites like YouTube and Flickr are often

thought of as primarily video and photography sites, these websites "began implementing

SNS features and becoming SNSs themselves" (boyd d., 2007).

boyd and Ellison (2007) note there are three key elements to SNS: profile pages,

relationships, and comments. Within SNS, users create profiles, which "may include

audio, images (e.g., pictures and video) and text (e.g., blogs and personal descriptions)"

and "'status updates', which allow users to share a short text description of their current

location, emotion, or activity" (Moreno, 2010). The collaboration between the adolescent

users and their SNS over time creates a long and constantly changing narrative. *Friends*,

fans, *contacts*, and *followers* are terms that SNS use to define social relationships and

connections within individual sites. One goal of SNS, as boyd and Ellison describe, is to identify, categorize, and display relationships with other users (p. 213). Often these relationships are observable by the public and/or other SNS users. SNS also offer users the opportunity to write public and private messages to other users. Private messages are similar to emails and can only viewed by the sender and the recipient(s). Public messages, such as the "wall" on Facebook profiles, can be viewed by anyone with access to that profile page.

The popularity of SNS among adolescents has been steadily increasing, as made evident by the Pew Internet & American Life study, "Social media & mobile internet use among teens and young adults" (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010). Although this study is based on American youth, it is used throughout other international articles and journals as the basis for Internet use among youth. The authors of this study, Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, and Zickuhr (2010) state:

- 93% of teens go online,

- 63% of online teens use the Internet daily,

- 73% of wired American teens now use social networking websites, a significant increase from previous surveys. Just over half of online teens (55%) used social networking sites in November 2006 and 65% did so in February 2008,

- Older teens, 14-17, are more likely to report SNS use (82%) than younger teens (55%). Age restrictions of SNS can be a cause because only 46% of 12-year-olds are on SNS compared to 62% of 13-year-olds. MySpace and Facebook are the most popular SNS for teens,

- Certain SNS practices have declined from 2006-2009 – group messages (61%-50%), post comments to a friend's blog (76%-52%), and send private messages (82%-66%),

- SNS practices that have not changed from 2006-2009 are: commenting on a friend's picture (83%), sending IMs or text messages through SNS (54%-58%), and commenting on a friend's wall or page (84%-86%) and,

- 38% of teens share content (photos, videos, artwork or stories) online.

Figure 2.1 – Pew Internet & American Life Study statistics (2010)

93% of teens go online

73% of wired American teens use SNS	63% of online teens use the Internet daily

Older teens, 14-17, are more likely to report SNS use (82%) than younger teens (55%)	Only 46% of 12-year-olds are on SNS compared to 62% of 13-year-olds.	38% of teens share content (photos, videos, artwork or stories) online
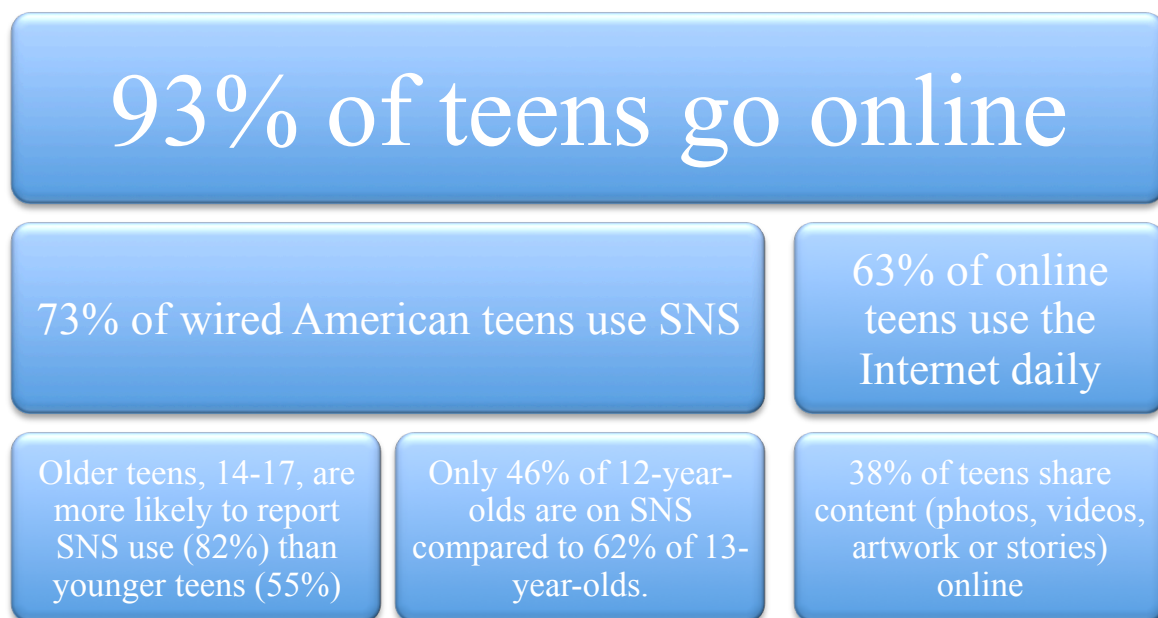
Adolescent and Youth.

As with much research around children maturing, terms such as youth, teenager(s), and adolescent(s) are used interchangeably but are also hard to define. Within research of adolescent Internet use, Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, and Zickuhr's "Social media & mobile internet use among teens and young adults" (2010) is the definitive source for online data

collection. Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, and Zickuhr's collection of data on adolescents

encompasses non-adults between 12-17 years of age. Terms such as youth, teenagers,

and adolescents are helpful in referencing the time between childhood and adulthood.

Developmental psychologist, Erik Erikson (1959) describes adolescence as a time when

youth experiment with different identities and shape and mold who they are and who they

will become. Weber and Mitchell (2007) define adolescence as:

> A series of questions that youth ask of themselves, the world, and each other, and
>
> that others ask of them. 'Just who am I?', 'What will I do when I leave school?',
>
> 'Where do I fit in?' 'Who do I love?' (p. 26)

In this paper I will use the terms youth, adolescent and teen interchangeably. Youth,

teens, and adolescents go through a time of development known as adolescence.

Choice.

Choice is defined as "the act of choosing; preferential determination between things

proposed; selection, election" and "the power, right, or faculty or choosing; option"

(Oxford English Dictionary, 2012). With regards to adolescent use of SNS, choice can

also refer to decisions that youth make online. These decisions involve privacy, publicity,

relationships, and technical decisions about specific SNS.

Lessons and Learning.

Lessons and learning in this thesis refer to the informal learning that occurs outside of

formal educational settings, such as elementary and secondary schools. Youth learn to

use SNS in a variety of ways, such as trial and error and observation. They also learn to use SNS from a variety of people, such as peers, family, and strangers.

Education.

In this thesis, education refers to direct connections between the research and formal educational settings, such as elementary and secondary schools. One connection is the benefits that SNS has in formal education. Another connection is the benefits formal education could have on adolescent SNS use. An objective of this study is to demonstrate the benefits of integrating SNS into formal education.

Contradiction.

One theme found throughout other academic articles on adolescent Internet and use of SNS is the contradiction of older perceptions of SNS by current research on SNS. The term, contradiction, shows that previous knowledge, usually negative, is not necessarily applicable in current SNS and Internet theories. There is much evidence that supports the moderate use of SNS by adolescents and formal education settings.

Storytelling.

Storytelling is "the action for telling stories" (Oxford English Dictionary, 2012). A story is "a narrative, true or presumed to be true, relating to important events and celebrated persons of a more or less remote past" (Oxford English Dictionary, 2012). The Oxford English Dictionary (2012) defines narrative as:

An account of a series of events, facts, etc., given in order and with the establishing of connections between them; a narration, a story, an account.

A representation of a history, biography, process, etc., in which a sequence of events has been constructed into a story in accordance with a particular ideology…especially a story or representation used to give an explanatory or justificatory account of a society, period, etc.

For the purposes of this thesis, narrative and storytelling are used interchangeably. Each contribution to a social network site shares a story, whether it is long or short. Adolescents not only contribute their narratives to the online world textually but pictorially, visually, orally, and audibly. Adolescents upload photos to share moments of their lives. They also create new backgrounds, change fonts, and reorganize the structure of their pages on social networking sites. Youth share links to YouTube videos that help define their online, and to a certain extent, real-life identities.

By collecting and combining these terms, a social phenomenon is unveiled that exists within the online and offline lives of adolescents. These terms and themes have facilitated the investigation of the choices youth make online. In this chapter they also demonstrate how choices affect adolescent identities and personal online narratives. They also illustrate the connections of these choices to the negative perceptions of SNS and the connections between these choices and previous generations of adolescent development. These terms and themes also helped examine the learning youth give and receive and how they can and should be seen as evidence for using SNS in formal educational settings.

Figure 2.2 – Themes within the review of literature
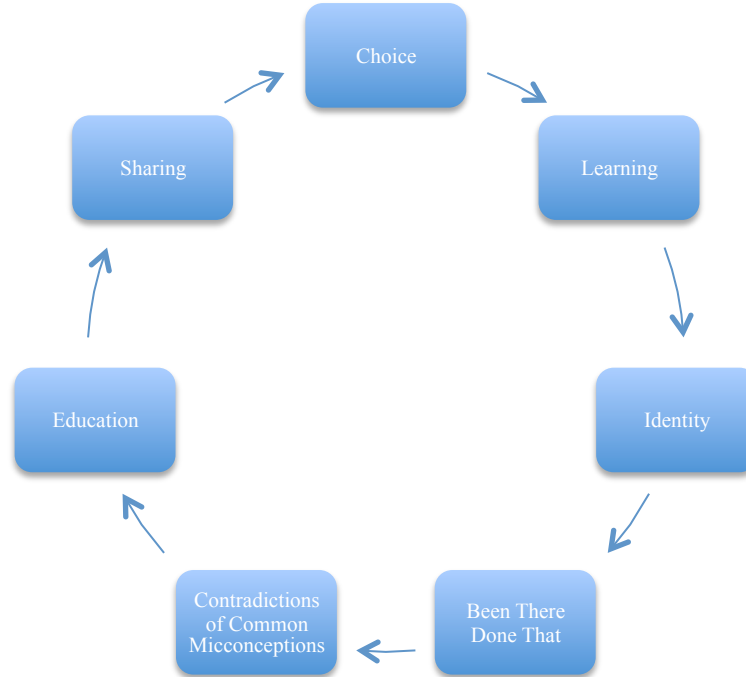
Themes

Choosing.

An important part of online narrative creation is a youth's choice around what and how they post narratives. As part of their adolescent development, youth "are likely to experience a strong sense of their own autonomy, and of their right to make their own choices and to follow their own paths—however illusory this may ultimately be" (Buckingham, 2007, p. 17). Given the choice presented on SNS, youth "have almost full control over informational disclosure, they can be more strategic in managing self-presentation, as compared to traditional face-to-face interactions" (Ong, et al., 2011). Youth choose to share online because they "find it easier to talk about personal things" and they "think it is easier to keep things private online" (Livingstone & Bober, 2004).

Privacy is a topic that many investigate when studying adolescent behaviour online. Adults often believe that adolescents over-share online, and that privacy and the decisions made about disclosing personal information and ideas may be viewed and respected differently by youth (Muise, Desmarais, & Christofides, 2012). Muise, Desmarais and Christofides' study (2012) shows that adolescents decide to share more than adults online mainly because they spend more time online than adults; however, adults that spend comparable amounts of time also share more online (2012, p. 52). Youth often edit or omit personal information to protect themselves from parents and/or predators. Stern (2007) notes:

> Their decisions about what to reveal, exaggerate, and omit in their online communication, youth authors reveal a highly conscious process of self-inquiry. Adolescents consciously and conscientiously negotiate the boundaries of public and private spheres as they deliberate about who they are and who they want to be, within their local community and the larger culture. The Internet, young authors suggest, affords space and place for such complex identity work. (p. 97)

Youth must then negotiate an online profile that allows them to be found by peers but hidden from others (boyd d., 2007). On Facebook, youth may grant access to their profile to their parents but can regulate how much their parents can view (Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008). Livingstone (2008) suggests that privacy is not necessarily tied to the revelation of personal information but is more about control over that personal information:

> Teenagers described thoughtful decisions about what, how and to whom they reveal personal information, drawing their own boundaries about what

information to post and what to keep off the site, making deliberate choices that match their mode of communication (and its particular affordances) to particular communicative content. (p. 404)

Van Manen (2010) states that adolescents have a different sense of privacy. He argues that adolescents "experiment with their identity, con-structing textual, pictographic, video, and photographic images of themselves that reflect less who they are than who they would want to be" (p. 1026). Van Manen also connects choice with identity. He states, "in learning when and how to keep things inside and when to share, young people learn to confer their sense of identity, independence, uniqueness, and autonomy" (p. 1024). In his argument for adolescent privacy, van Manen continues that "privacy, secrecy, and innerness in young people's lives play a critical role in the development of self-identity, autonomy, intimacy, and the ability of learning to negotiate closeness and distance in social relations" (p. 1024). Adolescents can have a different sense of privacy, but they also have the opportunity to choose more carefully how to protect their private thoughts and feelings. The ability to publicize their stories and identities, places more importance on the privacy and secrets adolescents do keep, while lessening the importance of what is written into public SNS. The importance of privacy, disclosure, and discretion presents educators with the opportunity to teach those concepts in conjunction with SNS and Internet use.

Another major choice that adolescents face when posting online is choosing their audience. SNS give multiple options for sharing with different people. In adolescence,

youth begin to assert independence from their parents and adult authority figures and "it is understandable and natural for children to keep part of their lives secret and separate from their parents; early adolescents are not necessarily being duplicitous" (Clarke, 2009). Freedom of choice is actually quite limited for youth on SNS. They are constantly thinking of audience, real or perceived, as how to post to that audience. As Livingstone (2008) suggests youth "are constrained in two ways: first, by the norms and practices of their peer group and, second, by the affordances of the technological interface" (p. 400). Livingstone (2008) continues that, "various representations of 'adult society' (parents, media panics, etc.) also play a lesser role in alerting them to the risks of strangers, viruses, threats to privacy, etc." (p. 400)

Youth must also make choices about what they include on their SNS with regard to how it may impact their future. danah boyd (2007) gives an example of young African-American's profile page and its impact on a university application:

> The admissions committee had planned to admit a young black man from a very poor urban community until they found his MySpace. They were horrified to find that his profile was full of hip-hop imagery, urban ghetto slang, and hints of gang participation. This completely contradicted the essay they had received from him about the problems with gangs in his community, and they were at a loss. (p. 133)

The decisions youth make when creating, developing, editing, and publishing their SNS profiles negotiate fitting in with peers and being inoffensive to their families without jeopardizing their future success.

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Choices regarding online friendships are also made and the choices we make online to *not* friend someone may be equally important to those we do friend. The decision not to accept a friendship shows a boundary (Maranto & Barton, 2010). Adolescents also see differences among their friends but do not necessarily need to end friendships based on differences. Older friendships can still be maintained using SNS (Clarke, 2009, p. 76). Adding or not adding friends is another choice youth make. When creating social networks adolescents cannot be completely private. There needs to be some openness to develop trust among friends and peers. Livingstone (2008) notes that SNS are binary – friend or not – but that is not the case anymore. SNS often allow people to categorize their social connections and who sees what. This adds to their deliberate decision-making online. There is a social hierarchy that translates between online and offline worlds. Choices must also be made to escape social awkwardness. MySpace includes a "Top Friends" section for users to differentiate between regular friends and special friends. Youth must then choose how to use those spots to maintain strong bonds or increase social status by adding more popular friends. These choices reinforce social choices that often occur offline (boyd d., 2007, p. 130).

Adolescents also choose who they can be, reflect on their choices and make changes accordingly, as they "communicate who they want to be to a mass audience, an opportunity previously afforded only to the privileged, and so extend the reach of their own influence" (Greenhow & Robelia, Old Communication, New Literacies: Social Network Sites as Social Learning Resources, 2009). By using SNS as a tool for communicating with friends, adolescents are choosing to make their communication

public (Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008, p. 126). Choosing to communicate through SNS with peers may enhance peer relations, however, it may also jeopardize relationships with the youth's families (Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008). This conflict between communicating with peers and families could be paradoxical. Youth will communicate online with their peers because their families do not. Families may not attempt to communicate online because their children are always online.

Reich's article (2010) defends the choice to publicize communication by describing the choices her research participants made on their SNS. The girls in Reich's study choose favourable representations of self by editing their profiles so they can be seen in the 'best' possible way (p. 696). Reich finds that the girls' choices help create social communities, and although the motivation may be equally selfish and selfless, the girls choose to post on a sad friend's profile to brighten her day. In return these public posts would be seen by the girls' social network while alleviating the emotions of a sad friend (p. 701).

Studies (Greenhow & Robelia, 2009; Buckingham, 2007) note an abundance of technical choices when youth post online. Greenhow and Robelia (2009) state, "like fingerprints, no two subjects had the same combination of colors, graphics, layouts, media features, and applications displayed on their page" (p. 131). SNS profile choices can also affect social standing and as Buckingham (2007) notes, "the issue of performance is also very relevant to the ways in which young people construct identities, for example, via the use of avatars, email signatures, IM nicknames, and (in a more elaborate way) in personal homepages and blogs"(p. 6). Weber and Mitchell (2007) also compare youth's SNS

profiles to fingerprints:

> The posting of photographs extends their bodies into cyber space; their sites bear
> their "fingerprints," the traces of their activities, the imprint of their inventive
> spellings and font choices, the visual evidence that they exist, a signpost to who
> they think they are or who they want you to think they are or who they would like
> to become. As they choose and post a plethora of photographs that include candid
> photographs of groups of friends, impromptu "clowning around" snaps as well as
> posed, stylized, and sometimes altered photos, they are presenting themselves,
> performing their bodies, and trying on "looks." The choice of photographs of their
> idols can also be viewed as an extension or projection of their bodies, a desiring or
> coveting of another's appearance. (pp. 30-31)

The actual choice of SNS is not a major issue (Livingstone S., 2008). Youth base their
choice of SNS on a combination of external factors: peer choice, adult approval, and
access. Currently, Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter are the most popular SNS (Lenhart
A. P., 2010).

Choice is an important part of adolescent use of SNS. Youth are given autonomy over the
decisions they make about what, where, when, why, and how they post on SNS. They
choose their friends. They choose their stories. They choose their uploads. They choose
their voice and their identity when posting to SNS.

Learning.

SNS does not only have formal educational benefits. SNS also provide an opportunity for youth to teach and learn informally. As Buckingham (2007) notes, "in learning with and through these media, young people are also learning how to learn. They are developing particular orientations toward information, particular methods of acquiring new knowledge and skills, and a sense of their own identities as learners" (p. 17). In learning how to use SNS and how to create on SNS, "the interest in self-documentation reflects many young authors' desire to witness their own personal growth" (Stern, 2007, p. 103).

Greenhow and Robelia (2009) notice that youth learn about SNS informally and non-formally as apprentices to more experienced SNS users. Livingstone and Bober (2004) also mention that informal learning is the preferred method for how to use the Internet, that most learning comes from trial and error, that lessons are learned from youth's peer groups and families, and that some teachers do help and teach about the Internet. Livingstone and Bober (2004) report that these informal lessons develop stronger social ties and encourage the importance of playing. Weber and Mitchell (2007) note, "without direct adult supervision, the learning is informal and self-motivated, embedded in their daily lives outside school, and occurring at their own pace and in their own space" (p. 42). They also state that as youth teach each other and share ideas, adolescents "co-construct identities" (Weber & Mitchell, 2007, pp. 31-32).

Adolescents learn much about profile creation from their peers. Since a SNS profile is the main function of SNS, it is important that adolescents follow cues from their peers to

create a successful SNS profile. danah boyd (2007) describes the process of online profile creation:

> Before writing anything of depth, teens tend to look at others' profiles, starting with the friend who invited them. In viewing that profile, they are offered links to their friends' MySpace Friends, and so they can spend countless hours surfing the network, jumping from Friend to Friend. By looking at others' profiles, teens get a sense of what types of presentations are socially appropriate; others' profiles provide critical cues about what to present on their own profile. While profiles are constructed through a series of generic forms, there is plenty of room for them to manipulate the profiles to express themselves. At a basic level, the choice of photos and the personalized answers to generic questions allow individuals to signal meaningful cues about themselves. (pp. 128-127)

One area that adolescents have learned relates to social etiquette and general socialization. Karen Bradley (2005) mentions one example of learning social etiquette by noting that, "most young people now know the perils of 'flaming' online where many of them saw instant messaging as a free-for-all for rude behaviour as few as three years ago" (p. 67).

There is also much technological information that must be learned. In Greenhow and Robelia's study "Informal learning and identity formation in online social networks" (2009), they find:

> Simply participating in the SNS to the extent they did required knowledge of a

range of information and communication technologies, including: the ability to

search out, preview, select, incorporate, and share audio and video files; the

ability to create, edit, copy, find, upload, tag, and arrange image files; the capacity

to strategically monitor, respond, multitask, and navigate multiple communication

channels (e.g., instant messaging, MySpace email, wall posts, blog comments,

tagged photos, video shares, etc.), and more. (p. 133)

Recoding profile pages can alter profiles on MySpace. This is an intricate process that

requires attention to detail and specific knowledge. HTML and CSS coding allow youth

to deeply personalize their profiles. Since most youth do not know how to code

technically, lessons and tips are shared and codes are copied and pasted. Knowledge of

creating unique profiles becomes a traded commodity (boyd d., 2007, p. 128).

Identity.

Identity is an important factor in adolescent development. Although this study is not

directly focused on adolescent identity it is important to be cognizant of this theme. There

are four areas that relate adolescent identity to this study: identity formation, identity

exploration, adolescent identity and technology, and adolescent identity and friendship.

As described earlier, SNS are a common activity and form of communication among

adolescents and identity formation is a key component of adolescence. It is

understandable then that SNS would play a significant role in identity formation. danah

boyd (2007) supports the study of adolescent SNS use by noting "how youth engage

through social network sites today provides long-lasting insights into identity formation,

status negotiation, and peer-to-peer sociality" (p. 119). She also mentions "social network sites are providing teens with a space to work out identity and status, make sense of cultural cues, and negotiate public life" (p. 120). With regards to SNS there is "a relatively unique self-presentational ability that online genres offer some young authors is [*sic*] the chance to present the kind of identity or self-image they feel they cannot present in other spaces" (Stern, 2007, p. 107).

Identity Formation in Adolescence.

The study uses Erik Erikson's (1959) description of the importance of identity creation during adolescence. In *Identity and the Life Cycle* (1959), Erikson describes the psychological stages of human development. Adolescence begins when individuals look beyond family for tools and skills to develop identity and the direct need for familial support for personal development. This stage in development usually occurs alongside the beginning of puberty. During adolescence, adolescents accept and reject values from previous generations and their own peers. Erikson argues, "the adolescent's ego development demands and permits playful, if daring, experimentation in fantasy and introspection" (p. 164). Adolescents also experiment with different values until they have negotiated a balance of personal desire and general acceptance from peers and/or other generations. Adolescence ends when their choices become "commitments 'for life'" (1959, p. 155).

Identity Exploration in Adolescence.

Erikson emphasizes the creation and experimentation of identity during adolescence.

Erikson also notes that adolescence is a time when youth can experiment with different

identities, or different forms of self. Adolescence is a process of developing individuality

and identity. He also asserts that adults imprint the beginnings of identity creation during

childhood, but that once adolescence begins youth will experiment with, reject, and

accept different morals and values from previous generations. According to Erikson it is

the "adolescent who is so eager to be affirmed by peers, to be confirmed by teachers, and

to be inspired by worth-while 'ways of life'"(p. 130). If met with conflict or resistance

towards an adolescent's development or expression, the adolescent may become

defensive and break into new forms of identity. Because of the negotiation between

previous generational pressure and influence and the new desire to become a unique

individual, Erikson (1959) finds:

> Adolescence is thus a vital regenerator in the process of social evolution, for
>
> youth can offer its loyalties and energies both to the conservation of that which
>
> continues to feel true and to the revolutionary correction of that which has lost it
>
> regenerative significance. (p. 134)

Livingstone (2008) summarizes Erikson's discussion on adolescence as:

> The adolescent must develop and gain confidence in an ego identity that is
>
> simultaneously autonomous and socially valued, and that balances critical
>
> judgment and trust, inner unity and acceptance of societal expectations. Thus, they
>
> must make judgments that are difficult offline as well as online – whom to trust,
>
> what to reveal about yourself, how to establish reciprocity, when to express

emotion, and so on. (p. 397)

Youth are using SNS as a space to make decisions that they would make offline. Instead of looking at SNS as a separate entity from youth's offline world, it should be seen as a branch of their development.

Part of creating identity in adolescence is the opportunity to change and experiment with different forms and approaches. Clarke (2009) adds that "emerging identity is an important aspect of early adolescent development, and in our existing digital culture children have an immense opportunity to explore their world, be creative, play with identity and experiment with different social mores" (p. 74). Put simply, "a major milestone of adolescence is identity development, and SNS provide a technological venue for adolescents to explore their identities" (Moreno, 2010). Stern (2007) connects SNS creation with exploration and identity by maintaining, "expressing oneself online becomes a way for them to explore their beliefs, values, and self-perceptions, and thereby to help them grapple with their sense of identity" (p. 102). Weber and Mitchell (2007) complement this point by connecting youth and technology, "like youth identities, new technologies keep changing, converging, morphing — seemingly always in flux, and like youth identities" (p. 26). When posting online, youth adapt and modify their profiles and online identities to become more appealing to their audience (Stern, 2007). Although the changes are not seen as fabrications, youth will admit to representing themselves more positively online (Stern, 2007). Stern (2007) also points out:

Rather, most young authors see themselves trying to capture who they are—albeit in a palatable fashion for the audience—rather than trying out entirely new and

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different identities. In nearly all cases, young authors perceive the identities they

present online to be authentic, even if "shined up" and "polished". (p. 110)

Adolescent Identity and Technology.

Buckingham (2007) also sees a connection between communication, technology, and

identity and notes technology "provides new ways of forming identity, and hence new

forms of personhood; and by offering communication with different aspects of the self, it

enables young people to relate to the world and to others in more powerful ways" (p. 14).

