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YOUNG GIRLS' LIVED EXPERIENCES OF 'GOING ONLINE': AN EXPLORATION INTO THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN SOCIAL MEDIA USE AND WELL-BEING FOR PRIMARY AGE GIRLS

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One day, when you're big, I hope you'll understand and just be proud of me.

ABSTRACT

In our digital age, with the creation of online social groups, individuals are constructing their identities in different ways. This 'convergence culture' maps a new territory where consumers can manipulate this online media in offline and real-time spaces. There has never been a more recordable or observable 'looking-glass' than that of social media, whereby all utterances that are sent out online are put forward for a reaction (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2011).

This thesis explores how past (Goffman, 1959; Marcia, 1966) and present (Brook et al., 2008; Urrieta, 2007) theories of identity, as either a fixed or fluid entity, are reflected in contemporary social media practices that young girls aged eight to eleven, from a London primary school, choose to participate in. This thesis investigates how interactions in both the online and offline 'figured worlds' (Holland et al., 1998) of blogs influence children's identity formation as they 'figure' out who they are at this pre-adolescent stage.

This thesis adopts a mixed methods approach, combining interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) of interviews with thematic, dialogic analysis of written blog posts and a dialogic discourse analysis of questionnaires. These data offer valuable insight into young girls' perceptions, pressures and motivations behind using or avoiding platforms the Internet has to offer. This thesis has a particular focus on blogging and the opportunity for online communication on blogs.

This thesis adds to the limited UK research on social media, blogging, and identity, both perceived and performed by children; we already know about studies providing statistical evidence around screen time and popular apps, but this thesis reveals in-depth and personal reported and lived experiences of six young girls behind these figures. Findings for this sample show that three key motivations for using blogs are (a) connecting with others, (b) sharing feelings and experiences and (c) learning from others and helping others to learn.

This thesis highlights the ways in which identities can be seen to be 'informed', 'affirmed', and 'stabilised' within the dynamic nature of identity, and, through this, how agency can be achieved. When other members of the online community positively greet online performances, in both the closed blogging platform within this study or other various contexts, this affirmation can inspire creativity, future-orientation and ambition in the individuals concerned.

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This thesis aims to explore and examine how young girls, who regularly go 'online', perceive and perform their identities, and to also consider how these girls interact in a closed online social spaces such as blogs. It was hoped that the findings from this research would offer insights into the extent to which social media influences the self-perceptions of participating pre-adolescent girls. The case studies of some of the participants illustrated how the use of online spaces can impact on the development of participants' identities.

The roles of **social interactions** within online **communities** are key themes that run throughout this thesis.

This chapter begins by presenting the context for this study, how my previous career as a primary school teacher and, more recently, teaching and research in Higher Education (HE) has shaped this. The broader debate around the 'toxicity' (Palmer, 2007) or 'vitality' (Alexander, 2007) of contemporary childhood is discussed, with a prime focus on the cultural artefacts presented through the integration of technology into our lives. This chapter also outlines the aims, setting, sample, research approach and Research Questions for this study, situated within a London primary school.
Throughout this thesis, the key terms and definitions provided are collected together and presented in Appendix A, glossary of terms. These terms are demarked in bold italics.

1.2 Context

1.2.1 Personal context: past and present careers in education

Having worked as a teacher in primary schools throughout London for over a decade before recently moving into a teacher-training role within HE, I feel a very present interest around children's identity development and associated mental well-being. Too often, I have seen cases of children who experience social and emotional problems emerging after online interactions. I have witnessed first-hand the detrimental effects that upsetting online experiences can have upon young people, including self-harm, eating disorders and elevated levels of anxiety and depression; each of these behaviours can be influenced by interactions between participants engaging in exchanges on social media platforms. On balance, though, I have also seen children overjoyed to video call with children overseas in

Guatemala during a pen pal exchange, and overheard discussions of evenings or weekends spent whiling away hours on online games or browsing video content online, met with great enjoyment and amusement by the user.

My curiosity around identity development and the impact of this on well-being is matched by a personal and professional interest in the use of technology, including social media. In my previous role as a primary school teacher, and through my work as a curriculum coordinator for computing, I have become increasingly enthusiastic about the positive role Information Communication Technology (ICT) can play in children's lives and within their education. The longer I taught, the more I saw children embrace technology, particularly social media platforms such as *Facebook* and *Instagram* (see Appendix A, Glossary), online gaming and shared virtual worlds, and blogging and online chat. Equally now, as a mother to two young boys, I see my eldest son keen to go online and play multiplayer games with school friends in his free time.

As a frequent user of social media, and as someone who takes advantage of technology in both my personal and professional life, I strongly felt that it would also be insightful to offer an illustration of the ways that interactions online can affect identity, both positively and negatively. Our current 'convergence culture' maps a fresh territory (Jenkins, 2008) where consumers can manipulate this online media in offline, real-time spaces, meaning that there is a dissolution of the divide between the real and the virtual.

As a researcher, adopting an interpretivist philosophy, I have always been keen to explore issues and related findings that could help me to better support pupils in my classroom. Findings included gathering information on the websites, online games and apps that the pupils in my classes were using outside of school, in order to be able to support their learning and promote their safety online. Findings also revolved around keeping up to date with new innovations of technology, such as collaborative online storyboards, or the ActiVote hardware that allows for simple assessment, in order to bring those into my classroom to support my teaching and promote pupils' progress. In my current HE role as a lecturer in Primary Education, I am now supporting trainee teachers with their practice, and equipping them with strategies to take into primary schools. I hope, therefore, that the result of this doctoral research will help us as parents, teachers, and educators to gain an insight of how girls interact online, and thus how we can support these communications through becoming aware of the emotional turmoil that may be involved in such interactions.

Attention must also be drawn to my previous experience as a primary school teacher during the data collection stages of this study (discussed later in more detail in Chapter 3, Section

3.1). As a teacher, my role came with a sense of responsibility and guardianship of the pupils in my care, and thus children's use of the internet was shrouded in concerns for children's well-being, which could be damaged through online bullying or possible exposure to inappropriate or offensive material. My first steps in planning this project involved gathering data around possible online risks presented to children through online use.

1.2.2 Wider context -The rise of children's online communication and risks this presents

In our Western 'digital culture', children are born into the world of technology and social media (Net Aware, 2001: 3; NAEYC, 2012). Prensky (2001) initially labelled these children as 'digital natives', implying that these children inherited a natural relationship with computers, the internet, and technological tools from birth, and thus are 'native speakers' of digital language. This study refutes that idea, grounded in my career as a primary teacher and role as a mother, where I would argue that technology is a tool that is introduced to children, who must develop skills in order to use these tools, and thus disputing Prensky's claim (2001). The one element that is true, however, is that there is often a familiarity with these devices for children born into our digital age. From the first days after birth, to their first steps, or the first school play, most children watch their parent or caregiver taking photographs and sharing these images with friends and family online via social networks; a term known as 'sharenting'. It is natural that young children will imitate this behaviour, as with any other. Children's confidence with technology, therefore, is facilitated and developed within the structure, and through the opportunities, provided by the caregivers during childhood.

 Over the last decade, there has been a substantial increase in Internet usage by children under nine years old (Holloway et al., 2013). While the Internet offers numerous benefits for children, as they can use it to learn, communicate, develop, create and explore the world around them, young people can also face risks online which need to be addressed (Bentley et al., 2017: 40). These risks are detailed further in Section 1.2.3 below.

1.2.3 Online risks and opportunities

Several research studies have pursued the identification and classification of online risks (Dönmez et al., 2017), and the content of these categories and lists have evolved, as outlined in Table 1.1 (below).

Author(s)	Risks of online use for children
Jantz and McMurray (1998)	Two broad themes of 'content-related' and 'communication-related'
Aftab (2010)	Six themes composed of inappropriate or harmful content, cyber-stalking, online harassment, the disclosure of sensitive information, cyber-grooming, and online-purchase frauds
Poftak (2002)	Five themes including pornography, hacking, copyright issues, cyberbullying, and inappropriate relationships with adults
Boulton et al. (2016)	A list of seven risks associated with 'inappropriate contacts, content, and conduct' (Boulton et al., 2016: 610) categorised as: 1. People may not be whom they say 2. Meeting strangers 3. Deliberately sharing personal information 4. Accidentally sharing personal information 5. Cyberbullying 6. Sharing personal photographs 7. Computer viruses

Table 1.1: Risks of online use for children

 'How Safe Are Our Children' (NSPCC, 2017), deemed as the most comprehensive overview of child protection in the UK and the fifth annual report of its kind, was conducted by the NSPCC to establish indicators that impact upon children and young people and their health and safety. It states that in 2016/17, there were 12,248 Childline counselling sessions about online safety and abuse, which was a 9% increase on the previous year. In addition to this figure, 30% of reviews by young people of the most popular social networking sites, apps and games 'reported seeing violence and hatred' (Bentley et al., 2017: 40); this means that one in three young people taking part in the study have witnessed upsetting images, footage or interactions online. A similar study was conducted by Ofcom (2016), exploring children's and parents' attitudes towards media use. One of the key themes that emerged from the report highlighted that social media, a central medium for both pre-adolescent children and teenagers, 'creates new opportunities and new pressures' (Ofcom, 2016:3).
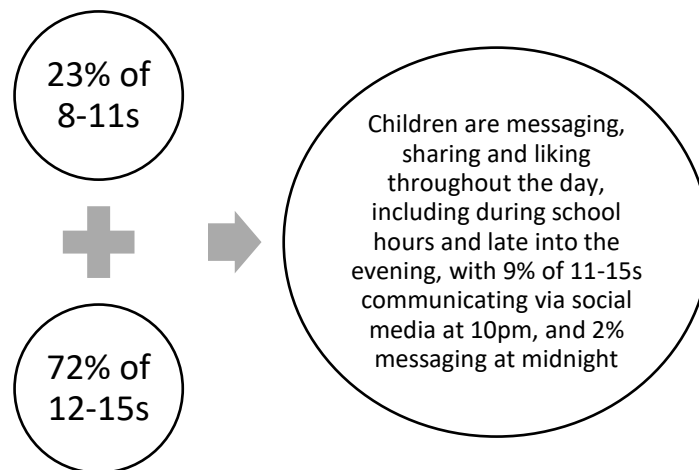
Figure 1.1: Children's social media use (adapted from Ofcom, 2016: 3)

Children's interactions with ***social networking sites (SNS)*** (see Appendix A, Glossary) are continually evolving, which can bring both creative opportunities but also risks (as discussed in Table 1.1 previously). The latest trend identified in this qualitative study (Ofcom, 2016) showed that children are increasingly using group messaging services including ***WhatsApp, Instagram,*** and ***Facebook Messenger*** (see Appendix A), but that although opportunities involve support with homework and peer enjoyment, risks can involve offensive banter or bullying (see Table 1.1 previously for further identification and classification of online risks for children).

Of current debate is the idea of 'toxic' childhood. Concerns in some literature warn that the modern world is 'damaging' our children, with at least 'one in five children in the developed world' diagnosed as having 'developmental or behavioural problems', and the number is rising by 25 percent each year (Palmer, 2007). 'Toxicity' is therefore defined for this study as something harmful or detrimental to well-being, which is the ability to function properly and feel generally positive on a daily basis.

In a thoughtful twist on this debate, Alexander (2007) argues that viewing contemporary childhood through a 'toxic' lens is unhelpful and can, in fact, be detrimental to children's learning. If children are '*obliged to begin from the premise that their culture- the building blocks from which their identities are created- is 'toxic'* (Alexander, 2007: 57), they can become passive rather than active learners in their cultural world. Children learn to be cautious about dangers in their environment from birth, and if they end up fearing the introduction of new cultural tools, such as modern technology for example, children may avoid incorporating such tools into their lives. Avoiding cultural artefacts could reduce an individual's autonomy and thus hamper opportunities to learn and develop. Although

statistics around children's use of technology (see Figure 1.1 above) suggests that this is not the case for all individuals, I would argue that the societal view of these tools as toxic may influence parental attitudes over child's agency.

Alexander (2007) states that we should instead consider the 'vitality' of modern childhood, seeing both the negative but also the positive opportunities that living in the twenty-first century presents, such as globalisation and the integration of technology. To build upon Alexander's point, although the cultural artefacts and daily tools used by children during childhood may have changed, it is through the exploration of children's adoption of these cultural artefacts that we can better understand contemporary childhood. Through the lens of 'vitality' rather than 'toxicity', it is exciting to see how children can become active sculptors in identity construction and consolidation during childhood.

In critique of this view, Livingstone (2013) warns that the effects of childhood experiences are not yet fully understood, and thus we cannot even begin to assert or assess the risk or toxicity involved in children's use of online media. Even the data shared above cannot give a true picture of risk or harm experienced online, due to issues of confidentiality, reporting or children's own understanding of what they have experience. Livingstone muses:

> *'On the internet, we do not know how many children are hurt, or how severe are the consequences; there are no accident figures. If the offline were like the online, it would be like knowing, only, how many children report crossing a road and perhaps, how many report that something bad happened in consequence. On the other hand, if the online were like the offline, we would also know the online equivalent of how many cars were on the road and how fast they were driving (e.g. exactly what pornography they saw or how they were cyberbullied or groomed); most important, we would know whether an accident resulted (i.e., whether the child suffered harmful consequences, for how long and with what severity)'* (Livingstone, 2013: 18).

Linking to this research project, which is looking at identity development through online interactions, although as Livingstone (2013) states, risk and harm cannot be fully measured, instead this study offers the opportunity to explore if independence and autonomy over such cultural tools are accepted by the participants or not, and the subsequent influence on identities in response to this acceptance- or non-acceptance- can be analysed. It is only through further data-gathering and analysis that we can begin to understand better how the exposure to new phenomena, such as that of generating an online identity through the use of social media, can allow children to develop competencies to deal with these new cultural influences (Alexander, 2007). Through the participants' self-reports there may also be the

opportunity to reflect upon how the parents and carers of these participants, who are dealing with the modern technology, may be supporting or opposing the integration of such tools into their offspring's childhoods.

An insightful example of how these new cultural artefacts can come 'part of the fabric' of everyday life for individuals who did not grow up surrounded by technology is revealed in the findings by Davies (2014). Davies explored how, for a group of hairdressers in the north of England, the social networking site (SNS) of Facebook played an integral and essential part in both the individuals' personal and professional lives. These hairdressers are adults who had been used to other ways of interacting before social media, hence the term 'digital immigrants', whereas children have grown up with it. Davies found that sometimes Facebook interactions mediated social acts, such as securing clients and advertising business, yet at other times, these social media connections constituted social events in themselves (Davies, 2014), such as games and conversation. Davies notes that by the end of the study, all of the participants had also signed up to other SNS, including *Twitter* and *Instagram* (see Appendix A), and were using these alongside their original Facebook accounts (Davies, 2014). Davies' findings highlight that individuals can play parts on several stages simultaneously, yet also that individuals readily choose to have more than one stage on which to perform. This is worth considering in light of Goffman (1959), who saw the stage as a place that performers could choose how to perform for their audience. The adoption of several SNS suggests that individuals wish to have different audiences, and thus to enact different aspects of their identity to different groups of people, such as how a child will behave differently in front of a teacher or their friends or their parents.

This thesis aims to shed light on the experiences young girls are encountering online, and the nature of online interactions that may- or may not- affect personal views of identity. It is, therefore, appropriate to start to provide a context for how identity is understood in this thesis.

1.3 Identity, Positions, and Roles

Situating 'identity' within the broader realms of the self and self-concept, and the tendency for some researchers to use 'self' and 'identity' interchangeably, has posed problems when defining and establishing these terms in the literature (Andriot and Owens, 2012: 1).

1.3.1 Self

 '**Self'** is seen in the light of Goffman's seminal text, 'The Presentation of Self in Everyday

Life' (1959), as a personally-constructed conception based on experiences and interactions with others and developed through one's self-esteem and self-efficacy. Again, the role of the 'other' as being vital in interactions, and subsequent self-perceptions, is key. A parallel can be drawn between Goffman's regions of the front stage (when interacting with others) and backstage (often at home or alone), and the stage that the Internet provides- with the front region being the online interactions with others, and the backstage being the offline, face-to-face communications. Our behaviour adjusts within the various groups of which we are members, and our identities are thus defined by the groups to which we belong, our positions within them, and the ways in which we play these roles (O'Neil, 2006); multiple roles, in turn, thus allowing us to possess multiple identities. It is synthesised, therefore, that the nature of interactions including dialogue signal the 'position' and identity afforded members of a community.

1.3.2 Identity

In recent years, identity has become an issue because rapid social changes have led to identity 'dis-ease' (Lawler, 2014: 1). Bauman (2004) argues that with the collapse of apparently fixed and stable identities around constructions such as gender and nation, there is more of a social fluidity, and insecurity, around identity (Lawler, 2014: 3). This insecurity relates to the development of online identities, where the screen of a device presents a mask of anonymity that users can choose to adopt, concealing (or revealing) parts of themselves that may not be able to be hidden in the non-virtual world. Here is a parallel to Goffman's view of the stage (see Section 1.3.2 above). This fluidity can, in turn, present the opportunities for multiple identities to be adopted in multiple realms, and it is either through the harmony or conflict of these identities (Brook et al., 2008) that our security or insecurity may be established. While various uses of the term 'identity' exist, it is used here to refer to the parts of a self, composed of meanings that individuals attach to the multiple roles they typically play in highly differentiated contemporary societies (Stryker and Burke, 2000).

James Marcia (1980) raised that identity is not a single entity, but instead, it is a structure-both a personal and socially-influenced perception of oneself- formed by identity parts depending on roles played. This role of social-influence is highlighted in the more recent literature, such as studies by Sfard and Prusak (2005: 14) who define identity as 'a set of reifying, significant, endorsable stories about a person'. These individually told stories must be shared to become visible. This thesis, therefore, aims to explore these girls' stories through the implementation of a mixed-methods approach that involves:

i.   examining the girls' views of their identities (from interviews);

ii.   reviewing the nature of online interactions through their blog posts

iii.   considering their developing views of identity as they engage further with blogging through three questionnaires.

1.3.3 Roles and role-playing

In society, individuals occupy different social positions. Role identity theory, explored by McCall and Simmons, is inspired by the language of dramaturgy, the artistic components of drama on a stage. *Role identity* defines the role (or character) that an individual plays when holding specific social positions in groups, seen as a parallel to an actor performing on a stage, hence the shift of dramaturgy from the arts to the social sciences. Role identity is relational, since people interact with each other via their own role identities (Andriot and Owens, 2014), and, as Urrieta (2007) explains, our identities are shaped and influenced by the ways others speak to us, behave towards us and 'position' us in relation to them. The 'others' are key in their parts as both the audience and as other performers for us to observe (see further detail in Section 2.3.1 in the next chapter). When exploring roles and role-playing, it is impossible to ignore Goffman's seminal text, 'The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life' (1959). Although this book may be classed as a dated work, this sociological frame offers itself as the ideal mirror for the online interactional 'performances' that are being played out on virtual stages over sixty years after its publication. Goffman looked to explain society through our everyday interactions, and one of his most significant ideas is that of each individual as a 'player' on a stage, with those that he or she interacts with as a culmination of both the other players and the 'audience'. Goffman discusses several reasons that 'players' may act in different ways, both consciously and subconsciously, to achieve various objectives (see Table 1.2 below).

Objective	Purpose	Conscious/ Unconscious
To evoke a response	To give an impression to others to evoke a specific response that the individual wishes to obtain.	Conscious
To 'fit in' (camouflage)	To 'fit in' with a group, or because the social status of an individual requires a certain kind of expression.	Conscious
Tradition	The traditions of individual's role may lead him or her to give a well-designed impression of a particular kind.	Neither

Table 1.2: Objectives behind actions (adapted from Goffman, 1959)

These objectives can be 'translated' to online behaviours by exploring the motivations of participants to engage with the blog actively, and detailed through their self-reports during interviews, and their written reflections during questionnaire responses. Perhaps the two key 'objectives' for online behaviour (as linked to Table 1.2 above) are the ideas of 'to evoke a response' and 'to fit in'. Both of these behaviours, in turn, could be seen to offer an insight into the development of identities. These two objectives reflect very different behaviours, from a more extrovert performance- a wish to gain 'friends' or 'likes' or comments, to a more introvert desire to blend in to a social group, to 'camouflage' with the crowd and feel part of a community, perhaps using similar language or drawing upon the same 'emojis' (picture symbols) to connect and align with others as a virtual in-group, adhering to unspoken social 'norms' in the online space.

Regarding the issue of gender, research into how girls' and boys' identities are shaped through online interactions is lacking. Research *offline* in schools by Murphy and Ivinson (2007), explored how girls' and boys' identities are shaped and developed in classrooms. The authors suggest that single-sex grouping can 'create circumstances that constrain rather than extend students' agency' and even limit the accessibility of subject knowledge due to teachers' practices in certain gender-biased subjects such as Science and Design Technology, that have a traditionally male demographic (Murphy and Ivinson, 2007: 14). The knowledge-gender dynamic is undoubtedly something to be considered for future research (see Chapter 8, Section 9.5), but this thesis explores the uses of social media for young girls, and the reasoning behind this is discussed further in the next chapter (see specifically Sections 2.3.5 on gender, and 2.4.5 on girls' use of social media).

1.4 Setting

The Internet is an integral part of our lives (du Plessis, 2013; Sawyer 2011), but there is a considerable lack of research into the impact of social media and the associated interactions, on children. This study is chiefly significant because it focuses on the under-researched area of identity development (Cooper, 2014) and lived experiences of pre-adolescent girls, many for whom online communication is becoming a daily habit (Nominet, 2014), something new and unseen in our world in previous decades. Pre-adolescent girls were selected for this study due to recent research (NSPCC, 2017) which shows a worrying trend of increased social media use amongst this age group, and elevated levels of anxiety, stress, depression, and self-harm, yet a lack of qualitative data to offer insight as to the experiences of these children.

The research for this project was conducted within a two-form entry independent primary school, referred to throughout as Fairtrees Primary School. Fairtrees Primary School is situated in London, UK. The attainment of the pupils throughout the school is above the national average. The percentage of pupils who speak English as an additional language is well below the national average. Pupils typically come from various boroughs in London, and their ethnicity reflects the full range of the area. Fairtrees Primary School was selected as it could provide a homogenous sample for this study. Justification for this sample, and not a mixed heterogeneous sample, is evident when considering the established link between girls' social media use and well-being (Fauth and Thompson, 2009) and the increasing concerns around social media usage and well-being that are noted in recent educational and medical research (DfE, 2012; UKCCIS, 2014; NSPCC, 2015; Mental Health Foundation, 2015).

This study ran from January 2016 until July 2016, involving six Key Stage 2 pupils (eight to eleven years old) at Fairtrees Primary School in London. Qualitative data were collected through this mixed-methods study, resulting in three datasets. Firstly, three phases of 1:1 interviews were held with the six girls (further justified below in Section 1.5); secondly, three written questionnaires were issued, and thirdly, a secure blog was created for this study, allowing for the observation of written 'conversations' in the form of blog posts and comments (see Section 3.6 for further detail on these methods).