Karen Bradley (2005) applies the conventions of the Internet to Erikson's ideas of

adolescent autonomy and independence. She claims, "adolescence is marked by the

desire for autonomy and independence. The Internet generally, helps adolescents feel

autonomous. The Internet offers adolescents social, moral, recreational, and intellectual

experiences that are not mediated by adults" (p. 62). The Internet and SNS are places that

help adolescents develop autonomy. Bradley (2005) continues this argument:

> Internet experience is an area where they are able to be freer than in most arenas
>
> of their lives. And because the rules are preordained – the beauty of the Internet is
>
> its anarchic, anonymous, constantly shifting nature – young people can
>
> experiment, explore, and make their own judgments in ways that prove
>
> meaningful to them." (p. 74)

Clarke (2009, p. 64) adds to this argument by describing that the developmental stages

for adolescence may not change but the Internet and SNS give a new space for youth to

develop.

Adolescent Identity and Friendship.

Another important part of identity creation is building friendship as youth become independent from their family. Youth begin to assert their independence by initiating, building, and maintaining friendships (Clarke, 2009, p. 55). In "Teens, Privacy & Online Social Networks", Lenhart and Madden (2007) note "adolescents are intensely focused on social life during this time, and consequently have been eager and early adopters of Internet applications that help them engage with their peers" (p. 1). They also mention that "in order to reap the benefits of socializing and making new friends, teens often disclose information about themselves that would normally be part of a gradual 'getting-to-know-you' process *offline*" (p. 2).

Subrahmanyam and Greenfield (2008) discuss that online and offline worlds are directly connected; therefore, the development of adolescent identity must occur online as well. Because of this connection it is important to study and understand the effects of SNS on adolescents. Subrahmanyam and Greenfield (2008) state:

> Society's traditional adolescent issues, intimacy, sexuality, and identity have all been transferred to and transformed by the electronic stage. Among the hallmarks of the transformation are greater teen autonomy, the decline of face-to-face communication, enhancement of peer group relations at the possible expense of family relations, and greater teen choice. Given the connectedness between the physical and virtual worlds, the challenge is to keep adolescents safe (both physically and psychologically) while at the same time allowing for the

explorations and interactions that are crucial for healthy psychosocial

development. (pp. 139-140)

Adolescence is an important period of identity forming. At this time between childhood

and adulthood, youth experiment with different social roles, personal interests, and

values. Adolescence is also a time for youth to assert their independence and grow more

autonomous from their families. Because of the interconnectivity of their online and

offline lives, SNS are now used as places for youth to make decisions about their identity.

SNS also become venues for youth to experiment with different values, explore different

identities, and shape and reshape their selves. Youth also use SNS as a form of

communication to project themselves on to their surrounding online and offline worlds.

The Internet and SNS provide many avenues for personal and independent decision-

making. While forming identity online, youth also experiment with their socialization to

expand their friendships. Youth traverse online and offline worlds; therefore it is

important to notice that their use of SNS play a role in forming their identities.

Been There, Done That.

Social network sites are a relatively new creation but the opportunity to share narratives

to aid identity creation has been around for generations (Maranto & Barton, 2010). In an

article from Maranto and Barton (2010), the authors compare youth behaviours online to

"older high school traditions: cruisin', the high school yearbook (or annual), and

courtship rituals (love notes, "going steady"). These rituals have always blurred the line

between public and private" (p. 39). They also argue that SNS are the evolution of

adolescent narrative creation, which has roots in the freedom, entertainment, and independence that 'cruising' gave youth of the 1950s and 1960s (p. 40). Another comparison Maranto and Barton make between SNS and 'cruising' is the early division among social classes that could afford in previous generations, cars, and more currently, regular internet access. As time progressed for the 'cruising' generation and as time progresses for the SNS generation, access becomes more available for a larger population of youth. danah boyd (2007, p. 136) compares late-twentieth century shopping malls with SNS as a place of adolescent socializing. The comparison between socializing on SNS and methods of socializing in previous generations can continue. As previous generations of youth have flocked to malls, roller rinks, arcades, and skate parks, today's SNS generation has moved some of their socialization from offline spaces to online SNS communities. And, as previous generations customized their cars, chose specific outfits, and decorated their school binders to show their individuality, today's youth are upgrading and customizing their profile pages.

Social connections over educational support made by previous generations are also being replaced by SNS. In relation to traditional offline educational processes, Greenhow (2011, p. 7) states:

> Such informal sharing, peer validation and feedback, alumni support, and spontaneous help with school-related tasks has typically occurred offline, pre-dating the internet, these social processes, moved online into social network sites, can now be archived and tracked with social graphing software. (p. 7)

danah boyd (2007) suggests that SNS are becoming a place of overabundant

commercialization and advertising. She notes that many adults are concerned with the effects of direct marketing to teens; however:

> Following World War II, organizations and corporations began explicitly targeting teens directly, appealing to the tastes and values generated in teen culture. Spaces like dance halls, roller rinks, bowling alleys, and activity centers began offering times for teens to socialize with other teens. (p. 136)

As a means of connecting and communicating, danah boyd (2007) also notes:

> Earlier mediated communication devices— landline, pager, mobile—allowed friends to connect with friends even when located in adult-regulated physical spaces. What is unique about the Internet is that it allows teens to participate in unregulated publics while located in adult-regulated physical spaces such as homes and schools. (p. 136)

Although the creation and implementation of SNS as an adolescent space is new, the socialization, narrative creation, and self-promotion within this space is not.

Contradiction of Common Misconceptions.

As a grade seven teacher, I am often told by parents, counselors, administrators, and fellow teachers that SNS are dangerous and should not be accessed by children and adolescents. As mentioned in the previous chapter, there is a child created poster that declares Facebook is evil outside of my classroom. This apprehension to embrace SNS is often based on the perceived "dangers" of online predators and lack of online security and privacy. Muise, Christofides, and Desmarais (2012) state, "the popular perception is that online adolescents naively tell all, only to fall prey to bullies, predators or regret

when they later realize the folly of their ways" (p. 49). Part of my desire to study SNS and adolescents originates from this poster. Under the theme of contradiction I use literature to dispel many misconceptions that SNS are inherently dangerous spaces for youth to explore.

I acknowledge that the Internet and SNS can be risky areas for adolescent development; however, the purpose of my research is to defend SNS use within educational settings. There is a multitude of literature available that showcase the negative aspects. For example, Maranto and Barton (2010) note that the dangers of strangers is not new; now unknown predators can pose as friends or peers, so the 'don't talk to strangers' lesson does not necessarily apply to SNS. They also mention "passwords, authentication checks and secured connections are the most common means of erecting these barriers, but each method ultimately fails because it's often not possible to know the actual identity (much less the motivations) of a user" (Maranto & Barton, 2010, p. 42). Livingstone (2008) is also aware of the perception of SNS and reasons, "it is commonly held that at best, social networking is time-wasting and socially isolating, and at worst it allows paedophiles to groom children in their bedroom or sees teenagers lured into suicide pacts while parents think they are doing their homework" (p. 395). In this thesis, I will only defend the threats and risks of SNS use that I hear in my personal and professional lives.

The dialogue from adolescent and digital media researchers seems to point to the notion that SNS and online sharing helps youth develop. Like most habits or hobbies, moderation is important in the time spent by youth on these sites, and in front of an

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electronic screen in general. One negative misconception, for example is, "online, it was

thought, people could be whoever they chose to be and could slip in and out of various

identities. But over time concerns were raised that such identity play may hinder, not

help, adolescent development" (Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008). Gross (2004, pp.

642-643) verifies this with her study by stating the Internet cannot be an "identity

playground" because youth are often in contact with people that know them. Often youth

will engage in dishonest behaviour to play jokes on friends or to give a false age to

participate in online activities that require an age requirement. Another misconception is

that youth socialize with strangers online; however, "a significant component of young

people's social interactions online are actually taking place with people they *do* know in

the real world, and the effects of those interactions inevitably bleed across to the 'real'

world, informing young people's thinking in the social and moral domains" (Bradley,

2005, p. 64).

Another misinterpretation of the Internet is that it does not socialize youth appropriately.

In my opinion, the Internet is changing how that socialization occurs. Youth now learn

quickly how, where, and when to post. For example, Karen Bradley explains,

"adolescents now also understand that there is always a risk that an instant message

conversation or a posting to a blog could be misinterpreted by a peer or read by an adult"

(Bradley, 2005, p. 68). An additional socialization misconception is that youth are

isolated online but Livingstone (2008) contradicts this by noting that they are not

choosing to become isolated, nor are they choosing to meet strangers. Instead, youth still

need and use face-to-face communication and other forms of online communication –

email, blogging, chat rooms – are being displaced by SNS. In her study, Livingstone (2008) finds "most of the teenagers interviewed were clear that they use social networking sites for only part, not all, of their social relations" (p. 408). Subrahmanyam and Greenfield (2008) also find that SNS not only support offline relationships but also are used to evaluate potential offline friends (p. 120).

As an advocate for including SNS in educational settings and promoting its use among adolescents, Buckingham (2007) describes:

> Unlike those who bemoan the media's destruction of childhood innocence, advocates of the new "digital generation" regard technology as a force of liberation for young people—a means for them to reach past the constraining influence of their elders, and to create new, autonomous forms of communication and community. Far from corrupting the young, technology is seen to be creating a generation that is more open, more democratic, more creative, and more innovative than their parents' generation. (p. 13)

SNS continue to be perceived as negative influences in the lives of adolescents. There are many misconceptions that surround the use of SNS. Parents, teachers, school staff, and other influential adults often perpetuate these negative perceptions. These misconceptions, while rooted in truth, often portray the Internet and SNS as dark and dangerous places. These dangers include, but are not limited to: online predators, malicious marketers, devious and fabricated identities, socialization with complete strangers, negative socialization, and social isolation. Through the research mentioned

above and the research in this study, these dangers are present but are also

misrepresented. As with any aspect of life, moderation, knowledge, preparation,

experience, and personal prudence can help minimize the risk of participating on SNS. It

is the role of parents and educators to express concern, educate, and prepare youth to use

SNS instead of quickly denouncing their existence.

Education.

As social network sites become more prevalent in society and the adult population

becomes more familiar and comfortable with using SNS, it can be used for a variety of

educational purposes. At first, SNS can be used among educators (Strom & Strom, 2009).

Then as SNS progresses, SNS can be used between educators and their students. In fact,

many educators use classroom blogs to share ideas, generate discussion, and promote

projects and events. danah boyd (2007) suggests "as a society, we need to figure out how

to educate teens to navigate social structures that are quite unfamiliar to us because they

will be faced with these publics as adults, even if we try to limit their access now" (p.

138). Subrahmanyam and Greenfield (2008) also see a connection between school and

SNS. They state, "the challenge for schools is to eliminate the negative uses of the

Internet and cell phones in educational settings while preserving their significant

contributions to education and social connection" (p. 119).

As an important part of investigating the integration of SNS in formal education, I believe

it is imperative to examine the lessons and concepts on Internet education that are

mandated by the British Columbia provincial government to teach. To investigate the

current state of Internet education in British Columbia, I studied the <u>Integrated Resource Packages</u> created by the BC Ministry of Education (Ministry of Education, 2005). These packages include the prescribed learning outcomes that teachers must incorporate in their teaching and also give ideas and lessons to help guide and inform teaching practices. After reading the <u>Integrated Resource Packages</u> for *Health and Career Education 8 and 9*, *Planning 10*, *Information and Technology 8, 9 and 10*, and *Information and Technology 11 and 12*, I found the closest connections to teaching SNS are these prescribed learning outcomes:

- Information and Technology 8, 9 and 10

    o Grade 8

        ▪ Create electronic text documents

        ▪ Describe the effect of multimedia presentations on intended audiences

    o Grade 9

        ▪ Evaluate the suitability of information for use in specific contexts

        ▪ Analyze the impact of multimedia documents on the intended audiences

    o Grade 10

        ▪ Practice handling Internet information in an ethical way

        ▪ Use information technology tools to gather and organize information and produce documents

        ▪ Create multimedia documents using a variety of electronic sources

- Information and Technology 11 and 12

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- o Grades 11 and 12

  - Evaluate different types of personal computing/digital devices that could be used for educational purposes

Although there are openings for an educator to instruct students on appropriate use of SNS, there is no explicit connection between SNS and BC curriculum. In fact, the Internet is infrequently mentioned in the Integrated Resource Packages (Ministry of Education, 2005).

Youth, SNS, and technology are inevitably linked; therefore, "if educators are to successfully motivate students to learn, then they need to craft learning designs that unite youth technology practices with effective learning practices" (DeGennaro, 2008). With so much attention being paid to social network sites and other online activities, youth are often more interactive with their entertainment, which may require a need by educators to shift passive teaching strategies to involve students in direct creation of their learning (Muise, Desmarais, & Christofides, 2012, p. 49). Buckingham (2007) also states that using technology can shift education and that learning:

> Can take the form of a kind of apprenticeship, as newcomers observe and gradually come to participate in particular social practices by modeling and working alongside "old timers." This theory also suggests that learning entails the development (or "projection") of a social identity; in learning, we take on, or aspire to take on, a new role as a member of the community of practice in which we are seeking to participate. (p. 16)

Greenhow and Robelia (Old Communication, New Literacies: Social Network Sites as

Social Learning Resources, 2009) reflect upon Buckingham's discussion on technology in education and call upon educators to stop adapting old lessons to use new technology. These studies (Greenhow & Robelia, Old Communication, New Literacies: Social Network Sites as Social Learning Resources, 2009; Buckingham, 2007) ask teachers to develop new lessons to match new technologies. For example, teaching communication skills should not only include new technology used to communicate but new lessons on communicating.

June Ahn (2011) finds a direct connection between the skills used on SNS and benefits for education. She notes, "perhaps SNS, which are ideal identity building tools, can be used to aid students in exploring different characters, voices, and perspectives during the learning process" (p. 1442). Ahn also sees SNS: " (a) are used for particular educational means, (b) have strong academic cultures that are built within the online community, and (c) encourage particular information and social learning behaviors will lead to better learning outcomes" (p. 1443). More specifically, Greenhow and Robelia (Old Communication, New Literacies: Social Network Sites as Social Learning Resources, 2009) assert that MySpace "'supported students' social learning in three important ways. MySpace provided: (1) validation and appreciation of creative work, (2) peer alumni support, and (3) school-task related support" (p. 1146). Pujazon-Zazik and Park (2010) add "online interaction provides a venue to learn and refine the ability to exercise self-control, to relate with tolerance and respect to others' viewpoints, to express sentiments in a healthy and normative manner" (p. 80).

Buckingham (2007) notes many different implicit educational benefits of SNS. He states, "In learning with and through these media, young people are also learning how to learn. They are developing particular orientations toward information, particular methods of acquiring new knowledge and skills, and a sense of their own identities as learners" (p. 17). Buckingham also sees "remembering, hypothesis testing, predicting, and strategic planning" (p. 17) as benefits associated with computer games and SNS.

SNS are also an opportunity to create new learning communities. Learning communities on SNS "enable a more personalized experience for learning in an online environment. This support from instant messaging, wikis, blogs, discussion boards, and other Web 2.0 facilities can complement what is taught in a traditional classroom setting" (Griffith & Liyanage, 2008, p. 79).

SNS not only create learning communities but also support networks. Subrahmanyam and Greenfield (2008) find:

> The interpersonal connections with strangers made possible by electronic media may be particularly valuable for youth suffering from illnesses, such as AIDS, eating disorders, and self-injurious behavior, about which they may not feel comfortable talking with their friends in person. Online bulletin boards and chat rooms allow youth to form such connections. A study of the personal Web pages of adolescent cancer patients found that they often expressed a strong desire to help other young cancer patients through providing information, sharing personal experiences, and giving advice. (p. 133)

The support networks that exist for adolescents to use also illustrate one benefit of having anonymous contacts and information online.

Maranto and Barton's article, "Paradox and Promise: MySpace, Facebook and the Sociopolitics of Social Networking in the Writing Classroom" (2010), summarizes misconceptions of SNS in educational settings and responds to those by illustrating positive methods for incorporating SNS in the classroom. One such misconception or problem teachers see with SNS use is that the language, grammar, and syntax youth include in their writing on SNS is not educationally appropriate; but, Maranto and Barton discuss that if an entire faculty or group of educators join a SNS and invite students to participate, the level of discourse and language use would improve based on simple "modeling" techniques (p. 39). The authors see incorporating SNS as an opportunity to include fellow students in teaching SNS techniques in lessons on writing for SNS, which could be expanded into more formal writing lessons. Although Maranto and Barton see opportunity of engaging in SNS in educational settings, they are apprehensive about social boundaries between teachers and students. Although the opportunity could exist for students to connect with their teachers outside of the classroom, Maranto and Barton question the role of an educator entering a student's online social space. Essentially, they ask what right do educators have for becoming part of that space and if they are in that space, how active should educators be (p. 38). The authors implore restraint and careful negotiation of student/teacher relationships on SNS but encourage its incorporation into classrooms.

In Vie's article, "Digital Divide 2.0: "Generation M" and Online Social Networking Sites in the Composition Classroom" (2008), she also makes a claim that "the time has come, then, for us to pay attention to online social networking sites so that we can effectively teach technological literacy in the writing classroom and attend to the deepening digital divide between Generation M students and their instructors" (p. 11). She continues to explain that youth are moving well beyond the online skills of their teachers and the opportunity to teach critical thinking and stronger SNS skills are passing most educators by (p. 10). The opinions of research participants in Vie's study contradict Maranto and Barton's concern about teachers encroaching into student spaces. Vie states, "students did not expect that instructors would encroach on online 'student spaces'" (p. 18). Vie finds most students uses SNS "to share class notes and ask questions about homework; to find old friends and make new ones; to keep tabs on significant others; to track the latest trends in music, movies, and viral videos" (p. 17). Teachers can expand student knowledge of SNS to include "larger societal issues regarding intellectual property, attribution, and marketing" (p. 16) by using Vie's simple applications as an introduction to SNS. Vie also notes that educators can improve literacy by allowing students to create, re-appropriate, and remix content on SNS in a method that is interesting and useful to the students (pp. 20-21). Vie continues the appeal to educators to include SNS and new online technologies in their teaching.

Greenhow and Robelia (2009) also connect SNS and education by applying danah boyd's (2007, p. 120) four properties of presentation – persistence, searchability, replicability, and invisible audiences – to journal writing. Journals, online in SNS blogs or offline, can

be saved indefinitely, quickly searched for terms and ideas, can be easily changed or copied by other users, can be read by a variety of audiences in different contexts, yet those audiences cannot be directly seen (Greenhow & Robelia, Informal learning and identity formation in online social networks, 2009).

Education about social network sites also involves adolescents educating themselves about the specific sites. With respect to sharing (or over sharing) online youth may learn to disclose more online because they see their friends sharing stories and events (Muise, Desmarais, & Christofides, 2012, p. 49).

Gross (2004) found adolescents spend much time multitasking online, which could benefit class discussions and researching online. McGinnis, Goodstein-Stolzenberg and Saliani (2007), although speaking of transnational youth, support this idea by stating "these youth engage with multiple forms of media and multiple forms of language in their online sites to express, explore, and describe their multiple identifications, and also use their sites to contest and challenge their positioning as youth living in transnational contexts" (pp. 299-300).

McGinnis et al. (2007) best summarize the need for a change in technology education, especially SNS:

> To help prepare youth to be actors on a global stage, educators need to understand the complexities of their students' literacy practices including the variety of ways that youth move across modes and media and the ways youth express themselves

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through multilingual language forms. That is schools should consider a range of ways to bridge youth's digital worlds with their academic worlds; to provide space for all youth to express and share their concerns and challenges related to local, national, and global issues and politics; and to encourage and build on such transnational literacy practices. In short, educators need to consider the role transnationalism plays in the literacies and identities of their students, and view students as knowledgeable and active members of this fast-changing global culture. (p. 302)

SNS have viable applications in formal educational settings. To be used effectively in schools, teachers and school staff can adopt SNS into their professional practices and communication strategies. After applying the use of SNS to their professional lives, teachers and school staff can integrate their applications in their classrooms and other school environments. Currently, and unfortunately, Internet education and SNS are not actively included in government-mandated technology education in British Columbia secondary schools. SNS are important areas of adolescent lives and can increase student interest if used effectively in the classroom. SNS and online education can encourage student engagement, provide additional educational support, and increase student interaction and participation. SNS can also create new learning communities and support networks. In more formal educational settings, SNS can be used to improve online writing, including grammar, spelling, and syntax. SNS also provide a new format for students to explore social issues and share student work. The increasing significance and applications of SNS outside of schools also demonstrate the importance of teaching youth

how to use tools that could, and probably will be integral to their success after graduation.

Sharing.

Adolescents create online narratives using a range of techniques. While most SNS focus

on text-based communication, pictures, video, design, and music also contribute to

youth's online narrative base. SNS profiles create an autobiographical textual and visual

narrative that includes demographic information, pictures, comments, thoughts, and

personal interests. Each contribution is a part of a larger SNS or online narrative (boyd d.,

2007). danah boyd (2007) summarizes SNS as a narrative creation by stating that the

"profile can be seen as a form of digital body where individuals must write themselves

into being" (p. 129).

While adolescents create and post their narratives on SNS, content can also be "generated

by friends (e.g. wall-posts), or by the system (e.g. number of friends, number of photos)"

(Ong, et al., 2011). By posting online "the self becomes a kind of 'project' that

individuals have to work on: they have to create biographical 'narratives' that will

explain themselves to themselves, and hence sustain a coherent and consistent identity"

(Buckingham, 2007).

"The Internet, particularly in its modern incarnation, has provided an opportunity for

adolescents to construct a unique online self" (Gajaria, Yeung, Goodale, & Charach,

2011). The use of walls (Facebook), testimonials (Friendster), or comments (MySpace)

allows friends to create public dialogue (boyd d., 2007, p. 124). This dialogue also

contributes to their narrative.

When sharing online, youth acknowledge that exaggeration occurs to boost their status among peers because they want to entertain their friends. However, they must navigate their online sharing between exaggeration and reliability to amuse their friends without losing their trust (Clarke, 2009).

In their study of adolescent online production, Weber and Mitchell (2007) note that youth "often take up or consume popular images, and combine, critique, adapt, or incorporate them in their own media productions" (p. 27). The authors continue to note that youth become producers, consumers, and critics of youth-created media. While producing and consuming media, youth begin to adapt and change their own productions and develop a process of creation, consumption, reflection, and adaptation. Weber and Mitchell summarize this process as:

> As in a collage, you can see remnants of other images that contribute to identity—bits of media material, fragments from personal life, original poems, family photos, social symbols, shared memories, cut-and-paste resources of media tools, and site hosts—that in combination add up to a unique image—an identity work-in-progress that, like block construction, can be toppled, changed, or rearranged. (p. 39)

In their study of transnational youth, McGinnis, Goodstein-Stolzenberg, and Saliani (2007) see the language used in online narratives as similar to traditional diaries.

Although their study was primarily on blogging sites, they find that of youth express thoughts, emotions, opinions, and narratives about daily events and social relationships. They also state, "unlike traditional diary writing, however, much of the writing on their blogs and web pages is situated within a conversational register" (McGinnis, Goldstein-Stolzenberg, & Saliani, 2007, p. 300).

Conclusion.

There has been a large shift in research on adolescent use of SNS. Before SNS first came into prominence in the mid-2000s, adults feared for the safety of youth when using the Internet for socializing and communicating through chat rooms, instant messaging programs, and message forums. With the popularity of SNS among adolescents exploding over the last ten years, adult fear for youth safety did not dissipate. Without ignoring the dangers of overuse and online predators, more researchers are investigating the role SNS play in the development of adolescent identity and socialization. Education researchers have also begun to explore the role SNS can play in formal educational settings. It is important for newer research to move beyond blindly condemning SNS and focus on guiding and educating youth on the positive and negative aspects of SNS.

CHAPTER 3 – METHODOLOGY

This study explores the knowledge and opinions of a small group of early adolescents. Grounded theory was chosen as the methodology to best elicit responses from young adolescents. Grounded theory allowed me to create, review, code, and adapt my research as the process moved forward. This study also employs case study methodology to elicit personal responses without having students divulge their own personal stories. In describing the research participants (the terms *participants* and *students* are used interchangeably throughout this thesis) all names and identifying characteristics have been changed to protect the privacy and confidentiality of these youth. The thoughts and opinions of these youth emphasize the role of SNS in their daily lives, as well as the need for SNS to be included in formal education.

Grounded Theory

As defined by *The SAGE Dictionary of Social Research Methods* (Jupp), grounded theory is "the interaction between data analysis, theory building and sampling" (p. 131). Analysis of data is used to create categories around the research. These categories and resulting data are compared to find relationships within the data. Next, "concrete categories are then modified into more abstract concepts" (p. 132). Abstract concepts are rearranged and placed in a format the can be modified as more data is collected. In essence, the research theory adapts to the data. *The Dictionary of Qualitative Inquiry* (Schwandt, 2001) states grounded theory is "a specific, highly developed, rigorous set of procedures for producing formal, substantive theory of social phenomena" (p. 110) and it

uses "techniques of induction, deduction, and verification to develop theory" (p. 110).

Charmaz (2003) adds that the "purpose of grounded theory is to generate theory, not to

verify it" (p. 255).

As leaders of grounded theory, Corbin and Strauss (1990) add that grounded theory

includes standards generally associated with scientific research, such as "significance,

theory-observation compatibility, generalizability, consistency, reproducibility, precision,

and verification" (p. 4). Creating abstract themes through the research based on the data

creates more generalizability. Corbin and Strauss (1990) explain reproducibility in

grounded theory as:

> A grounded theory is reproducible in the limited sense that it is verifiable. One
>
> can take the propositions that are made explicit or left implicit, whatever the case
>
> may be, and test them. However, no theory that deals with social psychological
>
> phenomena is actually reproducible in the sense that new situations can be found
>
> whose conditions *exactly* match those of the original study, although major
>
> conditions may be similar. (p. 15)

Corbin and Strauss report the basis for choosing grounded theory is the belief that

"phenomena are not conceived of as static but as continually changing in response to

evolving conditions, an important component of the method is to build change, through

process, into the method" (p. 5). Grounded theory also allows for the research process to

have an effect on those elements or people being studied. Dynamics among research

participants will change as a study progresses or changes; therefore, grounded theory

accounts for "how the actors respond to changing conditions and to the consequences of their actions" (p. 5).