1.5 Aims

This thesis aimed to gather insight into how young girls, who regularly go 'online', perceive their identities, and to explore and examine how these girls interact in online social spaces such as, but not limited to, blogs. This enquiry has a view to connect the effects of online communications and interactions to the current debates about children's social media use and the 'toxicity' of childhood. Interestingly, then, it must then be asked is a child's presentation of self their true self? As Coleman (2017) warns, can the data collected during projects such as this be relied upon, or has it been subject to impression management? Impression management, necessarily, is the act of a performer 'successfully staging a character' (Goffman, 1959: 203). Goffman could not have known about the future existence of online stages, but these stages are the ideal platform for the 'arts' of impression management to be played out, with performers able to hide behind the anonymity of the screen. Through analysing girls' experiences of constructing identities both in the physical and virtual world, unique contributions are made to this under-researched, yet highly relevant, field.

1.6 Research approach

This section will briefly summarise the research approach, the methodology, and the methods employed for this research project. For further expansion of these points, please see Chapter 3, Methodology.

Research falls into two basic approaches: positivism and interpretivism (see later, Table 3.3 in Chapter 3). While positivism, born in the 19th century by Auguste Comte, often explores institutions in society, interpretivism looks at the individual. The aims (Section 1.5 above) highlight the need for this research to be located within the interpretivist paradigm, possessing a qualitative nature, dealing with individual perceptions and responses. The most significant branches of interpretivism include 'hermeneutics', the theory of interpretation, 'phenomenology', the 'philosophical tradition that seeks to understand our world through directly experiencing the phenomena' (Littlejohn and Foss, 2009:13) and 'symbolic interactionism', which explores the roles of artifacts and symbols in constructing reality through shared meaning individuals assign to those symbols.

Interpretation of participants' accounts of their experiences is one of the most common approaches taken that are located within an interpretivist paradigm, often gathered through methods that involve conversation or dialogue of some kind, which could be through interview, questionnaire or conversation (further detail in Section 3.6), It is through talking to participants that they can share their experiences of a phenomenon (Smith et al., 2009) as the phenomenon of generating an online identity with social media is explored. It is also possible to discern a person's experiences through other means such as their written notes, (open) responses to questionnaires, and diary entries. Although not relevant for this study, it should be noted that future research (see Chapter 8, Section 8.5) could employ such methods to develop understanding of the social media phenomenon further, especially as there are often abbreviations, synonyms and a wide variety of forms of sub-text, slang and emergent terms that have originated through social media such as **'LOL', 'YOLO'** and **'ROFL'** (see Appendix A).

1.7 Structure for this thesis

This eight-chaptered thesis will present the results of a study exploring the nature and effects of online communication on young children, exploring social media usage and the identities that children assume online, with the hope of revealing more detail about objectives and motivations behind these interactions (Goffman, 1959).

Chapter 1 sets the scene for the study, explaining the context, rationale, and aims of the research.

Chapter 2 presents a narrative review of the literature on identity theory, social identity theory, and the critical debates around social in-groups and online communications.

Chapter 3 describes the methodological approach of the study. This chapter includes justification of the research design and the methods employed to research the nature of young girls' online identities. This chapter also explains the three data collection methods employed in this study: questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and written threads on an online blog. Analytical frameworks are discussed. Ethics, regarding the BERA guidelines (2011), are discussed.

Chapter 4 presents idiographic case studies for each of the six participants.

Chapter 5 discusses questionnaire data from the six participants and considers how their knowledge and identity may have evolved through a small community of learners (resonating with a mini-community of practice, CoP, or 'community of learners', CoL) presented by the online blog.

Chapter 6 looks at the nature of the dialogue that emerged through the blog posts and begins to consider how that data substantiates or not the interviews and questionnaire responses

Chapter 7 advances the findings in Chapters 4, 5 and 6, aiming to contribute new insights and reflections regarding the development of identities of pre-adolescent girls are afforded and assumed online and offline, and the relevance of this concerning the issues debated within this thesis. Reflections are made on the employed methods.

Chapter 8 offers conclusions, comments on the research methods, quality of data gathered and limitations, and suggests future research areas.

1.8 Chapter summary

To summarise, this first chapter has presented the context for this study, including the background of the author. The nature of the study has been shared, the lack of research into children's social media usages has been highlighted, and the need for the involvement of young, female participants have been justified. The aims, setting, and significance of this study have been presented. The next chapter will present a detailed literature review with further detail, background and theory on identity, roles, and social interactions regarding blog interactions and impression management of identities that individuals may assume when communicating with others in an online space.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

In this second chapter, views on identity will be analysed and evaluated. Earlier literature on identity often defined identity as a singular, more static entity (Marcia, 1980; Goffman, 1959) but the reading of more recent work promotes the fluidity of several multiple identities in the life of each individual (Holland et al., 1998). This chapter will progress to defining 'self' and 'identity' as situated in the current literature debate, moving on to discuss how social interactions have a key part to play in the development of our identities through the different 'figured worlds' in which we participate (Holland et al., 1998).

In our a heavily mediated society, a 'digital thread' is now woven through the fabric of young people's personal, social and learning lives (Livingstone and Sefton-Green, 2016: 56). Social interactions today are increasingly technologically mediated, with many children and adolescents interacting with others online (Reich, 2017). Regardless, little effort has been made to form connections between the phenomenon of social media usage and the identities children assume. Very few studies have looked at both; in fact, voices of 'globally mobile children' have been little explored in research at all (Hannaford, 2018). This chapter will reconsider recent literature concerning online interactions, and the presence of online communities in children's lives, before focusing on blogs and the platform that blogs present for social interaction and development of roles and positions. It must be noted that the blogging in this project was significant as a means to the research rather than a reflection of broader social media practice (see Chapter 3 for further detail). The ways in which social media may link to children's well-being are discussed. Livingstone and Sefton-Green (2016: 55) warn that 'digital media – although not necessarily determining young people's lives – have become a key site of anxiety and struggle between the generations'.

2.2 Identity: Fixed or Fluid?

The development of identity, theories about identity, and indeed the very question of how many identities a person may possess, has always been a topic of debate. This section will review how the view of 'identity' has come to be understood over the years and will provide a clear view of how identity is regarded to set the tone for this thesis.

Cooley coined the notion of the 'looking glass self' which pointed to the key role of others' reaction to one's behaviour in the development of the self (Cooley, 1902); people imagine

how others view them and act accordingly. The ways in which these acts and behaviour are composed include the use of language, communication, and role-taking; these skills and abilities are thus central to the symbolic interaction by which the self is constructed, and which forms the basis of social life (Ashforth and Mael, 1989), as demonstrated through daily behaviour and activity both offline and online. Symbolic interaction, as briefly touched upon in the previous chapter, involves the verbal, physical and written cues to which individuals apply meaning; there are emotional, shared experiences when participating in symbolic interaction rituals (Patulny et al., 2015:8), the experience of which is of importance when gaining understanding around behaviour in our society.

> *'Different individuals have different motivations for seeking social interaction; people seem to seek a number of goals in social situations: to be approved of and to make friends, to dominate or to depend on others, to be admired, to be helped or given social support, to provide help to others, and so on…people want to be liked' (Argyle, 1994: 11)*

Here in Argyle's words, the motivation for people wanting to be 'liked', the perfect parallel to the world of social media where, as shown in later Section 2.5, central motivations revolve around connecting with friends and sharing photos or videos that may provoke positive reactions in the form of 'likes'.

Cooley (1902) claimed that society and individuals are not separate but are in fact collective and distributive aspects of the same thing, explaining that individuals have an intrinsic motivation to interact with people or objects around them; we are creating our own stories for ourselves, our life narratives, through the elements we choose to engage with. Even from early childhood, individuals define themselves as distinct from others, observing differences of opinion or partaking in different hobbies. We are all, however, connected by our shared foundation, the culture and context within which we are living. Cooley's initial claims, although over a century old, are now proven valid through many individuals' motivations- and increasingly children's motivations- to interact with others online (Tahir and Husin, 2017).

The primary way in which identity is considered is only concerning the child's entry into adulthood (Calhoun, 1994). There have been other attempts to view identity as a question and to locate it socially. Such efforts are found in the work of Mead and Goffman (discussed in detail later in this chapter). In their work, we see attempts to understand identity as a **process**, as something that can be achieved rather than something that is innate, as done rather than 'owned'. If identities are created through a viable process, it begs questions as to

how our daily lived experiences impact upon that process: when children have accepted and welcomed social media into their daily lives, how is this phenomenon of generating identities online impacting upon their personal identity process, and, in turn, what forms of identities will be achieved?

In the 1950s, the humanistic movement challenged the idea of a 'fixed' identity. Erikson (1950, 1968), as discussed earlier in Chapter 2, argued that identity may be more fluid and socially shaped than initially believed and that individuals may adapt their identity depending on the response of the 'others'. Erikson named this social identity as an 'ego identity', created through social interactions. Erikson constructed a psychosocial model with eight stages a person's identity goes through during their lifetime (as shared later in Table 2.1), and also, like Marcia (1966), considered the importance of emotional conflict and identity crises.

The 1980s brought yet another consideration of the construction of identity, with Tajfel's (1985: 255) work on social identity at the forefront, claiming social identity to be:

> *'That part of the individual's self-concept which derives from their knowledge of their membership of social groups, together with the value and emotional significance of that membership'.*

Tajfel emphasises the importance of two key influences on identity: personal identity and self-concept, versus the social context within which self-concept is situated. Similarly, Badiou (2014) talks about the 'subject' and the 'situation'. Identities are considered here as being fluid, on being entities that are reliant on the membership within social groups. This dependence offers a new conflict in the identity debate. Ultimately, identity gets down to the problem of the subject versus agency (Badiou, 2014), with the first issue addressing mind-body duality: am I uniquely and only my body? Or do I transcend/transform/transgress my body? Can there be a disembodied me? The process of growing up and ageing locates the body as a vessel in time, which presents further questions: will I survive my body? And if I do, will I (now) know about it then? The second issue around identity addresses free-will versus determinism. If I am socially constructed, and fluid (or even just a collection of hormonally driven associated behaviours) am I responsible for my acts?

A further debate around identity is that of performativity, introduced by Butler (1990). Butler expanded upon the notion of a socially constructed identity by introducing performativity and the extent to which an individual's identity is discursively constructed. Performativity relates to the discursive construction of identity (McKinlay, 2010). Butler's key concept is

performativity: how gender identity is embodied and enacted, rather than a more or less adequate reflection of some underlying bodily reality. Butler draws on Foucault in several respects, not least her stress on the physicality of individual and social life, and her concern to understand identity as a social process. Identity is always provisional rather complete, a profoundly ambiguous and unstable moment. Performativity is not reducible to performance, and the degree of choice involved in identity construction both makes it appear more 'natural' for the individual and also open to reinterpretation (McKinlay, 2010).

In agreement with Butler, Urrieta (2007: 118) defines identity as a 'dynamic co-constructed cultural phenomenon', formed within our societal and cultural constructs, through dialogic exchanges with our audiences. To better understand the fluidity and multiplicity of identities, and the nature of interactions, this reconsideration of the literature is essential. Identities are 'in constant flux' (Urrieta, 2007: 119), ephemeral entities and therefore difficult to assess or measure. It is through the relationships with others, the interactions with others, and the experiences shared with others that identities shape, form and change. The 'other' here becomes key, as Sarup (1996: 47) highlights:

> *'...identity is always related to what one is not—the Other. Identity is only conceivable in and through difference. One is not what the Other is but is critical in defining who one is.'*

While older literature seems to define 'identity' as a more intrinsically-shaped entity, more recent literature emphasises the role of the 'other' as an external, extrinsic factor that can shape identity development. Holland et al. (1998) consider how it is through internal dialogue with ourselves that we consider the 'self-making' process. We present ourselves to others and tell the 'others' who we are, but this process involves us also telling ourselves who we are and acting under this projection, and importantly involves the multiplicity of identities as we communicate in different forms. Self-making allows us to construct a sense of who we are, 'as individuals and in collectivity' (Urrieta, 2007: 119). Identity is about how people understand themselves and the journey during which they come to 'figure' who they are from participation within the various 'worlds' that they hold membership in. Key processes in identity construction involve how we relate to others within and outside of these worlds (Urrieta, 2007).

The concept of 'figured worlds' focuses on understanding the individuals' practice of improvisation and innovation, namely 'agency', their ability to make choices and changes. Due to this, when viewing the world through a figured world lens, we think of individuals as actors- like Goffman's initial idea (1959), however these actors can perform to a particular

type of script, but also may or may not have the power to improvise within the figured world narrative (Holland et al., 1998).

Holland et al. (1998) emphasise figured worlds as spaces of practice wherein actors 'form' as well as 'perform'. Particular individuals are figured collectively in practice as fitting certain social identities, and thereby positioned in power relations, as shown in Simpson's study (2013). Over time, it is argued, actors 'grow' into their worlds, establishing themselves in the worlds and gaining an understanding of their position, power and power dynamic of that particular community of practice (Bartlett and Holland, 2013).

To conclude this section, definitions of 'self' and 'identity' as viewed by the researcher of this project can be presented:

'Self' is the individual human vessel, composed of the 'I' and the 'me', built up through personal values and beliefs, culminating in self-concept, as created through reactions of others to the self's behaviour. The 'self' may have one true identity, or, more likely, be constructed of several identities (Holland et al., 1998). Harmony can be achieved when these selves are similar and hold similar values and beliefs (Brook et al., 2008).

'Identity' is how we understand ourselves, created and presented by an individual, fluid and transforming through daily new experiences and interactions (Urrieta, 2007). Essentially, we may have several identities, each varying in different social groups or situations. Together, these form our 'self'.

2.3 The social self

2.3.1 Positions and Roles

The Social Self

For Mead (1934), all aspects of identity are interrelated, all are processual (Williams, 2000) and all are social. Both 'I' and 'me' are forged out of language and communication and interaction with others. As Jackson (2010) notes, the American pragmatist tradition in which Mead was writing was important in developing the concept of a social self: 'a product of relations with others' (Jackson, 2010: 124). Mead was concerned then to show how identities are in process, and how self-consciousness, and identity, are produced through the interpretation of experience (Williams, 2000). His work shows how people both live and reflect on their existence, and how the process of reflection, in turn, reworks and reinterprets experience (Jackson, 2010). Jackson argues:

'For Mead, time, self and sociality interconnect: the self is a social phenomenon and

a temporal one, reflecting on itself, in time, and forward from the present in anticipating other's responses and orienting future action in the world. It is always in the process of becoming as well as being' (Jackson, 2010: 125).

To take Mead's point, therefore, of our self as perceived by others and ourselves as a social creation, set apart from our biological being, it seems that we are negotiating a continual internal narrative, a monologue, in response to the reactions of those around us. It is through this private narrative that we adjust and adapt our behaviour to seek and achieve further goals and outcomes. This is important in light of this study, where the interviews and questionnaires allowed for participants' reflection and sharing of these narratives. James (1948, 1971) also believed the 'self' to be a social product, existing as an effect of caring about what diverse groups of people think. As we each interact with different social groups, each person plays multiple selves or 'roles', such as a parent, teacher or artist. Essentially, this means that there are as many different selves as there are distinct positions that a person holds in society and diverse groups that respond to the 'self'. 'Identity' therefore refers to all the parts of a self that is made up of the meanings that an individual attaches to the many roles they typically play: 'the self reflects society' (Stryker and Burke, 2000:101).

Positioning

The relationship between social identities and social representations of self is a source of ongoing debate in social psychology (Markova, 2007). Duveen's position infers that socially shared knowledge about groups precedes and frames the individual's development of an understanding of her place in society (Duveen, 2000; Duveen and Lloyd, 1993; Phelps and Nadim, 2010). Duveen's conceptualisation of the interplay between our social identity and social representations draws attention to the process of being 'identified' by others and equally making identifications. Later in Chapter 4, the participants' identifications of themselves are explored along with their possible manipulation, namely shaping of their behaviour, and assumption of their identities.

This relationship among self, other and object/representation forms the unit of analysis in social representations theory (Markova, 2007). Based on this premise, Markova argues that the relationship between self and other should be fundamental in theorising identity:

'One cannot meaningfully ask the question about identity without posing the question about self and other' (Markova, 2007: 219).

These external identities, taken on and negotiated by individuals, shaped through dialogue, help them structure their social world and orient themselves within this world. Identities can thus be defined as positions in relation to social representations. People make sense of themselves and their experiences by drawing on and reconstructing social representations (Duveen and Lloyd, 1993); this is positioning in action. Within our convergence culture (Jenkins, 2008) where boundaries are dissolved, it is important to acknowledge that the participants do not necessarily physically move, but rather illustrate their position through the nature of the interactional dialogue. Importantly, identities are fluid and evoked and shaped in actions and daily social exchange (Urrieta, 2007).

Roles

'Roles' can be seen as a 'bridge' between social conformities and normative expectations, and an individual's perception of performance and behaviour (Jones et al., 1961: 302). Levinson (1959) attaches the controversial debates about role to the attempts many writers and researchers have made between viewing role as an aspect of social structure and viewing it as a description of socially relevant individual behaviour. The positive (or negative) self-image and associated self-esteem one possesses is also to a degree affected by the success of the groups to which that individual belongs. Group roles and community membership will be considered in the three data analysis chapters (Chapters 4, 5 and 6) where the participants reflect, report, and perform on and within these communities. Group behaviour is part of the explanation for people thinking highly of in-group members and devaluing member of out-groups, essentially those they see as being within their tighter social circle or not; it keeps up their self-esteem (Argyle, 1994: 203); this then has a potential significance when looking at how young people interact with others online and how this subsequently impacts on identity formation. When learners are in a community, learning and growing together, this can be seen as a 'community of learners' (CoL) (Lave and Wenger, 1991). The blogging platform employed for this study allows for an observation into roles and behaviour, and any behavioural imitations or associations with fellow group members.

Gergen (1961) comments that general adherence to relevant sets of social norms is crucial in facilitating social interaction and that many social interactions can be adequately described regarding the interplay of appropriate role behaviours. Goffman believed that we might feel forced to wear a 'mask' when interacting with people to be accepted, namely manipulating impressions and 'successfully staging a character' (Goffman, 1959: 203) rather than revealing our true behaviour or thoughts. Cooley suggests that personal freedom is linked implicitly to the relations that comprise society (Rousseau, 2002); self-feeling and

social feeling are two sides of the same phenomenon and must coexist as two parallel strands within an individual. Goffman explains that the word 'person' derives from Ancient Greek 'persona', the name of the masks worn by actors in Greek tragedies on stage. The word means 'that through *[per]* which the sound [of the actor's voice, *[sona]* is heard' (Doniger, 2005: 203). The actor's presence was an 'integral' part of the mask; 'he animated it, and it animated him' (Lawler, 2014: 121). Park similarly explained that we are all, always, consciously playing a role: 'it is through these roles that we know each other; it is in these roles that we know ourselves' (Park, 1950: 249).

The reactions of others around us is the biggest determiner of our self-image and subsequent self-esteem; we see ourselves as others categorise us, as in Cooley's 'looking-glass self' theory. To see ourselves, we see how we are reflected in the reactions of our audience. There are many social situations where those around us are regarded as the 'audience', and where one's performance may be assessed (Argyle, 1994: 209). When a person addresses an audience of any kind, it is no good her speaking in the informal 'familial' style; she won't be heard properly. It is inevitable that she must put on some 'performance'; once she does so, she is accepting a certain definition of the situation and presenting a certain face: she can perform before this audience (Argyle, 1994: 209). Identity theory offers implications, therefore, for both self-esteem and self-efficacy (Burke and Stets, 2000). When playing a role, the evaluation of the role performance will influence self-esteem (Stryker and Burke, 2000); positive assessment will result in higher self-esteem (Hoelter, 1986) and this positive evaluation will have been constructed from the appraisals of others and their approval (Franks and Marolla, 1976).

An example of role playing that most children in the UK commit to is that of the role of a pupil at school. Schools and educational institutions are amongst the first and most significant communities that children are part of during their childhood. Being able to classify oneself amongst one's peers, 'social classification', allows for the assertion and definition of oneself in the social environment (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). It must be questioned whether online networks can conjure a similar feeling of community and whether online interactions and connections can provide this idea of 'connectedness' in a way that can also positively affect well-being and self-concept.

2.3.2 Self-concept and Role Identity

Giddens (1991) stresses that 'the self is not a passive entity, determined by external influences' (Giddens, 1991: 2); rather, we continually employ new mechanisms of self-

identity that are cultivated by, and contribute to, the institutions of modernity in order to promote these social influences that, in turn, shape our self-concept. 'Self-concept' is comprised of a personal identity encompassing distinctive characteristics (e.g., physical attributes, abilities, psychological traits, interests) and a social identity encompassing salient group classification. Linking back to Duveen and Markova's identity theories in the earlier section 2.3.1, social identification, therefore, is the perception of oneness with or belongingness to some key group or collection. Social identification is fundamental in helping an individual to build up a picture of themselves within the societal structure in which they exist. To give an example here, a girl may define herself in terms of the group or groups with which she classifies herself, such as 'I am a girl. I am British'. The individual in question perceives herself as an actual, or typical, representative member of these groups, and she perceives the fate of the group as her own (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). Social identification can help an individual in providing a partial answer to the question, 'who am I?' (Stryker and Burke, 2000). It is important to recognise that the definition of others and the self are largely 'relational and comparative' (Tajfel & Turner, 1985: 16); they define oneself relative to individuals in other categories. Although many social categories are categorical, such as 'girl', 'British', a 'pupil at Fairtrees Primary School', the extent to which the individual identifies with each category is a matter of degree. Such identities tend to be viewed positively since the individual invests more of his or her self- conceptions in valued personas (Adler and Adler, 1987; Ashforth and Mael, 1989).

2.3.3 Children's development of identity

Identity formation is a main adolescent psychosocial developmental task when there are complex interconnections between different processes that are at the basis of one's identity (Negru-Subtirica et al., 2017). Adolescence is a particularly crucial time for identity development, as studies into ethnic and racial identity show (Wang et al., 2017) as individuals are also developing the cognitive skills to understand these terms and their meanings. These cognitive and sociocultural changes result in adolescents grappling with defining themselves and constructing a new identity (Erikson, 1968).
Fundamental theories such as those by Marcia (1966) and Erikson (1968), although considerably dated now, show that there are various points of identity crisis and commitment that must be overcome *before* adolescence is reached, justifying why girls of an early age, pre-adolescence, (eight to eleven years old) were selected for this study. Erikson's and Marcia's identity theories are now discussed in greater detail below.
Erikson's Identity Theory
How is a sense of identity developed? Erikson saw our construction of identity as a process

of inner conflict, involving balances of certainty and uncertainty and constructs of exploration and commitment (Brocious, 2017: 321). Erikson himself spent his life on a quest for his identity and believed that this search is our primary goal in life. The demands of the process of maturation and cultural expectations create eight different crises- posed by Erikson as eight psycho-social stages throughout one's lifespan that an individual must 'pass through' and resolve to develop healthily and develop their identity; for Erikson, being comfortable with one's identity is understanding oneself in society.