Charmaz (2005) builds upon Corbin and Strauss' description of grounded theory by calling for constructivism to be added to the methodology. Charmaz (2005) notes constructivist grounded theory "emphasizes the studied phenomenon rather than the methods of studying it" (p. 509). She also notes grounded theory is very "interactive" and that the process brings that the past interacts with current interests (p. 510). Within constructivist grounded theory Charmaz (2005) finds:

> Four crucial points: (a) theorizing is an activity; (b) grounded theory methods provide a way to proceed with this activity; (c) the research problem and the researcher's unfolding interests shape the content of this activity, not the method; and (d) the products of theorizing reflect how researchers acted on these points. (p. 511)

Charmaz (2005) also calls upon researchers employing constructivist grounded theory to return to Chicago school traditions, which "assumes human agency, attends to language and interpretation, views social processes as open ended and emergent, studies actions, and addresses temporality" (p. 521). Her call to return to Chicago school traditions include these five steps:

1. Establish intimate familiarity with the setting(s) and the events occurring within it – as well as with the research participants,

2. Focus on meaning and process. This step includes addressing subjective,

situational, and social levels,

3. Engage in a close study of action,

4. Discover and detail the social context within which the action occurs,

5. Pay attention to language. Language shapes meaning and influences action.

(pp. 521-525)

Charmaz (2003) declares that the "constructivist approach recognizes that the categories, concepts, and theoretical level of an analysis emerge from the researcher's interactions within the field and questions about the data" (p. 271). Constructivism allows the researcher to be present in the current reality and understands that there may be many realities and viewpoints around the research (Charmaz, 2003, p. 273).

Grounded theory is very cyclical. Data generates ideas, thoughts, hypotheses, and more questions that can be explored by analyzing more data. Eventually the data create theories and answers the previous questions. Concepts are constructed and confirmed by additional data. Grounded theory co-founders, Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, define this approach to research as *theoretical sampling* (Glaser & Strauss, 2009). Glaser and Strauss (2009) define *theoretical sampling* as:

> The process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyzes his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his theory as it emerges. (p. 43)

By using theoretical sampling, the researcher can follow the data towards new comparisons and stronger, more abstract concepts and categories. Theoretical saturation occurs when "no additional data are being found whereby the sociologist can develop

properties of the category" (Glaser & Strauss, 2009, p. 61). Glaser and Strauss also note any type of data and any method of data collection can be used to find different points of view on the research. They call these different points of view, "slices of data" (Glaser & Strauss, 2009, p. 64). These "slices of data" are then collected, compared, conceptualized, and categorized through the grounded theory process.

Figure 3.1 – Grounded Theory cycle
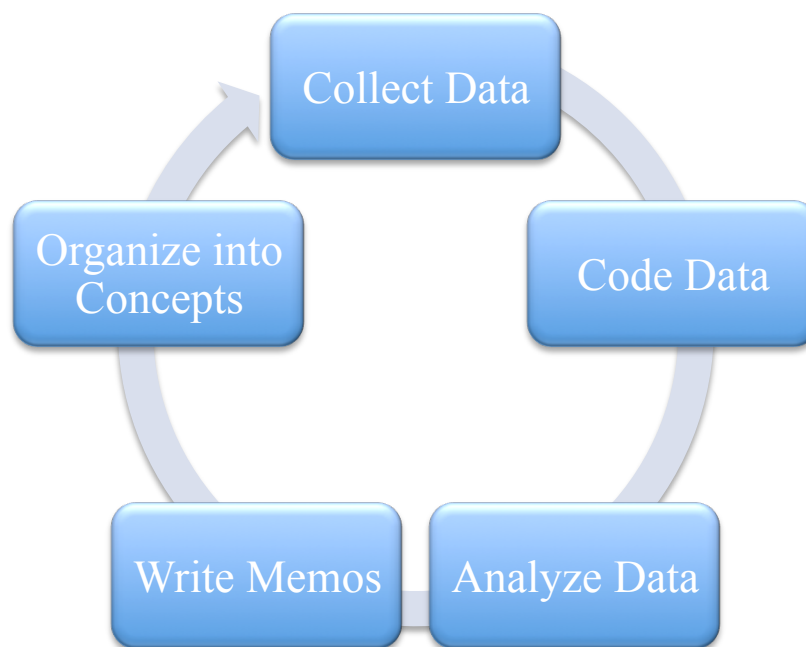
Research based on grounded theory methodology begins with preliminary questions. Analysis begins with the first collection of data. Data collection and analysis happen almost simultaneously through the research process. As data are collected and analyzed, concepts will arise as "each concept earns its way into the theory by repeatedly being present in interviews, documents, and observations in one form or another---or by being significantly absent (i.e., it should be present, but isn't, so that questions must be asked)"

(Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p. 7). Concepts are the basic units of analysis. Concepts arising as phenomena are compared and collected under common titles. As analysis continues, the number of concepts rises and becomes more abstract.

According to Corbin and Strauss (1990), "concepts that pertain to the same phenomenon may be grouped to form categories" and "categories are the 'cornerstones' of a developing theory. They provide the means by which a theory can be integrated" (p. 7). Categories are not just abstract headings created to group similar concepts but are a full representation of the abstract concepts coded and analyzed within that area. As categories develop, so too should the hypotheses about the research and data.

Comparisons are integral to using grounded theory. Data are compared with other data to create concepts. Concepts are compared against each other to create and differentiate categories. The analysis makes use of constant comparisons. The benefit of these constant comparisons is to "help to achieve greater precision (the grouping of like and only like phenomena) and consistency (always grouping like with like)" (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p. 9). Charmaz (2005) also defines grounded theory, with regards to comparison as "a comparative method in which the researcher compares data with data, data with categories, and category with category" (p. 517).

Within grounded theory, coding is the initial analytical step. While analyzing data, the researcher will utilize four forms of coding. The preliminary form of coding is *line-by-line coding*. Line-by-line coding "makes a close study of the data and lays the foundation

for synthesizing it" (Charmaz, Grounded Theory in the 21st Century: Applications for Advancing Social Justice Studies, 2005, p. 517). *Open coding* breaks down data and compares events, actions, and interactions to develop concepts and categories. *Axial coding* is used to help verify the data by taking categories and hypotheses and testing them against the data. Finally, *selective coding* relates all categories to one core category. Categories are completed will more description around the core category. The core category is "the central phenomenon of the study" (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, pp. 12-14).

Cassel, Huffaker, Tversky, and Ferriman (2006) used grounded theory for their study on the language of online leadership. They developed 34 different codes that matched student posts online. At times, multiple codes were used for single messages. Some codes were used once and others were repeated 25 times. Cassel, et al. also mention that codes could be matched to a single term or to a multiple-sentence phrase (2006, p. 442). Cassel, et al. eventually divided the 34 codes into two supracategories. For example, the code, 'share personal narrative' is an informative code, while 'agree and add ideas' is interactive" (2006, p. 442). Informative and interactive are the two supracategories, under which all concepts and codes could be compared and placed.

As a tool to organize and analyze data, memos are employed when using grounded theory. Memos help track concepts, categories, new questions, new thoughts, and analysis from within the research. As the research project develops, so does the memo writing. Throughout the writing process memos should be added to, omitted, and reorganized (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Charmaz (2003) provides five reasons for the

importance of memo writing:

> (a) Grapple with ideas about the data, (b) to set an analytic course, (c) to refine
> categories, (d) to define relationships among various categories, and (e) to gain a
> sense of confidence and competence in their ability to analyze data. (p. 263)

When employing grounded theory, the researcher must include the entire process in the data collection. This includes the research participants' reaction to the research process as well as the researcher's own bias and background. Baker, Wuest, and Noerager Stern (1992) found:

> From the grounded theory perspective, the researcher is a social being that also
> creates and recreates social processes. Therefore, previous experiences are data.
> No effort is made to put aside ideas or assumptions about the situation being
> studied. On the contrary, the researcher uses these in order to understand better
> the processes being observed. (p. 1357)

I see grounded theory like building a puzzle. At first the researcher has an idea what the data will entail, like the picture on the front of a puzzle box. As data come in, similar areas and concepts are grouped together, like the corners or edges of a puzzle. By adding new pieces of data to the concepts, eventually an overlying theory emerges, like the final picture of a puzzle. As the researcher builds the puzzle, the researcher's own opinions and ideas about what the final product will be shape how the puzzle is built. Eventually adding new pieces to the puzzle does not change the final product; therefore, data are collected and added and the theory around the data is modified until new data stops

altering the final theory.

Case Study

As defined by *The SAGE Dictionary of Social Research Methods* (Jupp), case study is the "in depth investigation of one or more examples of current social phenomenon, utilizing a variety of sources of data. A 'case' can be an individual person, an event, or a social activity, group, organization, or institution" (p. 20). There are three styles of case study research: exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory. Exploratory case study research focuses on a phenomenon that will be investigated in future studies. Descriptive case study research examines the entire depiction of a case or cases. Explanatory case study research explores the reasons and causes behind a case or series of cases.

Case studies can also be classified as intrinsic, instrumental, or collective. Intrinsic case studies are used to find an understanding about a specific case. Instrumental case studies are used as an instrument to investigate a bigger phenomenon. Collective case studies examine multiple cases to compare phenomena (Stake, 2003).

Stake (2003) describes these steps to use a case study approach:

1. Bounding the case, conceptualizing the object of study;
2. Selecting phenomena, themes, or issues – that is, the research questions – to emphasize;
3. Seeking patterns of data to develop the issues
4. Triangulating key observations and bases for interpretation;

5. Selecting alternative interpretations to pursue;

6. Developing assertions or generalizations about the case. (p. 155)

This study employs the use of collective and descriptive case studies to help elicit description of the decisions youth make on SNS. Case studies are often used in combination with other research methods; therefore, this study uses grounded theory as the main methodology and implements case study as a safe method to evoke personal responses from the research group.

Early Adolescents as Research Participants

Early adolescents are at an important time in their lives. Coleman and Hendry's *The Nature of Adolescence* lists five reasons to study early adolescence: "an eager anticipation of the future, a sense of regret for the stage that has been lost, a feeling of anxiety in relation to the future, a major psychological readjustment and a degree of ambiguity of status during the transition" (1999, p. 10). At this stage of development adolescents can remember the past, act in the present and plan for the future.

Mishna, Saini, and Solomon (2009) chose to implement grounded theory in their study on cyber bullying "to allow participants' perspectives to emerge and to explore the complexity of this phenomenon" (p. 1223). They organized their research participants into focus groups to minimize the prominence of the adult researcher and to provide a safe atmosphere for children to share thoughts, opinions, and ideas around their fellow peers. Although Mishna, Saini, and Solomon acknowledge the notion of keeping

homogenous (same gender) focus groups, they mention that the mixed groups gave richness to their data and that the focus was not on personal experience; therefore, the groups could be mixed gendered. The formation of this study's research groups were inspired by Mishna, Saini, and Solomon's use of grounded theory, early adolescent participants, and mixed gender focus groups.

My Personal Background

This thesis marks the end of my third degree at the University of British Columbia (UBC). I began my most recent degree, Masters of Education, in September 2010 in the Urban Learner 9 cohort. Our focus was on cosmopolitan care. The Urban Learner program gave me the tools I needed to become a graduate student. There were many times throughout our first year together that I thought I was reading something written in an alien language while studying academic literature. I realized that my time away from UBC had affected my ability to comprehend academic journals and articles. However, as time passed, I relearned how to participate and succeed in an academic setting. As I adapted to being in university again, I felt a desire to expand my academic interests to pursue my own research topic within the realm of educational inquiry. I also learned about the procedures necessary to complete a behavioural research ethics application and review at UBC and my local school district. At this time, I decided to transfer from a Master of Education degree to a Master of Arts degree. With this change I was hoping to investigate my own research topic with the aid of a small group of high school students. During my last few terms in the Urban Learner program I began piecing together all of

the individual pieces needed to complete the UBC Behavioural Research Ethics Board's and the Surrey School District's applications.

I graduated from UBC with my Bachelors of Education degree in the autumn of 2004 and was quickly hired to teach for the Surrey School District. I have taught in many different educational settings but have mainly been teaching in an inner-city environment with many diverse and challenging student needs. I currently teach grade seven. As an elementary school teacher, I teach all academic and non-academic subjects. Grade seven students are beginning to enter adolescence. I enjoy teaching this age for many reasons. The first reason is I appreciate the difficult physical, mental, and social changes this age group experiences. The second reason is this age group develops an appreciation for more critical thinking. As a class, we can have open and honest conversations about a large range of topics, yet grade seven students still understand that they have a lot to learn about the world around them. The final reason I enjoy teaching grade seven is that my students, if taught in an engaging way, desire to learn.

In my experience as an educator I began to see a wide technological disconnect between teachers and students. I understand that this view is a broad generalization of an entire profession but it is what I saw in the classrooms and schools around me. Students quickly learn more about technology than their teachers. Teachers refuse to integrate new technology and new concepts in their teaching. At best, teachers began to adapt new technology to old lessons. Problems arose when new technology entered the classroom and teachers were ill equipped to handle these problems. Students started bullying each

other on SNS. For example, inappropriate pictures were being passed around instant messaging programs. Immediately, teachers began to ostracize SNS and the Internet for their corruption of children. Without contemplating other strategies, SNS and Internet bans were set in place at school, forums were held to educate parents about the evils of the Internet and a "don't ask, don't tell" policy was established about the children's use of mobile technology, SNS, and the Internet. As mentioned earlier, I am aware of the many risks associated with SNS and Internet use among adolescents; however, I don't think ignoring the issue is the correct method of addressing SNS and Internet use.

In my personal life, my partner works in a public relations and marketing firm. In her profession she became an expert in social media. Through our discussions I see the true power and potential (including risks of overconsumption, direct marketing to youth, and the ability of companies to use social networks/media to influence adolescents) of social networks/media. We often debate the ethics and effects of companies bombarding social networks with direct marketing and advertising aimed towards children and youth.

At the beginning of my second year in the Urban Learner program and the fourth year as a grade seven teacher in my current school, my academic and professional worlds collided. As the class was reading van Manen's "The Pedagogy of Momus Technologies: Facebook, Privacy and Online Intimacy" (2010), a poster declaring, "Say No to Facebook" was stapled to the wall across from my classroom. These two incidents were purely coincidence. Van Manen discusses the importance of privacy for identity development in youth. He also notes that SNS are removing the possibility of adolescents

developing "self-identity, autonomy, intimacy, and the ability of learning to negotiate closeness and distance in social relations" (p. 1024). Students in a leadership club created the "Say No to Facebook" poster, which listed many dangers of creating a profile and using SNS. From viewing an academic paper and a student-created poster, I realized that the issue of adolescent SNS use was too large to "just say no" to or to ignore. It became obvious to me that a connection must be made between education, youth, and SNS. I made a goal to use my academic and professional opportunities to connect social networks, my teaching practices, my interests, and my academic pursuits. As my research has slowly come together, my professional efforts have shifted as well. I have taken the opportunity to lead the Surrey School District's Innovative Learning Design project at my school with the focus of implementing new technology in the classroom. My specific focus will be implementing new forms of communication, like SNS, to increase student, school, and community interactions and relations. An overlying goal for our integrated technology grant project is to educate and encourage fellow teachers to incorporate new lessons with new technology, not just adapt old lessons to integrate new technology.

The combination of professional, personal, and academic interests around the integration of SNS and formal education has invigorated me and has encouraged me to pursue this topic and thesis.

Research Procedures

Behavioural Research Ethics Application

To begin the research process I had to plan, formulate, and organize my research goals and protocols. As my colleagues were preparing their proposals for their final papers, I began to organize my proposal in the form of the UBC Behavioral Research Ethics Board (BREB) application. This process helped me define and plan my research. Through this process I learned a lot about the risks and benefits of including research participants, and in particular, minors. Throughout every step, I learned about researching and my own project. The BREB helped me set goals, refine my procedures, and plan my timeline.

Figure 3.2 – BREB and Surrey School District application inclusions
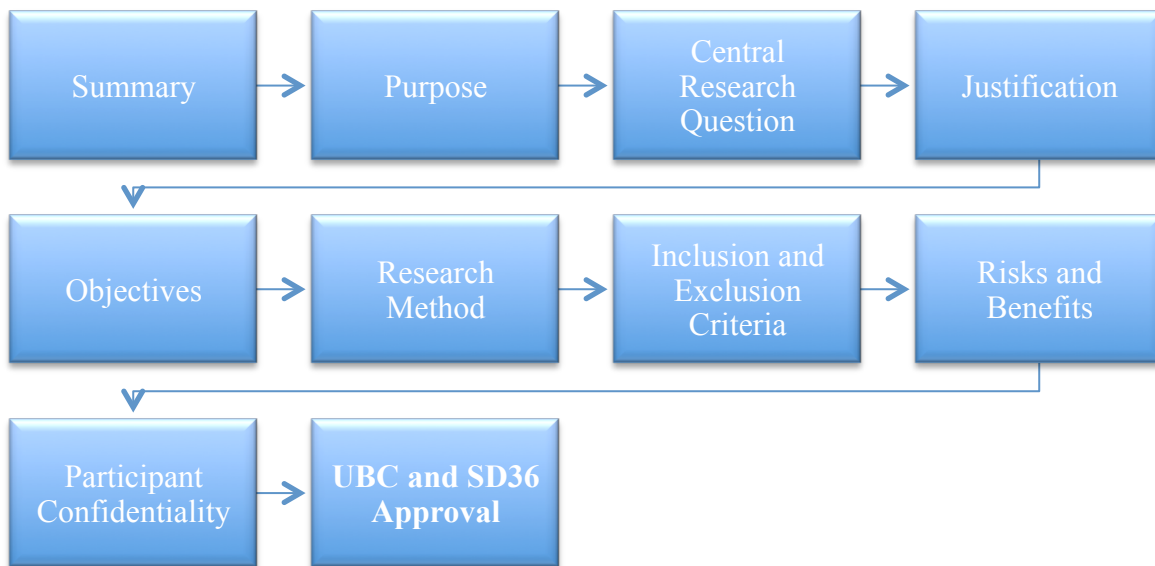
In my BREB application I first titled the study:

Sharing Online Stories:

A qualitative study of the decisions early adolescents make when posting on

social network sites and creating online/real selves.

I then summarized the project:

>Social network sites (Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, etc.) perform a variety of functions. With respect to youth, social network sites provide an opportunity to talk with friends, explore different interests, and share their thoughts. The study will work with a small group of high school students to learn more about the personal decisions youth make when posting online. The study will also investigate the learning process youth experience when creating online selves. The purpose of this study is to increase educator and parent awareness of the role of social network sites in the lives of adolescents.

I also defined the purpose for my study:

>The purpose of this study is to develop an understanding of the role of social network sites in the lives of adolescents by investigating the influences, learning, and choices they make when posting about themselves online.

I created the central research question:

>Many adolescents create an online self. With this creation, choices are made about sharing personal information, ideas, and narratives. How do adolescents make decisions about how, what and where to share their online narratives? Who and what influence their decisions to share online? Without direct instruction from parents and educators, how do they learn to share online?

I also formed the justification for the study:

>Prior research on youth and social network sites have noted that online behaviours contribute significantly to youth identity exploration and creation. Few research studies have investigated the choices adolescents make when posting online

narratives to social network sites.

The objectives for the study are to:

> 1. Describe adolescent participation in social network sites;
>
> 2. Document their views related to their choices and decision-making (sharing);
>
> 3. Analyze ways they learn to participate (influences).

After defining the rationale for my study I defined my research procedures. I described the research method as:

> This study will employ empirical research methodology through small focus
> group discussions around case study examples. This study will include 6-8 young
> adolescents between the ages of 13-15 years old with an equal number of male
> and female participants.

I added the inclusion criteria:

- Early adolescent youth (13-15) with consistent Internet access that regularly (3+ times/week) participates on and contributes to at least one social networking site (Facebook, MySpace, etc.)
- Parental consent

I also identified the exclusion criteria:

- No Internet access
- No parental consent
- No regular participation in social networking sites

I then stated the recruitment methods as making contact with a counselor at a local high school to assemble a group of interested grade eight and nine students. I also described

the research procedure as one survey, three group discussions, including a review of three case studies for the focus group. I also added that the total participation time for each participant would be two hours over the period of four weeks.

An important part of the BREB application procedure was detailing the risks and benefits of this research. The most important part of this study was ensuring that the participants knew their participation was completely voluntary and that they could leave the study at any time. I carefully constructed two letters of consent, one for the students' parents and one for the students (see Appendices 1 and 2). In the consent letters, I wrote about the objectives, purposes, risks, and benefits of the study. The risks of the study were the inclusion of questions that the students may find personal and that any participant reveals "there has been an incident of abuse and/or neglect of a child (or that there is a risk of such occurring) the researcher must, by law, report this information to the appropriate authorities." Assurance was made that if any parent or participant felt uncomfortable with the study at any time, they could voluntarily leave the study. All participants that returned the two consent letters and completed the initial survey participated in the full study. To counter the risks of the study I included these benefits for the participants:

- Discussion will focus participants view on and opinions about contributing to online narratives
- Participants may develop a better understanding of the effects of posting and sharing online
- Advancement of knowledge
- Enlighten educators and spark interest in teaching what/how to write online

- Break negative stereotypes of social network sites

For the protection and privacy of research participants, I stored all data and audio recordings on a password-protected computer in a secure location in my house. During the transcription process, I used coded identities and anonymized those identities in this thesis. As per UBC protocol, audio recordings and data will be kept in these secure locations for the duration of five years.

I also attached detailed discussion questions and case studies to the BREB application (see Appendix 4). By creating these research protocols well in advance of beginning the study, I was better able to organize the series of discussions and shape the overall path that I wanted the research to follow. As I will describe in the following sections, discussion questions created for the BREB application were not necessarily used verbatim in the focus groups because I was following grounded theory procedures and adapted the questions upon previous thoughts, answers, opinions, and ideas shared by the students. However, the original questions became the backbone of our discussions and kept the study focused and on track. The case studies remained true to the BREB application.

Upon completion of the BREB application, and after a few minor edits at the request of the BREB, the study was granted conditional approval. This began a small tug-of-war between UBC and the Surrey School District, with myself in the middle. Both UBC and the Surrey School District required final approval from the other to grant their own final

approval. After a few phone calls, Surrey seceded and accepted UBC's conditional

approval to continue. The Surrey School District's research application is much less

intense but just as strict as UBC's BREB application. During the Surrey School District's

approval process, I had the opportunity to discuss my study with the school district's

helping teacher in the school district's research department. Her advice, criticism,

clarification, and support are truly appreciated and included in the application and the

research process. By the end of the application process I learned much about my study

and the research process in general. Although the applications created a significant

amount of work, I appreciate the guidance and organization they lent to this study. Both

UBC and the Surrey School District granted final research approval to this study.

Creation of Case Studies

I created three case studies to elicit personal responses from the research participants

without exposing their own identities or personal information. Justifiably, UBC and the

Surrey School District value the privacy and confidentiality of child and youth research

participants. The disclosure of personal stories and information can easily divulge

personal identities. As such, creating case studies about possible events in youth's lives

could bring out responses about how and what the students post online.

In the creation of the case studies, I wanted to create three believable and different

scenarios. At first I used computer-generated names at real locations to make these cases

believable. Through my discussions with the Surrey School District, I learned that

although the names may be fictional, the student participants might unintentionally

connect fiction with reality; therefore all people, locations, and events in the cases were completely fictional. The characters I created were also meant to comprise a variety of different types of high school students – athlete, troublemaker, volunteer, popular, unpopular, smart, below average, and average. I also tried to have the characters correspond to different socio-economic and ancestral backgrounds to represent the diversity of potential research participants. Within actual case study discussions, the type of student and their background were never discussed; therefore, I conclude that the characters were either believable or the background were irrelevant to the research participants.

I developed a positive public event, a negative public event, and a negative private event. I hoped that these three contrasting areas would extract different levels, methods, and reasons for sharing online. The first case I created was about an average grade eight girl. She leads her basketball to a victory over a rival secondary school. Her parents are at work when she arrives home and she does not have anybody to share her happy story with. I created this event to investigate how the research group would share a positive and personal story with others. The second case is about a group of boys that intentionally watch a fight between two classmates in a large group off of school property after school. One of the boys records the fight on his phone and emails it to his friends. I created this case to explore if and how the research group would share the video of the fight or personal details of witnessing a negative but public event. The third case involves a caring (he is a student volunteer for a KIVA club – a non-profit lending organization) but socially isolated student and his response to learning his mother has a terminal disease.

With this case, I wanted to examine how the research group would use the Internet and SNS to share and manage an important, private, and unfortunate personal event.

The discussions around the cases were not very detailed. The research group was very quick to describe that they use SNS for quick forms of communication, social and academic inquiries, and entertainment. From the case study discussions, I learned that data could be collected from silence about an issue as well as from direct dialogue. For example, the students quickly dismissed the case about watching the fight because they would not want to get into trouble for witnessing the event; however, most of the participants would tell a trusted adult in the school about it the next day. The research group also dismissed the case about the boy and his terminally ill mother because it was too personal. Further analysis of the student responses to these case studies will be discussed in the following chapters.

Recruitment and Research Participants

Prior to completion of the BREB and Surrey School District applications I made contact with a counselor at the closest secondary school to my own school. Because my elementary school feeds into this secondary school, I believed that there was a better chance of making a connection with possible participants. The counselor and school administrators also did a remarkable job finding space for me to hold discussions after regular school hours. I gained valuable allies and resources by making this early connection with the secondary school. Recruitment of my research group began shortly after approval from UBC and the Surrey School District. I forwarded specific recruitment

criteria to the school and the counselor issued requests for student volunteers to specific, grade-appropriate classrooms and through school-wide announcements.

After the counselor made contact with potential participants, I held a formal recruitment meeting. The initial turnout was large. There were approximately twenty interested students. At this first meeting, I described the objectives and rationale for the study, informed the students of their potential commitment and involvement, reminded them that their participation is completely voluntary, and read through the consent letters. After reading through all of the formal information, I answered questions from the group. All of the student questions were based on meeting schedules, volunteer experience, and payment for their services. I quickly established that our schedule was flexible and would be set to meet the needs of the final group. I explained that I did not know if their involvement with the study could count as formal volunteer experience but recommended they discuss that option with a counselor. I also informed the group that their participation was completely voluntary and they would not be paid for their service; however, I would provide after-school snacks at these meetings. By the end of the meeting twelve students collected parent and student consent forms.

Although I was quite anxious before the initial meeting, I was optimistic about the research process after asking one question to the group. As the twelve interested students were leaving, I mentioned that after answering all of their questions I would like to ask one too. I asked, "Why do you want to volunteer to take part in this study?" Their

response was that teachers, including myself, have helped them in the past and now it is their opportunity to return the favour.