Psychosocial development refers to the development of self in relation to society, with changes in behaviour being a response to the interaction between our internal motivations and the demands of our culture. Culture is a crucial factor on psychosocial development, as although Erikson states how all individuals go through the same sequence of eight stages in their lifetime (Erikson, 1968), each culture has its structure and way of guiding an infant's behaviour. Psychosocial development is culturally relative and, as social demands change within each culture over time, thus the factors on this development change over time. Erikson divided the human lifespan into eight stages; each stage is characterised and denoted by the identity crisis for that age range (see later Table 2.2).
A crisis can be defined as a 'psychosocial challenge that presents opportunities for development' (Korb, 2018: 41). The favourable resolution of crisis leads to growth, but negative resolution (or no resolution) leads to maladjustment.

Stage	Age	Crisis
Infancy	0-1 years	Trust versus mistrust
Early childhood	2-3 years	Autonomy versus Shame and Doubt
Preschool	3-5 years	Initiative versus guilt
School Age	6-11 years	Industry versus inferiority
Adolescence	12-20 years	Identity versus role confusion
Young adult	21-24 years	Intimacy versus isolation
Adulthood	25-60 years	Generativity versus Stagnation
Old Age	60+	Ego integrity versus despair

Table 2.1: Erikson's stages of psychosocial development (1968)

Stage four, 'school age' (see Table 2.1 above) like the participants in this study, is the stage of 'industry' versus 'inferiority'; industry involves doing things that others value, and performing these acts gives the individual a sense of industry, competence and mastery. On the other hand, failure to be 'industrious', or unsuccessful experiences during this stage, can lead to feelings of inadequacy, inferiority and lack of self-worth. The positive resolution of this crisis involves productive work, successful experiences interacting with others, and understanding of personal progress.

A central assumption of identity theory is that adolescents reconsider current identity commitments and explore identity alternatives before they make new commitments in various identity domains (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1966). In their five-year study of adolescents, Becht et al.'s (2017) findings supported Erikson's (1968) hypothesis, supporting identity theory but also indicating that the processes of identity formation might differ depending on the identity domain (Becht et al., 2017: 2103).

Considering the recent literature on identity shared earlier in this chapter (Section 2.2), this study refutes Erikson's clear-cut idea of 'stages' in identity that at different ages, different identifiable crises and conflicts occur, but instead argues that crises and conflicts occur in different ways for different people at any time in their life. A study by Becht et al. (2017) confirmed Erikson's notion that identity crisis is often experienced daily during the period of adolescence (Becht et al., 2017: 2010), but it could be argued that these crises are not always visibly defined but are instead the process of figuring out the values, attitudes and behaviours to adopt in our 'figured worlds' (Urrieta, 2007; Holland et al., 1998).

Marcia's identity theory (1966)
Erikson's theory was extended further by James Marcia (1966) who distinguished different *forms* of identity- through the synthesis of childhood skills, beliefs and identifications, from the end of childhood and the beginning of adulthood, and by providing the young adult with both a sense of continuity with his or her past, and a direction going forward for the future. Marcia claimed that individuals develop their sense of identity through two fundamental processes: an individual explores identity alternatives and forms commitments towards suitable alternatives (van der Gaag et al., 2017). Interestingly, social media, including blogs, offer visible and observable platforms for these explorations to take place. Marcia's identity theory reveals four forms of identity as shown on the following page (Table 2.2).

		Committed to identity?	
		YES	NO
Searching for identity?	YES	Identity Achievement	Identity Moratorium
	NO	Identity Foreclosure	Identity Diffusion

Table 2.2: Marcia's four identity statuses (1966)

Crisis in this context is seen as exploration through an individual's considerations such as their beliefs in religion, employment, and life plans. Commitment refers to an individual's ownership of choices, values and goals. Definitions of these four statuses are given below:

> ***Identity achievement:*** *the subject has experienced personal crises but has resolved them on her terms. The individual is committing to beliefs and values.*
>
> ***Moratorium:*** *the subject is in an acute state of crisis: she is exploring and actively searching for values to eventually call her own. The individual is still trying to find elements of identity of which to commit.*
>
> ***Foreclosure:*** *subject has not yet experienced identity crisis, but commitments have been made; this is often as a result of the influence of authority, such as parents. Commitments are made without individual exploration and questioning.*
>
> ***Identity diffusion:*** *the subject has not yet experienced an identity crisis nor made any commitment to a vocation of a set of beliefs. (Muuss, 1996: 260)*

Again, in light of the more recent literature on identity (Section 2.3), however, this ability to possess several identities in several figured worlds refutes both Erikson's and Marcia's notion of the self as being composed of one single identity. It is acknowledged that emotions are a key part of the process of identity construction, but to classify 'an identity' neatly into a category, as with Marcia's four identity statuses, does not sit well within the contemporary understanding of identities as an ever-shifting entities. One view that sits with both old and new identity theory, however, is that of the role of the 'other', and the significant power of others' attitudes in response to our behaviour.

Marcia also conducted research into the personality characteristics that may be experienced by individuals as they encounter crises and commitments on their journey of identity construction (1996; 1967; 1980); these characteristics are '**anxiety**', '**self-esteem**', '**authoritarianism**', '**moral reasoning'**, '**autonomy**' and '**styles of cognition**' (Table 2.3).

Personality characteristic	Definition
Anxiety	A feeling of uncertainty and discomfort
Self-esteem	An individual's judgement of self-worth
Authoritarianism	Behaviour that is submissive to authority figures
Moral reasoning	The ability to judge what is right or wrong
Autonomy	The capacity for self-governance
Styles of cognition	Mental acts of gathering knowledge and understanding

Table 2.3: Definitions of personality characteristics as defined by this author

Why is it important to understand the identity statuses and the characteristic components of individuals? Research shows links between these personality characteristics and successful self-regulation and positive thought and interaction (Slugoski et al., 1984; Moses and Marcia, 1969). Linking to this thesis, research into cyberbullying found that when children are 'in distress' they need to have their voices heard (Mishna et al., 2014: 341). If children have more confident identities, they should be better equipped to talk about distressing experiences they encounter online for these experiences to be supported. Alternatively, individuals less confident in their identities seem more 'conceptually constrained', unable either to integrate multiple perspectives or to advance beyond a somewhat rigid position (Slugoski et al., 1984: 659), and are less able to participation in sensitive discussions and seem to care less for the feelings and opinions of others. To summarise, impression management can arise from cognitive dissonance, anxiety, and the moral desire to fit in with society. It is essential, therefore, to explore role-playing in greater detail.

2.3.4 Role playing and Goffman's Presentation of Self

Goffman (1922-1982) believed that individuals are always trying to control or guide the impressions that others have of him or her by preselecting appearance, manner and attitude depending on the audience they encounter; while this interaction is developing, the person that the individual is communicating with is trying to gain information about the individual and form an impression of them. I find Goffman a useful theorist here as I agree how these interactions with others as our audience are the building blocks of our identity formation. It is

through social performances and interactions that we assert which values, beliefs and behaviours we wish to commit to, to be well-received by our audience. Goffman's analogy is that life is a performance that is consciously upheld by individuals to create a positive or desired impression. Further, Goffman also believed that all participants in social interactions are engaged in certain practices to avoid being embarrassed or embarrassing others; this led to Goffman's dramaturgical analysis (1959). Dramaturgy, or the dramaturgical approach, refers to the theatrical representation of life, finding similarities in both the way that people act in their everyday life and the way actors perform on stage. In both social interactions and stage performances, there is a 'stage' where the actors perform for the audience, and a second stage, behind the curtain.

On stage, individuals can promote a positive self, but, behind the scenes, those individuals can set aside their chosen role or identity and act differently. Interestingly, unlike other researchers and writers who have used this dramaturgical metaphor, Goffman draws connections between all elements of acting and live performance, not just the stage and backstage presentation, and comments on how 'props direct action'; how the actor is being watched by an audience but is also simultaneously an audience for the viewer's performance. Goffman highlights that social actors can choose the stage, props and costumes to utilise in front of a specific audience. This 'theatrical' performance that Goffman explained applies to face to face interactions can now be applied to those online interactions that did not exist in any great form before his death in 1982, with the uptake of electronic mail (email) not coming until the early 1990s. Social media gives the perfect platform for such performances to be acted out, with individuals having the ability to hide and conceal their physical appearance and true identity should they so wish.

Goffman's dramaturgical model is broken down in Table 2.4 below. Social interaction is the key drive for playing 'roles'.

Social Interaction	Goffman argues that social interaction is all about the successful playing of 'roles'
Construction of 'self'	Goffman claimed we actively construct our identity by controlling and manipulating our 'audience's impressions of us'
Drama Analogies	Goffman uses drama and theatre vocabulary and elements to explore and examine social interaction, including words such as an 'actor', 'stage', 'script', 'prop'

Everyday life	Goffman stated we are all actors engaging in the drama of our everyday lives

Table 2.4: Key concepts in Goffman's dramaturgical analogy (1971)

Not only are our audiences judging our performances, but often there are unspoken social standards with which to adhere. There are moral requirements that must be met. In the 'backstage', the actor can step out of the role of performer and can resign from playing the characters that he or she may choose to play when 'front stage' playing to an audience. Suppressed actions in the front stage or various kinds of informal actions are found in the backstage. Argyle concurs that *'the self is not at work all the time; people are not continually trying to discover, sustain or present a self-image'* (Argyle, 1994: 209), such as when at home compared to when at work, or in the audience rather than on the stage; at these times, the 'self-system' is not very active. Identities, through roles, can, therefore, shift depending on both the roles and the stages in use (Holland et al. 1998).

With regards to online and offline platforms, Alexander (2007: 59) writes that for children who have grown up with virtual relationships as an integral and natural part of their 'normal social repertoires', the boundary and differentiation between 'real' and 'virtual' may not be so clear. The ambiguity around, and dissolve, of boundaries are supported by findings by Davies (2007) who explored how everyday life is acted out through the online platform of a photo-sharing website, Flickr, where 'traditional boundaries between the public and private spheres are being extended, challenged or eroded' (Davies, 2007: 549). Essentially, online spaces can become stages for individuals to recreate and represent themselves online. Participants' social experiences both on online and offline stages will be considered for this study to allow for comparison and contrast. To link to identity, it is the appraisal and responses of the audience, or audiences, that influences our future performances.

Consideration must now be made of how the performance of roles, both online on the front stage and offline in the backstage (Goffman, 1959), are contributing to identity development. Although Goffman's performance of roles can offer some consideration of the ways we adapt our manner and behaviour depending on the audience, this is a constrained view of the performance of roles as, highlighted above, there is not one explicit 'front stage'. When individuals are performing on so many varying stages to so many different audiences, life cannot be straightforward 'front' or 'back' stage. An example of this is that when 'actors' meet the same 'audience', such as peers from their class at school, in different contexts, such as

at a birthday party, or the school Open Day, or at the supermarket, they will most likely speak and behave differently in those contexts despite meeting the same people.

Building on Goffman's original ideas, Sinha (2009: 104), presents impression management as 'an active self-presentation of a person aiming to enhance his image in the eyes of others'. The ability to interact with others online where the physical self can be hidden if desired offers an exciting opportunity for impression management to take place, opening a new realm of 'cyberpsychology', a relatively recent field that offers up psychological issues and developments through the employment of emerging technology. A study by Pearce and Vitak (2016) explored how young adults balance the tensions between wanting to connect, create, and interact in these spaces while still adhering to behavioural codes (Pearce and Vitak, 2016: 2595). Research by Roulin and Levashina (2016) explored how- in the quest for achieving positive identities- users employ impression management on social media to manipulate the impressions of friends and family (Roulin and Levashina, 2016). While these studies advanced understanding of impression management, including social media use, neither looked at this critical identity formation process in pre-adolescents.

As well as being developed by Sinha (2009), Goffman's theory around impression management also links to the works of Butler as discussed earlier (see previous Section 2.2). Butler's essay introduces the idea of theatrical acting to contrast the actor's act and the performative act. While actors know that they are acting, we, performing gender, often do not know that we ever formed a belief in our gender. We take our gender as natural and forget that it is naturalised through performative acts. We sometimes take the appearance of substance as reality, when it is only a constructed identity. Butler reminds us that any gender is an historical situation and a construction, not a natural fact (Row, 2013: 1). Butler defines gender as 'what is put on, invariably, under constraint, daily and incessantly, with anxiety and pleasure… socially shared and historically constituted' (Butler, 1990: 530).

2.3.5 Gender

> *'Being born a girl or a boy has implications that carry considerably beyond chromosomal, hormonal, and genital differences' (Ruble et al., 2007).*

There is vast literature on the significance of gender in children's development, and it is through these developing gender narratives that children build up their identities (Rogers, 2018). Young children search for cues about gender (Martin and Ruble, 2004), such as who does certain activities or plays certain roles or who can play with whom (Martin and Ruble,

2004). As children learn that boys and girls are different, gender identity is assumed, and children realise that they a member of one group of the other.

Ruble et al (1998) present a 'multidimensional matrix' that makes up the gender system in society; this matrix is composed of four constructs (concepts/beliefs, identity/self-perception, preferences, and behavioural enactment) and six contents (biological/categorical sex, activities/interests, personal-social attributes, social relationships, styles/symbols, and values) (Ruble at el, 2007). Essentially, there are biological, social and cognitive forces at work that may determine alignment to one gender or the other or cause an individual to wish to identity with a gender that differs from their assigned sex at birth, known as transgenderism, or even to transition from one sex to the other during their lifetime, known as transsexualism.

Bem (1983) highlights the importance of the process of a child aligning with either 'masculinity' or 'femininity', the process of 'sex typing' at an early age, as it is a process that involves a child exploring 'sex-appropriate preferences, skills, personality attributes, behaviours and self-concepts' (Bem, 1983: 598). Essentially, it is through this process that the developing child comes to 'match the template' that is constructed and defined as being gender appropriate by the culture and society within which that child exists. This concurs with Butler's notion of gender performativity.

In a society that is becoming ever-more aware and sensitive to gender issues, findings by Bragg et al (2018:1) revealed that 'many young people have expanded vocabularies of gender identity or expression' and, through this, have explored critical reflexivity about their own positions. Although living in a culture that is accepting gender diversity with more tolerance and understanding, Bragg et al (2018:1) warn that, 'overall, it appears that young people's immediate social cultural worlds are constructed in such a way that gender binary choices are frequently inevitable, from school uniforms and toilets to sports cultures and friendships' (Bragg et al., 2018). It must be acknowledged here that gender studies on childhood vary from culture to culture, and country to country (Esperon et al., 2018). This thesis is grounded in the UK system at a London primary school.

We must consider the value and influence of social networks, both offline and online. Within a society, it is the family, and the child's 'dyadic family relationship experiences' (McHale et al., 2003: 113) with parents and siblings that play a very important part in the process of gender development during childhood and adolescence, but with the accessible platform of the internet, there is the opportunity for influence to come in other shapes and forms, through peers, celebrity role models, or even strangers with a shared interest on social

media (O'Keeffe and Clarke-Pearson, 2011), such as forums on transgender issues. The role of others in our identities must be discussed further and is detailed in the following section.

2.3.6 Social constructions of self; Interpersonal theory

> *'Even when we are alone, our thinking and behaviour always relate to other people, real or imaginary' (Elkind, 1972:1)*

Psychiatrists and psychologists have always been concerned with the role of others in an individual's identity and behaviour (Adler, 1927; Freud, 1966; Jung, 1969). Freud, concerned with psychoanalysis, argued that most neurotic disturbances were due to the 'interference' by others during an individual's development. Psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Harry Stack Sullivan (1892-1949) claimed that Freud's argument did not go deep enough, leaving the neurosis within the individual as an 'encapsulated entity' (Elkind, 1972: 1). Sullivan argued that mental illness is 'interpersonal' not 'intrapersonal' as essentially it involves how individuals deal with other individuals.

Also, like Erikson (discussed earlier in Section 2.4.2), Sullivan (1953) set out a sequence of developmental stages, which he referred to as 'epochs', during which identity is shaped: infancy, childhood, juvenile era, preadolescence, early adolescence and late adolescence. Parallels can be seen between these developmental epochs and those of Erikson (see previously, Table 2.2: Erikson's stages of psychosocial development (1968)). The key difference is that while Erikson's final stage is 'Old Age', Sullivan's epochs end with late adolescence; this ties in with the work of Marcia (1980) who focuses predominantly on adolescence as the time for critical identity development to take place.

Sullivan, concerned with the study of human living, stated that 'all that is the self-system arises in interpersonal relations' (1953:41); the various parts of a multiple self are involved in 'communicative interchange', which takes the form of a dialogue (Hermans, 1996) in which each voice may be in accord or discord with the other. Sullivan (1953) viewed the individual in his relationships to other people, suggesting that there are three aspects of interpersonal cooperation that are necessary for an infant's survival and which dictate learning; the 'Good-Me', the 'Bad-Me' and the 'Not-Me'. Sullivan claims that within all infants, this tripartite 'cleavage' in personification exists. While we desire to be the 'Good-Me', from this comes into being an exceedingly important secondary dynamism (Sullivan, 1953: 161).

Sullivan's theory links to Goffman's concept of 'impression management', as Sullivan highlights that motivating forces in the development of the self-system range from the need for security in infancy, to a need for satisfaction, intimacy, and agentic power throughout development. The need for tenderness, security and intimacy reflect the need for human contact. Sullivan stressed the importance of appraisal from others in shaping one's self-image (Flett, 2007); again, links can be made here to Goffman's concept of impression management (1959), as this appraisal from our audience can influence our future behaviour and presentation of self.

Ziller's framework (1973) for interpersonal behaviour (shown in Figure 2.2 below) attempts to link social experience to the perception of others, to social behaviour, and reactions of others to the individual.
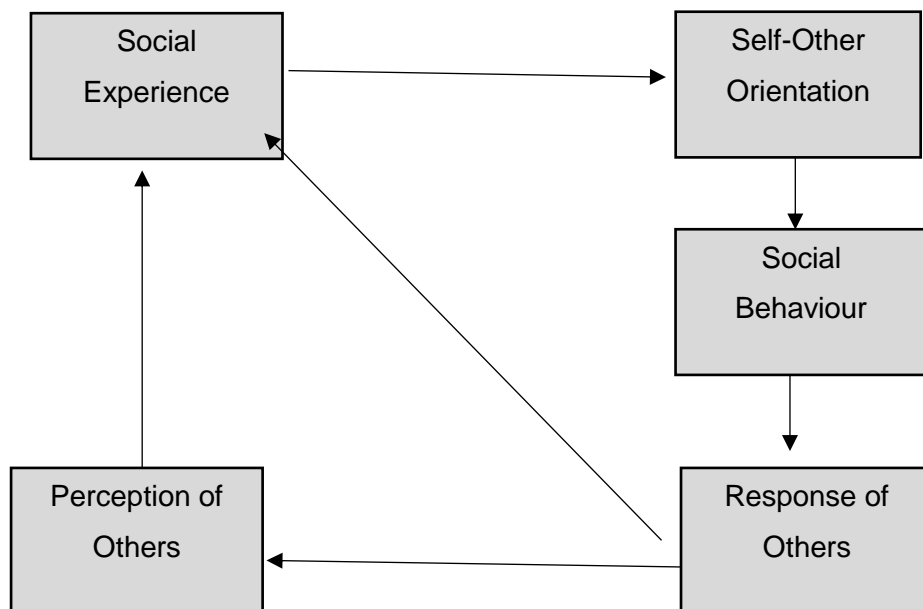
Figure 2.1: Ziller's framework linking social experience and social behaviour (1973: 144)

Elements of Goffman's sociological theories are evident here (in Figure 2.1), with the importance of the response of others (the 'audience') in our social experience. The crucial link is between social experience and social behaviour, which is mediated by self-other orientations; in other words, social experience impacts on identity formation, which in turn influences social behaviour.

Both Sullivan and Ziller's work on identity are of interest when considering how children are constructing their identities through interactions with others. It is through the works of Goffman, who also highlights the importance of social interaction, that this study can more deeply consider the lived experiences of girls online: through Goffman's concept of 'stages'. Additionally, Goffman highlights an individual's desire to 'conform' in some way, to meet societal or group expectations to be accepted. Chapter 6 will allow for an insight into

individual behaviours in the group blog through the presentation of colourful screenshots. Taking Ziller's ideas a step further, we would expect the lived experience of online communication and social media use to influence the nascent identity formulation of pre-adolescents. This process would then be visible in their subsequent online social behaviour. This study considers these links, as well as the possible links to well-being.

2.4 The Phenomenon of constructing identities on Social Media

Having considered the definitions of identity, and the role of lived experiences in better understanding how identity is created, this section will now focus on the phenomenon of social media: a rapidly evolving contemporary platform upon which individuals are constructing their identities. 'Social media' can be defined as a 'group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of the Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content' (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2011:60). Social media encapsulates ways that individuals can create, share and exchange ideas and information in a virtual space or online community. At times throughout this thesis, the term 'online communication' is used alongside or seemingly interchangeable with the term 'social media'; at these times, this is due to the element of communicate on being the key part of the many facets that social media presents.

In recent years, social media platforms have 'penetrated deeply' into the mechanics of our everyday life, affecting both our informal interactions but also our professional routines (Fisher, 2015: 72). Social media is the 'latest innovation in computer-mediated communication that poses serious challenges to existing institutions' (van Dijck and Poell, 2013), such as the institutions of mass media and the government. The rapid development and integration of such cultural tools has forced us to adapt to a new cultural reality. On a daily basis, news, information and select entertainment are at our fingertips and no longer a privilege for the few. Fast-growing networks like *Facebook* and *Twitter* (see Glossary, Appendix A) with millions of active users are 'rapidly penetrating public communication, affecting the operational and institutional power balance of media systems' (van Dijck and Poell, 2013: 3). Waggoner (2013) noted that users could see their online selves as having equal status with their offline selves; the two selves then, are not different, but the same entity in different contexts. If not seeing the two as identical - participants wish to 'keep them as close together as possible, and not adopt new persona' (Bullingham and Vasconcelos, 2013: 9). By looking into the motivations behind social media use, the relationships between this phenomenon and individuals' wellbeing may begin to become somewhat more transparent.

Blogs and wikis are two strands of SNS that rely upon social interaction and collaboration. The word 'blog' comes from 'web-log', essentially an online diary (Snee, 2013). 'Wiki' comes from the Hawaiian word for 'quick', as wiki interfaces offer authors quick editing and revision of content. Whereas wikis often encourage large groups of authors- such as the class wiki pages used at Fairtrees Primary School where this study takes place- blogs often have one sole author, with opportunities for readers to comment, interact and share content with others. Blogs are still a popular method for communication today, and it is argued that many forms of online status posting take the form of micro-blogs, such as Twitter. Many popular online games, such as Roblox, a massive multiplayer online and game creation platform, have a blog connected to them (see https://blog.roblox.com/ for an example).

2.4.1 Having an 'informed' identity

> *'To what extent can media be seen to embody a form of language that is similar to written language?*
> *To what extent, and in what ways, do users need to learn to use and interpret media, as they must learn to interpret print?*
> *And is there a single literacy that applies across the whole range of contemporary media?' (Buckingham et al., 2005: 3)*

Current literature around digital literacy, namely the ability to access, navigate and understand digital content, suggests that children 'already possess quite high levels of functional literacy' (Buckingham et al., 2005: 3); it is thus posed that education around using technology and online communications should be aimed at preparing young people to manipulate these spaces, rather than seeking to block or filter them (see later in Section 2.4.4 for further discussion on digital literacy).

With focus on a UK demographic, data from 'Statista' from 2018 shows the five biggest motivations behind social media use in the UK for sixteen to thirty-four-year-olds are: to find out what friends are doing, to send messages to friends, to keep in touch with relatives, to post photos/videos and to see what friends are watching or listening to (Statista, 2018). Although admittedly from Statista market research, as opposed to academic research, this data can still help to give context to the motivations of users to use social media, offering honest and personal insight into individual habits. As there is still relatively little research conducted with pre-adolescents, as the eight to eleven-year-olds in this study, research with this older age group should be considered to provide context for social media use generally. Within the IPA data analysis (Chapter 4), motivations for the pre-adolescent group may be

revealed and can thus be compared to this data.

Motivation a): 'To find out what my friends are doing'/ 'to send messages directly to my friends'/ 'to see what my friends are watching or listening to.' (Statista, 2018)

Friendship, and to know what friends are doing, is a powerful drive in using social media. Social networking sites (SNS) first appeared in the mid-90s. In recent years, however, Web 2.0 technologies have made modern SNS increasingly popular and easier to use (Luo, 2018), and as a result, social networking has become a global phenomenon as more users than ever have connected to the networks. An SNS can be any site that allows for online communication, including gaming sites, virtual worlds, video sharing sites or blogs (O'Keeffe and Clarke-Pearson, 2011). Two of the most popular SNS, Facebook and Twitter, have reached one billion users and exceeded half-billion users, respectively (Luo, 2018).

Users access social media to be 'informed' about what others are doing. The ways in which users behave online, and the platforms they use, is informed by influences from home, school and peers. When individuals have an 'informed identity', equipped with eSafety skills, social media can be navigated with independence, autonomy, and growing confidence. The ways in which children are exposed to modern technology 'allows them access to a greater range of texts and they quickly develop skills to navigate internet sites and other forms of communication technologies' (Gibson and Smith, 2018: 4).

2.4.2 Having an 'affirmed' identity as a user of online spaces

As well as being 'informed' online, literature shows that a motivation behind using SNS is to have their identity 'affirmed'.

Motivation b): 'To post my photos/videos' – Presenting a digital self (Statista, 2018)

Humans have always been concerned with their social image. Strategic self-presentation to project a favourable image of oneself to the audience is not a new phenomenon (Goffman, 1959), but the growth of social networking sites (SNS) has had a considerable influence on such social endeavours. As shown through self-presentation on popular SNS Facebook, when users choose how to present themselves digitally, they apply strategies and make choices that influence the liking and respect they receive from others (Bareket-Bojmel et al., 2016).

But how much do we reflect on the digital self that we present? Regarding self-presentation versus self-reflection, an interesting study by Thomas et al. (2018) explored how our digital selves can be captured using physical books, photographic triptychs or films, to present our social media data (our self-presentations) in a way that provokes self-reflection of their digital identity. Although conducted with adult users, the findings of Thomas' et al. study (2018) are linked to Goffman's (1959) self-presentation theories, showing that a fluid rather than bounded interpretation of social media spaces may be appropriate, arguing that remediation (of converting the online data into a physical object) can contribute to the understanding of digital self (Thomas et al., 2018). This thesis will allow for pre-adolescents to present their stories, their lived experiences, so we can better understand the participants' motivations for social media use and consider links to their well-being.

People now curate their own archives of everyday life on social media (Beer and Burrows, 2007) through the utterances they put out for their audiences. This study involves the safe and secure creation of a closed blog to avoid ethical issues around public and private content (Snee, 2013), but the purpose of the blog was the same as if researching in the wider blogosphere. The blogosphere is made up of all blogs and their interconnections, with this term itself implying a 'connected community', linking back to the motivation (Section 2.4.1) to 'know what friends are doing'.

It is clear that, although many research projects are exploring social media use (Thomas et al., 2018; Wallace et al., 2017; Geurin-Eagleman and Burch, 2016), few are concerned with children. These studies as mentioned in this section are relevant in setting a context for the phenomenon of social media, but now the connections between social media and children's identities and well-being must be examined in greater depth.

2.4.3 Finding 'stable' identities: Research into social media in the lives of children and adolescents

Before continuing with the section, the definition of 'stability' must be consider: what does it mean for identities to be 'stable' in a time when we appreciate that identities are equally fluid and dynamic? Stable, here, means having confidence and belief, and alignment with the values of, a current 'dimension of self' (Wenger, 1998).

> *'How do children gain access to and experience new media, especially the Internet, in their home, school, and community?*
> *Does the reconfiguring of identity, knowledge, social relations, and intimacy afford*

children more risks than opportunities?' (Livingstone, 2014: 129)

As the use of technology in our lives continues to evolve, the conventional daily performances of 'communication, education, entertainment, commerce, and participation are being rewritten through the use of online digital technologies, especially mobile and social media' (Livingstone, 2014: 129). Young people's lives today are saturated with digital media at a time when their brains are still developing and when neural plasticity is high, resulting in changes to learning and thinking, which may promote the skills of multitasking and problem solving (Thompson, 2013). The provision of such skills is reflected in the study by Kwakh and Park (2016) which explored how the growth of the Internet as the primary source of information and knowledge has dramatically impacted the way people make use of their memory. As a result, interest in the Internet environment, and the role of transactive memory in a social media environment, has been heightened. Transactive memory is the shared memory system that is formed through interactions between people. Through social media, people have been able to build various human networks, which in turn have made it possible to acquire the latest information and knowledge. In this sense, the utility of transactive memory has been further increased in a social media environment (Kwakh and Park, 2016). Links can be seen here to the earlier discussion on Erikson; cognitive and sociocultural changes result in adolescents grappling with defining themselves and constructing a new identity (Erikson, 1968) and it can be argued that there is no more visible platform for identity to be observed that the platform of social media (Litchfield et al., 2018).

Mobile communication and SNS serve a significant role in the process of self-presentation and emancipation, providing 'full-time' access to peers and peer culture (Mascheroni et al., 2015). Adolescents are amongst the highest consumers of social media, and research has shown that their well-being decreases with age (Booker et al., 2018). A recent report by Ofcom, the UK's Office of Communications, stated that adolescents aged twelve to fifteen spend more time online than they do watching television (Ofcom, 2015). Adolescents in the UK are ranked in the bottom third on overall well-being in a United Nations Children's Fund report comparing several countries (UNICEF, 2013), although the relationship between social media interaction and well-being is not well established.

Ofcom (201) warns that although more young people are using social media daily, children's online safety skills have failed to rise at the same rate, with many risks arising from the lack of privacy on SNS. Most parents of children aged between five and fifteen years old believe that they are equipped to protect their children from online risks, but findings by Internet security system McAfee revealed that eighty per cent of teenagers claim that they know how to hide their online behaviour from their parents (Gordon, 2013). This links to Marcia's

personality characteristics as 'autonomy' becomes apparent while 'authoritarianism' is eroded; identity is being performed without parental knowledge or visibility. If four-fifths of teenagers are hiding their behaviour from parents, this implies that secret identities are being fostered, which prompts the question which behaviours these users are trying to hide from their families, and how these behaviours may be having an impact on the development of identities.

Age	Amount of time online per week (average) 2016	Amount of time online per week (average) 2015
3-4 years old	8 hours 18 minutes per week	6 hours 48 minutes per week
5-15 years old	15 hours per week	13 hours 42 minutes per week

Table 2.5: Children's Internet use, 3-15 years old (adapted from Ofcom, 2016)

Table 2.5 (above) shows how even within one year, from 2015-2016, Internet usage amongst children aged between three and fifteen years old has on average increased by two hours a week. More worryingly, the data (Ofcom, 2016) suggests that many pre-school children are spending over eight hours a week online each week on average, which links to earlier research by Livingstone et al. (2013) for 'EU Kids Online', where findings highlighted the critical need for information about the Internet-related behaviours of children aged eight years old and younger. EU Kids Online's research, confirmed through the data in Table 2.5 above, shows that children are now going online at a younger and younger age, and that young children's 'lack of technical, critical and social skills may pose [a greater] risk' (Livingstone et al., 2013: 3).

Aside from this, when exploring motivations behind Internet use for older children, the Net Aware Report (NSPCC, 2017) engaged in research with 1,696 eleven to eighteen year olds in schools across the UK and through Childline's engagement platforms such as Facebook and provides a snapshot into young people's online lives. Key findings of the Net Aware Report show that young people are motivated by enjoyment in their exploration of the online space, and value six critical opportunities that online spaces provide, as shown in Table 2.6 on the following page.

Opportunity Presented Online	Examples
Fun	Through gaming, videos and finding out more information on topics of interest
Communication	The chance to test boundaries, build communities and social groups
Self-expression	The opportunity to find a personal voice and express this freely
Self-representation	The possibility of manipulating the image given to control how one is perceived
Creativity	The chance to interact in a non-conventional space by image, video and audio as opposed to the physical, 'real' world
Online Autonomy	Independence to navigate online without adult interaction or adult-lead. Autonomous choice in the use of online tools and spaces

Table 2.6: Opportunities presented online, Net Aware Report (NSPCC, 2017)

From previous discussions in Section 2.4, it should be immediately clear that several of the opportunities (Table 2.6 above), such as self-expression and self-representation, play a role in identity formation and can be linked to theories put forward earlier in this chapter. From the findings by the NSPCC (2017), it is apparent that 'autonomy' and the opportunity for independence online is a draw for children, and this online autonomy can feed into identity construction through the exploration of values, beliefs and behaviour in front of virtual audiences.

NSPCC's Net Aware Report (NSPCC, 2017), discussed above, is one of few recent studies conducted with children and adolescents- though even this report only involved children aged eleven years and older. There have been several recent studies exploring the use of social media by adults and adolescents (Kitazawa et al., 2018; Manzi et al., 2018). When investigating students' experiences of social media brand communities, it was revealed that social media content plays an important sense-giving role in meeting members' need to understand themselves, feel distinctive and confident about themselves, and feel supported

and connected (Kitazawa et al., 2018: 55). Studies with two different generations, adolescents and adults, by Manzi et al. (2018) explored the significant play of two identity processes in the motivation for communicating with others online: identity motives satisfaction (esteem, continuity, belonging and efficacy) and identity exploration. Manzi et al. conclude that when using Facebook people are entering a shared and predefined cultural world to which they tend to adapt their identities (Manzi et al., 2018: 81).

It is important to acknowledge this changing face of our cultural worlds we are currently living in as digital technology becomes more prevalent. This is explored

2.4.4 Digital literacies and becoming social media literate

> *'Digital media is radically changing the way people communicate and influencing the thought processes and experiences of children and adults' (Globokar, 2018)*

New technologies pose a challenge to the educational process (Globokar, 2018), yet also an opportunity. Literacy practices for children are constantly developing due to the advances in digital media, and this means that the implications for how children deal with the influx of digital information that they receive are far reaching (Burnett, 2016). As previously discussed, digital devices are part of everyday life for many children and can be some of their earliest literacy experiences (Gibson and Smith, 2018: 4). Young children are engaged in a variety of multimodal, multimedia practices from an early age, and it is imperative that educators help them to manage the amount of information they receive and how they portray themselves online. Many texts that they encounter are from outside of school or family and are often formed around popular or consumer culture. Their engagement with these electronic texts can allow them to outmanoeuvre or subvert the instructions of adults (Carrington, 2005).

Earlier (Section 2.3.5 on Gender), the role of family in a child's development and process of making identities was highlighted. Marsh et al. (2005) and Marsh (2010) argue that children's learning in digital technology is scaffolded both implicitly and explicitly by their parents and other family members. As a result, their competence in the use of mobile phones and tablets is established from an early age. With this 'mobile literacy', they are able to create and distribute texts with ease, as their observations of adults around them demonstrate that this is a legitimate social practice this allows them to produce and receive information in their own right and therefore become active in global flows of information (Gibson and Smith, 2018: 4). Globokar (2018) insists that schools must accept this digital thread to children's lives, and should embrace it, teaching children 'self-respect… emotional development, community affiliation, creativity and innovation' (Globokar, 2018: 121).

Outside of school, however, the social networks and connections that the internet provides do not end. Many children and young people are in constant communication with their peers and are often consumed with checking their social media pages, which can ultimately have important repercussions on a variety of psychosocial outcomes (e.g., self-esteem, depressive symptoms, peer relationship quality) (Van Allen et al., 2018). Social media has also seen an evolution in bullying, a practice defined by Olweus (1981) as having four elements: negative acts, repetition, intention and a power imbalance (Canty et al., 2016). Cyberbullying is commonly defined as bullying using any technology, including mobile phone as well as internet communication technologies (ICT). While there is substantial blurring between functions, the one-to-many potential audience of social media is a distinctive element worth highlighting within the more general field of electronic communications (Canty et al., 2016).

Time spent on social media and making online comparisons with others may influence users' mental health (Fardouly et al., 2018: 1456), even without the presence of explicit bullying or cyberbullying. Research into links between parental control over children's social media use, children's time browsing social media and satisfaction found that 'preadolescents, whose parents reported greater control over their child's time on social media, reported better mental health' (Fardouly et al., 2018: 1456). This relationship was mediated by preadolescents spending less time browsing and making fewer appearance comparisons on social media. Parental control over time spent on social media may be associated with benefits for mental health among preadolescents (Fardouly et al., 2018: 1456). Although children may be digitally literate, it must be acknowledged by parents and care givers that boundaries must still be put in place to ensure a balanced amount of screen-time where possible.

Peers and parents can influence a child, but in the information of age of digital literacy, companies are interacting with children, too. A study into the links between children's visual consumption of food brand video content on YouTube and the purchase of these foods found that viewing the content resulted in higher frequency of consumption of unhealthy foods and drinks after adjustment for age, sex and socio-economic status (Baldwin et al., 2018). This study reveals that children who have higher online engagement with food brands and content, particularly through online video and advertisements, are more likely to consume unhealthy foods and drinks. Social media companies have a greater role to play in protecting children from advertising (Baldwin et al., 2018).

The UK's minister for suicide prevention, Jackie Doyle-Price, advocates the companies such as Facebook, Instagram and YouTube should 'be legally treated as publishers' (Hymas,

2019) so that they could face fines, prosecution or even arrest over the publication of inappropriate and harmful material, such as content on self-harm, suicide or abuse. This campaign is birthed from the tragic death of fourteen-year-old Molly Russell, whose family discovered she had been accessing content on social media that was connected to depression, self-harming and suicide, before taking her own life (Vaughan, 2019). Doyle-Price insists that these social media companies 'are currently operating as if they are completely not responsible for the content that sits on their platforms. That isn't an excuse we are going to have any more' (Doyle-Price in Hymas, 2019). The move would have profound implications across the sector forcing tech firms to be liable for the pictures and videos they host and distribute (Vaughan, 2019).

The shape of social media use by girls must now be explored to consider the role of this phenomenon in children's lives.

2.4.5 Social media use by girls

Figures from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) show that over a four-year period, the number of children using social media has nearly doubled (ONS, 2018), with girls between the ages of ten and fifteen years old using social media significantly more than boys (see following Figure 2.2).

% BOYS AND GIRLS SPENDING > 3 HOURS ON SOCIAL MEDIA ON A NORMAL SCHOOL DAY

■ Boys ■ Girls

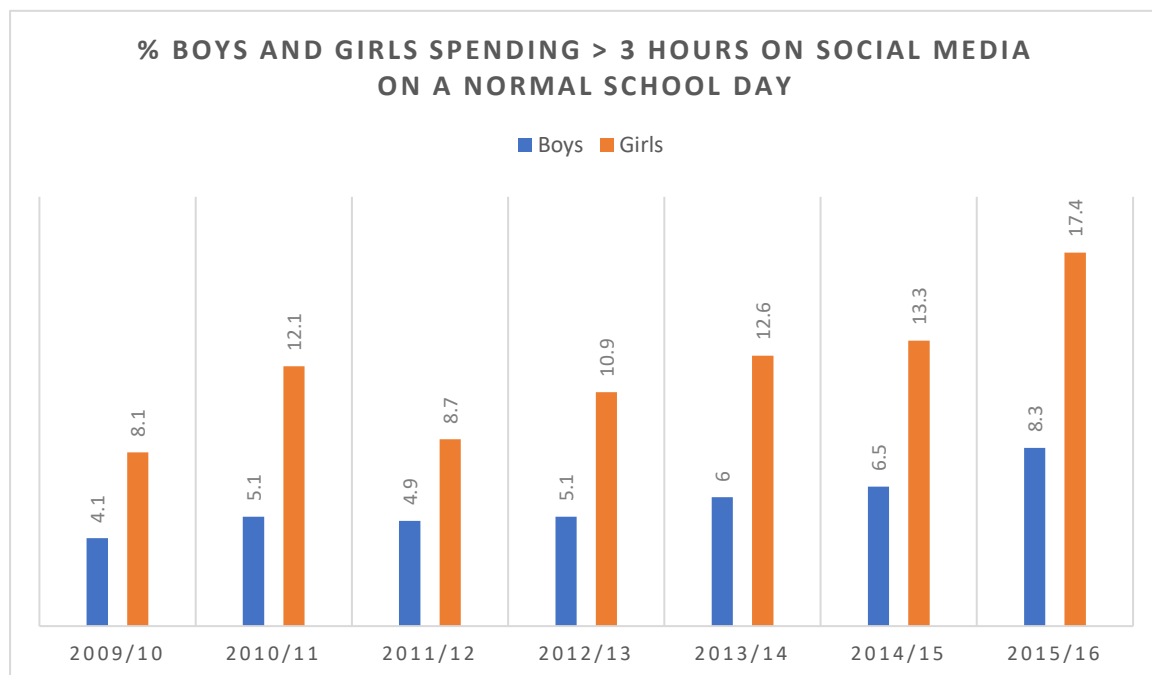|	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Boys	4.1	5.1	4.9	5.1	6	6.5	8.3
Girls	8.1	12.1	8.7	10.9	12.6	13.3	17.4

Figure 2.2: % UK children spending >3 hours a day on social media (Statista, 2018; ONS data 2018)

A separate study published by UCL and the University of Essex (2018) reveals that girls who use social media for at least an hour a day at the age of ten years old are unhappier through their teenage years, showing lower levels of well-being by the age of fifteen. This research showed that it is crucial to monitor early interactions with social media, particularly in girls, 'as this could have an impact on well-being later in adolescence and perhaps through adulthood' (Booker et al., 2018:116).

2.4.6 Social Networking Sites and links to well-being

Research into how the use of SNS increases the possibility of psychological, reputational or physical vulnerability in the UK, found that the larger the network size, the more possible likelihood of vulnerability. Connecting to large networks of online 'friends' can lead to increasingly complex online socialising that is no longer controllable at a desirable level (Buglass et al., 2016). Research into the quality of social interactions when on a **_smaller_** scale, i.e. in an online multiplayer video game, however, found that social interactions in this way can, in fact, build social capital, and do so by ensuring gameplay is in harmony with other goals and values (Perry et al., 2018). The gaming element unites the users through the shared passion, and subsequently strengthens the 'friendship' bond, even when that bond is between strangers who have not met in real life. Again, due to the nature of much research such as this being conducted with adolescent and adult participants, when analysing the lived experiences of the six participants in this study it will be interesting to explore if such bonds are also evident for pre-adolescents.

Why are girls suffering?

It is important here to try and explore the reason for the weaker levels of well-being (Booker et al., 2018) in girls as opposed to boys, and how the participation in social interactions is impacting upon identity constructions and perhaps leading to an identity crisis. A study with children aged 11-16 years old in three European countries (Italy, UK and Spain) analysed how online identities are developed and presented through online interactions (Mascheroni et al., 2015). This European study focused on young people's engagement with the construction of an online identity on social media through pictures and explored how peer-mediated conventions of self-presentation are appropriated, legitimated, or resisted in pre-teens' and teenagers' discourses, drawing on Goffman's (1959) work on the presentation of self and 'impression management'. Findings (Mascheroni et al., 2015) showed that girls who posted 'provocative' photographs on SNS confirmed to a socially accepted sexualised stereotype to be accepted by their peers, while also admitting pressure to look 'perfect' in

their photos. As Mascheroni et al. claim, these behavioural findings should be further developed to determine policy guidance for supporting these young people who are navigating their journeys through image-laden social media (Mascheroni et al., 2015).

There could be something to be said here for the context of young girls in a patriarchal society, where in a male-dominated structure, girls and women can find power in their feminine attributes and, for example, posting selfies (Mascheroni et al., 2015). Although the participants of this study attend a single-sex school, data above (see Figure 2.2) confirm that it is outside school where most online interactions take place (Statista, 2018; ONS data 2018). A further study by McLean et al (2015), however, found that in contrast to actually gaining power through such posts, 'girls who regularly shared self-images on social media, relative to those who did not, reported significantly higher overvaluation of shape and weight, body dissatisfaction, dietary restraint, and internalization of the thin ideal' (McLean et al., 2015: 1132). McLean et al's results (2015) assert that girls who post selfies are over evaluating their look, filtering and photoshopping their images, and this may lead to eating disorders. It must be noted that this small-scale project, however, did not include any male participants.

In the recent 'Children's well-being and social relationships' release (2018) from the Office for National Statistics (ONS), UK-based results reveal the continuing rise in the numbers of children using social media sites for more than three hours per school day. In addition to the doubling since 2009/2010 of the overall percentage of children devoting time online to friendships, there is a clear difference between the reported figures of boys and girls (Armstrong, 2018). Additionally, social media use and the engagement in SNS can be seen to have explicit links to identity construction. Facebook, for example, is a social network allowing people to express their own identity. As discussed previously, the frequency of use of Facebook can be explained in part by identity processes (Manzi et al., 2018). Further critics of SNS claim that children's increased interactions with the digital world can also mean fewer opportunities for nurturing social-emotional development (Pea et al., 2012) and, one would assume, favourable identity construction.