The next week I held our second meeting. Eleven of the twelve interested students attended this meeting. The purpose of this meeting was to collect consent forms, answer other questions about the study, remind the students to return the consent forms by next week, and establish a meeting time for the following week. At the onset of this meeting all but two students had their consent letters signed and were eager to begin their participation. Since nine of the students had completed consent, they were offered to write the initial survey that day. The two without completed consent forms vowed to return early the next week with their consent letters and would complete the initial survey before the discussion began. Eight of the nine students finished their initial survey before leaving for home. The ninth student had an appointment and took his survey home to complete. The group's enthusiasm and work ethic was surprising. My optimism for the research process continued to grow.

The questions, responses, and analysis of the survey and group discussions will be investigated in future chapters.

On the third week, ten students returned to our meeting, including the nine with complete consent. The tenth student still did not have parental consent (she insisted it was because she left the letter in her locker for two weeks but could get a note) but really wanted to participate. Despite respecting her enthusiasm for the study, I had to inform her that we

needed to move on with our discussions and her participation would not be needed. I thanked her for her interest and she left. At this point, the nine students finalized the research group and we were ready to begin our discussions.

The nine research participants create a diverse group. Of the nine members:

- Seven are female, two are male

- Seven are in grade eight, two are in grade nine

- All come from diverse socio-economic and ancestral backgrounds

- All meet the inclusion criteria

Most of the students did not speak English as their first language; however, they were proficient enough in English that they were not receiving English Language Learner (ELL) support in their secondary school. From our discussions, I did not see any problems arise over language. As a teacher of many ELL students, I confirm that their level of English was strong enough that participation would not be impeded. I also believe that language barriers do not impede their use of SNS. In fact, when I raised the issue of not being native English speakers, one of the students noted that SNS make language less important because of translation software and the opportunity to connect with people of different or similar cultures. I believe the diversity of the focus group added to the depth of our discussions. All participants expressed themselves thoroughly and offered a wide range of opinions.

The first discussion commenced after all surveys were collected and analyzed. All nine students participated in this discussion. At the end of the first discussion, I divided the

focus group in half to create two smaller and more intimate groups for our following discussion on the case studies. During the next two weeks, each half of the focus group met once to read and discuss the three case studies about adolescent SNS use. The smaller groups allowed the students to give more personal responses to the discussion questions. Although the large group of nine students allowed for more debate and offered more diverse opinions, the smaller groups added more depth and detail to the students' responses. The entire focus group reconvened for the fourth group discussion. I held one final optional meeting on the fifth week after formal discussions ended to give the students an opportunity to add any final opinions and ask any final questions they might have. I also used this brief meeting to clarify any outstanding questions I had with their final responses. By the end of the discussions, I was confident in the research and that there was enough data to continue with my analysis of the students' contributions.

I used the questions developed in the BREB application process as the backbone and general theme for each discussion. However, after each meeting, I followed the grounded theory methodology and immediately transcribed, coded, wrote memos, and prepared adapted questions for the next discussion. By transcribing and coding so quickly after each meeting, I really learned about the nuances of the focus group and was able to tailor each new set of questions to the personalities of the group to elicit more detailed responses from the students. For example, my initial thought was that the case studies would provide enough information to carry an hour-long discussion; however, I learned from transcribing and coding our first discussion that the case studies would not encompass the ideas and opinions brought up in the first discussion. I then amended the

case study discussion groups to include clarification questions that arose while analyzing that first discussion. During the second session, we discussed the case studies but the cases did not completely address the students' actual use of SNS. After the case studies were read and questions such as "Would you add non-text elements to this post (pictures, links, videos, etc.)?" were answered, there was plenty of time to include clarification and redirected questions about the first discussion; therefore, I created a series of supplemental questions. One topic that needed further clarification was the concept of creating social boundaries on SNS. The case studies did not include questions that specifically concentrated on creating social boundaries; therefore I included questions such as "If you shared online and your parents/teachers saw, do you believe that your independence be restricted?" and "Does sharing small amounts of information limit the consequences you could face, with peers (embarrassment/loss of social status), teachers (academic respect/independence at school), or family (punishment/removal of freedom/independence)?" The study benefits tremendously by employing grounded theory methodology to transcribe, code, and analyze between each session.

I found the transcription process to be incredibly time-consuming but worthwhile. I did not hire an outside agency or employ software to transcribe the focus group discussions. Despite the onerous task of compiling so much data myself, I used the transcription process as a first step towards line-by-line coding. When the transcriptions were complete, I was prepared to re-code, reorganize the data, and complete memos based on the details. As codes developed into concepts, I began writing preliminary memos such as:

Adult "friends" make a very small part of their online relationships. Adult friends are not in an authoritative role, like parent or aunt/uncle. They choose adult-kids, like cousins.

While the transcriptions became easier to complete, trends started to develop about different concepts. Coding and writing memos lead to more detailed comparisons among data and concepts. By the end of the data collection, more abstract concepts and core categories emerged and further rounds of analysis could commence.

My Bias

I must address my bias towards SNS, youth, and education before analysis and applications of the data can begin. I am in favour of using SNS. I use SNS in my personal and professional lives. I have an assortment of profiles, personal and professional, on a variety of SNS. I use SNS to share educational ideas with colleagues and I use SNS to connect with old friends. I also enjoy working with students that have entered into early adolescence. I believe at this age students can begin to make choices that will help define who they are as adults. I also believe that students can use this period to learn about ideas and processes that will help them rise to their potential. By combining my proclivity for using SNS in my personal and professional lives and my aspiration to best prepare my students for their futures, I hypothesize that SNS should be included in formal education as a communication and learning/teaching tool. Teachers should not bury their heads in the sand about the risks and benefits of SNS in and out of the classroom, nor should students solely use SNS as a means to advancing their social lives. From my research and

data collection, I see that there is great desire from students and an opportunity for educators to incorporate SNS in their academic lives.

CHAPTER 4 – THE STUDENTS' RESPONSES

Throughout the group discussions, research, and data collection process, the data analysis, coding and discussion questions were continually revised. There was a pattern to the data collection process – discuss, record, transcribe, code, memo writing, recode, create new questions, refocus the discussion group, discuss new questions, record, transcribe, and so on. By the end of data collection, and through multiple layers of coding and memo writing, concepts were altered, subcategories formed, three general categories were established, and finally a general theme emerged. The general theme of the research is that sharing on SNS is a common and preferred practice for adolescent decision-making, identity forming, and informal and formal learning. In the next chapter I will apply the analysis of the students' responses to demonstrate that educators should include SNS in their classrooms and teaching practices to help facilitate productive use and appropriate decisions.

During the coding phases of data collection, many codes were created to group blocks of data together. These codes were continually compared to each other and similar codes would be collected and formed new concepts. For example, data originally coded as "selfish" and "exclusion" were eventually amalgamated under the "disclosing self," "creating social boundaries," and "posting" final concepts. Eventually these concepts could be organized into three larger categories: *choosing*, *sharing*, and *learning*. The concepts associated with *choosing* are: choosing friends, choosing SNS, creating social boundaries, protecting privacy, and creating identity. The concepts connected to *sharing*

are: posting, disclosing self, storytelling, fabricating, and communicating. The concepts

related to *learning* are: discovery of SNS, helping school, awareness of online presence

and teaching.

After developing a general theme, categories, and finalizing concepts, a definitive

hierarchy emerges from the research.

Figure 4.1   SOS: Sharing Online Stories categorization and coding chart

Sharing on SNS is a common and preferred practice for adolescent decision-making, identity forming, and informal and formal learning.		
Categories		
↓	↓	↓
Choosing	*Sharing*	*Learning*
Sub-categories/Concepts		
• Friends • SNS • Creating social boundaries • Creating identity • Protecting privacy	• Posting • Disclosing self • Story telling • Fabricating • Communicating	• Discover SNS • Helping with school • Awareness of online presence • Teaching

In this chapter I organize the student responses into three large group discussions and two

small group discussions based on case studies. I focus my organization on the three

categories, *choosing*, *sharing*, and *learning*. From this analysis I demonstrate that these

three categories and corresponding student responses validate SNS as an appropriate tool

for adolescents to use to develop their decision-making, identity forming and learning. I

include specific quotes from the students in our discussions to support this analysis. Names are omitted and examples are generalized to protect the privacy and confidentiality of student participants. The ideas, opinions, thoughts, and quotes expressed by the student participants are invaluable to this research. Before the analysis of *choosing*, *sharing*, and *learning*, I believe it is important to report the initial responses of the first student survey (see Appendix 3) to establish a primary understanding of the student Internet and SNS uses. I also believe that it is relevant to describe the role of the case studies and their effects on the research process. The combination of survey, case study, and discussion groups creates a balanced view on the role SNS plays in the lives of this adolescent student group.

Initial Survey

The Internet is filled with choice. In the early stages of adolescence, the students begin to explore different aspects and uses of SNS and the Internet. In the initial survey the students describe their Internet uses, SNS choices, and online behaviour.

The students all have access to Internet. Their primary Internet access is at home. The majority (five students) of the students access the Internet more than five times every day and every member of the group accesses the Internet at least once every day.

Every member of the discussion group has a SNS profile. Four students have three or more accounts with different SNS and the other five students have at least one account with one SNS. The students access their SNS profiles every day. The majority of the

group (six students) access their SNS profile between two and four times each day and three students access their SNS profile over five times each day. Facebook is their preferred social network site and all members have a profile on this site. Twitter (six students have a Twitter account) is their second favourite site and Tumblr (four students have a Tumblr account) is their third choice. I believe that most of the group established accounts with Twitter and Tumblr by the end of the research process because our discussions revealed many of the students' inquiries about how to create different accounts and most mentioned viewing or posting on those sites. The students also have accounts with Google+ (three students), Habbo (two students), YouTube, MySpace, and Friendster (one student each). The students also declared that they feel safest and have the most privacy on Facebook and they feel Twitter and Tumblr are the least private.

The students also described what they share, how they share, and whom they share with on SNS. Most of the students (five or more) share stories about their activities with friends, family, or at school. Few students (three or fewer) share their feelings, emotions, opinions about media, or their opinions about other peers or family members. The students do not share their dreams or goals online. Every student uses text to express themselves online and almost all (seven students) upload pictures to their SNS profiles. Five students also upload videos and links to other sites to their social network site profile. Very few (two or fewer) share their own musical or video creations online. Other than SNS, the students note they prefer face-to-face conversations (eight students), phone calls (seven students), and texting on their phones (six students) to communicate stories to others.

Unsurprisingly, the students have more online relationships with their friends than with their families. Almost all students (eight) have SNS connections with close friends (peers they socialize with outside of school on a daily basis) and the majority (five) has online social connections with casual friends (peers they socialize with outside of school on a weekly basis) or acquaintances (peers they see in organized settings such as school, clubs, or teams). Only three students noted they have a SNS connection with a parent and five students noted they have a connection with siblings or cousins. Outside of their families, the students have even fewer social connections with adults. Only one student mentioned a SNS connection with a coach and five others noted a having a connection with a family friend. The majority (five or more) of the students believe they share less than their friends but more than their parents and siblings. The students also note that they learn about SNS mainly from their friends or cousins. All nine participants note that strangers and six participants note that unlikable peers are the most likely to be denied SNS connections. However, the students would also deny SNS connections to people based on their picture or the language they use in their friend request.

Table 4.1 – The online social connections of the student participants

The Online Social Connections of the Student Participants	
Close friends (Peers they socialize with outside of school on a daily basis)	8
Casual friends (Peers they socialize with outside of school on a weekly basis)	5
Acquaintances (Peers they see in organized settings such as school, clubs, or teams)	5
Siblings or cousins	5
Family friends	5
Parents	3
Trusted adult other than a family member	1
Deny connections to strangers	9
Deny connections to unlikable peers	6

The initial survey establishes a basis for the research. From this survey I see a general pattern of the average participant. If I were to amalgamate the nine participants into one average student, that student would use the Internet and access SNS multiple times during the day. The student would have social connection with a wide variety of friends and peers but would also include few family members. The student would mainly share stories about their lives in and out of school but would be hesitant to share personal opinions and feelings. The student is also aware of the dangers of adding strangers or unwelcome people to their SNS friendship circle. The survey establishes that the student group is very comfortable with SNS and also has many ideas, thoughts, and opinions on SNS and its use.

The Role of Case Studies

It was my initial belief that including case studies would help elicit stronger responses from the discussion groups. I divided the large group of students into two smaller groups

with the hope that this too would help draw out substantial reaction from the students. The smaller groups helped facilitate better discussions and more personal responses but the case studies were not successful in their initial objective.

The case studies centered on public success, public mishap, and private sorrow. The only case that brought out compelling discussion was the story of the girl that won her basketball game (public success). The group did not explain how the story of watching a fight among peers (public mishap) could be shared, nor did they detail how they would share the story of the boy with the terminally ill mother (private sorrow). The strongest conversations focused on positive events. As I learned through the data analysis, the students do not post or share negative stories online. They believe that these negative events will cast a shadow on their profiles and their friends will pay less attention to their SNS efforts. In the case of watching a fight, the students were quick to note that their participation in the fight by just watching could get them into trouble. Some did note that the best thing to do would be to tell an adult but thought that a face-to-face conversation the next day would be most appropriate. When describing their efforts in the case about the boy and his terminally ill mother, the students explained that this was a very personal and private matter. The students stated they would immediately reach out to family members and would eventually tell a friend; however, they would only use SNS if phone calls and face-to-face conversations were impractical or impossible.

Sometimes what is not said is as equally important to what is said. At first I thought the case studies were absolute failures because the discussions ended rather quickly;

however, my opinion changed upon further reflection. I thought that their silence around serious or negative issues shows that the students do not use SNS in negative ways. This helps develop the theory that the students will use SNS to alleviate their social status and entertain their friends. Their silence about serious or negative circumstances reveals that students know more appropriate ways of managing sensitive issues and there is an opportunity for educators to include SNS in a positive approach.

The case studies also provided snippets of valuable insights into *choosing*, *sharing*, and *learning*.

Choosing

Freedom to choose and make their own decisions increases as children and youth mature. With each new stage of development adolescents gain more independence. With additional independence comes the opportunity to make more decisions about their lives. Buckingham (2007) notes youth "are likely to experience a strong sense of their own autonomy, and of their right to make their own choices and to follow their own paths—however illusory this may ultimately be" (p. 17). As a major influence and form of expression for adolescents, SNS play a significant role in developing adolescent decision-making. On SNS, youth have the opportunity to make many decisions every time they log on. The choices they make online can have an array of effects to their lives offline. The group of nine early adolescents makes decisions about the SNS they use, the friends they share SNS with, the boundaries they erect around parents, strangers, and friends, their own identity, and their online and offline privacy. In discussions with the group of grade

eight and nine students, their comments, ideas, and opinions are organized into five different concepts: SNS, friends, creating social boundaries, creating identity, and protecting privacy.

SNS.

SNS are an integral part of adolescent existence. Eight of the nine participants stated that SNS are important in their lives and as one student said, "They are everyday rituals." Facebook is the most prevalent social network site (eight participants describe Facebook as their favourite). Students will choose the SNS that most of their friends use. This was confirmed in two separate incidents. First, when discussing the case studies, the students stated they would post the positive story about winning a basketball game to Facebook because more of their friends would see the post. Secondly, discussions about Tumblr arose organically throughout the research process. At the beginning of our discussion only a few students knew about or used Tumblr but by our final meeting all of the students were posting, viewing, or commenting on different Tumblr pages. Tumblr is also seen as slightly more exclusive. Students were fairly unfamiliar with the website and only learned about their friends' pages by detailed searches or being told directly. Tumblr is a good example of how preference of SNS can change quickly as more friends and peers start using something new.

There was debate among the group members around the perceived safest SNS. Initially the students claimed Facebook was safest but after further discussion, Twitter was considered safer. The students claimed Twitter is safer because it contains less personal

information and students can be more anonymous with their tweets. I believe the students felt Twitter was safer because fewer of their peers use it and Facebook has more social connections and personal information displayed through different posts, pictures, and profiles. Despite being "safer", the group noted Twitter does not have filters and their tweets have the opportunity of being visible to a much larger audience.

Decisions about the use and design of the students' SNS profiles are also important. They voiced strong opinions about the new "timeline" design on Facebook. Most decided to keep their Facebook's older style as long as they could. They claimed the "timeline" feature is "stupid," "confusing," "easier to creep," and it "brings up everything in the past." The students also commented on a desire to change their YouTube channel's background, add more colour to their Facebook profile page, add clever pictures to their profile pictures, and create more decorative Tumblr backgrounds.

Despite being knowledgeable about SNS, the students choose to use SNS to satiate more youthful desires. A majority of the discussion group chooses to use Facebook for chatting and playing games with friends. By the final meeting, it was clear that students choose Facebook as their choice to be one's self, Tumblr as a place for self-expression and entertainment, and Twitter as a place for distributing their thoughts.

Friends.

One of the most important decisions youth make on SNS is the inclusion and exclusion of friends. Youth have almost complete control over whom they add to their social networks

and who remains on the outside. Some relationships can be forced; by protective parents or nosy siblings, for example, but most of the youth's networks are controlled by themselves. This research group demonstrated that their online social decisions are guided by the connections they make offline.

Making social connections offline is the primary technique to adding friends online. In response to accepting online friendship, one student notes, "If I know that person. Well, if we go to the same school together and then we've met and introduce ourselves. Became great friends in real life. Then I can add them to Facebook." Most online social connections are created offline first because the students have not yet diversified their ability to make friends in more abstract ways, such as the workplace or online communities. They do not have many social connections outside of their local area, although that is beginning to change. Most participants state that their online friends come directly from their secondary school; however, as their offline independence grows and their exploration of other areas expands, their online network will expand as well.

Declining online friendships is also an important part of making decisions online. The students were proud to give examples of not accepting friendships. When asked about declining people, a student declared, "And if I don't like them, I will just be like, 'NO!'"

When discussing adults "friends," the students are very clear that they will add adults but usually when they are of the same generation. For example, one student may have an adult cousin and another may have an adult family friend on Facebook, but they only

added them because they are of the same generation. Their parents will be of one generation and they are the children of those parents. Very rarely are adults of older generations added as friends on SNS, and almost no adult is added if their offline relationship is authoritative, like parent, aunt, or teacher. Five of the students replied that a trusted adult approached them to become online friends and most have accepted those requests. The group also noted that the line between themselves and adults would get more faint as they get older and they could understand adding people from older generations later in their lives.

An interesting phenomenon was exposed when we had discussions about the quantity of friends. At first the participants agreed that they have the same amount of online friends as they do offline. In a couple of separate meetings I asked for estimates of how many friends they have on and offline. The average estimate for their online friends was around 100; however, on two separate occasions the students estimated they had between 5 – 50 friends offline. Only one student stated she had 100 offline friends. As our discussions continued, the students began to see differences in their online and offline friendship circles. One participant described she has more friends online "because I have like so many friends from around the world that I add them;" yet the students only considered people they see regularly as their offline friends. Online, the participants pad or add to their quantity of friends by adding family members, relations from around the world, casual acquaintances, teammates, and classmates that they would not count in their circle of offline friends. Because of this discrepancy between quantities of their online and

offline friends, I conclude that the students have stronger and more personal connections with their offline friends than they do with their online social network.

Very few students make friends with offline strangers. These social connections usually arise from sharing common interests and joining discussions on online forums or commenting on various websites. From their comments about online message forums and different Internet interests, I infer that meeting people online is a further stage in their SNS development. I see this expansion of personal interests and social networks as the beginning of more identity experimentation and creation. While in these new spaces with new people, the students have the ability to elaborate on their identity. The three most advanced and knowledgeable SNS users were the only members of the group to state that they have online friends that they have met only online. In response to meeting people online, and only online, the students recognize this behaviour and are reticent to share these connections or are very careful about making online friends. Three members of the discussion group noted they have been approached or sent friendship requests by complete strangers online, which matches statistics from Lenhart and Madden's study (2007). In response to being approached by a stranger, one student notes, "It's like someone I don't know but then I have a lot of mutual friends with them. But then I still don't add them because I don't know them." Another student replied with her own story, "There was this stranger guy that added me. I checked how many mutual friends and saw zero. So, I just ignore. That same guy added me again. I just hit ignore. Then everything's okay." All of the students agreed they would not add complete strangers to their networks.

Students also choose how to share with their friends. In response to the positive case study, over half of the discussion group would share their basketball story on SNS with friends or family. They would also readily share pictures of the event, if they were available. Most of the youth indicate that they share online stories within their smaller social circle. There are definite levels to their sharing. They will share small, safe, and non-personal snippets of their lives with a larger population. Their more intimate sharing is done with close friends or with friends and family that live in other areas of the world.

The choices students make about their online and offline friends impact their virtual and real social lives. Through our discussions, it is evident that maintaining these social connections is very important to them and also one of the most important parts of SNS. On SNS, the students explore their social choices by adding new friends, expanding their social networks to non-traditional areas, and experimenting with sharing stories with different groups of people. The students also use SNS tools to contact distant family members and friends that are no longer geographically close.

Creating Social Boundaries.

An important element of making choices on SNS is deciding which people get to see which information. Youth not only decide who they will allow into their social networks, but also how much can be shared with those people. The boundaries they erect around online relationships segregate adults, different groups of friends, and strangers.

The students in the research group do not feel that online social connections with adults are appropriate. Boundaries between the students and their families are not created by lack of access, as seven members express knowledge of an adult family member having a SNS account. SNS is a process that helps the students separate themselves from their family. They admit that they spend time with their family but use SNS as a way to connect with their peers. In response to having a parent in their online social network the students called the potential relationship "creepy" or "awkward." When asked to describe why, the students responded, "Because we are younger than them," "My mom would think I'm weird," and "My mom doesn't care." One student noted:

> There is some stuff that is inappropriate that the person (family member) doesn't need to know. I want my friends to know but not the parents. The parents just need to know about what we're putting on there because...just have this feeling, this weird feeling about it. What if they judge us or something? Like, what's with this picture? What's with that?

In my personal life I know many trusted adults, teachers especially, that have SNS connections for organizational or academic purposes. After explaining these circumstances, the students can see minor benefits to adding adults to their SNS but remain guarded of their SNS privacy. Only two students see the possibility of having a positive connection with coaches in an effort to better organize team information. Most students saw potential benefits for having contact with trusted adults on SNS for certain purposes – sports teams, leadership groups, school organizations – but would only make that contact under appropriate circumstances. The students did, however, see the

possibility of adding trusted adults when they are much older. They see a potential for adding a favourite teacher long after they graduate or making a connection in the future with an adult that made a difference in their lives.

Students want to use their SNS as a way of sharing (small) parts of their lives without worrying about their parents or teachers seeing them. Parents and teachers have the most control over the lives of adolescents, and youth don't want their opinions and sharing to jeopardize their earned freedom. Having SNS accessed by adults (parents/teachers) could have social (peers) and familial consequences. Parents could restrict parts of a student's life and the student could be embarrassed or lose social status by those repercussions. One participant's example was:

> Maybe because we are posting something about our parents, for example. And you don't want them to know a lot about your bad grades. I'm just saying like other people have problems like that. The people that I added talk about their parents in some way and stuff.

Another student added:

> Well maybe pretend your mom grounds you for like a week. And you just post it on Facebook, "Wow my mom is so unfair. She grounded me for a week". Then your mom would see that and be like (online), "I'm not unfair...blah blah blah. You did this, this and this". Then everyone would see that.

Students recognize that keeping their SNS lives separate from parents or adults may be difficult; therefore they learn to set up their SNS profiles to create those boundaries too. One student explains how he establishes his SNS settings:

> I have a family list on Facebook. If a family member adds me, I have this little group, family group, I just add them there. I just block mine so nobody can see it, like maybe some close friends. I add some people as close friends and they can see it. Not acquaintances or anything. My family can see it.

In response to the discussion about changing their SNS settings, some students were intrigued by the possibility of establishing these boundaries and another student tried to explain how to do it by stating, "You can go to custom settings and you could put block from family, friends, and stuff."

The students not only establish boundaries around their parents or other adults, but also limit their online interactions with other peers. When changing their settings, students will group their peers into different levels of friendship. Over half of the research group selects who can view their posts at some point. Members of the research group will often exclude acquaintances and casual friends from the majority of their posts. They will include their close friends in all of their posts. The students choose where the posts go and who can see them; whether it is from a permanent setting or from post to post, the students select who sees what they share. They are very aware of their online presence.

The discussion about the case studies showed that the students are willing to remove their social boundaries when there is significance about an event. With regards to the case

about watching a fight after school, most students describe that they would keep the information to themselves but two students would contact school authorities about the incident. The students that would not alert the appropriate authorities are more concerned with posting and facing consequences themselves. Adults are influential in youth's online behaviour. In regards to posting about a negative event, one student mentioned, "They'll trace you. They're going to call the police on you. Stuff like that. You have to be very careful."

Despite being very guarded about their SNS use, some members of the research group temporarily removed their social boundaries and described situations where they helped their parents or other adults establish SNS accounts. However, most students (seven of nine) said they would hold back information, would not disclose information that would create a closer online relationship with the adult, or would lie about SNS to protect their privacy. At first I was surprised with their honesty and probed a little more. Half of the group are reluctant to assist their parents with their use of SNS because of the frustration associated with that help. The students were more concerned with, "All of sudden they're going to start asking questions like, "What is this 'OMG'?" and "What does YOLO mean?" instead of their own privacy. The other half was concerned with an invasion of their privacy; yet all of the students admitted that they would not help their parents completely because of a combination of privacy and frustration.

As and adult that has listened to youth describe their online communications, I wouldn't want their communications to flood my SNS profiles. I think most adults would be happy

to use their SNS profiles for their own socializing without fear of being bombarded with adolescent updates. Students recognize that the adults around them have access to the same SNS (all nine participants noted they know a trusted adult, other than myself, with a SNS account) but choose not to use it to interact with them. I believe these boundaries around youth and adults are mutually constructed. Just as easily as the students can feel uncomfortable with the wrong online social connection, adults can too. However, as an educator, I see the potential in developing SNS connections that are appropriate and beneficial for both students and teachers.

Creating Identity.