Recent years have seen greater awareness of the mental and physiological threats that social media can exaggerate through overuse, misuse and addiction. As some users recognise mental exhaustion or stress because of social media use, they are deciding to stray from their participation on SNS; this mental exhaustion can be termed 'social media fatigue' (SMF). SMF can result in the 'deterioration of both mental and physiological strengths, whereby users are likely to develop unhealthy behaviours' (Dhir et al., 2018: 2;

Sun et al., 2017; Jelenchick et al., 2013). In response to SMF, people may choose to take a 'break' from using social media or either temporarily or permanently disable their social media accounts. A recent study into 'Facebook vacation' investigated whether abstaining from Facebook reduces stress but also reduces subjective well-being because of the resulting social disconnection (Vanman et al., 2018). Linking to identity, the study found that although breaks from a large amount of information shared on social media could be beneficial, the fear of missing out (FOMO) and being able to perform on stages, led to lower satisfaction. These results confer with Waggoner's earlier findings (2013) that suggest that the online and offline selves are not different but are the same entity in different contexts. By not being able to access the online stage, the full audience cannot be reached, and the full facets of identity cannot be fulfilled, and thus self-satisfaction is lower.

2.5.1 Third Space Theory, 'Figured Worlds', and Social Media as social spaces

Soja (1996) suggests another way of thinking about the spaces we inhabit; the first space is a place where we behave in one way, such as when at home, and the second space is a different- possibly conflicting- place or spatial group, such as at school or work, where we may behave differently. This theory seems ideally compatible with Goffman's dramaturgical analogy of front and backstage. A third space can be somewhere between these two sites, such as a sports club or regular social group, but they can often be spaces for 'open discussion and learning' (Garraway, 2017: 76). Garraway claims that difference amongst participants is thus a stimulus for development and learning, and the gap that emerges between the different groupings constitutes a learning zone, or a zone of proximal development or ZPD (Gutiérrez, 2008) in which new ways of doing and understanding can be collectively constructed, drawing on the original differences of the participants.

Regarding social media spaces, many different platforms can be used (see Appendix A). These platforms have birthed virtual environments where public and universal fields emerge, and social, gender, national and cultural boundaries merge and can be transcended (Arslan and Uysal, 2017). Some of these platforms are open, such as public **blogs** (see Appendix A), while some are closed, such as popular cross-platform mobile messaging app 'WhatsApp'. Different platforms offer various levels of publicity, privacy and membership, and host different network rules. Blogs, for example, offer a third space through the opportunity for a user-led space, populated only by the written word of the author who chooses to present themselves on that platform.

Holland et al. (1998) present the idea that it is through 'figured worlds', such as those spaces

that the Internet creates, that we have the opportunities to self-make to different 'others'. These worlds allow individuals to 'figure out' more about themselves through the different situations the virtual worlds provide. The 'world' for this study is the secure blog created for participant use.

'On the Internet, nobody knows you're a dog' is a popular saying, originating as a cartoon caption by Peter Steiner in The New Yorker, on the 5th of July 1993. The sketch shows two dogs, one sat on a chair in front of a computer, and refers to the issues around online identity. There has been growing concern over the ways people portray themselves as those with characteristics they do not possess, or 'catfishing' with fake or enhanced profiles (discussed in Chapter 4 as one of the dangers of navigating online spaces) (NSPCC, 2017).

Identity formation online does often take the form of the idealised self (Kalayeh et al., 2015), as shown by the popularity of Instagram filters that accentuated features such as eyes and lips and changing the colour palette to more flattering shades. A study in contrast to this, conducted by Huffaker and Calvert (2005), found that teenagers who blogged 'chose to represent themselves realistically' (Huffaker and Calvert, 2005: 10) rather than opting for unrealistic 'guises'. Blogging, therefore, may offer a more honest insight into the interactions that may be seen on other platforms such as ***Instagram***, ***Facebook*** or ***Snapchat*** (see Appendix A) with its disappearing pictures on a viewing timer.

The work of Brook et al. (2008) considered how we each possess several identities, and that the effects of multiple identities on psychological well-being depend on 'the number of identities, importance of those identities, and relationship between them' (Brook et al., 2008: 1588). Findings from Brook et al.'s research found that if our identities are in harmony, rather than in conflict or polarity, well-being can be higher. Brook et al.'s discussion of the multiple identities, and the harmony of these, is of significance when the Internet offers opportunity for several different identities to be created within different communities on different social platforms. One of these platforms is 'blogs'; this will be defined and reviewed in recent literature in the following section (Section 2.5.2).

2.5.2 Blogging as a platform for developing identities

Blogs (as detailed later in Section 3.6.2), from the words 'web log', are publishing platforms on the Internet that continue to grow in popularity (Lee and Gretzel, 2014). Blogs essentially allow users: *"…regular and frequent updating, whether writing, photos or other content; the expectation of linking to other bloggers and online sources; a month-by-month archive; the capacity of feedback through comments to the blog; a particular style of writing which is often characterised as spontaneous and revelatory"* (Wakeford and Cohen 2008: 308).

Regardless of usage, there has been an explosive growth of blog use in this decade, forming **connections** with several different audiences. However, little research has explored the forces that motivate users to engage in blog activities (Liao et al., 2013).

From my professional role as a primary school teacher (detailed in Section 1.2), I saw that the pupils I taught were keen to be part of clubs, societies at lunchtimes, and social groups out in the playground. I saw how pupils relished the chance to take control over projects or activities, such as designing their puppets or packaging and being granted autonomy. Despite there being a lack of research evidence, my perspective, therefore, was that motivations between online interactions might be a parallel for those in the primary school spaces; pupils wanted to connect with others, to share information, and to learn and help others learn.

Looking at professional identities in a blogging space, or 'blogosphere', Luehmann (2008) found that blogs can facilitate the 'trying on' and development of a variety of 'interrelated professional sub-identities' (Luehmann, 2008: 175). Research into blog participation with adults found that there were several motivations, not only utilitarian motivation (i.e. perceived usefulness) and hedonic motivation (i.e. perceived playfulness) but also habitual behaviour and social identity (blog identification) (Liao et al., 2013). Research into children's motivations for blog use is relatively unexplored, and **purpose and motivation** will thus be an important feature for analysis in the next chapter,

Gong (2010) conducted a cross-linguistic and cross-cultural comparison between American bloggers and Chinese bloggers, and found that the bloggers' linguistic practice is closely related to their developmental stage of life, their gender, and the cultural environment they are immersed in. Bloggers' linguistic practice is also constrained by the internal system of the language they use for blogging. **Language** is, therefore, another critical feature to analyse in the blog posts and interactions. It will be essential to observe the way that language is used to communicate between and to each other.

It merits here clarification over the role of discourse and dialogue, and their definitions. Dialogue is deemed the nature of verbal exchanges. Discourse is the general trend or focus of a series of written, verbal or even actional exchanges over time, thus likely deemed related to exchanges over a longer period of time. Discourse is 'institutionally defined socially acceptable ways of thinking, doing or saying' (Bartlett and Holland, 2013: 117). Both discourse and dialogue can be studied through Holland's projected theory of 'figured worlds', artefacts, and identities in practice. 'Discourse analysis' is a commonly used tool for

analysing blogs (Simpson, 2013; MacKay and Dallaire, 2014). Discourse analysis examines how language 'produces and moderates social and psychological phenomena' (Mullet, 2018: 116).

Linking back to Urrieta's concept of identity as *relational* (2007), a recent study by MacKay and Dallaire (2014) reconsidered the 'Skirtboarders' blog', produced by a crew of female skateboarders, as a space where crew members attempt to reflexively start a movement and, in doing so, construct and circulate a wider collective identity (Taylor and Whittier, 1992). Through a discourse analysis of the blog comments and interviews with blog users, MacKay and Dallaire attempted to understand how young women who visit the blog either adopt or reject this collective identity, namely the 'Skirtboarder' identity (MacKay and Dallaire, 2014). This study highlighted the applicability of discourse analysis as a tool for analysing the blog posts in my project. To be sure, I explored further studies using this approach.

A blogging study which involved discourse analysis was that carried out by Simpson (2013), into the role of a class blog, and the 'figured world' (Holland et al., 1998) is presented for a multilingual adult learner of English, 'Shahedah', and her peers. Although with a different sample to this study, parallels can be considered here between the primary school children participating in this project, and the adult learners in Simpson's study. The figured world itself offers a similar environment of learners, with a shared educational commonality, but it must be highlighted that each figured world is, in itself, a unique community and an unmatchable microcosm of behaviours, composed of the unique individuals who hold membership for that world.

Simpson (2013) found that the pedagogic use of the blog did not enable the development of new learner identity positions for students in Shahedah's class, often cited as an affordance of electronic media in language learning contexts (Simpson, 2013). On the blog, regarding expectations of linguistic behaviour and established power relations between students and their teacher, Shahedah's experiences of teacher-learner relations aligned with the relationship between teacher and learner online.
Simpson's analysis, composed of discourse analysis and triangulated with interview data that was gathered from the same participants, examined how blog interaction displays identity alignment. Simpson's study supports the claim of the following chapter (Chapter 3, Methodology) that triangulation can enhance the findings of this study.

Related to Lave and Wenger's views of communities of learners within a community of

practice (CoP), Simpson explored the role of hierarchies within blogs, and how there may be a power dynamic between different members. In their work on 'Learning in Doing: Social, Cognitive, and Computational Perspectives' (1991), Lave and Wenger place emphasis on the individual in playing their role as a learner when learning can be viewed as a 'feature of membership in a community of practice' (Matusov et al., 2013: 918). Lave and Wenger (1991) discuss the progression from a legitimate peripheral participant to one who becomes more 'expert' or experienced', who is then able to negotiate and navigate the unwritten membership rules within successfully- in this case- the online blogging community. The interesting role of a 'novice' in a new community presents, is, to the established 'old-timers', a 'newcomer' who must enter a cycle of negotiation within the community of practice. Learning processes, therefore, involve a parallel advancement of both the learner's membership in the community through the social interactions that take place, and the shaping of identity as a result of these interactions (Lave and Wenger, 1991).

This study suggests that entering an online space, such as a blogging platform, can offer this same developmental opportunity of negotiation and renegotiation between newcomers and old-timers as users seek to establish an online presence, and thus their membership of the blog, and their identity, develops through this process. It is of importance to observe the interactional discussion that is reified by the blog comments; it is here that the girls' conscious thinking is made explicit through their dialogic utterances. These utterances, and the nature and pattern of these utterances, can be interpreted and inferred from to inform emerging aspects of their identity. The blog posts analysed in this study (Chapter 6) also allow for exploration of Lave and Wenger's suggestion of sociocultural activity as a process for social and personal transformation, and for insights into the interactional processes, underpinning learning and identity development opportunities that membership in a blog may facilitate.

2.6 Research questions and framework

This review of the literature has culminated in the three research questions below:

RQ1: How do the girls, who regularly go 'online', report they perceive their identities?

RQ2: What is the nature of the girls' blogging interactions?

RQ3: How can online interactions on a blog be seen to contribute to the development of identities?

To help to answer these questions, a framework has been created for the purpose of this study, that has been constructed to analyse the data (discussed in Sections 2.4.1, 2.4.2 and 2.4.3) around the motivations and elements of children using social media (shown in Figure 2.3 below). The framework was inspired through literature that has been synthesised during this second chapter. Regarding '**informed'** identities, the top tier of the model (Figure 2.3 below), Buckingham et al. (2005) speak about children's high levels of functional literacy, which can relate then to children's digital literacy (Gibson and Smith, 2018). With '**affirmed'** identities, the second tier of the framework (Figure 2.3 below), literature by Waggoner (2013) highlighted the value and balance that users place on both their online and offline selves, and the dissolution of the divide between the two. Affirmation can also come through social alignment and the role of community (Mascheroni et al., 2015). The third tier to the model (Figure 2.3 below) involves **stability** and **agency**; in the light of blogs, the work of Wakeford and Cohen (2008) praise blogs for the self-publication and **autonomy** over this process, which can be seen to link to identity and independent action.
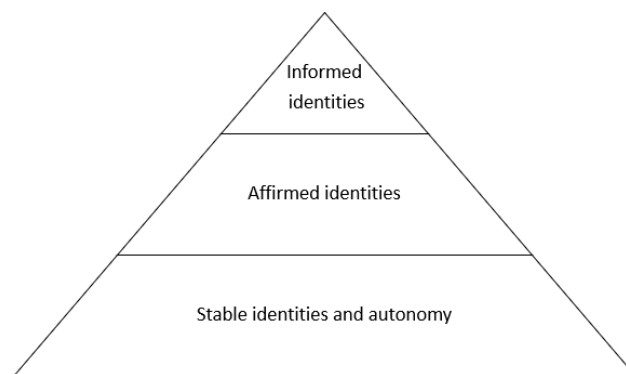

Figure 2.3: Motivations and elements of children using social media

This model relates to the 'community of learners' notion adopted from Lave and Wenger (1991) and also the concept of 'figured worlds' (Urrieta, 2009; Holland et al., 1998) as there is a dual focus on both the individuals' own processes of identity construction through their lived experiences and the 'other'. I have chosen to present this model as a triangular model, rather than a flow diagram for example, as there is growing significance in each of the three sections as you cascade down the model: at the top, the role of caregivers, such as the parent, and peers is vital in informing understanding of the technology being used, which gives a foundation to an individual to be able to develop their 'media literacy' (Buckingham et al., 2005) and 'digital literacy' (Gibson and Smith, 2018). The second section refers to the part the audience must play, the essential role of the 'other' in informing or affirming these values and behaviours through interactions. The third section is the largest section as this is where, through having experiences in the top two tiers of the model, individuals are creating

stable identities, or 'dimensions of self' (Wenger, 1998), and finding confidence in their online practices (Holloway et al., 2013).

2.7 Chapter summary

This review of relevant literature in the realms of phenomenology, social media, and children's identity construction has been critically considered to underpin and support this research project. Key themes include motivations for social media use (O'Keeffe and Clarke-Pearson, 2011), autonomy in the use of this cultural tool (NSPCC, 2017; Ofcom, 2016), and the role of impression management to help conform to the behaviour or beliefs of an online community (Bareket-Bojmel et al., 2016; Mascheroni et al., 2015).

The purpose of this research is to understand better how girls' lived experiences of the phenomenon of social media links to identity constructions through the roles and characteristics children assume online and offline; indeed, the very nature of boundaries, or dissolution of boundaries, between online and offline spaces is also explored. This chapter has shown that although there is awareness of issues around young girls' use of social media (Internet Matters, 2016; Bentley et al., 2017; NSPCC, 2017), there are significant gaps in the current body of knowledge relating to the impacts that this lived experience has on identity formation. The relatively new phenomenon of social media use has also been considered in light of several identity theories, the two key theories being Goffman's impression management (1959), and Urrieta's 'figured worlds' (2007). This chapter has presented recent literature that includes consideration of contextual, historical and cultural influences on the development of identity which is indicated through discursive exchanges. Finally, on the usefulness of identity itself as an analytic category, and the fluidity and multiplicity of our identities: '*If it [identity] is fluid, how can we understand the ways in which self-understandings may harden, congeal and crystallise?' (Brubaker, 2004: 29).*

Identity must be viewed as ephemeral, as 'constructed in the moment' (Simpson, 2013: 16), to be complemented by a consideration of how established identity positions and self-understandings are brought in to ongoing conversations and online discourse. Here is the justification for taking Lave and Wenger's 'communities of learners' (1991) forward into the chapter of questionnaire analysis (detailed further in Chapter 5). In the next chapter (**Chapter 3, Methodology**), the approach of IPA will be discussed in greater detail but following from this literature review, it is suggested that an IPA approach will allow for participants to reflect, think and feel as they work through what it means to be part of the social media phenomenon.

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

For early researchers, and even practised researchers, the full range of research designs, paradigms and approaches can present as a 'bewildering labyrinth' (Hammersley, 2012). In this chapter, a synthesis is given of an array of research philosophies and paradigms; unsuitable approaches are discussed and rejected, while the appropriate methodology and methods are explored and accepted. As discussed previously in Chapter 2, the research aims of this study are to analyse how young girls, who regularly go 'online', report to perceive their identities and to provide an insight into how the six girls' lived experiences of online interactions may be contributing towards their development of identities, alongside the nature of their blog posts.

There are three datasets that are analysed in this thesis:

1. Six idiographic case studies, constructed from three rounds of interviews with the six participants in Key Stage Two, totally three interviews per participant and eighteen interviews in total (participants aged between eight and eleven years old) (Chapter 4).

2. Questionnaire data, gathered from three rounds of questionnaires. As each participant (featured in the interviews/case studies in Chapter 4) filled in three questionnaires, this totalled eighteen questionnaires in total (Chapter 5).

3. Blog posts and interactions, on a secure blog set up for this study (Chapter 6). Thirty-four participants opted-in to take part in the blog, including the six participants who were involved in the interview and questionnaire stages as detailed above.

As Oxley (2016) warns, IPA studies tend to focus only on small samples, so there is no generalizability claimed. The founder of IPA, Professor Jonathan Smith (1996), claims that IPA studies should have no more than between three to six participants. However, it is intended that, by close examination and metaphorically shining a light on a small area, such as the six participants involved in this study, this may lead to the illumination of the whole. Bassey (1998:55) would claim that 'fuzzy generalisations might be made'.
IPA, therefore, involves finding a small homogeneous sample, for whom the Research Question can be meaningful (Smith et al., 2009), thus defending the small sample used in this study. This chapter will present the Research Questions for this study and will justify the approaches adopted and the tools designed in order to answer these questions.

3.2 Methodological position

'Methodology' can be defined as the philosophical stance that informs the design and style of research (Jupp, 2006), therefore, before an appropriate research design can be determined, researchers must be make explicit their methodological position (see Table 3.1).

Our standpoint	Our social positioning
Standpoints concern an individual's attitudes or perspective on a situation	Social positioning regards one's status in society, such as profession.
Our epistemology Epistemology is the nature of the relationship between the knower and what can be known.	**Our axiology** Axiology is the philosophical study of value, and the considerations of what values the researcher holds to understand the purpose of the research better.
Our ontology Ontology encompasses the form and nature of reality, and what can be known about it (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).	**Our theoretical, conceptual framework** A theoretical, conceptual framework is an analytical tool that is informed by the researcher's 'paradigm', i.e. the belief system that guides all they do.

Table 3.1: A researcher's lens (adapted from Walters, 2011: 7)

Walter claims that our methodological 'lens' (2011) is constructed from a range of elements, which are presented and defined in Table 3.1. Walters (2011) warns that it is through this methodological lens that a researcher sees the world. This lens will shape how research is approached and carried out. It is essential to consider how the alignments and beliefs that make up my researcher lens influence the methodological choices made for this project, discussed in this chapter. All the decisions and argument that follow should be seen concerning my researcher lens, which, again following the style of Walters (2011), is summarised in Table 3.2 and discussed below.

My standpoint	My social positioning
With a background as a primary school teacher, my research concern is to elicit	My current social position, as a lecturer in Primary Education in Higher Education (HE),

the nature and impact of online activity on the identity development (including their well-being) of young children. I see the period of childhood as a fundamental time of development where several factors can affect a child's academic, physical, physiological, social and personal achievements. If I can find out what has affected children's identity development through online activity, I can better prepare and educate them to deal with it.	now sees me in the role of teaching students that are preparing to become primary teachers themselves. As a researcher, my key interest has always been around 'identity' as is it the one thing that can be analysed in all people. Learning about individuals' identities can provide significant information about the impacts that a societal or cultural construct is having. My philosophy revolves around, therefore, the philosophy of phenomenology (see later Section 3.4.1), and the theory of hermeneutics (Section 3.4.2) that values the process of interpretation of experiences.
My epistemology: Contextualism I believe that individuals are each situated within very personal societal and cultural constructs, and that we each learn in personalized ways and create our own understanding of the world based on our context.	**My axiology** The purpose of my research in this study and its value is to develop an understanding of how the phenomenon of constructing identities online may be affecting young girls.
My ontology: Critical Realism The critical realist paradigm entails a belief in an independent reality, but it does not commit one to absolute knowledge of that reality (Scott, 2005).	**My theoretical, conceptual framework** My theoretical, conceptual framework needs to fit with the desire to explore participants' 'lived experiences', thus I wish to adopt a framework that is grounded in phenomenology. This framework centres around the influence of online interaction on the development of identity.

Table 3.2: My researcher lens

All the aspects of a researcher's lens are interconnected. My standpoint, as first discussed in 1.2.1, is shaped by my past experiences and interests. I appreciate that girls' responses to

particular questions (IPA analysis) can offer insights into characteristics of their personalities. By looking at the ways that girls interact, it will be possible to discern how they perceive each other; this is built upon years of working with young people and interacting with them to help them achieve in an academic and personal sense.

These beliefs are also closely linked to my social and personal position and my axiology. As I am focused on better understanding how a child's identity or self-concept is influenced by their life or 'lived experience' it is necessary to select a methodology that supports this. This is why, from the outset of the thesis, phenomenology, interpretivism and IPA have been introduced as they closely align with my standpoint, but also many other components of my researcher lens such as the theoretical framework and paradigm.

Regarding ontology (Table 3.2), I recognise that there are multiple ways that girls can describe their identities and others can 'see' them too.

> *'Theorising children as 'being and becomings' not only addresses the temporality of childhood that children themselves voice but presents a conceptually realistic construction suitable to both childhood researchers and practitioners' (Uprichard, 2008: 303).*

In terms of social and personal position, it stands to reason that our identity; our social, cultural, economic and personal statuses or 'roles', our age, gender and demographic location, will all have some interplay on how we view the world, the research we deem necessary and the data we regard as valuable. We are not 'all the same' (Walters, 2011: 8) and this calls into question the need for a researcher to identify and discuss their positions within their research project. Deciding on one's methodology involves establishing philosophical reasoning to the answer 'what do I want to find out?' (Holden and Lynch, 2004: 3); creating a philosophical perspective requires that the researcher make several core assumptions concerning two dimensions: the nature of society and the nature of science (Holden and Lynch, 2004: 3; Burrell and Morgan, 1979).

With a focus on the social construction of self, the desired information on how individuals react to problems they are confronted with, and how they deal with them (Pizam and Mansfeld, 2009), this study aligns with an interpretivist viewpoint. Assuming a critical realist ontology, and an epistemology defined by contextualism, requires an interpretivism standpoint due to its focus on social construction, relativity and meaning-making. When looking at the participants' feelings, experiences and perceptions, qualitative data is required. Concerning the type of knowledge sought through research, for the positivist researcher, this is about ascertaining facts or beliefs that are out in the world. For interactionists, which focus on how the individual shapes society and, crucially for identity

development, how the society shapes the individual, knowledge is about symbolic interaction and 'the coming together of two or more persons for focused interaction' (Denzin, 2008:133).

3.3 Research questions

'Deciding on an answerable and relevant research question

Lies at the heart of all good research projects' (Jones, 2003: 42)

Before defining the Research Questions for this project, I conducted a comprehensive review of the literature in the field of young children and blogging. This review highlighted the lack of literature on this topic, emphasizing the need for further research in this area (as outlined in Chapter 2). Aware that many children also use many different SNS on the Internet, and that blogging may be a new entity for some participants, I was also interested in learning more about the perceptions of these children around their identities and their self-concept.

There are some existing studies that indicate research findings about identity as reified through social media, as highlighted in the meta-analysis of literature conducted by Buckingham et al. (2005), however there is 'relatively little research' on how children are creating media in their lives Buckingham et al (2005:35). It is also noted in this same meta-analysis that much of this research is undertaken in schools, situated in an educational context, so I set about exploring how children are choosing to use social media and online platforms away from school, to learn more about their views of their subjective experiences. The first Research Question, therefore, was crafted to begin by establishing how the participants regarded their identities, as the views of young girls regarding their identity has been overlooked and is missing from the current literature (Buckingham et al., 2005).

RQ1: How do the girls, who regularly go 'online', report they perceive their identities?

The second and third Research Questions emerged from the literature review, and specifically meet Buckingham et al.'s (2005) recommendation that there must be more than just 'self-reports' used as data when exploring children's social media use. Buckingham et al (2005:8) share that in terms of methodology of the reviewed research, many of the findings are collected through self-reports; this suggests that self-reports have been a tried and tested method for gaining insight into children's experiences online. The other side to this revelation is that, as Buckingham et al (2005:8) state, there 'should be more observational studies that explore how media literacy is used in everyday life'. These findings support the tripartite data collection of this these, wherein the third part allowed for observation of

practices on the secure blog (see later section 3.6.5).

The second RQ, therefore, wished to explore the motivation behind online use, rather than just exploring use at surface level:

RQ2: What is the nature and motivation of young girls' online interactions?

To then link these two first Research Questions, a third question to bring identity and blogging behaviour together was required. Buckingham et al (2005:36) highlight the following concern:

'Assessing 'levels' of media literacy is highly problematic, particularly given the likely differences between competence and performance, and the unreliability of self-reporting. The use of more open-ended, visual methods seems to result in higher estimates of children's media literacy than the use of closed questions. Measuring media literacy (particularly in the area of 'understanding') solely via methods such as multiple-choice questionnaires may prove significantly less than reliable'

RQ3 needed to involve the use of 'visual' methods, therefore, as recommended by Buckingham et al (2005:36).

RQ3: How can online interactions be seen to contribute to the development of identities and overall well-being?

These three RQs can, together, be seen to build on the work by Buckingham et al. (2005), where the value of self-reports is recognised (RQ1), but chance for a deeper analysis through questionnaire data (RQ2) and observations of online interactions on a social media platform, namely a secure blog (RQ3).

3.3.1 Justification for IPA

The RQs frame this research project. With the scaffold of three Research Questions, the main aims of this study were to gather data on how girls, who regularly go 'online', perceived their identities, to observe how they interacted on blogs, and to provide an insight how these social behaviours and collaboration may contribute towards the development of identities. The first RQ links explicitly to an IPA methodology.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis is both interpretivist and cognitivist in its orientation; understanding an individual's lived experiences, and the meanings that those individuals attach to those experiences is the central focus of IPA (Larkin and Thompson,

2011), seeing participants as self-reflective and self-interpretative beings. Essentially the double hermeneutic involved in IPA studies requires the researcher to try to 'make sense' of the experiences shared by the participants.

The IPA approach allows for in-depth analysis and interpretation of first-hand experiences and perceptions of participants rather than objective account formation (Smith and Osborn, 2003). Therefore, IPA is well suited to the small available population size and idiosyncratic subject matter. In these small samples, a semi-structured interview format is commonly used as the primary method of data collection as it enables engagement in conversation, probing relevant, vital areas (Smith, 1996). As mentioned earlier in this chapter, IPA is better thought of as a methodology rather than a method. IPA, as a methodology, is a theoretically informed framework which combines the theoretical orientations of **phenomenology**, **hermeneutics** and **ideography** in an interpretative overlay of how individual experiences appear to others (Smith et al., 2009). The next sections in this chapter will outline these three key orientations of the IPA approach to justify the methodology of this study further.

3.4 Theoretical framework

3.4.1 Phenomenology

Phenomenology is a philosophical approach to the study of experience (Smith et al., 2009), with the aim of hoping to understand what our experiences of the world are like. Smith et al. (2009) consider the work of four phenomenological philosophers as a background to IPA: namely Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre. The 'phenomenon' in this study is the experience of constructing identities whilst living with access to the internet and being able to construct identities online.

3.4.2 Hermeneutics

Although there are multiple ways to interpret the same experience, IPA focusses on understanding the participants' experience through their lens, with the view that only her perspective can infer her meaning (Moriah, 2018). How a person perceives things to be, regardless of how 'skewed' their perceptions may be, is assumed to be their reality. This approach aligns with the epistemological position assumed in this research; that only the person experiencing a phenomenon is best able to describe and maybe understand their experiences. IPA is suited to circumstances in which participants are invited to offer a rich, detailed first-person account of their experiences (Moriah, 2018). The double hermeneutics of IPA exists where not only is the participant trying to make sense of their lived experiences, but additionally the researcher must then aim to make sense of the participant's reflections.

Any findings will, therefore, be an interpretative co-construction between the researcher and participants. In this case, I maintained a level of reflexivity throughout by acknowledging how my background, assumptions, positioning and behaviour impacted on the research process (Finlay and Gough, 2003).

3.4.3 Idiographic Study

Nomothetic and idiographic are terms used by Kantian philosopher Wilhelm Windelband (1848-1915) to describe two distinct approaches to knowledge. An idiographic study, as with IPA research, refers to the study or explication of individual cases or events (as opposed to nomothetic). In IPA participants are purposely sought out and recruited for their ability to reflect on a selected phenomenon. IPA studies 'represent a perspective, of personal experiences and application thereof, rather than a population' (Smith et al., 2009: 4; Langdridge, 2007).

There are other methodologies in interpretivist qualitative research that were considered for this research project, such as Grounded Theory (GT), but none matched the purposes of this research, nor my position as a researcher, as well as IPA. Each was discounted for a variety of reasons. As an example, GT was discounted even though it would allow comparison of lived experiences. One reason for its dismissal was that, as Payne (2007: 70) notes, GT is most appropriate where not much is known or understood about a topic and where 'there are no 'grand' theories to explain the specific psychological constructs or behaviours adequately under investigation'. It is clear that in the case of this study neither of these criteria apply.

Equally, symbolic interactionism is a methodological approach in the sociology of education that can be seen to achieve many of the things that I wished to capture, without the complexity and rigidity of the model that IPA seems to represent. I argue, however, that the model of IPA in fact allowed for a consistent, systematic and rigorous analysis to be conducted (Chapter 4) across the six idiographic case studies, and that this theoretical approach would frame a focus on the nature of verbal exchanges in the blog.

In summary, IPA is an investigative methodology which sets out to 'capture the experiential and qualitative experience and sense-making of an event from a particular perspective within a particular context' (Moriah, 2018:7). As IPA was useful only of use to analyse one of the three datasets, namely the interview data (Chapter 4), a framework was constructed to ensure a consistent approach to the overall analysis. I had to alter my approach methodologically to gather the three datasets, because each dataset responded to a different RQ, which involved being aware of the tools for data collection (discussed in detail shortly in Section 3.6). The framework is shown below (Figure 3.1).
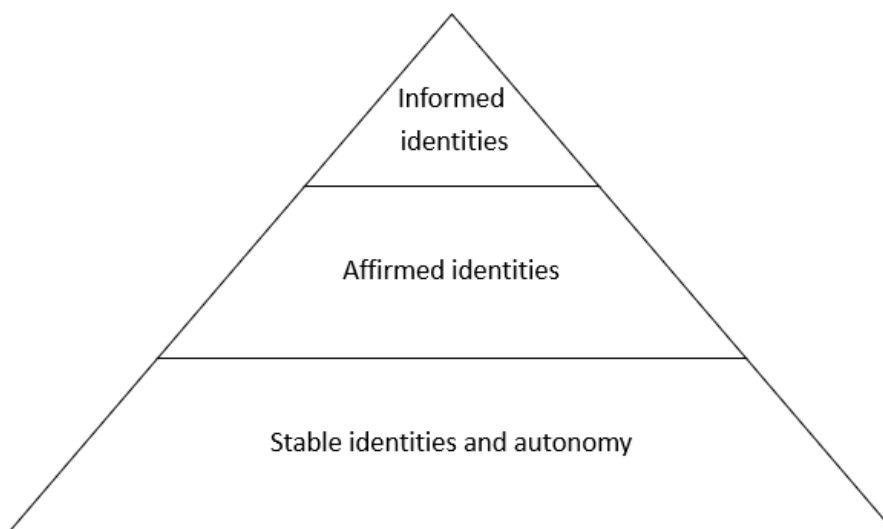
Figure 3.1 Elements of identities, an analytical framework

To ensure a consistent, rigorous and logical approach to the analysis of the three data sets, this one analytical framework was applied (Figure 3.1 above), and this was constructed from knowledge and insight into social media practice and the possible purpose, motivation and links to well-being.

In each of the three data sets (interviews, questionnaires and blog interactions) this model (Figure 3.1) allowed for a consistent examination of the data in order to champion the voices of the participants, whilst providing a systematic approach to exploring themes of identity development.

3.5 Research Context and Design

3.5.1 Setting

This study took place at Fairtrees Primary School, an independent, selective girls' school in

London that takes pupils from Reception up to Sixth Form. Fairtrees Primary School has been expanding in recent years and is moving from a one-form entry to a two-form entry school. At the time that this research study took place, there was only one form in each class in Key Stage 2. Fairtrees Primary School is a prime location for this study to take place as it is a single-sex girls' school. As this study requires only the participation of girls to look at the vulnerability of girls in our modern society, conducting this study at this school will allow for pupils to be selected from a range of backgrounds. As the focus of this research is to advance understanding how the phenomena of social media are shaping identity in children's lives, this primary school setting will allow for IPA with girls that are shown to be having daily lived experiences with this phenomenon.

Fairtrees Primary School was an ideal location, not only for the female demographic of the desired age range, but also for my role as a teacher there at the time of research. This facilitated the ethical process within the school as I was able to discuss the project at depth with the Senior Leadership Team (SLT). Although access to information and thus the implementation of this research project may have proven easier regarding practicality, it is worth highlighting that the emotional battle between colleague and researcher was a trickier one to conquer (see later Section 3.9 on 'insider research').

3.5.2 Participants

All pupils in Years 4 to 6 were invited to opt into the project. With twenty-four pupils per class, this had a potential total of seventy-two pupils. Once all pupil and parental consent forms were returned, thirty-four out of seventy-two pupils wished to take part (see Table 3.3 below).

Year Group	Age of pupils in Year	No. of pupils in the class	No. who opted into the study and took part in the blog	No. who were selected for interviews
4	8/9 years old	24	8	2
5	9/10 years old	24	16	3
6	10/11 years old	24	10	1
TOTAL		72	34	6

Table 3.3: Pupils who took part

With projects undertaking IPA, the aim is to attempt to understand the lived experiences of participants and the meanings and sense that the participants give to these those

experiences, therefore, it was essential to interview participants who had experience of the phenomena in question. This was made clear during the recruitment process.

Change in Methods/Size of Sample

Reflections and reflexivity as the study progressed

Over the year before the implementation of this research project, I significantly scaled down the sample from thirty-four to six participants for interview, after realising that my initial ideas of wanting a breadth of data did not align with the interest of my project concerning studying individual experience in the manner of IPA (Smith, 1996; Smith et al., 2009). Here, IPA is adopted as a structured framework and emphasises how a small data set, ideally between five and ten participants can enable and facilitate allow for more in-depth analysis, both of each's lived experience, and the data set overall (Smith et al., 2009). The number of participants was reduced from thirty-four to six participants; the nature of data was one to one interviews, and depth was more important than breadth (Smith, 1996) to allow time for transcription and careful analyse of each individual transcript. The themes and issues from the data then had to be synthesized to produce the explicit case studies (Chapter 4) of these girls who has been invited, and subsequently agreed, and had parental consent, to take part in the study.

It was important that the participants had experienced social media and internet use. This information was gathered on the consent form when participants opted-in to the study. As the purpose of the study was to explore the lived experiences of online communication, it was necessary that participants had relevant experience to reflect upon. The reduction in participants would allow for a deeper, rather than a broader, analysis into six participants'/girls experiences. Well-being and identity are two challenging concepts to research. Being able to more deeply explore six cases was deemed to be of greater value that touching briefly on the experiences of a greater number of participants. With the time limitations imposed by research degrees, and the proven value of IPA analysis into small datasets (Smith, 2009), I decided to continue with six participants for interview and questionnaire.

3.5.3 Timeframe

The initial proposal of the study was discussed with the head teacher at Fairtrees Primary School in the autumn term, 2015. Once ethical approval was given from the University of Study, the information around the project was relayed to pupils and parents in the spring term, 2016.

The study was then divided into three stages:

1. Round 1 of interviews and Round 1 of questionnaires (March 2016).

2. Round 2 of interviews and Round 2 of questionnaires (May 2016).

3. Round 3 of interviews and Round 3 of questionnaires (July 2016).

See Appendix B for interview information, Appendix C for prompt questions and Appendix D for the full interview schedule.

The blog was set up in April, and participants were given their usernames (randomly allocated animal usernames) and passwords. The first blog post was posted at the end of April 2016 (see later Chapter 6 for screenshots).

IPA is an approach that takes extensive time to repeatedly return to the interview transcript data to make meaning of the participants' lived experiences. The write-up of this thesis, therefore, took considerable time with much of this time being concerned with data analysis. This data is, however, still recent and relevant with regards to the phenomenon in question, of the contribution of social interactions to the constructions of identities online, and associated well-being.

3.5.4 Ethical procedures

The first step was to obtain permission from the gatekeepers at the school to conduct this research project. As Fairtrees Primary School is part of a school that runs from Reception to Sixth Form, this involved appointments with both the overall Head of Fairtrees School and the Head of the Junior School. Secondly, it was necessary to carefully and offer the project to the desired year groups of pupils, Years 4 to 6 inclusive. Information sheets (see Appendix E) were sent out to each pupil in those year groups, complete with pupil consent forms (see Appendices F and G), giving pupils a choice to opt into the project if they so wished. To those pupils who had returned their consent forms, an information sheet for parents (Appendix H) was sent out with a parental consent form (Appendix I). The information to pupils (Appendix E) were sent out on the 7th of March 2016 following my short presentation to Years 4, 5 and 6 to explain the research project in brief to them. Information to parents (Appendix H) was sent out a week later, with the return deadline of the end of the spring term, and the project began at the start of the summer academic term, in April 2016, running through to the end of the term, July 2016.

3.6 Methods of Data Collection

To support the IPA approach of this project, the principal method of data collection was semi-structured interviews (Flick, 2002); this method allows the participant to recall an

accruing narrative account over time of their experiences, whilst being prompted by the researcher towards critical questions and points as needed (Robson, 2001; Bryman, 2006; Silverman, 2010). Knowledge is produced through interaction between interviewer and interviewee (Kvale, 2007), helping to understand the world from the subject's point of view and unfold the meaning of people's experiences. Each girl's experience is unique and cannot be explored with closed, specific questions. Due to the interpretive nature of these communications both on and off-line, a hermeneutic approach was taken for data analysis (Jovchelovitch and Bauer, 2000), fitting with the IPA framework (as discussed later in 3.7). However, to facilitate the interviews, two other methods of data collection were used. The first of these was questionnaires, send out in three rounds (see Section 3.6.1 below), and the second was a closed blog created solely for this study (see Section 3.6.2 below).

3.6.1 Questionnaires

Questionnaires are a research method that provides a self-reported data collection and can obtain information about participants' *'thoughts, feelings, attitudes, beliefs, values, perceptions, personality and behavioural intentions'* (Johnson and Christensen, 2008: 203). Response rate and quality of responses are better for shorter and medium-length questionnaires than for lengthy questionnaires (Johnson and Christensen, 2008); this guided my questionnaire writing so that there was a maximum of eight questions per questionnaire.

3.6.2 Blog analysis

Blog analysis is a term that encapsulates any analysis that uses blogs as a source of data, meeting a wide range of approaches and a wide range of research questions (Snee, 2014). Blogs essentially are a publishing platform that allows users:

> *"…regular and frequent updating, whether writing, photos or other content; the expectation of linking to other bloggers and online sources; a month-by-month archive; the capacity of feedback through comments to the blog; a particular style of writing which is often characterised as spontaneous and revelatory" (Wakeford and Cohen 2008: 308).*

Discourse analysis has been shown to be an appropriate approach to analyse written comments on blogs through several previous studies (Bosangit et al., 2016; Myers, 2010), although 'dialogical analysis' may also be used. Dialogical analysis explores the embedded communicative significance of utterances and could be seen as a way of analysing what the utterances may mean about the participants' views of themselves, the other, and the other's view of themselves. It is worth mentioning here that, due to the IPA approach to this study,

blog analysis was not initially deemed necessary for this project. The blog was not intended as a source of data, but to provide a safe and secure experience for the participants to 'blog' and interact with other participants. The purpose of the blog was, essentially, to allow participants to experience a blogging platform, to reflect upon these experiences asked about in the interview.

3.6.3 Semi-structured Interviews

Perhaps the most dominant advantage of the interview over other research methods is its flexibility and 'adaptability' (Bell, 2009: 157). An interviewer can remodel and shape the interview to follow up leading ideas, 'probe' responses and explore emotions further, which a static, written questionnaire cannot do. The 'unwitting' evidence of interviews lies in the interviewer's observations of how the interviewee's responses are made, such as through the tone, body language, facial expression, or with pause and hesitation (Bell, 2009: 157), providing additional information that the 'witting' evidence of a written comment may not reveal. Where questionnaire responses are immobile, responses in interviews can be further moved on through further questioning, development and clarification.

Wiseman and Aron (1972) use the analogy of a fishing trip to reveal the need for the necessary skills and techniques required for successful interviewing. Cohen and Crabtree (2006) extend this analogy, highlighting that interviewing requires 'careful preparation, much patience and considerable practice if the eventual reward it to be a worthwhile catch' (2006: 172). Bell (2009) concedes that interviews, particularly unstructured interviews, around a topic can provide a 'wealth of valuable' data. To achieve this, the interviewer must have a 'great deal of expertise' to control the interview and must spend a 'great deal of time' on analysing the findings (Bell, 2009: 161), complementing Smith et al.'s IPA guidelines (2009) that considerable time must be devoted to the reading and re-reading of transcripts. A slight difference with IPA interviews, however, is to aim for the dialogue to be as participant-led as possible, with only prompting from the interviewer when necessary.

By staggering the interviews over a four-month period (see Appendix D for interview schedule), I was able to reflect on and evaluate each interview, and consider any issues I missed, or highlight issues I wished to pursue further in future interviews; these notes I made in my research diary. By the final interviews I was gaining a fuller picture of the participants' fears, concerns, and main attractions to online communication, thus could question more deeply their feelings and experiences where necessary and consider how these lived experiences had impacted upon the participants' identity development.

Having read widely around the issues of online communication, such as 'trolling', where strangers purposely write mean and hurtful comments on the posts of others, 'cyber-bullying', and the often-tragic outcomes from these that are media-covered, I appreciate that there are disadvantages as well as benefits in the state of 'knowing' since the views of the researcher-interviews may not always be easily detached from the research investigation (Hammersley, 1992; Silverman, 1993). The research interview, however, can be described as a tool for providing access to what is

> *'inside a person's head, [the interview] makes it possible to measure what a person knows (knowledge or information); what a person likes or dislikes (values and preferences) and what a person thinks (attitudes and beliefs)'*
> *(Tuckman, 2000: 268).*

Since no situation will ever be viewed in the same way by all, the interview is the primary path through which to discern these multiple realities. Semi-structured interviews were adopted, not just as the IPA method of choice, but because this style of interview enables the interviewer to probe and expand on meaning once the respondent has answered initial basic questions (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995). The six participants in this study were asked the same significant questions, but the opportunity was available to explore responses so that each interviewee had a unique experience. The aim was to enable participants to tell their own stories even though I had in mind a list of issues that I wished to raise, a technique proposed by Stake (1995).

The **first** round of interviews with the six participants was to gather their self-reported experiences of using the Internet generally, to provide a context for their social media usage. As explored in Chapter 2, there may be several motivations for going online, and to help answer RQ1, I wished to learn more about the participants' perceptions of their identities in light of their behaviours, both off and online. The **second** round of interviews aimed to dig deeper into the participants' use of online communication tools such as private messaging, and the impacts of tools such as these on their behaviour. The **third** and final interviews, informed by previous interviews and research diary notes, were an opportunity to fill any gaps in data from each participant by collecting final valuable insight into the lived experiences- both online and offline- of each participant, and overall perceptions of themselves as young women. The interviews could also allow conversation around their hopes and fears for their future world intertwined with technology.

A point of critique to this method that must be acknowledged here, however, is both the possible restrictions, rigidity or power dynamic that may have been imposed through the tool

of semi-structured interviews. In defence of this, I found that as the participants were young children, the approach of a semi-structured interview allowed for a structure to guide the conversation but did not impose restrictions as I allowed participants to 'talk-out' ideas until they had no more to say on a point before I asked the next question. I balanced the power dynamic by considering the seating arrangement, side by side in the same room, providing refreshments for comfort, and with a clear introduction and icebreakers to put the participants at ease.

These issues aside, the literature had shown me that there were wider points to consider when interviewing, and these are analysed further in Section 3.6.4 below.

3.6.4 Issues related to interviewing techniques

A sweep of the literature showed that there were several issues to consider when regarding interviews and interview techniques. I did not experience any difficulties when conducting the interviews for this study but will review the precautions I took to eliminate potential problems, detailing how these were dealt with during the interview procedure. Yin (1993) points out that interviews should always be considered as verbal reports only since they are subject to issues of bias and poor recall. A reasonable approach is to corroborate interview data with other sources of evidence. When adopting the IPA approach, the interview data is seen to provide detail on its own to construct the six narrative stories.

However, to ensure direction yet balancing depth of content, interviewers should reflect on content during the interview and respond to and ask participants to verify the interviewer's interpretation and probe meaning more deeply. During the interviews I made every effort to follow this advice:

> *'To sustain an objective approach to data collection that will reveal*
> *Valid and reliable data …the semi-structured interview must be flexible,*
> *Unstructured and sensitive to the context of the interaction'*
> *(Hitchcock and Hughes: 1995 158)*

This advice is particularly relevant when conducting IPA research, as there is the need for the participants to guide the interview to help them to convey their lived experience. There is the need for rapport, empathy and understanding between interviewee and interviewer (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995) so that sensitive issues, if any, may be raised and shared in a safe space. By developing a rapport with the participants, interviews can provide as much depth as possible (Smith et al., 2009). I, fortunately, had no loss from the sample of six participants over the course of the four-month project. I also asked respondents how they felt about taking part in the research after the third interview, with a positive response.

Again, here we see the value of the IPA approach, and its 'double hermeneutics' (Smith et al., 2009). Essentially, there are two complementary commitments of IPA research: firstly, the phenomenological requirement to understand and 'give voice' to the participants and, secondly, the interpretative requirement to contextualise and 'make sense' of these claims and concerns (Larkin et al., 2008).