When students make choices on SNS, they are also choosing representations of self. The students do not observe a strong difference between their online and offline selves but they make choices that affect both. Aesthetic choices are also made about their SNS profiles that affect their identity. Choices are also made online that have direct consequences on the students' identities. Some of their decisions are made to connect more with their peers and most of their posts are to entertain or impress their friends. Although their identities are flexible in adolescence, the students' online choices have consequences, large and small, for their future selves.

At different times in the research process, the students described conflicting self-images. Initially most students (seven of nine) note that they are not different people online. They also do not see themselves as changing beings. It is hard for them to look beyond where they are in the present. For example, most responded that they do not see their SNS habits

changing, as they get older. Yet, many students claim that their online identity helps form their offline identity. One third of the participants admit that the interests or relationships they develop online transfer and affect their offline selves. At this stage in their lives, explicit identity experimentation is either just beginning or has not started. They begin to play with lying and swearing online but most of their decisions seem true to themselves. When asked about the differences between their online and offline selves, their responses were varied, "The only thing I do differently is say LOL a lot," "I talk more online," and "My offline personality is 'let's go have fun', 'let's play' and stuff like that. Online is when I just ask 'help me on this, help me on that'. Offline is like let's just go play and have fun." Four of the nine students claim to use more profane language online. Six students declare they lie more online. Three students describe themselves as more confident online. Whether it be lying, swearing or acting with confidence the students' online behaviours affect their identities.

The students take pride in what they post. A couple of students were very proud to share posts or themes that make them unique. They feel their SNS posts create a unique identity for themselves. The desire to be included, yet unique, is present.

The students choose to post for a variety of reasons, such as the entertainment of their friends. When choosing to post on SNS, the students often mentioned that they do so to impress or amuse their friends. The students choose entertaining posts because "it entertains yourself," "so you can be popular," and to elicit Facebook "likes" and attention from their friends. When asked to define popularity the student response was based on

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how many people know that person or have a lot of friends. The students note that the number of online friends often correlates with the number of offline friends. For example, if a student has many online friends that student would most likely have a lot of offline friends too. The students make conscious choices to tweak their identities to become more entertaining to their friends.

In our discussions, the students also mentioned language and gender when posting online. They noted that language does impede SNS use, regardless of their level of proficiency in English. One participant states, "I think it is easier because people don't speak English and they speak another language." The students acknowledge that they use very informal language online and have access to different websites and software that can easily translate, or explain any unknown communication. Unlike language, gender does alter how people post online. According to this research group, girls post more frequently and send more personal messages. They will post more about their lives. Boys will post less frequently and will be more direct. Although the research group is predominantly female, the male participants shared equally in our discussions, and debates about gender differences never arose. All of the students declared that females include more emotion in their posts, such as "I ran out of ketchup (in a wispy emotional tone)," "You're such a traitor." and ""Ohhhhh, this person broke my heart;" where the students describe male posts as more blunt, such as "I failed." These examples illustrate the students' unconscious acknowledgement that more traditional gender roles are reinforced online, yet their personal examples of their Internet use would not reaffirm such traditional roles.

Because of this, I believe, the students are more susceptible to posting in more conventional manners as means to be more accepted by their peers.

Many of the decisions students make on SNS are made while consciously thinking of their peers and intended audiences. Like varying types of social dynamics in past generations, this generation struggles with balancing the creation a strong social self and overextending their efforts. The group all agrees "popular" students post more online; however, those posts are entertaining and not personal. The students also note that less popular peers, or students that earn high academic grades, often share less and make better decisions on SNS. Once posting becomes too frequent or personal, the person's social status diminished. When describing how popularity is affected by posting online, one student states:

> You have to talk about funny things. Well you don't have to but it's more entertaining when you talk about funny things. Not like when some girl did on Facebook and just talk about, "Oh my god. Boys are this. This boyfriend did this. A true boyfriend does this."

Students also alter their SNS choices based on their peers. One member of our discussion group relates how she began a Tumblr page, "My friends talk about it online and at school. So I just said, 'Hmmm, maybe I should have Tumblr too'. Because I felt left out a little bit." By choosing how much to post, where to post, and what to post the decisions the students make because of the perceived and real opinions of their peers directly affect their identities. These effects can be minor, such as changing interests, or major, such as altering social networks and social status.

All of the students agree that SNS and being online helps them become teenagers. To them, SNS are a teenage experience; therefore, partaking in SNS makes them more of a teenager. Their development as teens is also strengthened by their increased social interactions with other teens. SNS is also a relatively new phenomenon for them and they do not associate childhood with SNS. A big decision they make while participating on SNS is the expansion of their social network. Most of the discussion group states that the extra socializing SNS provides is integral to their teenage development. The intentional use of SNS to create or embellish identity to expand the social network is also apparent. One student in the group is outgoing and funny but she uses SNS to push that identity and is successful. In one example she describes being approached by a student from another school and being asked for a photo because of her posts online. Despite their need for social acceptance, members of the research group also mentioned that they did not want to be labeled as "mainstream" and would often brag about knowing new forms of technology. When using SNS, the students all note they take explicit steps to present an identity, which is in line with whom they want to develop into as teenagers.

Protecting Privacy.

Although a major concern about adolescent SNS use is the lack of privacy online, many youth make strong decisions to protect their privacy. It is suggested that youth's sense of privacy is different than previous generations (Muise, Desmarais, & Christofides, 2012). The students in this research group demonstrate that they make many decisions to protect

themselves, to post on different SNS for different audiences, and to select how their posts are viewed and by whom.

Students have learned through trial and error, personal bad experiences, word of mouth, and formal education how to prevent dangerous or unknown strangers from accessing their profile or accepting unwanted social connections. For example, they protect their personal identity by fabricating their personal information for entertainment and privacy. One student notes she listed her geographic location on one SNS as District 12 (a reference to the popular novel *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins). All SNS require a geographic location in their initial set up but it is the student's choice to be honest or not. Unfortunately, some students are not careful or concerned about their personal online privacy but their friends help monitor and correct dangerous behaviour. In one conversation, a student remarked to another that, "I don't think you're safe anymore. You know if you go to Google and click on (your) user name, a bunch of pages pull up and it has all your pictures." After that comment both students quickly discussed how to change the settings to make the student's profile more private.

Students also want to learn about how to protect their privacy. In response to discussing new things to learn, three of four students in one small discussion group had a three-minute personal conversation about how to make their profile completely private. They discussed privacy goals and procedures to achieve those goals. Both of the small discussion groups mentioned negative experiences, including themselves or friends, which helped them learn how to protect themselves and their online privacy.

Students do not want to be associated with negative behaviour online; therefore they will omit information or posts that could connect them with negative events. When discussing the case study about the fight after school, the students would be worried about the consequences that could affect them for watching the fight. Two students wouldn't want to post anything about the fight on SNS "(be)cause your parents are on there too," and they "don't want people to link me to the fight." They are hesitant to share things that will get them in trouble. Their decisions on suspect behaviour demonstrate selective privacy. The students are very aware of the consequences of an adult viewing their posts and choose strategies to prevent authority figures from seeing what they upload or post. Over half of the group believe their independence would be restricted if their parents or teachers saw what they post online; therefore they limit negative consequences of posting online by posting smaller amounts of information. As mentioned earlier, the creation of social boundaries also creates selective privacy. They also construct these boundaries because of known threats (perverts, strangers, etc.) and authority figures that could snoop into their lives.

The students also choose different forms of SNS for different levels of privacy. They choose to post in Facebook if the messages are more private because they have more control over their audience. The students will post to Tumblr, Twitter, or YouTube to find a larger audience. They did note that their privacy could be protected on Tumblr, Twitter, and YouTube because they can post anonymously or because of the abundance of other posts to these sites, their own posts could easily be lost in the mass.

Choice is an important element of adolescent development because it supplements independence. The choices youth make on SNS affect their friendships, their relationships with their families, their identities, and their privacy. With each post or upload, adolescents define who they are in that moment and make a minor but concrete contribution to the world.

Sharing

SNS diversify how youth communicates with others. In previous generations, youth would call friends on the phone, share stories around lockers, and spread gossip in the privacy of bedrooms and playgrounds. Although those methods of sharing are still common today, and often preferred, SNS provide a new and much larger platform for youth to share stories, gossip about others, connect with peers, and make social plans. SNS is primarily used as a communication tool. Adolescents use SNS to make plans or quickly connect with their friends. However, SNS present an opportunity for adolescents to expand their breadth of self-publication. Posting on SNS is diverse. Adolescents can choose their audience, limit or expand their sharing, post to entertain their friends or gossip about others, and post in a variety of different methods. Their posting options may be abundant but youth are also aware of how to post appropriately and the consequences of inappropriate posts. Youth also use SNS to share stories about their lives. Stories can be shared in five-hour chat conversations, through quick status updates, or photo albums. There is extrinsic and intrinsic motivation to share, or sometime more importantly, not to share stories on SNS. When using SNS, youth have the ability to elaborate, exaggerate,

and embellish their identities and stories. Through their posts, chats, stories, and embellishments, youth use SNS to disclose parts of themselves. Their online disclosure may be limited, but I believe that what they do not share online makes their offline sharing much more valuable.

Communicating.

Communicating with SNS is the most basic form of sharing. SNS is a tool, which replaces telephones, emails, and to a certain extent face-to-face conversations. SNS often provide a function to have live one-on-one, or group, discussions through small text boxes. Chatting on SNS is often done in real time; although conversations can start and stop at any moment, they can also quickly resume and last for hours. Comparisons can easily be made between SNS and other forms of communication, such as phones and personal conversations. SNS, as means for communication, have become prevalent in adolescent culture because of its ease and accessibility. Youth no longer need to fear calling a "crush" and having to speak with the mother or father, instead they can simply send a message and wait for a reply. Because of SNS' inherent privacy and silence, communication can be much more covert. Although SNS provides many new opportunities for youth to share, there are also many negative aspects and problems with using SNS as a communication tool.

The primary use of SNS among adolescents is communicating simple messages. One student described how he would communicate being grounded on SNS, "My friend tells me, 'You wanna hang out tomorrow?' and I'll be like 'No. I got in trouble yesterday.'

He'd be like, 'Okay. Bye.'" With regards to socializing, the students note that they use it to communicate plans and events. The students in our research group often mention they use SNS to establish other social plans, like going to someone's house, watching a movie, or meeting at the local mall. Communicating through SNS is also popular because it is easily concealed. Students can be physically present with family or friends but communicate with others at the same time. One participant shares how he can spend time with his parents but still connect with his friends:

> Sometimes I just hang out with my parents and go on Facebook at the same time. We will because we're watching a movie together. I can be on the laptop.

And the other participants all agree that they act similarly in their homes. Despite undermining time with their families, communicating with SNS can also strengthen familial relationships, especially with family that live in other areas of the world. In this diverse group setting most students have family in Asia and the Middle East. Most (seven members) use SNS to communicate with friends and family overseas. The students often contact their cousins and reconnect with life in their native countries. The students describe their connections:

> I would (connect) to family from another country. I would be like, "Oh it's my birthday," or "It's my little brother's birthday. He turned 5," or something. Or if it was their birthday, I would be like, "Happy birthday."

And:

> Usually we just, like, send a message like once in a while. Like, "How's family? How's my aunt? How's grandpa?" And stuff like that.

Although one student replied, "They don't really need to know because they are all far away. What is the difference?", most students agree that SNS provides an opportunity to stay connected with family that they may have left behind when immigrating to Canada.

Online chatting was once relegated to special Internet software, like MSN Messenger, AOL, or ICQ, but now it is integrated into SNS. The students in our discussion groups note that their principal use of Facebook is to chat with their friends. From their comments, I see that Facebook chat is like having a phone in your bedroom. When I was in high school, the phone in the bedroom was a big deal, as was 3-way calling. Now youth can talk with more than three friends without tying up a phone line or wasting mobile phone minutes. When discussing the positive case study about winning a basketball the students state they would use chat on Facebook to share their story. Chatting is a more intimate experience than posting comments on friends' profiles because the audience is smaller and less public. The students note they only chat online with close friends and would not instigate conversations with their larger social network, unless there was a definite purpose, like asking for homework help. Despite being more personal, the students also like chatting online because, as two students proclaim, "You don't get to see their face." When asked about the duration of their chats, the student responses vary from "just a minute" to "five hours straight", but six students reply that they frequently chat for hours. The students clarify the length of their conversations can last for such long periods of time because they will often begin a conversation and accomplish many other tasks, like watching TV, completing homework, eat dinner, or do chores, while the chat continues. Breaks in the dialogue between two friends can last

several minutes. One participant explains that her conversations can last for several hours because, "first I'll ask what's for homework, then we'll talk different subjects and then it will be just crazy." Chatting online for hours appears to be more reasonable when it can be broken into smaller segments over a longer period of time and students can accomplish other tasks while chatting.

The students have very distinct categories for when to use SNS to communicate and when other forms of communication are more appropriate. Most students (eight of nine) agree that sharing something important or personal is better with face-to-face communication. The ninth member of the group admits that a personal phone call would also suffice. They are also most comfortable with face-to-face interactions. It is more immediate and the feedback is more direct. One member of the group states talking "in person is better 'cause you can face them and like talk about it. Typing is just way too much. Your hands hurt." Another student adds, "'Cause you get a better reaction." One more student states, "I think it's just easier telling the person in person and taking face to face because you could like talk more and stuff instead of typing." Other than chatting online, the students are also very definite in their preferred methods of communicating. Six of the nine participants prefer text messaging, while the others prefer Twitter messages or phone calls.

In our discussions of the case studies, the students' responses vary according to the scenario. With regards to the case about winning a basketball game the students were very willing to share some parts of their story. Four students would post their basketball

story online. Three students would invite friends over to their house to celebrate and the other two students would call or text a friend. This case confirms the students' previous comments about sharing that they will prefer to post on SNS or have face-to-face contact when sharing an important and positive event. After reading the case about watching an after school fight, only one student would share that event with others through a phone call or text. The other students declare that it is too risky to share information about the fight online and that if parents or school staff learned of their involvement they could face negative consequences. When discussing the more personal, unfortunate story of the boy that learns about his mother's terminal illness, the student responses are also more personal. The students discuss that they would immediately phone or text their father and would also call their family for extra support. Only one student would reach out to a friend immediately and the others would approach their closest friend when the right time presented itself in person. Only one student would post their story online after they had discussions with the mother and their family. Although the students use SNS as one of their primary means of communication, they also rely heavily on more intimate forms of communication, like face-to-face conversations and phone calls, when important or personal events arise.

The students also describe the pitfalls of communicating through SNS. One common complaint is typing long messages are slow and inefficient. Another common mistake is typing messages to the wrong recipient, which can lead to embarrassing or inappropriate consequences. The most common complaint was that the subtle nuances of personal

contact are often lost on SNS chat and mixed messages and unintentional meanings can easily be received.

Because the students use SNS to chat so much, I ascertain that the majority of their online sharing is done through small snippets of text, which when collected can tell larger, more complete and complex stories. At the end of our meetings, I asked the students what their favourite part of using SNS is, and six of the nine members responded they like chatting online with their friends at any time.

Posting.

Posting is a different act than communicating. Communicating is a conversation or dialogue that can occur at any time and can be of any length. Posting is the deliberate act of adding content to SNS and the Internet. Posting is often a one-sided communiqué. A student may post something and in time, receive a reply but posting rarely includes conversation or dialogue. In our discussions, the students describe unspoken rules about appropriate and inappropriate posts. They also share the importance of placing personal limits on posting and how they select an audience for their posts. The students also impart their most common topics for posts and the different methods they use to post online. To the students, posting is less frequent but more calculated than communicating.

Posting online is most often text based. Some students develop more complex posts by experimenting with different media. The students that use SNS the most, are older or are more advanced, and are also the students that post using different forms, such as video,

site links, pictures, and tweets; therefore, students add to their SNS repertoire as their skills and confidence develop. In this study, four students post multiple forms of media, such as pictures, videos, and audio to their SNS profile, three students include only pictures, and one student posts only videos. Only one student doesn't post anything other than text. One student notes, "I do post photos, sometimes. Sometimes I just send links to other people if they want to see a movie or a show or a funny clip or something." As our discussions progressed, curiosity within the group grew. Students were eager to share information on how to add different elements to their posts. These relationships positively affected both students. The teaching student gained self-confidence by imparting knowledge to a peer and the student gained new SNS skills and a stronger connection to their peers. Students use SNS to share ideas and interests. Facebook is the most common SNS for sharing favourite musicians, links, TV shows, or celebrities. By posting about personal interests to SNS, the students reveal a personal side and make themselves open for critique, praise, or indifference.

The students' posts are often brief, infrequent, and impersonal. When asked about their most recent posts, students responded that they last posted between twenty minutes (one student actually posted to Facebook during one of our meetings but not about the actual meeting) and two weeks ago. Most students post to SNS at least once every two days. Their posts range from brief notes about an online game and their daily lives to Mother's Day wishes or pictures of cats. One student describes his tweets on Twitter:

> I'm sure lots of people don't tweet about their lives. I don't tweet about my life. I
> just tweet like, "Eating cheese pizza. Yay." or "After school. Yay." or "School's

finally over." or "Spring break!" I don't tweet like...I don't tweet about my personal life, like "My mom did this." or "My dad did that." I don't do anything like that. Or like, "My friend said this."

When moving beyond posts about their basic, if not simple, daily lives, the posts seem to be for the entertainment of their friends. The students describe their average posts as "rude stuff that happens to me," "funny stories," "K-Pop" (Korean pop music), and "cat pictures." One student is brazen enough to post about her dislike for a teacher. While half of the discussion group post to entertain their friends, the other half are content with being entertained. The students upload entertaining posts to gain attention from their peers. A member of the discussion group describes the pattern of being entertained, "They're like, 'On YouTube, this is so funny. You have to watch it.' So I watch it. The students' social status increases as they post more amusing and interesting stories or links.

The students state that to increase attention from their friends their posts must either be positive, funny, or happy, or filled with gossip. When discussing gossip on SNS the students' descriptions appear innocent at this age but the gossip comments foreshadow the behaviour of some to come. Five students note they have begun posting negative comments about others to their friends. As mentioned earlier, the students also state girls will post more emotional posts and are more willing to post gossip about their peers. As their posts become more personal the students become more aware of the appropriateness of their posts and the audience they share with.

The material that the students post is most often positive or innocent. They do not feel

that they would hurt their parents or get in trouble if their parents saw what they posted.

However, their posts are private. They don't want their parents or family to judge their

posts. Many describe their online activity as embarrassing or weird. Their descriptions

seem innocent and immature. One student gives an example of a post that might anger his

parents:

> Because, maybe, like, you put on Facebook, "Wow, bombed my math test today,"
>
> right? But you don't want your mom to know that.

The students will use SNS to gossip about their friends and peers, but differentiate gossip

and spreading rumors. They try not to tell negative or hurtful stories but will gladly share

something funny or amusing; whether the unknowing peer would find it equally amusing

is unknown. In a rare admission of sharing a negative post one student and I had this brief

conversation:

> Researcher: What is an example of a negative post on SNS?
>
> Student: My (omitted) teacher. I was just saying how much I hate my (omitted)
>
> teacher.
>
> Researcher: How angry would the teacher be if (the teacher) saw the post.
>
> Student: (The teacher) would like really keep an eye on me. Really negative.

Younger and inexperienced users are most likely to make bad decisions by over-sharing.

The students describe the people that post most inappropriately as "stupid people," "fifth-

graders," "younger people," and "younger wanna-be's." They also describe what makes

these posts inappropriate as "talk about their personal life," "posting about love,"

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"pictures," "disturbing," and "they go into stores and they wear short dresses…And then they take mirror photos and post it in on Facebook."

The students try to limit the amount of posts they contribute and the amount of information they include as techniques to be more appropriate and limit. The students regulate themselves for how much material they share online. There is a desire to share enough to be noticed and liked but not too much so they don't scare their peers away. Six students confirm they would post more but limit their uploads. Although one student was brave enough to note, "I don't care what people think. If I like Vampire Diaries, I'm going to post Vampire Diaries." After this declaration, the students laughed and attention was given to the lighthearted example.

Choosing an appropriate audience is another technique the students use for mediating their SNS posts. Whether it is from a permanent setting or choices made post-to-post, the students select who sees what they share. Seven students report they choose to share with selective groups, especially close friends and family. They also explain they will share more with friends and family that are not geographically close. A story share with someone from another secondary school will not have immediate effects, even if it is gossip about other peers. Five students confirm they will share gossip, casual stories about others, but not rumors, dishonest or mean information. The students also explain posts that could reflect negatively on their self-image may be discussed in online chats or only discussed in person. By relegating questionable information to personal conversations, the students limit their intended audience and can also judge the response

more accurately. In the discussions, most students (six members) admit to being overly honest in their comments to and posts about their close friends but will only share that information personally or within tight circles.

The introduction of Tumblr as a SNS resource adds an interesting element to the students' choice of audience. Tumblr is used mainly for entertainment but allows users to follow their peers and comment on posts. It can foster privacy, anonymity, publicity, and social status. Tumblr pages can be viewed by the general public but are very hard to search for; therefore, the students must share specific sites for more or less attention. Often they use one form of SNS to promote another. For example, the students will post a link to their Tumblr page on their Facebook profile. When sharing these links the students decide on their intended audience; however, problems arise when pages spread through word-of-mouth. Once a page is well known and has generated many followers, publicity for the page will diminish. The students specify that newer Tumblr users will promote their pages much more than older or more experienced peers.

Posting to SNS is a more deliberate and specific form of communicating through SNS. The students will often post ideas, media, or stories to gain attention from their friends. When asked about the most disliked aspects of SNS, topics about posting were most common. For example, students do not like posts such as: "when people post things that you don't really care about," "people can be mean," "sharing stuff, especially about religion," "being tagged in people's stuff," and "when people spam me." Despite the negative reaction to other peers' posts, the students frequently contribute to their and

others' SNS profiles. The negotiation between gaining and losing their friends' attention is as prevalent online as it is offline.

Sharing Stories.

Sharing stories is a more deliberate and intimate form of posting on SNS. Stories are personal narratives or anecdotes from the lives of youth. Unlike communicating or posting comments, students have a particular or intrinsic motivation for sharing stories. This motivation can be based on distance and the need to reconnect with families or friends or it could be based on personal triumphs that they want to share with a large audience. However, their motivation for not sharing personal stories on SNS is equally as important.

When desire to share stories arise, the students' first response is to talk with someone face-to-face. Sharing online is not an immediate reaction. When asked about how they would share good news or a positive event, most students describe personal contact as their immediate reaction. One student describes his sharing process as:

> I'd go to family first. Then friends in person. Then the last I'd do is go online and update it. It depends what good thing.

Another student adds, "Cause you get a better reaction." When the students decide to share their story on SNS, they become very savvy. A few students would tag or include someone specifically in their post to increase their audience and specify their message. Most students would try to include pictures or video, if possible, to increase the appeal of their story. If pictures were available, they would try to broadcast their story to a wider

audience to gain the most attention. For example, in the case about winning the basketball game, the students would tag teammates in their post and add pictures of their win to announce their story to a larger social network. When asked, however, if they would include key terms, such as school names, to increase online searchability, the students replied with blank stares. This demonstrates the students have basic comprehension of how to broaden the scope of their story but they can still learn how to be more efficient or effective online communicators.

As mentioned earlier, the students in our discussion groups are more willing to share about positive and non-confrontational events. The meetings about the case studies provided the most information about how the students would share their own stories. In the positive case about winning a basketball game, most students would happily share some details about their efforts in winning the game. They are motivated by the positive comments and attention that would return from their friends. They would include many details, such as their effort, the points they scored, and how they actually played the game. They are motivated to describe only the positive aspects of this case. One smaller discussion group explains they would include details about the injured star player. One student declares, "I would be happy if somebody Facebook'd me and they are all like 'I'm sorry that you broke your ankle.'" They are experimenting with sharing for sympathy as motivation for storytelling. They don't want to post too much and drive their friends away but they want to make that social connection and get support online. Although some students would want to elicit sympathy for their teammate, others do not want to minimize their glory. The students' responses to this case vary. Most students

would share most details about this story, especially about their own success. Whether it is to maintain their glory or to save the feelings of a teammate, most students would not include all of the details about replacing the star player.

Conversely, the students are more reticent to share details about the fight after school. This reaffirms the exclusion of negative events when sharing online. Only one student said there was a small possibility of contacting other friends to discuss the fight. There is an element of danger associated with posting anything about this. The character in this story is not directly associated with this event; therefore sharing this story would be discussing events more closely tied with others. Sharing this story could result in negative consequences. If they shared this story and authorities found out, their independence could be restricted. To prevent being associated with this event, five of the students state they would immediately delete the email that contained the friend's video of the fight. The only exception to remaining silent about this event came from two students that mention they would do the "right" thing and tell an authority figure about the fight. These students feel it would be best to wait until the next school day and tell a teacher, counselor, or principal about the fight in person. This is additional confirmation that if a story or event is important enough, the students will use more personal contact to convey their story or information.

In an event that is unfortunate or negative and is very personal the students' willingness to share in public spaces, like SNS, is minimal. In the case of the boy and his terminally ill mother, the students want to make a more personal connection to their family. All of

the students remark they would call their father, then would try to contact their family. At first, the students would try to use more personal means of communication, like a phone call or online video chat, but if contact could not be made the students would resort to using email or SNS to share their news. The students describe the event as "too personal" and "too private" to share with a wider audience on SNS; however, the students also note they would only share their story after the mother shared hers. The students explain they want support from their friends but feel that SNS is too informal for such a serious and unfortunate event. Only after intimate contact has been made with a friend, will they reconnect using SNS. Three students note they would use SNS to seek support or information from cancer support or government agencies after some time had passed. From the three case studies the students show a desire to share their stories but also a strong understanding of personal boundaries, including how and when to share their stories appropriately.

When describing the physical act of sharing stories online, the students describe their posts as small; however, these posts could be collected or viewed in time as a larger narrative, instead of singular posts. There is also a correlation between distance, frequency, and the amount the student will share. The students state their posts to family members in other countries would be longer and more descriptive than what they send to local friends. Sharing stories may not occur frequently but as one of the older members of our group mentioned, he is more willing to express himself, take risks, and share online. He notes that this development progresses because he has learned more about SNS use and is less susceptible to make mistakes.

The students are selective storytellers. They are very discerning with the information they include in their online stories. Mostly, the students will include only the facts that will boost their self-esteem and social status. In the case of winning the basketball game, the students would be eager to share their story but would not include all details. This is most evident when the students were asked if they would share the fact they played in the game because the star player was injured. Some students admit they would not share because it is not important to *their* story but others felt that it was not their story to tell and would respect the privacy of their teammate. One student explains why she wouldn't include those details:

> I wouldn't post on Facebook, "This person got hurt," or something like that because maybe she doesn't want like 50 people commenting on her wall posts being like, "Are you okay?" I wouldn't talk about anybody else because maybe it's their life. It's their personal life. It's none of my business but that person got hurt. I would post on their wall being like, "Hope you feel better," and stuff like that but then I wouldn't comment on the...I wouldn't post it on Facebook.

The students also reconfirm that they share more with their closer circle of friends. With regards to the basketball story the students mention they would be more willing to share more details with their close friends than they would with a larger network of peers.

Although storytelling may be less common on adolescent SNS profiles, the students place more importance on being able to share bigger events. When asked for examples of their posts, the students would be vague or nonchalant about their everyday posts but when

they describe their posts about more substantial events, they would be excited to share the story again and would give more details about their original posts. At this stage in their SNS and personal development, the students are still learning how to share online and as the older students demonstrate, with more experience comes more elaborate and personal stories.

Fabricating.

Youth post online to share stories, associate with others, and expand their social connections. Because their posts can be shared and interpreted in a variety of ways, the opportunity to elaborate, exaggerate, and lie is very apparent. In our discussions six of the nine students admit to lying more online than offline. They are dishonest for many reasons including personal protection and self-image.

The students will fabricate demographic information, such as location and age, to protect their identities. The students admit they will lie about their age to access different SNS. Facebook requires users to be at least 13 years old when establishing an account, yet most of the students lied about their age to create a profile long before they were teenagers. Two students also admit they have SNS accounts where they claim to be 20 and 38 years old. Often SNS will also ask for a location when creating profiles and the students also admit to fabricating their locations to protect their identity, like the student that named her location as "District 12." Another reason to fabricate online identities is to protect their feelings. One student describes creating a false Tumblr page:

I have one on Tumblr. Just to put music in. I want it to separate from my account

in general from my music one. Because the other one I can get more followers and

people can know who I am, so they won't judge me. So I just put it all there.

This student has a Tumblr account that she shares with her peers and is moderated

closely; however, she uses her false account to express her more intimate and honest

opinions and interests. Another student created a false Facebook account so she can

access more games. She alternates between the two accounts to send game content to

herself.

Another important reason for fabricating information online is to improve the student's

self-image. At this stage, the youth seem to exaggerate and embellish more than outright

lie. These fabrications will increase sympathy and attention without too much risk. One

student explains how he embellishes online:

Maybe I got like a C- or something and be like "I bombed that test" or "I did

horrible" or maybe I just failed by 1% or something and be like "I just totally

failed it."

In our group discussions it was difficult for the students to be completely honest about

their dishonesty. They showed much pride in declaring themselves as completely honest.

When asked how similar there online and offline selves the students claim to be between

50% and 99% the same person on SNS and in their offline worlds. Despite being guarded

about their online honesty, one student summarizes why it is easy to lie online:

Well, it's easy to lie because the person can't really see you, like what you're

feeling right now. Ya, like your expression. Or like they don't know if we're

making fun of that person, for example. Or you're just joking.

Disclosing Self.

The purpose of communicating, posting, and sharing online is for youth to express

themselves. Like admitting dishonesty, the students are very protective of their emotions

and will rarely reveal themselves completely on SNS. Youth will become more candid

online to develop relationships, gain sympathy, and entertain others.

As reported earlier, students are hesitant to share negative stories about themselves. This

may be because they do not want to be rejected from their peers in such a public forum.

They feel sharing sad or negative stories about themselves will diminish their social

circle. The students often commented, sarcastically, "no one cares about me." The

students recognize the potential for gaining sympathy from posting sad stories but also

notice that they can quickly push friends away by posting too negatively. Five students

declared emphatically that they would not share sad stories to get sympathy from others;

yet the same five students responded equally emphatically that their posts are positive and

for the entertainment of others. In one small group discussion, three of the four

participants claim they limit their posts to prevent getting hurt or embarrassed. Although

specific examples were not mentioned directly, the students in both small discussion

groups were quick to point out that the wrong type of posts would have negative

consequences in their offline lives, especially the spreading of rumors. One student notes, "Other people will start talking about it. Rumors will spread."

For similar reasons, students are also very apprehensive about posting their own feelings online. Students prefer to communicate their feelings in face-to-face conversations. However, the majority of the group uses SNS to express themselves when necessary or is available as a prevalent option. Three students do not express their feelings on SNS, while three students admit they do express their feelings occasionally, two students say they will not hesitate to share their feelings online, and one student did not respond. However, all nine students state they believe it is easier to express themselves offline. I believe at this stage of their personal development, the students have learned how to express themselves directly and learn throughout adolescence how to express more abstractly. When asked why they don't express themselves more online, the most common response was "it's hard to do that" and one student explains, "All you can do is capitalize and add exclamation marks." The students also note they express themselves mainly through the use of emoticons, such as ☺, and "maybe just a few words." One student states she would share her feelings with "maybe close friends because they might have some sympathy."

An important part of their sharing is developing connections with friends and peers. One part of disclosing themselves is to strengthen or alter those person connections. The students believe that they have the biggest impact offline because the communication and feedback is direct. The consequences of communicating offline are usually less severe

than online. If given the opportunity to relate to a friend one participant will prefer offline communications because, as one student states:

> Pretend you're upset with someone. When you're offline you can go face to face and they can see how upset you are. And then they apologize. Then on Facebook, they might just think you're joking around or something. They don't know.

A personal and sensitive factor of posting on SNS is the give and take between posting and replying. Unfortunately, the students assert that there is no way of telling if their posts are being seen and they also admit that they rarely reply to their friends' posts. The immediate feedback on sharing is minimal. Although the students do not provide feedback to their friends, the lack of online support or acknowledgment can be hurtful. For example, the students describe themselves as "loner," "hurt," and "loser" if their posts do not elicit a response. Exclusion online should be a big issue for these youth; however, they minimize their feelings about exclusion or losing online friends. The students' response to being denied a social connection or friend request is very similar to not receiving replies to their posts. When a student is "unfriended" or a request is denied, the students claim, "I don't care" in front of the large discussion group but admitted within the smaller groups that their feelings are easily hurt and they often feel alone. An interesting discussion arose from the topics of exclusion and not replying, and by the end of the meetings students noticed their behaviour is hypocritical. When I mentioned that they felt sad if they were excluded from an online relationship or if no one replied to their post, yet they said they don't reply or accept friend requests frequently, two students immediately yelled, "We're hypocrites," and "Hypocrites!"

Although the students do not readily use SNS as a venue for self-expression, these students are at the early stages of implementing strategies that help them disclose themselves to their friends and develop stronger relationships. I believe the students need some guidance in using SNS appropriately and with proper etiquette, SNS can be used as an effective tool in developing a more positive self-image.

SNS provides a diverse platform for youth to express themselves and develop strong personal connections with their peers. From creating plans for the weekend to sharing feelings and stories, youth demonstrate that SNS are one of the most prevalent forms of communication in their lives. SNS are also empowering. Adolescents can choose to have a one-on-one conversation with a family member in another country or share a new song from their favourite band with their entire secondary school. With this empowerment comes added responsibility and awareness about the intricacies of human interaction and appropriate social etiquette. Adolescents must quickly learn to negotiate their sharing through different SNS, forms of media, varying audiences, and levels of discourse. The benefits are innumerable but the consequences can be drastic. Because most subtle nuances of human interaction cannot be typed, youth make many mistakes that can restrict their independence and crush their social status. Using SNS to share provides many valuable lessons and opportunities that help and hinder adolescent development.

Learning

SNS provides a new and varied platform for youth to diversify their learning. Buckingham states, "in learning with and through these media, young people are also

learning how to learn. They are developing particular orientations toward information, particular methods of acquiring new knowledge and skills, and a sense of their own identities as learners" (2007, p. 17). Youth learn about SNS from other youth (Greenhow & Robelia, "Informal learning and identity formation in online social networks", 2009). Within the realm of SNS, youth become simultaneous students and teachers. They discover various aspects of SNS from direct and indirect lessons from their peers and through personal exploration and discovery.

One of the lessons youth learn is about their own online presence. Youth discover that their contributions can have a significant personal, local, or global impact. Their contributions can positively and negatively affect their lives and the lives of others. Youth realize the permanence of their online actions. They can envision the effects their posts and the possible consequences their actions may have on others. Through informal and formal lessons, youth become gradually more aware of the online and offline worlds around them.

SNS also provides opportunities for youth to improve academically. As a communication tool, SNS give adolescents the ability to ask questions. They can chat with friends about missed assignments or collaborate on group projects. The social connections established through SNS provide peer tutors for adolescents.

Youth also become teachers through SNS. They teach their friends about different uses or settings and they teach their parents about establishing accounts and making their own

social connections. While becoming teachers on SNS, youth develop a stronger and deeper understanding of different SNS areas. Formal education also plays a role in the direct teaching of SNS protocols, risks, and procedures. SNS can be a valuable teaching tool.

Awareness of Online Presence.

By using SNS, the students become aware of the larger world. They see direct social connections with friends and families in different countries and they see how easy it is for their communication to spread. As they become more experienced users, the students develop a strong understanding of how their contributions can be felt locally and globally. They also discover the permanence of their actions and that posting can have long-lasting effects. The fear of making a few catastrophic keystrokes also pressures the students to think before they act and consider other people's thoughts and feelings before sending a message to their SNS community.

A criticism of SNS use is that youth are prone to make bigger and longer-lasting mistakes; however, the students learn that their words are always present online. They are very aware of their contributions to an ever-present online community. Six of the nine participants reaffirm that it is possible for their posts to be seen by the entire world. Although it may be unrealistic and naïve, one student gives this example:

> Well, if I got like accepted...if like I graduated...pretend I graduated from this
> Harvard university, I wouldn't mind if the world knew because people like high

top businesses and stuff could see that and be like, "He's a smart person. We

should hire him."

Frequently in our discussions the students would patronize me with a "we know, we

know" type response about the dangers of posting online. They also had examples of

"friends they know" and the mistakes of having posts read by unintended audiences.

Unfortunately, the students are fairly unaware of the power of suggestion on SNS.

Although the group is adept at posting links or videos of things they like, they do not

realize the potential of SNS for connecting themselves with people that share similar

interests. One student actively connects with others around shared interests and tries to

promote those interests on SNS and another understands the concept of sharing interests

online but does not do it. Three of four members of one small discussion group explain

they follow links to other friends' interests but never really think to actively promote their

own interests. They have a slight understanding of the influence of the Internet and SNS

but have not learned how much influence is actually available. A local example of SNS

influence is the students' ability to promote their Tumblr pages on Facebook. One student

describes a friend's promotion of a Tumblr page as, "They post it on Facebook, like

'follow me.'. This shows they have a very basic understanding of how to self-promote on

SNS. The students are aware that organizations and companies can be viewed,

researched, and contacted through SNS. In one small group discussion on the case about

the boy and his terminally ill mother, the students note they understand organizations

have Facebook profiles that will offer support and information. However, the students

seem oblivious to the direct marketing that lines the sides of their own profile pages. The

students mention they see the advertisements but do not pay much attention to them. I believe their naivety towards outside influences on their SNS will diminish as their online critical thinking skills develop. The older and more experienced members of our group are more cognizant of online advertising and hold more skills for acknowledging and managing their profiles and activity around those influences.

The students are aware of the dangers of posting online. They understand that online communication is more difficult to navigate than face-to-face interactions. One participant notes, "So you don't know if the other person is feeling bad about themselves. They could think it's a joke." Another student adds, "They don't catch the sarcasm." Although their responses seem trivial, the students demonstrate they understand two problems with communicating online. The students also understand the consequences of their actions. A student describes that "people would act differently around" her if she posted something wrong. Embarrassment among peers is the most important consequence to this group of students. In a small group discussion, all five members declared they do not share certain things because of the possibility of different audiences viewing the posts. They show that they are very aware of the ability for unintended audiences to view their posts. This awareness causes them to prevent or edit posts before posting online.

The effect of their online behaviour is also apparent. When discussing specific posts, three students had a short conversation about the problems around posting too often. The first student mentioned she posts a lot, mostly because of incorrect settings, about an online game and two other students quickly blast her:

Student 1: That's the reason I've blocked (the game).

Student 2: Useless to me. (You) send me too many requests.

Student 3: It's just an accident. I don't know.

Short conversations, like the example above, occurred frequently throughout our meetings. From these brief confrontations the students quickly learn how their SNS actions affect others and in return, have negative consequences in their lives. In a small group discussion, all five students agreed that they will be embarrassed or have rumors spread about them by posting certain things. They also agreed that they would lose independence at home and at school if their parents and teachers saw all of their SNS communication. I find this alarming. The students demonstrate a very basic understanding of the reach of their SNS use; yet they cannot connect that with the possibility that their parents or teachers could easily see their posts.

The students also have a very basic understanding of how permanent the Internet is. In response to the case about the after school fight, one student quickly mentioned she would delete the video that was emailed but quickly added, "It's probably still on my history though." In one meeting I asked the group what would happen if they make a mistake when posting or commenting online. One student stated, "You can delete it." But another student quickly replied:

Well, it's kind of hard. If that person's read what you said, then it is too late. Even if you deleted it because it is already in that person's head. That happened to me once.

Similar to their understanding of outside influences on SNS and the possible extent and consequences of posting online, the students are beginning to realize the depth of SNS and how they can be negatively affected by simple mistakes and miscommunication.

Despite their naiveté, the students are starting to become more aware of their online presence and are taking positive steps to protect themselves. Over half of the students believe they make wise decisions on SNS. Six participants think about what they are doing, and possible consequences, before they post. Three students out of four in one small discussion group think about who will see their post before they upload. For example, one student described her awareness of Facebook that "they have, like, subscribers and stuff. So you have to choose it carefully or otherwise they might go public." The students can also quickly describe posts that are not smart decisions, such as "pictures," "a fail," or "anything private or personal that you just want yourself to know."

The students exhibit both safe and unsafe SNS behaviour. This demonstrates a need for more proactive formal education around SNS use. It is clear they understand that there is a larger world around them and their actions do have consequences; however, guidance from parents and teachers would quickly rectify any poor habits and help minimize learning from negative or dangerous experiences.

Discovering SNS.

The students' use of SNS is beginning. They are learning how to expand their online repertoire. More experienced participants are posting videos. Less experienced

participants are only using SNS for communication. Despite their different levels of expertise, all of the students are eager to learn about and do more with SNS. I asked the students what they would like to learn about and they responded that they would like to change their background colours or design their own themes. Some were concerned about their privacy and others wanted to upload videos and music. These examples illustrate their simple understanding of SNS; yet, all students are curious and enthusiastic learners. Within our meetings I observed many different forms of learning and teaching. The students learn directly and indirectly. They also learn from their peers and from individual exploration and experimentation. The students take pleasure in the discovery of SNS.

It is hard for the students to describe how they learn to use SNS. Much of the learning comes from experimenting alone. They also mimic a lot of their friends' behaviours and actions. They learn about SNS through indirect observation and experimentation. Before they could use SNS, they had to learn about them. Six participants learned about SNS from a friend, one student learned about SNS from her mother and another learned from an older sibling. Six students also observed various SNS before establishing their own profile. The first step in trying something new is to hear or see something from a friend. After observing or hearing about a facet of SNS, the students will quickly try it independently. In a small group discussion, three of five members will try something after only hearing about it and two will hear, then observe, before trying something new on SNS. Age and experience play a large role in how much is shared. Older and more

experienced users will share more. They have more positive experiences to draw from and the negative experiences become more infrequent over time.

At this point in their SNS development, the students describe how little they actually know and actively seek lessons from each other. During the discussion about separating online friends into groups, certain students informed the group about how to separate their lists or posts. Their conversation demonstrates how quickly friends teach friends about certain aspects of SNS:

Student 1: Can you split what you post so they (unwanted viewers) don't see it?

Student 2: Ya, you can.

Student 3: You just press family and friends.

Student 4: You can go to custom settings and you could put block from family, friends, and stuff.

Student 5: I just block mine so nobody can see it, like maybe some close friends. I add some people as close friends and they can see it. Not acquaintances or anything. My family can see it.

Student 2: Whatever you post you can actually control what certain friends you want to see.

In this example four students walk the entire discussion group through how to change their Facebook settings to place their friends and families into different groups. One student's teaching was built upon another's learning. In another example, one student discreetly informed another student that her profile is very public and that her pictures can be seen from a simple search. She took the warning and acknowledged that it wasn't

safe and she would change her settings. These examples show that the students will happily learn from each other and are excited to develop their SNS skills.

The students are also very comfortable asking friends for help. I asked the discussion group how comfortable, on a scale of one (not comfortable) to ten (very comfortable), are they asking a friend for help. All but one responded with a ten (very comfortable). For comparison, I also asked how comfortable would they be asking an adult for help. There average response was just under 7/10 (not uncomfortable but not overly confident). When probed for a reason why they wouldn't be as comfortable asking adults, one student replied, "They don't know anything."

Although informal learning is strong and helps develop the students' SNS skills, I believe they could benefit from more direct feedback. Unfortunately, the students are initially good teachers but do not follow up on their lessons. After listening, observing, exploring, and experimenting, most students do not receive feedback or further information. The students described their most common form of feedback as from a friend clicking the "like" button (an option on Facebook for users to quickly agree or show approval for a comment or post).

The students are very confident in their online skills. When rating their confidence for trying new aspects of SNS, the average response was 8.6/10. After seeing their high self-confidence rating, I reflected on adults I know and how much lower their response might be. Much of this confidence comes from a youthful willingness to try new things. I notice

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that frequent experimentation and exploration, combined with infrequent or forgivable errors leads to more confidence. The student responses to why they are so willing to experiment are all similar. One student replied, "Just fool around so you get to know it better." Another added, "Because if you stay with the one SNS, it gets pretty boring sometimes." And one other responded, "YOLO! (You only live once)." After asking the students about the strategies they use when they do not know how to accomplish something, six answered, "Google!" If a friend is unavailable or cannot answer a question, the students will happily take their learning into their own hands and research their own answers.

Through our discussions, the students were most excited about sharing what and how they learn online. The students will happily listen, observe, and explore to find new methods of using SNS. Their learning is frequent, often informal, and is layered with knowledge from multiple sources. Learning on SNS also helps develop their social skills. The students demonstrated cooperation, patience, and acceptance when sharing different SNS strategies. As educator, I am very excited to see the students' positive response to learning about SNS.

Teaching.

The students' feelings towards teaching SNS to others were often conflicting. They realize that most of their SNS knowledge comes from their friends, yet they are often unwilling to impart that knowledge. Teaching can help youth solidify their own learning. By becoming an expert on using various aspects of SNS, youth gain confidence and can

build upon their prior knowledge. However, the students in our discussion groups were not patient when helping adults online, nor were they selfless with their time. Students often complain about high levels of frustration when others would quickly learn a lesson. Students find direct teaching difficult because of the lack of knowledge from the learner; yet, informal teaching occurs frequently.

In response to describing teaching others, the most common response was "frustrating." The students are selfish and do not want to spend time helping others. When asked to describe their feelings about teaching their parents, this conversation was their response:

Student 1: It was frustrating and crazy because the person keeps asking so many questions. Like, she was asking over 50 questions just how to work, add music. There was this and that. And then we were there talking for like an hour. But then soon she finds out, then she's happy and stuff.

Student 2: I just don't teach people. I feel like slapping them. I end up screaming at them too.

Student 3: So true. I don't like people so I don't teach them anything. It was hard. They were just so dumb. They weren't smart. It took longer. They kept asking questions.

Student 4: Frustrating.

Student 5: I never really taught anybody anything 'cause I have to first learn it myself.

Student 6: It was boring because parents don't know how to use the Internet. I tried to leave and she went, "Come. Come back here. Come back. How do you do this?" Just press the button. It's very annoying.

Students 2 and 5: Oh my god.

Student 7: It's time consuming. And frustrating. Depending on how dumb they are.

This conversation demonstrates the students' lack of patience for adults that may be hesitant to try to new technology or lack the inherent computer skills necessary for learning how to use SNS quickly.

Another concern is that the students are also condescending towards others that know less than they do. Occasionally in our discussions, students made snide remarks towards other members if they did not understand how to complete a "simple" SNS task. Inevitably though, one or two other students would quickly describe how to accomplish that task.

Despite the frustration, the students were equally excited to share success stories and would often accompany a personal story of frustration with one of success. Their positive attitudes seem to be a combination of bragging and altruism. The students gladly described moments when they taught friends, and even parents, how to use Tumblr or Facebook. They also describe teaching in online and offline environments. One student uses Facebook chat to teach his friends about YouTube and another student uses a pen and piece of paper to describe a process on Facebook.

The students are not as eager to become teachers of SNS, as they are learners, yet they will impart their limited knowledge when asked. Despite their reluctance to teach others, their combined efforts create a strong community of learners. With each lesson, their collective set of skills and self-confidence grows. I also believe that their patience and teaching ability will improve as they mature and develop their teenage social skills.

Helping with School.

SNS also provides direct support for helping students with their schoolwork. As a communication tool, SNS provides youth an opportunity to connect with classmates for homework help, group collaboration, and tutoring. Schools also incorporate lessons and assemblies about SNS use and risks.

SNS creates an easier platform for friends to help others with their schoolwork. One student explains how he uses Facebook for online support:

> Like at nighttime and like you're having problems with this science question, you can quickly go on Facebook and hope that person is online. You could just ask them.

Another student shares his experience with using Facebook for homework help:

> My thing that I really like about Facebook is that I can get help around 10:00(pm) if people and are online and stuff. And I probably wouldn't be doing that if I couldn't get that help. Because I wouldn't be able to finish my homework and still do that.

Many other students in the research group also note that they get to ask friends for help or clarification. There are definitely benefits to including SNS in formal education. Tutoring and help is one benefit and updating information and requirements is another. Every member of the research group mentioned that they use online chat as a strategy for improving homework. Two students described one time when they used Facebook for missing assignments because one student was sick. The healthy student provided the homework assignment and even listed all of the questions because the sick student didn't have her textbook. From these brief questions and chats, the students are able to balance their academic work and remain socially connected to their friends.

The students' secondary school also provided a guest speaker to lecture about the risks associated with SNS. This presentation helped the students see the importance and relevance of learning about the dangers of SNS and posting online. The guest speaker demonstrated how "everyone can see what you write" and "your posts will never be deleted." One student mentioned, "I went home and I changed everything." The students described the presentation as "scary" but "good." Aside from formal assemblies, the students also note that they would appreciate being taught how to use SNS better in their computer classes.

From the effectiveness of "scary" lectures on the risks of SNS use, to a desire to learn more about SNS in school, to using SNS to ask for help on schoolwork, the students illustrate the potential for SNS to be integrated in their formal education.

Concluding Thoughts

By working with students living in early adolescence, SNS is still a new experience. The students are able to describe their learning processes better because they are really trying to learn how to use SNS and how to integrate themselves into the larger world. I believe older students would know more about SNS and their place in the world and could possibly be less enthusiastic about learning. The students in early adolescents are very much in the beginning of their teen lives and they only have childhood behind them. The older students in the study illustrate more maturation and more experience, which lent a glimpse of where thirteen and fourteen year old students are developing. Reflecting upon the research decisions I am very happy to work with young adolescents. Their age brings enthusiasm, a little naïveté, and honesty.

These students also demonstrate that SNS use and the Internet do not hinder their development in early adolescence. Instead, these students suggest that SNS is only a new space with new techniques for socializing and growing up. Although SNS does create new challenges, such as online predators and violation of personal privacy, it also creates new and stronger personal connections. Friends can easily remain close, even if they move to other parts of the country. The students maintain close ties to their families in different parts of the world because SNS provides a platform for affordable, immediate, and personal communication. The students can now ask friends for help on their school work at all hours of the night, without worrying about the ringing of a telephone disturbing their sleeping family. There is a part of me that remains nostalgic and wishes these students would go to the roller rink or play street hockey in the lane in front of their

apartment buildings. In reality, however, the students do lead lives very similar to previous generations. As the students would pack up at the end of their meetings I would eavesdrop and listen to their plans for the rest of their afternoon. They still hang out at the mall with their friends. They still swing on playground swings while discussing their lives. They walk to the local strip mall for ice cream and slurpees. They still focus on intimate personal connections but they also adapt to include SNS and apply its lessons and opportunities to their lives.

SNS is an important tool in most aspects of adolescents' lives – social, academic, and family. It is also a common and preferred practice for adolescent decision-making, identity forming, and informal and formal learning. From the onset of the research process data were collected, transcribed, coded, revisited, re-coded, compared, grouped into common concepts, and categorized before a general theme was determined. Through this constant process, I learned that the students enjoy aspects of SNS on extrinsic and superficial levels but also benefit from the intrinsic principles of decision-making, identity forming, and learning.

In *choosing*, students follow a consistent process. At first they select one or many SNS to create profiles. On the SNS, they connect themselves to a social network and share stories, opinions, thoughts, and interests. With regards to their social network, the students include and exclude a variety of friends, classmates, teammates, peers, and family members. This selection process helps establish social boundaries as they gain independence from their families and explore new social interactions. With each post and

new "friend," the students also create an online identity, which helps shape their complete personal identity. The students' posts and profile decorations are often created to gain the attention of their peers. There are, however, many risks involved with their SNS decisions. As such, the students must make decisions about their audiences and posts that protect their identity, privacy, and self-image. *Choosing* begins the self-definition process of adolescence.

In *sharing*, the students explore and experiment with their connections to the larger world. They use SNS as a communication tool that replaces most other forms of communicating. Students no longer tie up family phone lines or waste valuable mobile phone minutes; instead they sign on to their SNS profile and happily chat, on and off, for hours. While sharing, students may briefly establish plans to meet friends at the mall or contribute their opinions about a favourite band to a larger audience or share a personal, but positive story. SNS becomes a platform for the students to express themselves in a wide variety of ways. As they express themselves, the students often find ways to embellish, elaborate or exaggerate their stories to develop a more exciting, entertaining, or positive self-image. When sharing, the students are making early decisions on how they want to be viewed in the world. The exploration and experimentation that occurs online helps them develop their own unique identity.