Each of the eighteen interviews lasted between fifteen to thirty minutes, and with honest reflection, less than two-thirds of the original interview questions (Appendix C) were asked directly to the participants. The reason for this format is that once participants felt comfortable speaking after the first 'ice-breaker' questions, I wished to reduce my role as the interviewer in order to give the participants the chance to express their thoughts and experiences more freely, in a less constrained format. I allowed the interview to vary on a tangent if relevant, asking appropriate questions to extract further information that related to this study. This approach followed the IPA theoretical framework which aims to gather as much of the lived experience of the participants as possible concerning their experience of the phenomenon in question. Interviews were recorded using the 'Recorder' app on the iPad and then transcribed using Microsoft Word. I did, however, make additional observations and notes in my research diary directly following the interviews to record important body language and other non-audible signals that I had detected during the interviews. Where appropriate, these were added to the interview data following the transcriptions (see Chapter 4) and included in the idiographic case studies.

3.6.5 Final dataset

The final data set comprised of transcripts from eighteen interviews (three interviews for each of the six participants), eighteen questionnaires (three questionnaires for each of the six participants), and screenshots of the blog posts- comprised of 201 comments from the thirty-four participants (see Section 3.1 for clarity). With a narrative approach in mind, and the aim to answer the Research Questions around personal emotion and experiences, the interview transcripts were the key data needed for analysis for this project (see **Chapter 4**), and these data were formed into six idiographic case studies (Smith et al., 2009).

3.6.6 Research Diary Notes

A research diary was kept during this project; notes were made following each of the eighteen interviews, and general information about participants' questions or comments throughout the running of the project were also kept here for later reflection. Regarding reflexivity, keeping a journal or diary during a qualitative research project helps to sensitise

the researcher to any prejudices or subjectivities, while promoting the researcher to consider the impact of these influences on the credibility of the findings (Dyment and O'Connell, 2014). Keeping a reflective diary builds upon four main metacognitive strategies: awareness, organisation and planning, monitoring, and evaluation (Kurt and Kurt, 2017: 226). The reflective journal can provide a first-hand account of interviewer bias and any preconceptions that may have negatively influenced the judgments.

3.7 Methods of Data Analysis

As discussed earlier in this chapter (Section 3.6), IPA has an idiographic focus, with the aim of exploring the unique characteristics of individual participants and their lived experiences (Larkin et al., 2009). As noted earlier, idiographic study is a key component within IPA that seeks to investigate the lived experience of an individual regarding the phenomena being studied. In the case of this research, idiographic case studies of each participant were created (Chapter 4) in order to investigate how the lived experience of these girls could be linked to the theories and findings around identity development that were presented earlier, particularly the work of Goffman (1959) and Urrieta (2007). In order to accomplish this, the following approach was adopted.

Once the interview data were transcribed, the next stage was to read and re-read the narrative to obtain a feel for the overall nature of the individual transcript. Re-reading sections also helped clarify the narrative at various points and helped with 'engaging' the text almost as though the opportunity had arisen to redo the interview, but with the additional facility of being able to stop at any stage and see what thoughts or lines of reasoning emerged (Blore, 2011). During this process of 'initial commentary' (also known as 'initial noting'), I wrote my initial analytic observations about the data on the interview transcript in a wide margin (see examples in Appendix J and K). This process allowed the generation of six distinct case studies. This analysis and the six participants involved is introduced and explained in greater detail in **Chapter 4**. IPA procedures helped me as the researcher to stay close to the data as this process involved developing codes and themes on the actual data item and to focus on the unique characteristics of each individual participant, as I could code and develop themes for each data item in turn. This process differs from other qualitative approaches such as Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006), where the procedure is primarily involved with identifying patterns across the entire data-set.

3.8 Ethics

Over the past two decades, since the growing interest in research and consultation with

young people discussed earlier, there has been a progressive advance in the reporting and sharing of children's opinions and experiences. We have seen developments of methods used with and by children in research, and increased respect for children's rights, alongside a general rise in concern about ethics in social research (Alderson and Morrow, 2011). The British Educational Research Association (BERA) guidelines (2011) followed for the duration of this project state that:

> *'Individuals should be treated fairly, sensitively, with dignity and within an ethic of respect and freedom from prejudice regardless of age, gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, class, nationality, cultural identity, partnership status, faith, disability, political belief or any other significant difference'* (BERA, 2011: 14).

It was essential that ethical approval was given from the University of study before the project could commence. It was essential that no harm should befall any of the participants, and extra attention was given to ethical considerations as the intended participants were young. Although many issues must be considered when conducting research, the central ethical responsibility lies with the researcher to protect the **rights** and **safety** of the participants (Ary et al., 2019), and the baseline for this comes through **confidentiality**. It was essential that I conducted an in-depth trawl of the literature on ethics before designing and implementing this study. As Drew et al. (2008) warn, key issues involve 'voluntariness' and individuals' ability to give **consent**. As this study involved children, consent from parents or guardians was also necessary, but essentially the **clarity** of the information given to participants and their carers needed to be clear and concise in order to ensure the project was understood. **Safeguarding** and **repercussions** must also be considered to 'maximise comfort' of participants (Sikes and Piper, 2011: 18).

Five key ethical considerations were highlighted of significance to this study:

Ethical Concerns for this project	Response/Action Needed
Confidentiality	Anonymise data
Clarity	Clear information suitable for children
Consent	Child and Parent Consent
Safeguarding	Awareness of school policy and procedure
Repercussions	Data protection and sensitivity

Table 3.4: Ethical considerations

3.8.1 Confidentiality

Participants were notified that confidentiality and anonymity would be maintained. Confidentiality of recovered data was maintained at all times, and identification of participants was not available during or after the study. The name of the school has been changed, and each of the six participants has been renamed. No specific geographic details have been published in this thesis, meaning the reduced chance of identification of the institution involved. As case law in this country recognises that confidentiality may be limited in some instances, and most professional guidelines in social science allow that there are limits to promises of confidentiality, I also made sure that participants were clear of the limits of confidentiality in my project. The written information letter to participants and parents provided detail on the confidentiality process.

3.8.2 Clarity

Erier (2012) raised some important questions I needed to consider during the collection and handling of data for this project, especially as the project required the participation of young learners of primary school age: when pupils gave consent to participate in this project,

> *'What might lie behind their giving consent? How much of the project is understood? Or explained? And how much does the researcher understand about the ethics of the activity given his or her superior standing?' (Erier, 2012:13*).

Erier (2012) makes explicit the importance of my clarity and clear explanation of the research project to all involved before I could begin collecting my data; again, this was achieved through the written information letters to participants and parents (see Appendices).

3.8.3 Consent

Ethical consent involves informing and respecting everyone involved in a research study. As Drew et al. (2008) highlight, voluntary consent concerns the ability of an individual 'to exercise the free power of choice' (Drew et al., 2008: 58). Due to the young age of the participants, permission from parents was required as well as consent from the participants themselves. General guidance from my institution of the study was to ask pupils' consent to opt into the research project (see Appendices F and G), and to then ask for parental consent (see Appendix I), both of which were gathered with written forms that could be discussed with participants to ensure understanding.

Also, to reinforce, pupils were firstly given a chance to read about the study and decide if they wished to participate or not (see Appendix E). Secondly, the parents of any pupils who returned the consent forms stating they wished to participate in the study were sent information sheets (see Appendix H) and a Parental Consent form (Appendix I) to give parental permission. Only pupils who had returned both forms were able to participate in the project. Sadly, three pupils returned their pupil consent forms registering their interest to take part, but parental consent was never given. I spoke to these pupils with sensitivity, and explained the situation that, due to their age, they could not participate without parental consent, which each of them understood. It was also made clear throughout the entire research process that participants could exercise choice, and withdraw, at any time (Drew et al., 2008).

3.8.4 Safeguarding

As within any area related to children, safeguarding needed to be in place for this study. Safeguarding can be defined as the process for ensuring children do not suffer from any maltreatment. When conducting research, the researcher is 'ethically responsible for protecting the rights and safety' of the participants (Ary et al., 2019: 8), but there was also a safeguarding procedure in place at the school that needed to be adhered too. Fairtrees Primary School, where this study was conducted, held a clear safeguarding policy that stated all staff members should maintain an attitude of "it could happen here". When concerned about a child's welfare, it was highlighted that staff members should always act in the interest of the child and seek advice from the Designed Senior Person (DSP) at the school, or external agencies if deemed necessary. Plans were in place for dealing with any difficult experiences or sensitive topics that could come up in either the questionnaires or interviews or at any point in the research project. The plans outlined referring participants to the School Nurse, who also acted as a pastoral carer, and supplying participants with websites and contact details of relevant organisations that provide support services for young people, such as Childline. Participants did not request these during the study.

3.8.5 Repercussions

Repercussions from this project were considered before the study was carried out. It was a possibility that repercussions could include children feeling segregated from their peers because of experiences they had shared, or a warped sense of power (Cook-Sather, 2006). As the institution of study, Oxford Brookes, highlights in the Ethical Application:

'UREC recommends that, where possible, researchers choose participant cohorts where no dependent relationship exists.' (Oxford Brookes University, 2016: 1)

For this reason, I was able to ethically carry out this project at Fairtrees Primary School as I had not been the class teacher for any of the classes the project was offered to and had no previous 'dependent' relationships with the pupils in question.

It was also recognised that the small size of the child group might provide potential data protection issues; however, these were mitigated by de-identifying participants (as mentioned above), and not presenting information that could identify or locate the school. For this reason, participants will not have the option of being identified in any future publication arising from this research.

Importantly, while other staff at Fairtrees Primary School were aware of the study, I was aware that discussion of those children who were participating in the study was a confidential matter, and thus any details were not discussed with any members of staff.

3.9 Issues of Reliability and Bias

Essentially, as with IPA studies, it is important to remember that the smaller sample is not aiming to produce generalisable data but wanting to maintain a more idiographic focus. Researchers may be attracted to IPA for its 'accessibility, flexibility and applicability' (Larkin et al., 2006), but this balancing act on behalf of the researcher may still involve bias. Bias involves the distortion of judgement, having a prejudiced outlook, or an unfair influence on an event (Bell, 2009, p.166). The personal, interviewer-led design of most interviews means that there is a danger of bias occurring, chiefly because 'interviewers are human beings and not machines, and their manner may influence respondents' (Selltiz et al., 1962, p.583). IPA interviews are participant-led, so this bias is reduced as participants experience greater freedom to take the conversation in a direction they choose.

Importantly, what is judged to be a fair, unbiased reaction from one person, may be biased prejudice by another (Bell and Opie, 2002: 233) and thus interviewers must tread carefully and with great care both when planning the prompt interview questions, and when asking them to the participants. Interviewers must be conscious of the danger of bias in the research and should therefore be continually on the lookout for signs of bias in their conduct, putting 'great emphasis on reflection on practice and triangulation' (Bell, 2008: 167).

Researchers must be critical when interpreting the data, regularly question the manner of conduct and practice, and- wherever possible- as in this research project, 'triangulate'. It was important to avoid data 'lacking in quantity, quality of depth' (McGrath and Coles, 2013: 14), and one means of providing the most valid and reliable data in qualitative work is through 'triangulation', grounding the related experience in a real-life event. Triangulation was

achieved through repeated interviews, and occurred through rigorous analysis (Chapter 4), following the IPA framework of reading, comparing, rereading, comparing, coding, reading, recoding (Smith et al., 2009), and then the further analysis of the questionnaire data (Chapter 5) and blog data (Chapter 6).

3.9.1 Insider research

In addition to the regard for ethically handling the data and the data collection process involving both children and staff, there was the added complication of my being an 'insider researcher'. The position as both teacher and researcher is not an easy one; not only did I need to maintain my 'personal integrity', but it was also essential to meet my 'professional priorities' and complete the research process to the best of my ability (Floyd and Arthur, 2012). It is important to note that that the participants invited to participate in this study were not in a dependent relationship with the researcher. Only pupils from Key Stage 2 were invited to participate; these were pupils whom I did not teach myself and had not taught in previous years. The fact that I was employed at the school still had implications for my relationship with the participants, and for my position as a researcher at the school with regards to any possible power dynamic that may have existed. To diffuse this, I took several steps:

- I mentioned on the information sheet given to both pupils and parents that participation in this study would have no impact on academic marks or grades.
- I mentioned several times that participation was entirely voluntary and that pupils could decide to pull out at any time, without the need to give a reason.
- No covert observations or studies of the participants were undertaken.

3.10 Summary

This chapter has outlined the researcher's ontological, epistemological and methodological lenses and carefully justified as to why Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was the most appropriate approach for this project. Part of the unique contribution of this thesis comes from the triangulation of IPA with questionnaire and blogging data. This chapter also explained how this study was carried out successfully at Fairtrees Primary School, London. A series of interviews were conducted with six young female participants, aged between eight and eleven years old, three rounds of questionnaires were returned, and a secure blog was hosted from April until July. In the following chapter, **Chapter 4**, idiographic case studies are presented, and participants' self-reported experiences are compared and contrasted to understand better these girls' identity developments, and their experiences associated with these developments.

CHAPTER 4 IPA ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

In this fourth chapter, idiographic analyses are presented for the six participants (see the justification in Section 3.4.3 in the previous chapter). The inclusion of this idiographic chapter aligns with the tripartite composure of IPA, having idiography, phenomenology and interpretivism as the guiding principles (Smith et al., 2009).

The three transcripts for each participant, from their three interviews, were combined into one case study. The presentation of case studies allows for a holistic and in-depth exploration of complex issues within a small sample (Zainal, 2007).
The chapter ends with a critical reflection upon how the sharing of these self-reports addresses the three Research Questions (presented earlier in Section 3.3).

4.2 Framework for exploring identities

In order to fully understand and support children's positive identity development, both online and offline spaces used by children should be researched. These spaces can include several worlds (Haythornthwaite and Kazmer, 2004), including their home world, their school world, and, with the insurgence of technology into our daily lives, the virtual world.

Each of these six case studies, as recommended by Smith et al. (1996) follows a similar structure using an analytical framework that allows for exploration of various identity elements (see Figure 2.2 presented in Chapter 2, and Chapter 3 for further justification). Using this framework allows for a consistent approach but without the rigidity of a more specific outlined framework.

It is worth noting that throughout the extracts, many emotions or characteristics may be present, but to maintain a level of consistency and focus, each emotion will be examined individually, while only highly relevant connections are highlighted. In part, the researcher's interpretation of these characteristics is just one interpretation and, due to the interpretative nature of IPA, and the hermeneutic cycle, other interpretations may be assumed by the reader.

4.3 Presentation of idiographic case studies

Identity exploration is the search for a revised and an updated sense of self and identity. The following sections analyse if these characteristics and tools for identity development are visible in the participants' narratives, as well as exploring if any other personality characteristics are shown through the lived experiences. Extensive extracts from each participant are shared, to stay close to the data, but without the need for literature in this stage of the analysis as the focus is on the data itself, as recommended by Smith et al. (1996). In brackets, the page and line numbers from the original transcript are shown in the format (Page, Line) represented as (P, L). To demark which of the three rounds of interviews each interview is from, T refers to the 'transcript' number, either T1 (pre-blog), T2 (mid-blog) or T3 (post-blog). Each extract, therefore, will be locatable in the original narratives from the location (Transcript, Page, Line), abbreviated to (T, P, L).

The reader should note that there are more explanation and definition of the appropriateness of any interpreted emotions in the case studies and, that as Bella's case study is presented first, the first case will help to link the literature to the analysis. This approach will incur a more extended first case study but will avoid repetition between cases. To fit with the personal approach that IPA adopts, the order in which emerging emotions are shared for each participant will reflect the nature of each participant's narrative. This analytical style, again, allows for familiarity with each case.
The application of the tripartite framework exploring 'informed' identities, 'affirmed' identities and 'stable' autonomous identities will provide the backbone of consistency.

Additionally, to provide visual prompts for the reader, the avatars that the participants created online during their first interview are included along with their idiographic case study.

4.3.1 Bella

Figure 4.2: Bella's avatar

Author: Bella- eight years old – fashion fan.

Bella was very enthusiastic to share her experiences with social media during her interviews. With a strong emphasis on wanting to be part of friendship groups, Bella likens online communications to a party and shows a daily dependence on contacting her friends online. Bella says that even the thought of being left out of online chats gives her 'g*oose bumps' (T1, P4, L7)*. Bella speaks about her future aspiration to launch her clothing label and discusses how the Internet would help her business to become 'global' (T3, P7, L4).

For Bella, main uses include threads on her email account and fashion pages on Instagram.

4.3.1.1 An informed identity

Anxiety

Bella expresses anxiety at several points throughout her narrative. Although stressing that it is possible to choose whether or not to interact with others online, Bella emphasises a keen interest in doing so, and likens her online conversations to a physical 'party'; the anxiety comes when Bella worries she may be left out of online conversations.

> *I would say that talking to my friends online, it can be like a little party, like on an email thread, and all your friends are there, and it's like 'hi, hi,'. I rely on the Internet to get me into my Gmail account. I need that to contact my friends. If I couldn't do that, well, that would mean after school… I couldn't talk to anyone. Oh, my goodness, like even the thought of that gives me goose bumps! (T1, P4, L1-8)*

Bella's use of strong verbs such as 'rely' and 'need' hint at a dependence to interact with others online, despite her claim of needing to be 'in the mood' and having a free choice over whether to speak to people or not. Interestingly, even just the thought of not being able to contact her friends online after school results in this physical response of 'goose bumps' (T1, P4, L7). Anxiety and uncertainty are present as Bella doubts commitment to her identity.

> *I guess I would worry, what if everyone else is on the thread and I'm the only one not invited. And then what happens, it's like the next day at school, people are saying things from the thread, and you don't know what it's about, and you feel left out. So that why I said it's like a party. Like how you miss stuff and then everyone else is*

talking about what they did, and you can't join in. And you try and act interested in it, but actually, it's just leaving you with this massive hole inside like you are smiling but inside it's literally 'ouch'! (T1, P4, L10-20)

Again, this reference to physical pain and discomfort from an abstract thought signifies that there is a ripple effect to a virtual issue that happens online; anxiety from the online stage seems to transcend from the virtual into the actual, offline world. It must be challenged here that when children are engaging with sociality online in real-time within 'real' contexts via their phones, that this divide between online and offline spaces is blurred. Contemporary digital media practices mean that, unlike in the past when users would have to power up a computer, wait for a dial up connection to the internet, and log into a chat room, for example, instead there is instant access and connection to these social networks, using a pocket-held device. Is there really any divide between the online and offline at all, or are these worlds interwoven and inseparable?

Bella's use of 'you' instead of 'I' shows she may be trying to show that she is not affected by these issues personally, and Bella instead uses the second person to detach herself from the pain she reports to have felt before when being left out of conversations online. By admitting to experiencing anxiety at the thought of being the 'only one not invited', Bella is 'in crisis' as she lacks commitment to the in-group at this point. Crises can create both internal conflict and emotional upheaval, thereby causing individuals to examine and question their values, beliefs, and goals. As shown in the following extract, Bella seems to endure the emotional upheaval of the crisis, as a counterbalance experience shows how other users' reactions help her to feel confident that she is committing to a secure online identity. Confidence and self-esteem are connected here as one fuels the other; approval from her audience causes Bella to feel confident with the identity- the values and beliefs- she is aligning with.

4.3.1.2 An affirmed identity

Self-esteem
Bella goes on to talk about the reasons she *enjoys* using online spaces:

I think the great thing about talking to people online is definitely getting all the reactions, say if you post a photo, like a selfie, just seeing people like it and all the comments. So, in real life, someone might just say, "oh, I love your dress"…(pause)

but if you have a photo and then people like it or react or post all the hearts or the heart eyes emoji, or comment, and you can look at it for longer and so it means more. You can also look back at it, like if you look through your photos and you see all the likes and comments.

Interviewer: How does that make you feel?

Bella: Yeah it's good, really good because it's like all of those reactions are because of something I did or said or a photo. And so that's the… that's the best bit. Because all those reactions are there, and you can go back to it (T1, P5, L2-16)

There seems to be something here in the constancy of online likes or comments on SNS which provide stability for Bella as these reactions can be 'looked back at' as opposed to verbal remarks which she hints may be forgotten or do not have the same gravitas. Interestingly, also in the above extract, her term of 'real life' can be noted, which underpins the idea that Bella does not regard online situations as real life. Bella's perception of this suggests, and perhaps justifies, the difference in her online and offline persona. Bella's emphasis on feeling 'good, really good' implies a fervent desire to gather online reactions from others on the front stage online, and she claims that 'that's the best bit' of online use. These reactions, therefore, are affirming the 'character' or identity to which Bella has committed herself, and thus endorse her identity and self-esteem; identity commitment is being achieved through online social interactions with the audience.

Bella's use of social media, posting photographs as she wishes, seems to suggest she has some degree of autonomy and free will when using the Internet, and thus that there is not a direct overbearing from authority figures on her actions on the front stage online. It must be noted here that, with reference to the discussion in Chapter 2 (Section 2.4.6), posting photos of oneself online suggests 'free will' for young girls doing so in a patriarchal society, where even in our contemporary society, female power can be asserted through superficial looks (McLean et al., 2015). Returning to Butler and performativity (discussed earlier in Section 2.3.5 on gender), the posting of selfies can be seen as a way that individuals, such as Bella in this instance, are constructing their gender through this repetitive performance of gender-confirming activity. This links to the theme of 'affirmation' of an identity and raises the idea of identities therefore not only being affirmed by the audience, and 'the other', but also affirmed by the self in this repeated performance and self-curation online.

Regarding this second theme of an 'affirmed' identity, it is interesting to consider where key influential family members are mentioned in each individual's narrative. Bella mentions authority figures in her opening introduction in her first interview:

> *My name is Bella. My favourite colour is neon lime green. I really, really want a dog, but my dad doesn't really want to get one, or I would really like a cat, but my mum is allergic to cats, so we can't really get one. And I don't really go horse riding a lot, because my mum is allergic to horses. But I love horse riding... (pause) I love drawing. I love ICT; I absolutely love ICT. I am very good at art. I'm chatty. I'm loud. And I'm funny. (T1, P1, L5-13).*

There are many elements and characteristics of Bella's life that she portrays in her opening introduction. Her matter-of-fact acceptance in accommodating her parents' wishes or allergies in her desires to have a pet or follow a hobby show a level of maturity and sensibility. It could be argued that this may or may not show authoritarianism of Bella's identity; is she submitting and accepting her parents' behaviour without question?
There is a commitment to her identity shown in this extract. Without prompt, Bella confidently talks about her favourite past-times, school subjects, animals and holiday destinations, which shows she has a range of interests and experiences. Bella uses the three adjectives of 'chatty', 'loud' and 'funny' to present her key attributes, which may suggest that not only does she feel herself to be quite a confident, popular and well-liked character, but also that these are three attributes she sees as being positive in others, too. Bella's choice of adjectives conveys the idea that Bella feels comfortable around other performers on the stage and does not feel threatened by those who show identity commitment. Being 'chatty' is prevalent through Bella's narrative and also present in her behaviour during her interviews where she often talks without prompt or hesitation; this suggests a level of self-appreciation, which links back to the previously discussed personality characteristic, 'self-esteem'. It is worth noting here that overlap is seen between the personality characteristics throughout each idiographic case study.
A stronger example of authoritarianism from Bella's narrative is shared in the extract below:

> *Friends? It's forever chopping and changing. My mum says I'm like Marmite, you either love me or hate me. And I guess it's like that with friends, they either love me or hate me and we are either like BFFs or just totally not talking. (T1, P2, L6-10)*

The recall of what her mother says shows authority in identity affirmation here, trusting in an authority figure.