In *learning*, the students attain an awareness of their online presence, which contributes to their comprehension of their place in the larger, offline world. The students learn of how their online contributions can be seen by audiences, sometimes of their own

choosing and sometimes not, and that their posts have permanence in the online and offline worlds. *Learning* is also associated with the informal, and often indirect, lessons they master about SNS use. Although they may be selfish and will label teaching as "frustrating," the students will impart their SNS knowledge on friends and family. When teaching others, their own knowledge becomes more definite and dependable and their teaching helps them develop social bonds with their students. SNS also has many benefits for formal education as well. The students use SNS to ask for homework help late into the evening and collaborate on group projects. *Learning* helps the students develop socially and academically.

After describing the processes, benefits and risks associated with adolescent SNS use, I am convinced that SNS should be integrated and incorporated in formal education. With guidance from knowledgeable teachers, a new community of learning can emerge around SNS use and *choosing*, *sharing*, and *learning*.

CHAPTER 5 – TEACHING SNS

Teachers are continually integrating new technology into their classrooms. Televisions, computers, projectors, cameras, laptops, and iPads are examples of prevalent pieces of technology that are used in classrooms today. As a result, SNS are emerging as a strong educational tool. As mentioned in the literature review (chapter two), SNS are new spaces for older concepts of adolescent development. I feel relating SNS to older forms of development and socializing, like the mall or drive-in, will help teachers accommodate and embrace this change. I firmly believe that incorporating SNS into formal education settings can provide benefits for students, educators, and school staff.

Teaching SNS is an ongoing process. Lessons on the risks and dangers of SNS are easy to find, and in my opinion, teachers are already do a great job of scaring the students into being aware of these risks. As the research group demonstrated, schools have found effective way to warn students about the risks of inattentive SNS use. I surmise, however, that the emphasis should be on teaching SNS use. If SNS is a tool that adults commonly use, then students should also be taught how to use it as a tool for themselves.

Teaching SNS begins a journey. As a grade seven teacher, I have the ability to reform students' SNS use from inception. In my experience, grade seven students have started using SNS recently, if at all. By integrating SNS as a tool in my classroom, I can teach the potential of SNS in choosing, sharing, and learning.

The journey of bringing SNS into the classroom begins with the creation of a class or teacher SNS profile. Using SNS in the classroom will be new for me. I use blogging, class web pages, and digital sharing for a variety of class assignments and information, but have not used SNS explicitly in my teaching. As a new experience, I want to use SNS in a very controlled manner. At first I thought of obtaining parental consent and creating a Facebook page but thought the connection between students' personal profiles and their academic lives may be too risky. I found a balance between safety, ease of use, and standard SNS style in Edmodo.com.

Figure 5.1 – Edmodo (screen shot from edmodo.com)

Edmodo is self-described as:

> A secure, social learning platform for teachers, students, schools, and districts. We provide a safe and easy way for your class to connect and collaborate, share content and access homework, grades and school notices. Our goal is to help educators harness the power of social media to customize the classroom for each and every learner. (Edmodo, 2012)

Edmodo provides an opportunity to create a classroom SNS page, my own profile, as a

teacher, profiles for each of my future students, and the ability for parents to view

assignments, calendars, and even possibly grades. Through implementing a classroom

SNS strategy, teaching about SNS will become a common occurrence. The teaching ideas

included in this chapter use Edmodo as the website of choice, unless noted otherwise.

This chapter is written from the perspective of the previous chapter (chapter four – The

Students' Responses). All of my teaching ideas come from the research, the students'

responses, my interpretations, investigations, and analysis of our work together. To write

this chapter, I restudied the transcriptions, codes, concepts, notes, outlines, and final

written work to compare and connect ideas from previous literature and my research that

will directly affect my teaching.

Choosing

SNS provides many different choices for myself as an educator and as a SNS user. It is

my ambition to guide students through their choices with the aspiration that they will

construct fewer or smaller boundaries between themselves and trusted adults. I wish to

guide my students through deciding which websites are appropriate for different purposes

and best for their privacy and safety. I also want to discuss the social intricacies of

including and excluding peers on SNS and the warnings and risks of strangers and their

profile. While implementing formal lessons around SNS use, I want the students to

develop their own online identity by decorating their own profile and contributing to our

online classroom community. I want to create more of a connection between trusted adults and youth through regular use and formal lessons.

The choice of SNS for appropriate classroom use is limited. Although Facebook is one of the most common SNS (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010) and has a teacher resource page, the minimum age for a profile is 13 years old (Facebook, 2012), which would prohibit the use of Facebook in an elementary school setting. I have seen other teachers ask parents for consent to create Facebook profiles and use Facebook in the classroom but I decided to use an educational SNS, such as Edmodo. I believe this would create a safer and more trustworthy online community among teachers, students, school staff, and parents. However, I can guide students through different SNS and other websites to show the positive and negative aspects of other sites and their most appropriate purposes. Each form of SNS is unique and there are uses for all of them; however, the class' SNS profile is a place for learning, communicating, and sharing, not thousands of cat pictures. I can observe and direct students through their personal choices when choosing a SNS and creating their initial profiles. I must also create rules about our classroom profile to show that SNS is not a free-for-all and that a sense of respectful and appropriate decorum must be maintained. I can incorporate other SNS, such as Facebook, when discussing our class' SNS choices.

When creating a classroom profile, I can also teach about the etiquette of adding or declining friend requests. Although we will not prevent any member of our own class from joining our profile, I can use the introduction to our profile and adding students as

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an example of how to make proper choices. I can also use our class' SNS profile as an example of the possibilities of connecting with friends and family from other parts of our district or our world. I know of other teachers that use the Edmodo website and these connections can easily be used as real examples. I can also instruct students about the warnings, dangers, and risks associated with strangers and SNS when teaching about adding or declining connections with others.

Teaching privacy is an important part of using SNS in the classroom. Privacy lessons can begin with the value of creating a strong but memorable password and establishing manageable but firm privacy and security settings. Classroom SNS also provide an opportunity to teach the significance of disclosing personal information online. The goal for the class should be to include enough information to be recognized by friends but private enough to remain distant from strangers. Most of the lessons about student privacy will be teacher-directed at the beginning of our use and can be monitored throughout the school year.

Lessons on the creation of a personal identity will be informal. It is important that enough time is given to the students for independent choices to develop their identity. One goal of the classroom profile page is to establish unique identities as part of a larger community. This allows for individual freedom but also firmly establishes that there is an audience that views and comments on personal contributions. The students and I can have conversations about how the choices made on SNS, such as the choice of language, types of pictures, and styles of posts, can be declarations of personalities and that they need to

be conscious of what their decisions say about themselves. I will observe the students' choices and guide students towards balanced profile creation.

Another goal of the classroom profile page is to remove, alter, or minimize the social boundaries between trusted adults and adolescents. Once the classroom SNS is established, the students can become the experts and subsequently teach their parents about our SNS profile. It is important to mention to the students that the boundaries they are beginning to build are an acceptable part of their personal development. They should feel comfortable with keeping some information to themselves, as they grow independent. I can use myself as an example and that my profile will have "secret teacher stuff" on it that I wouldn't want students to see. However, it is also imperative for the students to learn that they should be using SNS and sharing posts that are positive and acceptable for their age level. An easy way to teach these differences is to discuss the consequences of mistakenly showing an adult an inappropriate post. Students should feel free to privately express themselves online but shouldn't be concerned about the consequences of their posts. It is understandable that the students will find their own private space online; yet the students will learn that SNS is not just an adolescent or teen space by working along with parents and teachers. Teaching and using SNS together helps remove or minimize some social boundaries and it shows the students that connections between youth and adults are acceptable in trusted and appropriate circumstances.

Establishing a classroom SNS profile provides an opportunity for direct and indirect

lessons on appropriate SNS choices. I can instruct students about how to choose

acceptable SNS, create a personal but private profile, accept friends without excluding

peers, remain available to friends and family without sacrificing personal privacy and

security, and develop as unique individuals in an online space. I believe these lessons on

choice will help establish a solid classroom SNS profile and a more unified learning

community.

Figure 5.2 – Integration of SNS in the classroom

Choose appropriate SNS

Create unique identities in a community of learners

Establish appropriate etiquette.

Teach privacy

Teach inclusion

Integration of classroom SNS
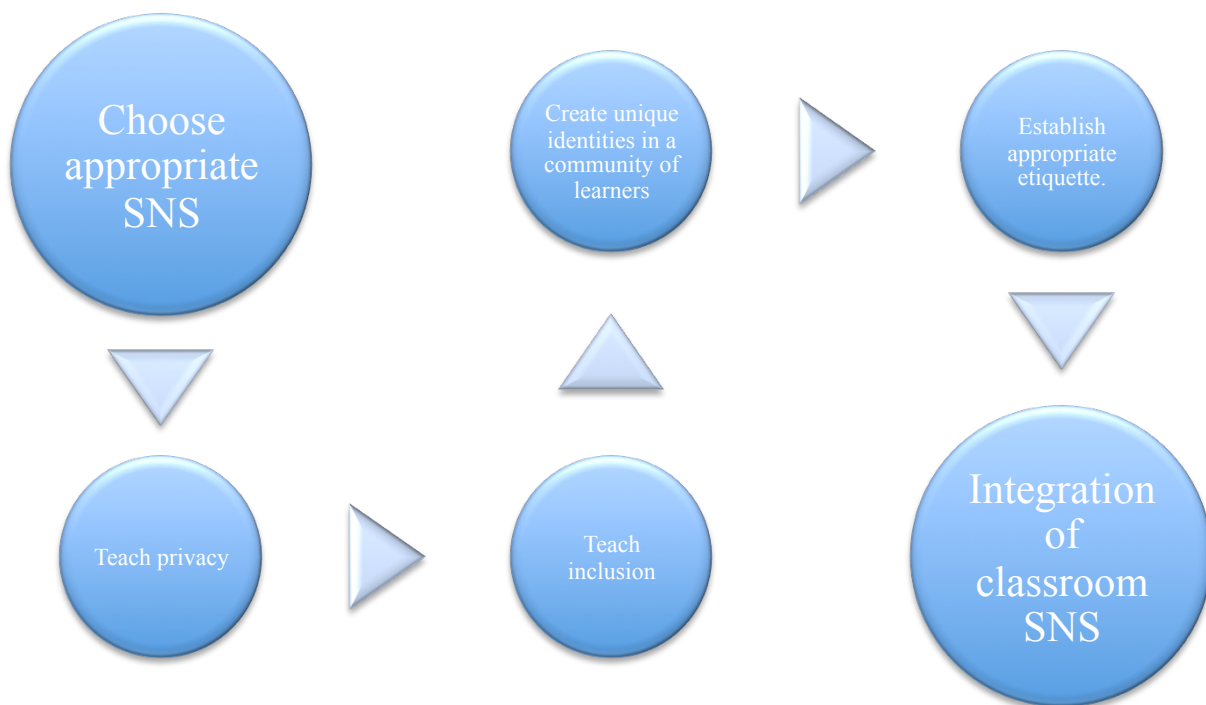
Sharing

A classroom SNS profile provides a unique and exciting opportunity for students to share themselves online. Students can use SNS to share thoughts and ideas about current assignments, lessons, and academic topics. Assignments can be uploaded to the class' SNS profile for parents to see and comment. I can also instruct the students on acceptable SNS etiquette and different writing styles by sharing on SNS. Together the students and I can learn how to communicate, post, tell stories, and express ourselves in a safe online space.

There are many different ways to use SNS to communicate. There are many different areas among a classroom SNS profile that can be used to communicate to students, staff, and parents. At first it will be important to describe the different forms of communication that the students and their parents can use on the classroom profile. The students and I will be able to use our classroom SNS profile to send private messages, post on the profile's home page, comment on uploaded assignments, and generate online discussions. The SNS profile also includes a calendar that will include important due dates, non-instructional days, holidays, assemblies, and field trips. Assignments, quizzes, and grades (privately) can also be posted to the classroom SNS profile. I used a class website during the last academic year to post homework due dates, special event information, and website links for different subjects, but adopting a new SNS model increases the amount of material that can be posted and the accessibility and interaction for students and parents. I find posting information online is much more effective than only using student planners and verbal reminders. Most students have Internet access in their homes or on

their phones; therefore, they can always check the class website or SNS profile for homework or important events. Parents will have access to the calendars, activities, and their child's grades. As the teacher and primary account holder, I will have the ability to control the students' and parents' access. I will be able to teach various forms of communicating with SNS through an ongoing series of informal lessons and observations. Communicating will naturally occur because it is the most common use of SNS.

Teaching how and when to post will also be an important component of a classroom SNS profile. Using SNS as a class will provide an opportunity for me to teach proper online etiquette. The research group showed that posting on SNS is usually a one-sided relationship; however, posting and receiving feedback helps maintain relationships and develop social skills. Students also need to learn to use acceptable language in a variety of contexts. SNS provides the possibility to teach the differences between informal and formal language and when to use each. Another lesson on posting could involve creating short but powerful texts. Since writing on SNS is very concise it is important for students to learn how to best express themselves in a short amount of space. One idea I have is to create a series of Twitter-length (140 characters or fewer) responses during a novel study. By restricting the volume of writing, students can feel less daunted by the task but will really need to focus on word choice and syntax to convey short and powerful pieces of writing. Other lesson on posting etiquette would be the difference between gossip, rumors, and anecdotes. It is important to ask for permission before posting about others and in the right context sharing funny or casual stories is acceptable forms of posting. In

addition, the students need to learn about how posting rumors or gossip can hurt others and damage their own reputations. Another valuable use for posting on the classroom profile is to share links and extra information. By creating a platform for students to share ideas and findings, the students can take more ownership over their learning. Throughout the school year, I will have the opportunity to help students create online contributions, learn about integrating SNS and the Internet into their learning, and monitor their posts. As the involvement of SNS in the classroom develops, I hope to provide less feedback as other classmates contribute more.
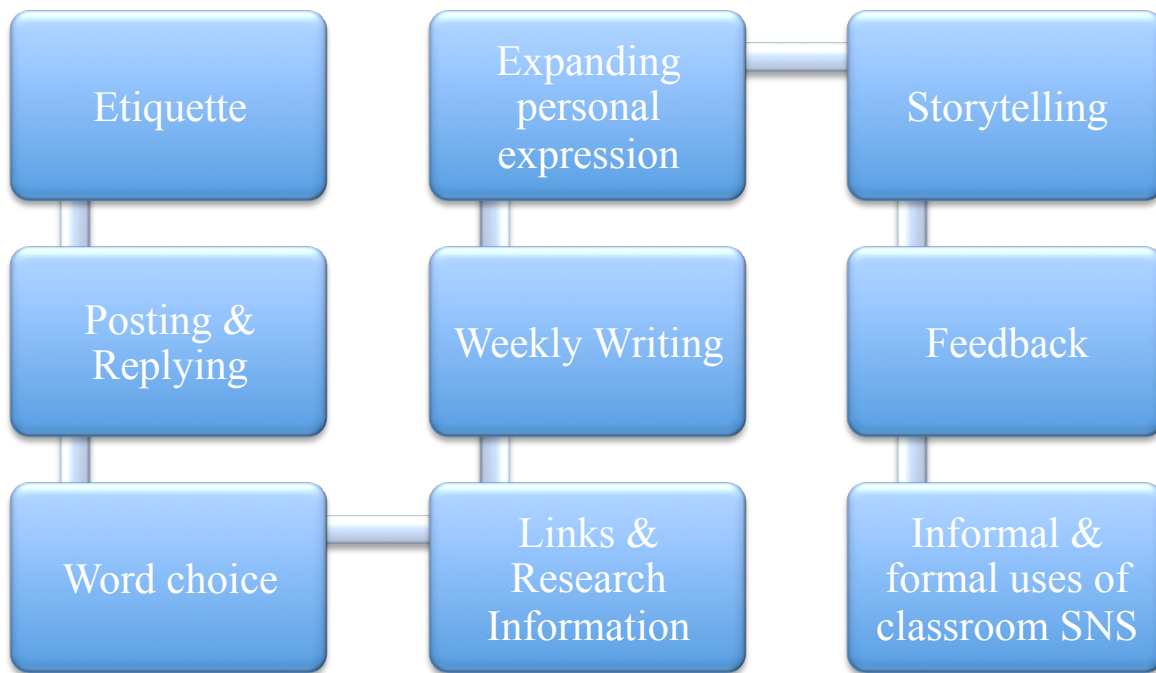
I aspire to create a community of sharing on the classroom SNS profile. Aside from communicating and posting, I hope that stories will eventually be told on our profile. One benefit of using SNS to share stories is the diversity of techniques available to share stories. Students can write text, create audio podcasts, or upload personal videos about their own stories. I want to encourage the students to use SNS to share about themselves to become more comfortable with different methods of expression. I will not expect, nor desire, overpowering waves of emotion but do wish students share more about what is important in their lives. In a previous teaching assignment, I incorporated personal writing in a weekly exercise and I hope to move that assignment to the classroom SNS profile. At first the writing can be directed solely to me but as students become more comfortable with posting online, I hope that the writing will be shared with the class and their parents. I also recognize that storytelling will only be positive stories at first, but I can model how to share appropriate sad, or unfortunate, or angry, or disappointing stories as the year progresses. I can also demonstrate how to edit stories on SNS to show proper

language use and the inclusion of appropriate and important, but not too personal, details. As a class, we can explore ways that SNS can be used to find help, advice, and report problems. There are a variety of methods and techniques that can be used to share online stories in the classroom.

SNS also provide an opportunity to teach self-expression. From posting a link to sharing a personal story to uploading a meaningful video, SNS can be used to disclose self in a variety of ways. I can implement different forms of media, such as pictures, video, and audio, as methods for the students to express themselves. I can also use SNS to validate thoughts, ideas, and feelings. I think it is very important for the class to become involved in giving feedback to their peers when posting. Although self-expression is a major goal of incorporating SNS in the classroom, I appreciate that every student is different and every student will feel comfortable contributing different amounts; therefore, I do not expect grand contributions but only that the students develop and grow as writers and communicators.

Developing SNS within the classroom opens new potential for students and teachers to share themselves and their stories. I believe a stronger network of communication will develop with the integration of SNS in my classroom. Information will be much more readily available and students will have more access to their learning outside of regular school hours. It is my aspiration to create an online space that students, adults, and educators can contribute for the betterment of the class and our development.

Figure 5.3 – Sharing with a classroom profile

Etiquette	Expanding personal expression	Storytelling
Posting & Replying	Weekly Writing	Feedback
Word choice	Links & Research Information	Informal & formal uses of classroom SNS

Learning

Using SNS should not be a punishable activity. Instead, parents and teachers should educate youth on how to use SNS appropriately. It is important to see how the students learn about SNS for me to know how to teach it. A goal of integrating SNS in my classroom is to teach my students how to use SNS effectively and judiciously. I believe the students will learn how to use specific facets of SNS as well as develop a better understanding of their online presence. I also hope to use the classroom SNS profile to encourage cooperation and patience by giving the students more responsibility for their learning. I believe that by establishing this classroom profile, students will have more access to academic help and advice than they did before.

One of the most important lessons early adolescents should learn about SNS is that they become public figures when they contribute online. Many educators already teach the dangers of SNS; therefore, I want to use the classroom SNS profile as a real-world example of the power of SNS. Although youth may think their private messages will stay private, their most personal correspondence is a simple "copy and paste" away from being spread throughout the world. Adolescent messages are often not substantial enough to warrant worldwide attention; however, a tiny piece of gossip or an ill-worded line in a private chat could be enough to collapse their social circles. Teaching preparation and prevention are important at stopping inappropriate posts before they happen; students also need to learn about what to do after an online mistake has been made. SNS provides instant opportunities to admit mistakes, promote honesty, and apologize for hurtful or embarrassing messages. Forgiveness is another valuable lesson that the class can learn from the implementation SNS in the classroom.

Through direct teaching, modeling, observation, and discussion I will use our classroom SNS profile to demonstrate the power and reach of SNS. I can also use our profile to illustrate the use of social media to influence and advertise to youth. I want to show the positive and negative aspects of companies being on SNS. For example, a car manufacturer bombarding my personal messages with "limited-time deals" is negative but learning about an upcoming charitable event can be positive. I can teach students to use the influence of SNS to their advantage by sharing interests and opinions in powerful but brief messages. The incorporation of classroom SNS profiles will demonstrate the

students' presence in the world, the effects their contributions have on their friends and family, and the permanence of their actions.

I believe that the discovery of different aspects of SNS should be organic and unique to each student. At first I want to model for students how to find our own answers by utilizing specific language on search engines and help sections. There will be many lessons on the basics of establishing a SNS profile, such as disclosure of personal information, uploading a picture, and reorganizing security and privacy settings; however, freedom should be given to students to create profiles that promote their own identities and personalities. The biggest goal for integrating SNS into my classroom is to build more of a community of learners; therefore, I need to give time to the students to explore, experiment, and discover on their own. Once they have begun developing their own online identities, I will encourage students to share their findings and creations. While students construct their online selves, I will observe and work with them on an individual basis to help them achieve their personal goals. As the research group demonstrated, students learn about SNS in many different ways; and so, I will implement a variety of teaching strategies to instruct and guide the students' learning, such as direct teaching, modeling, group or partner work, student led instruction, independent exploration, and individual research. While learning about SNS, it will be important to learn from our mistakes; accordingly, I will be forthright with my own mistakes and show that extra work can usually make up for our errors. Eventually, I want the students to become the experts, take ownership of their learning and development, and be able to share their knowledge with others.

As the research group illustrated, SNS are already being used for homework help. I will

embrace that collaboration. On the class SNS profile, they can post questions for

clarification or assistance and I will encourage students to respond. I too will make

myself more accessible, but will remind them that there are limits. Students can seek

clarification or ask for help but ultimately, they are responsible for their learning. If help

is not received, the students must try without it and ask for help from me in person the

following day. I can introduce the Edmodo app, so students can view and contribute to

the class' profile from their phones or tables so that access to the class community is

completely mobile. Since I will move from a class website to a SNS profile, the

connection between student, teacher, and parent is much stronger and collaborative.

Concluding Thoughts

I believe that the entire strategy of implementing SNS pedagogy in the classroom will

academically benefit the students. Teachers and students will meet in the middle by using

the students' preferred tools (Internet, SNS, mobile phones) but on the teachers' terms.

The combination of learning and SNS use will, hopefully, develop more responsible,

accountable, and creative learners. As I discover new aspects and benefits of

incorporating SNS into my teaching methods while writing this chapter, I am excited, and

a little intimidated, to start this new project. From my experience, most teachers feel

proud for teaching students only about the dangers of SNS. Now, I need to move beyond

teaching dangers and risks, remove the social stigma around adolescent SNS use, and

embrace SNS as a transformative teaching tool in my classroom.

EPILOGUE

After a yearlong process of my personal faculty changes, applications, proposals, meetings, emails, discussions, transcriptions, and much writing, I am tired. But, I am also invigorated. The findings in this study demonstrate that my aspiration to use SNS as a teaching tool in the classroom can come true. I am encouraged to try something new and to unsettle the sometimes stagnant teaching practices that have developed over the past six years. When I enter my classroom in September, I will be optimistic, yet not naïve, that I can successfully alter my teaching to better address the needs of my new class. And in time, when I feel the hunger for change again, maybe studying the effects of integrating SNS in a real classroom environment will make for a fascinating Ph.D. project.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Student Consent Letter

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
Faculty *of* Education | UBC

UBC Faculty of Education
Department of Curriculum and Pedagogy
2125 Man Mall
Vancouver, BC, Canada V6T 1Z4

April 18, 2012

Tel: 604-822-5337
Fax: 604-822-4714

Sharing Online Stories:
A qualitative study of the decisions early adolescents make when posting on social
network sites and creating online/real selves

Student Consent Form

Who is doing this study?

Principal Investigator:
Dr. Karen Meyer
University of British Columbia (UBC)
██████

Co-Investigator:
Brett Cameron
Master of Arts: Educational Inquiry
University of British Columbia (UBC)
Grade 7 Teacher – ████ Elementary
████████

The research from this study will be used for completion of a graduate thesis and will be
made available to University of British Columbia (UBC) for review.

Why are we doing this study?

Social network sites (Facebook, MySpace, etc.) perform a variety of roles. They give us a
chance to talk with friends, explore different interests and share our thoughts. This study
will explore the decisions youth make when posting stories, opinions and ideas online.
You have been chosen to contribute your thoughts on what you and others create and
share online. This study aims to increase awareness of the role of social network sites in
the lives of youth.

What happens if you say, "Yes, I want to be in the study"?

At any point in the study, you may decide to end participation and can leave the study at any time.

If you participate in this study you will complete a brief survey about your regular Internet habits. You will also participate in three group discussions. The group discussions will occur after school hours in a classroom at Guildford Park secondary or Holly Elementary (10719 150 Street). The group size will range from 3-8 students.

The first group discussion will take 30 minutes after school. In this discussion we will review and clarify the survey. You will also discuss your opinions about how youth learn about social network sites, create their own profiles and decide what information they share online.

The second group discussion will take 60 minutes after school. It will focus on discussing three case studies. All stories and characters in theses case studies are fictional and created for this study. The first case study is about a grade 8 girl's successful basketball game. The second story is about a grade 8 boy watching a fight after school. The final case study is about a grade 9 boy learning about his mom's cancer diagnosis. As part of a small group, you will discuss the decisions you would make about possibly posting each story online.

The third and final group discussion will take 30 minutes after school. During this discussion you will briefly review the case studies from the previous discussion. You will also discuss the connections between posting online and communicating in real life.

If you decide to participate, you will spend a total of two hours in small group discussions over four weeks. At any point, you can decide to end participation.

Our group discussions will be recorded. These audio recordings will be kept in a private and locked filing cabinet by co-investigator, Brett Cameron. Your participation will be made anonymous in all transcripts. The audio recordings and transcripts will be destroyed in accordance with UBC guidelines five years after the completion of this study.

Study Results

The results of this study will be reported in a graduate thesis.

Can anything bad happen if I join this study?

We do not believe there is anything in this study that could harm you. Due to the nature of group discussions, some questions or comments may seem personal. You do not have to answer any question or comment if you do not wish, and you can leave the study at any time.

Will being in this study help you in any way?

By taking part in this study you may develop a better understanding of the effects of posting and sharing online. Although participation might not directly benefit you, we feel that, in the future, others may benefit from what we learn in this study. We hope that parents and teachers will see the use of social network sites as an opportunity to expand student learning and development.

Confidentiality

Your confidentiality will be respected. Information that discloses your identity will not be released without your consent unless required by law. All documents will be identified by a code number and kept in a locked filing cabinet. All data and recordings will be kept on a password-protected computer. Participants will not be identified by name in any reports of the completed study. Due to the nature of discussion groups we cannot control what participants do with the information discussed; however we encourage participants not to discuss the content of the discussions to people outside the group. At any point in the study, it you reveal there has been an incident that involves abuse and/or neglect of a child (or that there is a risk of such occurring) please be advised that the researcher must, by law, report this information to the appropriate authorities.

Who can you talk to if you have questions about the study?

If you have any questions or concerns about what we are asking of you, please contact the study leader or one of the study staff. The names and telephone numbers are listed at the top of the first page of this form.

Who can you talk to if you have complaints or concerns about the study?

If you have any concerns about your rights as a research subject and/or your experiences while participating in this study, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at 604-822-8598 or if long distance e-mail RSIL@ors.ubc.ca or call toll free 1-877-822-8598.

Participant Consent and Signature Page

Taking part in this study is entirely up to you. You have the right to refuse to participate in this study. If you decide to take part, you may choose to pull out of the study at any time without giving a reason and without any negative impact on your class standing.

Your signature below indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records.
Your signature indicates that you consent to participate in this study.

_____   _____
Participant Signature   Date

_____
Printed Name of the Participant signing above

Appendix 2 – Parental Consent Letter

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Faculty of Education UBC

UBC Faculty of Education
Department of Curriculum and Pedagogy
2125 Man Mall
Vancouver, BC, Canada V6T 1Z4

Tel: 604-822-5337
Fax: 604-822-4714

April 18, 2012

Sharing Online Stories:
A qualitative study of the decisions early adolescents make when posting on social network sites and creating online/real selves

Parental Consent Form

Who is doing this study?

Principal Investigator:
Dr. Karen Meyer
University of British Columbia (UBC)
███████████

Co-Investigator:
Brett Cameron
Master of Arts: Educational Inquiry
University of British Columbia (UBC)
Grade 7 Teacher – ████ Elementary
███████████

The research from this study will be used for completion of a graduate thesis and will be made available to University of British Columbia (UBC) for review.

Why are we doing this study?

Social network sites (Facebook, MySpace, etc.) perform a variety of roles. They give youth an opportunity to talk with friends, explore different interests and share their thoughts. This study will explore the decisions youth make when posting stories, opinions and ideas online. Your child has been chosen to contribute his/her thoughts about creating and sharing online. This study aims to increase awareness of the role of social network sites in the lives of our children and students.

What happens if you say, "Yes, I want my child to be in the study"?

At any point in the study, you or your child may decide to end participation.

If you allow your child to participate in this study he/she will complete a brief survey about his/her regular Internet habits. Your child will also participate in three group discussions. The group discussions will occur after school hours in a classroom at Guildford Park secondary or Holly Elementary (10719 150 Street). The group size will range from 3-8 participants.

The first group discussion will take 30 minutes after school. In this discussion we will review and clarify the survey. We will also discuss how youth learn about social network sites, create their own profiles and decide what information they share online.

The second group discussion will take 60 minutes after school. It will focus on discussing three case studies. All stories and characters in theses case studies are fictional and were created for this study. The first case study is about a grade 8 girl's successful basketball game. The second case study is about a grade 8 boy watching a fight after school. The final case study is about a grade 9 boy learning about his mom's cancer diagnosis. Your child, as part of a small group, will discuss the decisions he/she would make about possibly posting each story online; if he/she would actually post these stories online.

The third and final group discussion will take 30 minutes after school. During this discussion we will briefly review the case studies from the previous discussion. We will also discuss the connections between posting online and communicating in real life.

If you and your child decide to participate, your child will spend a total of two hours in small group discussions over four weeks. At any point, you or your child can decide to end participation.

Our group discussions will be recorded. These audio recordings will be kept in a private and locked filing cabinet by co-investigator, Brett Cameron. The participants will be made anonymous in all transcripts. The audio recordings and transcripts will be destroyed in accordance with UBC guidelines five years after the completion of this study.

Study Results

The results of this study will be reported in a graduate thesis.

Can anything bad happen to my child if he/she joins this study?

We do not believe there is anything in this study that could harm your child. Due to the nature of group discussions, some questions or comments may seem personal. Students in this study do not have to answer any question if they do wish, and any parent or student may choose to end participation in the study.

Will being in this study help your child in any way?

By taking part in this study your child may develop a better understanding of the effects of posting and sharing online. Although participation might not directly benefit your child, we feel that in the future others may benefit from what we learn in this study regarding the use of social network sites by youth.

Confidentiality

Your child's confidentiality will be respected. Information that discloses your child's identity will not be released without your consent unless required by law. All documents will be identified by a code number and kept in a locked filing cabinet. All data and recordings will be kept on a password-protected computer. Participants will not be identified by name in any reports of the completed study. Due to the nature of discussion groups we cannot control what participants do with the information discussed; however we encourage participants not to discuss the content of the discussions to people outside the group. At any point in the study, it you or your child reveals there has been an incident that involves abuse and/or neglect of a child (or that there is a risk of such occurring) please be advised that the researcher must, by law, report this information to the appropriate authorities.

Who can you talk to if you have questions about the study?

If you or your child has any questions or concerns about what we are asking of you and/or your child, please contact the study leader or one of the study staff. The names and telephone numbers are listed at the top of the first page of this form.

Who can you talk to if you have complaints or concerns about the study?

If you have any concerns about your rights as a research subject and/or your experiences while participating in this study, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at 604-822-8598 or if long distance e-mail RSIL@ors.ubc.ca or call toll free 1-877-822-8598. If you decide to take part, you may choose to pull out of the study at any time without giving a reason and without any negative impact on your child's class standing.

Parent and/or Guardian Consent and Signature Page

Taking part in this study is entirely up to you. You have the right to refuse to participate in this study. If you decide to take part, you may choose to pull out of the study at any time without giving a reason and without any negative impact on your child's class standing.

Your signature below indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records.
Your signature indicates that you consent to participate in this study.

I consent/I do not consent (circle one) to my child's participation in the study

_____   _____

Parent or Guardian Signature   Date

_____

Printed Name of the Parent or Guardian signing above

Appendix 3 – Introductory Letter and Initial Survey

Brett Cameron

UBC and ▮ Elementary

▮ Street• Surrey, BC V▮ ▮• Phone: ▮ • E-Mail: ▮

Date: April 26, 2012

Hello,

Thank you for participating in our study on youth and social network sites.

The purpose of this study is to develop an understanding of the role of social network sites in the lives of adolescents by investigating the influences, learning and choices they make when posting about themselves online.

To begin we ask that you fill out a brief survey to help us learn about your Internet practices.

This survey will be used to understand how you use the Internet and how you use social network sites (Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, Nexopia, Google+, Friendster, Habbo, etc.).

Please choose the answers that are closest to your actual use of the Internet. We have added space for you to write your own response if we have forgotten to add something important. If a question does not apply to you, please leave that question blank

Remember your participation in this study is completely voluntary, if you are not comfortable answering a question, please leave that question blank. You may end your participation in this study at any time.

Sincerely,

Brett Cameron
Co-Investigator
Grade 7 Teacher – ▮ Elementary (SD36)

SOS: Sharing Online Stories-Protocol 1 – Initial Survey

Please choose the answers that are closest to your actual use of the Internet. If you are not comfortable answering a question or it does not apply to you, please leave that question blank.

1. Do you have access to the Internet?
    a. Yes
    b. No

2. Where do you access the Internet most?
    a. Home
    b. School
    c. Library
    d. Smartphone (iPhone, Blackberry, etc.)
    e. Friend's home
    f. Other (please tell us another area we forgot: _____)

3. How many individual times do you access the Internet in an average week?
    a. 5+ times everyday (28+ times per week)
    b. 2 – 4 times everyday (14-28 times per week)
    c. Once, 1 time, every day (7 times per week)
    d. 2 – 3 times per week
    e. Once, 1 time, per week
    f. Never

4. How many social network sites (Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, Nexopia, Google+, Friendster, Habbo, etc.) do you have an account with and participate on?
    a. 3 or more
    b. 2
    c. 1
    d. 0

5. How often do you access (log in) to a social network site (Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, Nexopia, Google+, Friendster, Habbo, etc.)?
    a. 5 or more times every day
    b. 2 – 4 times every day
    c. 1 time every day
    d. 2 – 3 times per week
    e. Once (1 time) per week
    f. Never

6. Rank you favourite social network sites (1-your most favourite to 12-your least favourite. Please write NA if you do not know of or use that site)
   a. _____ Twitter
   b. _____ Habbo
   c. _____ Facebook
   d. _____ Bebo
   e. _____ Google+
   f. _____ MySpace
   g. _____ Friendster
   h. _____ hi5
   i. _____ Xanga
   j. _____ Nexopia
   k. _____ WeeWorld
   l. _____ Other (please tell us what we missed _____)

7. Because of privacy concerns, are you more comfortable sharing on specific social network sites rather than others? Rank these social network sites in order of privacy (1 – most private to 12 – least private. Please write NA if you do not know of or use that site)
   a. _____ Twitter
   b. _____ Habbo
   c. _____ Facebook
   d. _____ Bebo
   e. _____ Google+
   f. _____ MySpace
   g. _____ Friendster
   h. _____ hi5
   i. _____ Xanga
   j. _____ Nexopia
   k. _____ WeeWorld
   l. _____ Other (please tell us what we missed _____)

8. What do you share or post on social network sites (Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, Nexopia, Google+, Friendster, Habbo, etc.)? Please check all that apply.
   a. Stories about activities (going to the mall or the movies, playing sports, etc.) with friends.
   b. Stories about activities (meals, trips, etc.) with your family.
   c. Stories about school (test scores, sports, clubs, something that happened in class).
   d. Your feelings and/or emotions (happy, sad, angry, frustrated, excited)
   e. Your dreams and/or goals (school goals, sports goals, career dreams, etc.)
   f. Your opinions about music, movies, sports, school, celebrities, etc.
   g. Your thoughts or opinions about people you know
   h. Other (please tell us what we forgot _____)

9. Other than using text (typing), how do you share online? Please check all that apply.
   a. Pictures
   b. Videos you've created and uploaded
   c. Videos other people created and uploaded (eg. YouTube)
   d. Links to other websites
   e. Music you've created
   f. Music other people have created (ex. Jango, Grooveshark, etc.)
   g. Other (please tell us what we forgot _____)

Questions 10 – 13 refer to people that may or may not have access to your online profile(s). These questions specifically ask whom you permit to view your profile(s), by accepting as a "friend" on an online social network site or by allowing access to your profile through your security/privacy settings.

10. What peers or classmates have access (can view and/or post) to your social network site profile(s)? Please check all that apply.
    a. Close friends (friends you socialize with outside of school daily)
    b. Casual friends (friends you socialize with outside of school weekly)
    c. Acquaintances (peers you see and/or talk to regularly – usually in an organized school, team or club setting)
    d. Peers known to you (may not talk to these people but your recognize them)
    e. Peers unknown to you (do not recognize these people)
    f. None (You do not share an online profile with peers and/or classmates)
    g. Other (please tell us what we forgot _____)

11. What family members have access (can view and/or post) to your social network site profile(s)? Please check all that apply.
    a. Mother
    b. Father
    c. Brother
    d. Sister
    e. Aunt
    f. Uncle
    g. Grandparent
    h. Cousins
    i. None (you do not share an online profile with members of your family)
    j. Other (please tell us what we forgot _____)

12. What adults in a school setting have access (can view and/or post) to your social network site profile(s)? Please check all that apply.
   a. Teacher
   b. Student teacher
   c. School volunteer
   d. Principal and/or Vice Principal
   e. Counselor
   f. Program leader
   g. Coach
   h. Education Assistant
   i. None (you do not share an online profile with adults from a school setting)
   j. Other (please tell us what we forgot _____)

13. What adults outside of a school setting have access (can view and/or post) to your social network site profile(s)? Please check all that apply.
   a. Coach
   b. Recreation centre employee
   c. Church leader
   d. Program leader (Scouts, cadets, etc.)
   e. Counselor
   f. Family friend
   g. Co-worker
   h. None (you do not share an online profile with adults outside of a school setting)
   i. Other (please tell us what we forgot _____)

14. How do you decide *not* to add or block a person from viewing your online social network site profile(s)? Please check all that apply.
   a. Person is unknown to you
   b. Person is known to you but you do not want that connection
   c. Language used when posting or requesting an online connection
   d. Image or picture of that person
   e. An online connection would be uncomfortable and/or unprofessional
   f. Do not like that person
   g. Other (please tell us what we forgot _____)

15. Who helped you learn about social network sites the most? (1 – helped you the most to 12 – helped you the least. Please write NA if that person did not help you use social network sites).
    a. _____ Friends
    b. _____ Parents
    c. _____ Older siblings (sisters and/or brothers)
    d. _____ Younger sibling (sisters and/or brothers)
    e. _____ Cousins
    f. _____ Aunts and/or uncles
    g. _____ Family members of friends
    h. _____ Strangers
    i. _____ Acquaintances (friends of friends, classmates you don't talk with outside of school)
    j. _____ Teachers and/or other school staff
    k. _____ Adults outside of school (coaches, members/leaders of a church organizations, etc.)
    l. _____ Other (please tell us who we forgot _____)

16. Other than social network sites (Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, Nexopia, Google+, Friendster, Habbo, etc.), in what ways do you share stories and thoughts?
    a. Email
    b. Phone
    c. Face to face conversations
    d. Text message
    e. Online message program (MSN, AIM, Yahoo, ICQ, Gtalk, etc.)

17. Compared to your friends, do you post online:
    a. More
    b. Less
    c. The same amount
    d. I don't know
    e. This doesn't apply to me

18. Compared to your parents, do you post online:
    a. More
    b. Less
    c. The same amount
    d. I don't know
    e. This doesn't apply to me

19. Compared to your brothers and/or sisters, do you post online:
    a. More
    b. Less
    c. The same amount
    d. I don't know
    e. This doesn't apply to me

Appendix 4 – Group Discussion Questions and Cases (Initial)

Protocol 2 – Group Discussion 1
(Full group participation of 6-8 participants for 30 minutes)

Purpose of discussion 1:

- Focus on clarifying, discussing and elaborating the initial survey (protocol 1)

Discussion 1 Questions:

1. Are there any questions and/or answers from the survey that surprised you?
2. How do you feel about social network sites?
3. Love them, hate them, useful, help procrastinate, indifferent?
4. How do you learn to use social network sites?
5. Friends, families, watching others?
6. When first creating an online profile did you jump right in or did you join and observe others first?
7. Did you mimic what others post and how others create their profiles or did you create an individualized profile?
8. Do you feel more control when sharing through different forms online (email-Facebook-twitter)?
9. Do you see some social network sites as more private than others?
10. Is it easier to post and share on some sites more than others?
11. How do you decide how to share an idea, event or situation?
12. Something happens, do you consciously think about putting it on Facebook, tweeting it, personal email, text or telling in person?
13. Are there levels to how and what you share?

Protocol 3 – Case Study Group Discussions
(2 smaller group discussions of 3-4 participants for 60 minutes each)

Purpose of discussion 2:
Read and discuss 3 case studies to understand choices adolescents make when sharing a variety of personal stories on social network sites

Case Study 1-Minor personal event

Ashley

14-year-old female

Grade 8 student at John Abbott Secondary School

Background:
- Lives in an apartment with her mom, dad and younger sister

- Both parents work changing shifts

- Has a small but strong circle of friends (3-4 girls)

- Well liked by her classmates but is not "the most popular girl" in grade 8

- Is a C+/B student

- Is well liked by her teachers but needs reminders to focus on her work more than talking with classmates

- Participates in the anime club

- Member of, but not starter on, the volleyball team and

- Non-starting forward of the basketball team

- Shares a computer with her sister but his kept in her bedroom

Event:
On a Friday afternoon, Ashley's basketball team has regular season game at Joe Clark Secondary School. Her team is having a successful (5 wins and 2 losses) season. Ashley plays one brief shift in the first quarter and sits on the bench cheering for her team for the rest of the first half. Two minutes into the third quarter and with the score tied, John Abbott Secondary School's starting forward sprains her ankle after jumping for a rebound. Ashley's coach tells her that she will be playing for the rest of the game and she should try her best. Although Ashley is nervous and can feel the pressure to perform, she

tries her best. For the remainder of the third quarter, Ashley runs hard, guards well and scores two baskets. In the fourth quarter, Ashley shines and she scores 6 baskets. Partly because of Ashley's effort, John Abbott Secondary School defeats Joe Clark Secondary and adds one more win to their season.

Post Event:

After the game, the girls go back to John Abbott Secondary School to change and gather their backpacks. They are happy and excited. They take their time leaving the school by sharing stories about the game. Eventually, they all walk to their respective homes. When Ashley gets home, her parents have left for work. Her mom has left her a note that reads:

> Hey Ashley,
>
> We have been cheering and hoping for you. It's too bad we missed you but we had to go to work. We can't wait to hear all about your game when we get home, if you're still awake or tomorrow morning at breakfast. Dinner is in the fridge.
>
> Have a good night.
>
> Love,
>
> Mom and Dad
>
> PS
>
> Don't forget to empty the dishwasher and do your homework. Love you.

After having a quick snack, Ashley goes into her room and turns on her computer.

If you were Ashley, what would you do? How would you share this story?

Would you call someone (friend or family member)?

Would you email someone (friend or family member)?

Would you invite a friend or family member to visit you that night?

Would you text someone (friend or family member)?

Would you post this story online?

If so, what social network site would you post to?

What details would you choose to include?

What details would you leave out?

How would you post this story?

Would you include tags of people (teammates, friends)?

Would you include tags of key terms (John Abbott Secondary School, basketball, win, etc.)?

Would you send this post directly to people?

Would you post this on your profile page, another person's page and/or an organization (John Abbott Secondary School, Secondary School Athletic Society, fan page, etc.)?

Would you add non-text elements to this post (pictures, links, videos, etc.)?

How public would you make this post (friends, family, acquaintance and/or strangers)?

Case Study 2-Significant Public Event

Erik

13-year-old male

Grade 8 student at Robert Borden Secondary School

Background:

- Lives with his mom in a townhouse during the week and with his dad in an apartment in New Westminster on weekends
- Has two very close friends, Tim and Mike, but is acquaintances/not-so-close friends with a wide variety of Robert Borden Secondary School students – different hobbies, backgrounds and ages
- Does not belong to any clubs or teams
- Is a C/C+ student
- Gets into a little trouble in his classes because he talks out of turn and socializes too much but does not cause any conflicts or problems outside of class
- Has his own computer in his bedroom

Event:

During Erik's last class, French, on Thursday afternoon he begins talking to another boy, Mike, in his class during an independent work time. Mike tells Erik that after school two grade 9 boys are going to fight in the park behind the school. Erik and Mike know of the two boys that will fight but are not close friends with either one. Erik and Mike become excited that there is more for them to do after school than go home and play Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3. At the end of French, Mike and Erik make plans to meet in front of Erik's locker to walk to the park together. After the final bell rings, Erik meets up with a grade 9 friend, Tim, and asks if he has heard of the fight too. Tim mentions that he knows the two guys, Arturo and Freddie, and they will fight. Tim also knows that they are fighting because Freddie told his math teacher that Arturo has been cheating on his math tests all semester. Arturo has a meeting with his math teacher, the principal and his parents on Friday and expects to be suspended for his cheating. Arturo wants to fight Freddie for revenge but also to get Freddie into trouble too. Tim and Erik meet Mike at

Erik's locker and walk through the school, the parking lot, and the field and eventually get to the small park. On their way they notice other small groups of boys walking to the park too. Freddie is in one group and looks nervous.

When they arrive at the park, Arturo is waiting with a group of 5 other boys and 3 girls. In total there are about 20 kids in one corner of the park. As Freddie arrives, Arturo yells at him, then runs towards him. Freddie swears and turns to run away. Tim grabs Freddie and pushes him towards Arturo so he cannot escape. Arturo grabs Freddie and starts punching him in the body. Freddie and Arturo punch each other, pull at each other's shirts, and push each other to the ground. The group of 20 bystanders encircles the two fighting boys and encourages them to continue by "ooohing", "ahhing" and yelling at them to fight more. While Freddie and Arturo are fighting, Mike takes out his iPhone and begins videotaping the fight. After 3-4 minutes of punching, kicking, pushing, pulling and throwing each other around neither boy is hurt other than a few cuts, scratches and fat lips. Then an adult from an adjacent house steps out his front door and yells that he is calling the school. One unknown bystander yells, "5-0!" and the group of bystanders and fighters run and scatter through the park.

Post Event:

Erik meets with Tim and Mike in front of the school after the fight. They all live in the same direction and begin to walk home together. They talk about the fight throughout their walk. Outside of Erik's house, the three boys stop and re-watch the fight on Mike's iPhone. Tim is excited that Mike taped the fight and asks Mike to email him the video. Erik does not want to feel left out and asks Mike to send him the video too. After Mike emails the video, Erik runs up his stairs and into his townhouse. He yells hello to his mom as he throws his backpack on the floor and runs into his room and closes the door. Once the door is shut, Erik sits down, turns on his computer, opens his email and downloads the video.

Case Study 2 Discussion Questions:

If you were Erik, what would you do? How would you share this story?

Would you tell your mom?

Would you call someone (friend or family member)?

Would you email someone (friend or family member)?

Would you invite another friend or family member to come over to watch the video?

Would you text someone (friend or family member)?

Would you tell a teacher, counselor, principal, RCMP liaison or other school staff member the next day?

Would you post this story online?

If so, what social network site would you post to?

What details would you choose to include?

What details would you leave out?

How would you post this story?

Would you include tags of people (fighters, friends, bystanders)?

Would you include tags of key terms (Robert Borden Secondary School, fight, park, etc.)?

Would you send this post directly to people?

Would you post this on your profile page, another person's page and/or an organization (Robert Borden Secondary School, PSST – Protecting Surrey Schools Together, RCMP, etc.)?

Would you share the video Mike taped?

Would you add other non-text elements to this post (pictures, links, etc.)?

How public would you make this post (friends, family, acquaintance and/or strangers)?

Case Study 3-Significant Private Event

Jamal

15-year-old male

Grade 9 student at Louis St. Laurent Secondary School

Background:
- Lives with his mom in an apartment 2 blocks from his high school
- His aunts and uncles still live in northern Africa
- His dad lives in Toronto and they have limited contact because of the distance separating them
- Has one close friend, Stewart, and a social circle of 5 other boys that he socializes with at school.
- Joined the volleyball team but quit after 4 practices
- Member of the KIVA club (an organization that raises money to give small loans to entrepreneurs in developing nations)
- Is a C student
- Unnoticed by most students and does not get into trouble with school staff.
- Shares a computer with his mom in the main room of his apartment

Event:
After a late KIVA club meeting at school on Tuesday, Jamal walks home. Normally his mom is happily cooking dinner when he gets home late. Tonight, he walks in and sees his mom sitting silently on their couch. Immediately he knows something is wrong. Jamal sits in the chair next to her asks what's wrong. She quickly dismisses him and mentions that she should be cooking dinner. Jamal's mom lifts herself off of the couch and slowly wanders in the kitchen. Jamal turns on the TV quietly but pays more attention to his mom's actions. He hears cupboards opening and closing but after 10 minutes notices that she has not started cooking. He goes in to the kitchen to check on her and sees she is crying. Jamal hugs his mom and walks her back to the couch.

After asking and guessing what is wrong, Jamal's mom finally gives in and tells him about her day. She tells Jamal that she has had sharp pains in her stomach for weeks, never feels like eating, and has begun to feel nauseous everyday. At first she thought she had the flu but the symptoms did not get better. Two weeks ago she went into the doctor's office and has undergone many tests. Today she learned of her results. Her doctor informed her that she has stage 5 pancreatic cancer. Jamal is shocked and begins to weep with her. Through the night, Jamal and his mom discuss her treatment options. She tells him that the doctor has planned intense chemotherapy sessions but the cancer has spread too much and is inoperable. She tells Jamal that the chance of her surviving is very small and that she may not live longer than a year. Jamal is crushed but remains strong for his mom and consoles her. She talks about her dreams for him and that she has already talked to his father. Jamal's mother tells him that his father plans on visiting Surrey throughout the next few months to help around the house and begin to be a larger role in their lives. She mentions that Jamal's father is being very supportive and has offered to move Jamal and his mom to Toronto to live him after the school year ends. After talking, crying and trying to comfort each other for hours, Jamal's mom falls asleep. Jamal places her head on a couch pillow and wraps her in a blanket.

Post Event:
After kissing his mother good night, Jamal shuffles into his bedroom. Exhausted, he flops on the bed. He tosses and turns but cannot sleep. He wanders out of the bedroom and back into the main room. His mom is still asleep. He sits in front of the computer and turns it on.

Case Study 3 Discussion Questions:

If you were Jamal, what would you do? How would you share this story?

Would you call someone (friend, crisis line or family member)?

Would you email someone (friend or family member)?

Would you invite another friend to come over?

Would you text someone (friend or family member)?

Would you tell a teacher, counselor, principal or other school staff member the next day?

Would you post this story online?

If so, what social network site would you post to?

What details would you choose to include?

What details would you leave out?

How would you post this story?

Would you include tags of people (friends, family)?

Would you include tags of key terms (Louis St. Laurent Secondary School, cancer, mother, Toronto, etc.)?

Would you send this post directly to people?

Would you post this on your profile page, another person's page and/or an organization (BC Cancer Agency, KIVA Club's webpage, cancer support groups, etc.)?

Would you add other non-text elements to this post (pictures, videos, links, etc.)?

How public would you make this post (friends, family, acquaintance and/or strangers)?

<u>**Protocol 4 – Group Discussion 3**</u>
(Full group participation of 6-8 participants for 30 minutes)

Purpose of discussion 3:
Focus on the creation of and connections between online and real life selves

Discussion 3 Questions:
1.   Do you change your language online compared to how you talk to people in "real life"?
2.   Does what you say online affect how you are in real life-if you make up a story online do you promote it/perpetuate it in real life?
3.   Do stories about one event change among friends?
4.   Are there times that your online sharing creates a persona/character?
5.   Do you find yourself trying to live up to that persona/character?
6.   How does the creation of online stories affect/relate to personal stories in real life?
7.   How much do you share or not share online?
8.   Think of a percentage – do you share 10%, 50%, 75%, 100% of your real life self, online?
9.   Do the connections, to others and to other interests, you make online transfer into your offline world?