As in the above extract, when asked about her friends, Bella gives a somewhat rational response, claiming that '*they either love me or hate me and we are either like BFFs or just totally not talking'.* Here, Bella seems at ease with the idea that sometimes she may be friendly with peers, and at other times not. Bella shows a comfortable fluidity within her friendships that may suggest inner contentment with who she is as a person, someone who has accepted their identity yet appreciates that others may not always like her, but that this might change. Her casual dismissal of others 'just totally not talking' to her seems to show an indifference to this attitude, or at last her appreciation of the potential short-term nature of others' opinions, as, after all, relationships and identities shift over time.

In the following extract, Bella also shows sound reasoning around taking care online with unknown users; this awareness shows Bella has committed to a cautious part of her identity.

> *Interviewer: So, are the things we put online, like the photos or the comments, for example- are they an accurate representation of who we are, do you think?*
>
> *Bella: Hmm. I suppose not everyone is as honest, as genuine. Like some people might have all the filters on their photos, or some people use other people's photos- that's called 'catfishing'. There's actually a TV show about it, and they track down these people who have been making these fake profiles! And that's, like, they aren't even the right person whom they are claiming to be. So, I think you just have to be careful and just think, if something doesn't feel right, then it probably isn't right. And then just tell someone like your mum or something. (T2, P6, L1-17)*

Bella's awareness at only eight years old of 'catfishing', and understanding of people's manipulation of SNS, was explained in a straightforward, matter-of-fact way. Bella's warning of being aware of if 'something doesn't feel right' shows, again, her control when navigating online spaces, and shows that although she is aware of the dangers she may encounter, she feels she can judge if these encounters are safe or not. Again, this shows commitment to a resilient and informed identity. Bella then advises, in the form of a command, 'just tell someone like your mum' (T2, P6, L1-17), which shows confidence in the handling of a situation, almost as if she is the expert cascading this knowledge to the listener. Although Bella is committing to specific roles online, such as that of a confident and informed navigator, in times of crisis, adult intervention may be sought. Bella's confidence online may be seen to link to digital literacy, as discussed earlier in Section 2.4.4.

4.3.1.3 A stable identity and autonomy

Autonomy

The core idea of Marcia's social identity theory is that one's sense of identity is determined by choices made, influenced by personality traits. Bella's narrative suggests that it is through the opportunities for autonomy that these choices and commitments can be made, as shown in the following extract where Bella discusses switching between virtual and non-virtual communication:

> *Normally I'm just really tired, like at the end of the day, and I can't be bothered to type that much. But if we're talking, I'm always in the mood for chatting! So, I'd have to say it depends on my mood, on the time and place… if I'm in the mood, maybe like on a weekend, I love to just go online and check my emails, look at cute videos, look at fashion. And there are some really cool fashion pages with all the styles. Or if you look on Instagram, you can see so many good clothes and looks and also make-up and hair and jewellery, and that is good because otherwise, you can't know about these things. (T1, P3, L1-12).*

Bella's response about the use of SNS, such as the photo-sharing site Instagram, reveals not only her autonomous navigation of such platforms but also emphasises her control over whether to use such sites or not, saying that she needs to be 'in the mood' (Bella, 2:3). The link to 'mood' also portrays some emotional aspect here, suggesting that social media can fulfil an emotional need. She sees the Internet as offering an insight that, without it, 'you can't know about these things' (Bella, 2:5), an essential aspect, suggesting, however, an almost premature acquisition of such knowledge about 'make-up and hair and jewellery' and a desire to 'look at fashion' that without the Internet would perhaps not be available or accessible to an eight-year-old girl. This ties in with her following comment which again shows a level of maturity and understanding of online spaces, and her confidence in her navigation on SNS:

> *But you can choose if you want to talk to someone or not. Like, if you go out, you're going to see people you know, and you have to talk to them. But, if you go online, you don't have to chat you can just maybe look at things or…you don't have to talk to someone if you don't want to. (T1, P3, L19-24).*

Bella's autonomy here is seated in her digital literacy and her manipulation of digital spaces, which seems predominantly self-taught. As discussed earlier (see Section 2.4.4), children are learning to both consume and create digital content from an early age, and here this is

now manifested in Bella's confident control over when she wishes to access this content. A well-developed identity gives on a sense of one's strengths, weaknesses, and individual uniqueness. A person with a less well-developed identity is not able to define his or her strengths and weaknesses and does not have a well-articulated sense of self; Bella's strength at controlling her behaviours and interactions suggest an identity that is thriving.

For this third theme of a 'stable' identity, Bella's confidence in her present identities is reflected in her forward-looking attitude to her future orientation. Future orientation is of significance in identity development and development as it appears to be more critical during transitional development periods such as childhood transitioning into adolescence. Individuals who are future-oriented are strongly motivated to succeed show initiative and carry out plans related to future fulfilment of activities. People who have stable identities may also be more willing to be involved with new and exciting activities, as there is more confidence and faith in their self-concept. Bella ends her narrative by speculating about her future aspiration and ambition, which seem to link to her current Internet use, as shared earlier, around looking at online fashion pages and Instagram:

> *I am **really** into fashion, so I would love to one day maybe design clothes and have my own label and the Internet will be great for that because I would have a website, and a Facebook page, and an Instagram where there are models wearing the clothes and then links to buying the clothes as well. I think that is so cool because I can sell clothes all around the world to all the countries and that's how you become a famous designer because everyone knows about it. (T3, P8, L4-12)*

Bella seems self-assured that she can achieve this goal by using the present tense, saying she 'can sell clothes all around the world to all the countries', and acknowledges the Internet as a way of connecting with people on a global level. This positivity is based on her knowledge of the workings of Internet and SNS, combined with a realistic world-view that seems to have given Bella confidence in her identity; she shows commitment to achieving her goals and powerfully shows the personality characteristic of future orientation. Through exposure to discomfort online, Bella has built resilience and created strategies to avoid future discomfort or upset where possible. Instead, she seems to embrace the opportunity to interact with others online, and, as highlighted in the previous extract, wishes to embark on a future career intertwined with the Internet too.

Summary of Bella's idiographic case study

Bella's confidence through her current Internet use, her managing of online dangers, and her positive aspiration for the future are all supported by the content and mature character that Bella presents during her interviews. She has a confident self-image to which she shows commitment and appears to navigate both online and offline spaces with self-assuredness and control.

She is a confident member of online communities and shares how the reactions of others online is *'the best bit'*, while she admits that the thought of being left out can give her *'goosebumps'.* Yet, there is a presence of some crises for Bella as her daily use of the Internet to contact friends after school does show a reliance on social media, and Bella herself admits a 'need' for her online conversations. Her simile of online communications as a 'party' helps portray the emotions involved when she is either 'invited' and part of the party or left out which leads to inner-turmoil and upset.

Bella shows awareness of several dangers that may be encountered online, such as 'catfishing', cyberbullying or people sharing personal content with others without consent. Bella shows equal awareness of how to deal with these dangers, such as using personal judgment in a situation, telling a parent or appropriate adult if something happens, or trying to avoid such situations in the first place.

Bella shows strong future orientation to her dream ambition of hosting her own global fashion brand online.

4.3.2 Charlie
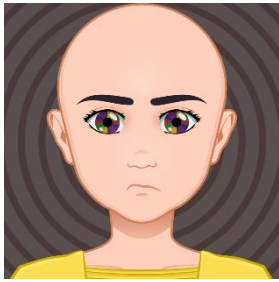
Figure 4.3: Charlie's avatar

Author: **Charlie- nine years old - YouTube and Vlog fan**

An avid YouTube fan, Charlie, nine-years-old, aspires to be a stand-up comedian or scriptwriter in the future with her 'fan base'. Charlie sees online spaces as an 'exciting' space and talks about how she shares some of her comedy routines with friends online.

Primary uses for Charlie are WhatsApp messenger and YouTube comment threads.

4.3.2.1 An affirmed identity

Self-esteem

As is shown throughout Charlie's narrative, she is strongly committed to one of her identities as a comedian, and this identity is a continual thread throughout Charlie's life both online and offline. This commitment can imply greater self-efficacy and self-esteem.

> *What am I like in real life? Funny, definitely, because I'm the class clown. I'd say I'm quirky, or strange. And sporty. What am I like online? I guess online is where I can put my funniness across. (T1, P1, L13-16)*

Here, Charlie asserts herself as the 'class clown', using strong affirmation of 'definitely', showing she is confident in her identity and how her peers see her. She also considers her perception of herself with 'I'd say', showing an awareness of people having different opinions and perspectives, which links to the characteristic of moral reasoning. Charlie appreciates that the Internet offers up a different stage and different opportunities for behaviour management, which suggests that by being able to engage in both offline and online spaces, she is constructing separate parts of her identity in diverse ways.

Charlie accepts that online responses may not be real but is not fazed by this.

> *That's the cool thing about the Internet as well- what I'm putting out there… are my jokes. I don't need to know my audience; I just want their response. The likes or the reactions. Or the comments. I can send out a video on my WhatsApp group and see what my friends say. Do you know what they say- in comedy- it's all about timing? And I think; also, the thing is that, with the timing, I can post a video or a joke or whatever when it is a good time for me. The Internet or the WhatsApp group…they're there all the time for when it's the right time. (T1, P2, L16-18)*

Here a link can be made between the constancy and loyalty of the Internet and Charlie's ambition. Charlie's claim of how she 'just want[s] their response' links shows that she wants to know what others think, and this may be seen to link to self-esteem if she regards their judgement as positive. Charlie's consideration of using the Internet 'when it is a good time for [her]' links to Bella's needing to be 'in the mood' in the previous case study.

> *People can act different. I met a YouTuber once. There's a YouTube, called 'Jack Septiceye'. And he's way nicer. But he was different. Because online he makes less jokes. It was kind of like…in real life… he was just being himself, and he was so funny. But- I don't know- I think this can work both ways. Like if you watch a vlogging challenge, it might look so, so funny, but they might have filmed it loads of times and just show you the best version. So actually, **is what you are watching even real?** I love watching vlogging challenges. (T2, P4, L4-12)*

The juxtaposition of these two sentences- one suggesting that material viewed online is entirely fabricated, and then one declaring her 'love' for watching it- shows that the falsity of the videos does not in any way hamper the effects for the viewer. Charlie has accepted a realistic worldview of this situation; she is not naïve when it comes to being a receiver of content, but this acceptance of truth has not affected her enjoyment of viewing the online material. Charlie shows the strength and resilience of character in being able to distinguish reality from entertainment.

4.3.2.2 An informed identity

Anxiety

Charlie's experiences are not without anxiety, however; she gives a vivid metaphor of an 'electric bubble' to encapsulate online communications:

> *When I go online, and I'm chatting to people, it feels exciting. Everything else kind of fades away and you are just in this bubble, like an electric bubble, talking. It's like, 'don't let it pop!' Sometimes my fingers can't keep up with all the stuff I want to say, and I get all nervy because I want to be the funniest person with the best comments and sometimes someone beats you to it. (T1, P3, L15-22)*

This links back to the identity Charlie has committed to, that of the comedian. Anxiety comes when, in-crisis, Charlie sees her position as being challenged by other 'performers' on the online stage. As mentioned earlier, it is when identity is 'in crisis' that anxiety is at its highest,

which is shown clearly in Charlie's extract above.

Charlie shares examples of when, being informed by previous experiences online, she is able to cope with stressful or unfulfilling interactions:

> *And if it all gets a bit much, like some people get a bit angry or annoying, then I leave. (T1, P3, L-20-22)*

This experience shows that Charlie is confident in taking control when in a stressful situation or experiencing emotional conflict. Charlie's management of stressful situations online suggests a parallel to this task and suggests that her identities are informed from past experiences and behaviours.

> *So, you have to be a bit wary I think. I don't think you can trust a lot of what you see online. But I think that's why it is so popular. You can be whom you want. You can do what you want. You can say what you want. You can be who you can't be- who you couldn't be if it was in the real world. Although, unlike me, I'm funny online and offline (laughs). (T3, P6, L3-9)*

4.3.2.3 A stable identity with autonomy

As with Bella, Charlie has considered her future career. Charlie talks about how the Internet acts as a platform for her comedy and considers how this may play a part in supporting her future ambitions.

> *One day, I really want to write scripts for movies... be a script person, writing comedy films or stand-up comedy. Right now, I like testing out my comedy online. It's a good way to put stuff out there and get feedback without actually being face-to-face with people in case a joke doesn't work, and I'd be like 'facepalm'. Online, I can't tell if they're laughing or not, it just depends what they type. And so, I suppose my friends might be typing LOL even if they're not laughing. I hope not! (laughs and pulls a face of mock horror). (T1, P1, L16-25)*

It is clear to see Charlie's differentiation between Goffman's front and back stages here, the online stage where Charlie sees the audience as being distanced from her performance in a way that cannot be achieved in the offline world. Charlie recognises that self-esteem can be fuelled more easily online by audience response without the added visibility of offline performances. Charlie speaks with a realistic world-view, again presenting moral reasoning

and suggesting that she is not naïve when it comes to the stage that the Internet can present. She understands that things said online cannot always be trusted, but also sees the Internet as offering up a platform, both in the current time and for future scope, for her comedy and her ambition to be a stand-up comedian or comedy writer. This shows stability and confidence in the identities that she holds.

Summary of Charlie's idiographic case study

Charlie is a confident navigator of online spaces, and she enjoys taking advantage of this as a platform for her comedy in her pursuit of a career in stand-up comedy or writing comedy scripts. She shows a strong commitment to this identity, including her future orientation in her styles of cognition. Anxiety arises when this identity is in crisis, such as when threatened by other '*performers'* on the stage whom Charlie perceives as '*funnier'* than her.

The reader may note from the above checklist that no aspects of authoritarianism were shown in Charlie's extracts. Charlie's free will may be due to the family culture in the household, perhaps related to the fact that Charlie has an older brother (whereas all of the other participants are either the eldest sibling or, in the case of Summer, an only child). Again, this is speculative and down to interpretation of the researcher and the reader.

Charlie is aware that what she reads and sees online can be no more than a presentation for an audience, but this does not hamper her enjoyment of using online spaces.

4.3.3 Daisy

Author: Daisy- ten years old- online gamer

Daisy, ten-years-old, admits to her passion for online gaming and shares experiences of communicating with others in online games Daisy shares both positive and negative lived experiences of the online gaming world.

For Daisy, main uses are the chats on online games.

Figure 4.4: Daisy's avatar

4.3.3.1 An affirmed identity

Self-esteem

For Daisy, self-esteem is built up through online gaming and approval from other users. This shows a commitment to her identity that is affirmed through the behaviour and interaction with others, as this identity is recognised and accepted by her 'audience':

> So, my favourite thing when I go online is gaming. The colours, the tasks, the rewards, the challenge of it all. Meeting new people who are into the same thing and challenging them. I love games with worlds where you have to walk around and explore and find things or build things. (T2, P3, L20-22)
>
> It feels so creative like I can't build a house in real life like in my room, but I can go online and build a whole city. It's just the best thing to do. (T2, 4, L1-3)

Here, her lived experiences of gaming have fed into Daisy's imagination and desire to create and build, showing the development of a creative identity through her commitment to her gamer persona.

> And doing it online means everyone else can see it too. I love games where I have to decorate my house and choose all the wallpaper and furniture, and you can earn coins to buy new things. I can make my house just how I want it. And then other people come and look at it as well and say, 'Oh wow, how do you get the TV?' and I'll tell them how to unlock it. (T2, P4, L2-9)

Here, the added attraction of online gaming as opposed to offline gaming for Daisy is the ability to share her creations and support other users. These users are unknown, represented only by the virtual avatar they have created, but Daisy does not show fear of

this but the opposite- she is willing to help others develop their online knowledge and skills. By helping others, Daisy's knowledge is affirmed, which contributes to a positive self-concept and perceived esteem on the online platform.

Independence can be seen to thrive when authority is not domineering; to see if Daisy's narrative supports this, the personality characteristic of 'authoritarianism' should be explored.

4.3.3.2 An informed identity

When it comes to the second theme of having 'informed' identities, Daisy's narrative shows how both past and present experiences in her life has informed the context of her identities:

> *Some people definitely act differently online. I can tell when people do something they wouldn't normally do in real life. But with my friends online, I don't think I act differently. I don't see the point. I'm me, wherever I am. My mum's house, my dad's house, school. I'm still me, and I don't have to prove anything to anyone. (T1, P2, L14-19)*

Again here, Daisy's ease with her identity and the idea that she doesn't 'have to prove anything to anyone', yet she recognises that other users of SNS may wish to present a front, as in Goffman's idea of front and backstage:

> *But I think some people want to try and be different online. Some people want to be completely different, like pretending they're a boy or girl, or I think…some just want to be a bit better- a bit funnier or more popular. (T1, P2, L20-23)*

Through frequent Internet use, Daisy seems to have developed moral reasoning and judgement around safe use of online spaces.

> *I normally play games on the computer just for fun, and when I have to interact with someone, it's almost like that person isn't really on the other side of the computer. But it doesn't actually feel like there's a person really there talking to me. But I know when it gets weird I should turn it off and stuff. (T1, P2, L7-11)*

The repeated use of 'but' here seems to suggest a mix of emotions around communicating with others online. Daisy's acknowledgement of being able to 'turn it off' if a conversation becomes inappropriate shows her ability to manage online dangers should they present themselves, and this ability has come through the encountering of these dangers.

4.3.3.3 A stable identity with autonomy

Daisy seems to have a very balanced view of the role of computers and technology in society also.

> *I like using the computers at school. The most recent thing I've done has actually been my favourite thing, where we've been planning a picnic on Excel worksheets. The things we do on the computers are more about tools…we don't really talk about social media or those things, but we can use Microsoft Office and learn about how to use the different applications so, in the future, you might need it at secondary school or for a job. (T1, P1, L10-17)*

Daisy's extract above shows an awareness of the facets of modern technology, and also suggests future scope as she mentions secondary school and employment. This extract shows future orientation as it hints at Daisy's future aspirations, and that she recognises her current position in primary school as being the first steps on a lifelong journey.

Daisy goes on to share a negative experience with an unknown user online which hints at her stable identities:

> *There was a time with my friend when we went on the Internet. We made a comment, and one person got really angry with that comment, got really angry, and so my mum had to shut the game down, and we never went on it again. I think it's weird how… (pause) someone can get so angry about a comment. It's actually a bit scary. I suppose it's creepy because you don't know who that person is. They might just be a very angry person. (T2, P4, L15-23)*

Daisy has dedicated support in place with her mother being able to take control of the situation and 'shut[ting] the game down', and she is then able to avoid repeating dangers by saying she 'never' went on that game again. Daisy can now take control of the situation through avoidance. This experience has not, however, dissuaded Daisy from using the Internet, as she admits to continued daily use, showing resilience and stability of character.

Summary of Daisy's idiographic case study

Daisy shares both positive and negative lived experiences of online gaming. The positives involve the freedom and creativity that come from building games such as Minecraft, while the negatives include confrontational conversations online with strangers.

Daisy shares the enjoyment of interacting with unknown users online, but also shows resilience and is aware of strategies to use when online interactions take a turn for the worse, showing that through the autonomy of online use she has developed the confidence to navigate these spaces independently. In turn, I suggest that through her lived experience of imaginative game-playing online, Daisy's creative skills have been developed, as well as an affirmation of her self-concept through the teamwork with others in an online environment.

4.3.4 Summer

Figure 4.5: Summer's avatar

Author: Summer- ten years old- connecting with friends and family.

Summer spoke about the Internet as a private, personal space. An only child, she also spoke about how having the chance to communicate with others online in the evenings, at the weekends and during holidays provided welcome company from isolation.

In her emotive narrative below, Summer shares both positive and negative emotional lived experiences as she connects with others online.

Summer's main platforms online are the class wiki page and her email threads.

4.3.4.1 An affirmed identity

Self-esteem

Although IPA offers the opportunity to try and interpret experiences where participants are feeling elevated levels of self-esteem, it is important to note Marcia's (1966) warning around this personality characteristic, namely that there is unreliability in self-esteem measurement.

> *My name is Summer, I'm ten years old, and I'm in Year 5 at school in London. If I had to describe myself in three words, I'd say… 'quirky', 'funny', 'sporty'… or 'chatty'- probably 'chatty'. I like reading, and I like doing sports, and I really like doing things on the Internet. I'd say I'm pretty confident using technology, I mean, I use the Internet every day. (T1, P1, L4-9)*

Summer's opening remarks have her describing herself, rather than considering how others would label her (*with the statement 'if I had to describe myself'*) which already shows a shift to a more ego-centric identity that is seen in the other participants (*who reflect on 'if my friends/ my best friend described me'*). Summer also asserts her favourite subjects and hobbies, stating that she is 'confident' using technology and uses the Internet every day. Summer's justification for why she is confident interestingly involves her use 'every day' rather than the mentioning of skills or knowledge.

> *When someone gets in touch online, it makes me feel good about myself. Like this: once, someone left school, so everyone gave them their email addresses. And then someone found a way of getting my email address from my class. I think they asked the person who left school for my email address, and they emailed me, and they*

were like 'hi!' and then we were emailing like every five seconds. When you look, and you see you've got that little message notification, it feels very good. Like someone cares and they are reaching out to you. It makes me feel really good (smiles). (T3, P3, L8-19)

Here, Summer discusses how through feeling connected online, she 'feels good'; when other users message Summer, this affirms her identity as part of a community, or in-group. The use of online messaging is not, however, without anxiety for Summer, which shows that her identity is still very much developing and is not yet fully committed to or achieved; this is highlighted in the next section.

4.3.4.2 An informed identity

Anxiety

When discussing the emotions around online posting, high levels of anxiety are present in Summer's following extract. Summer presents the simile of fishing to try and describe her lived experience of social media. In the following extract, there is a crisis between negative and positive emotions. It is this encounter with stressful situations that in fact can help the user to become more resilient and form a more positive, stronger identity as a result.

I think writing something on social media...it's like catching a fish. You put out your idea, like the bait. And then you wait. Actually, I get a bit stressed, sometimes, when I am waiting and wondering if anyone is reacting to what I've said. And sometimes if I look, and no one has liked my idea or said anything at all, I get this horrible cold feeling. It's like I wish I hadn't written anything at all. And then suddenly, next time I check, maybe there is a comment saying, 'yes I agree' or something like that. And suddenly I felt like a glow. Well, I guess that is like when you catch the fish! (T1, P3, L13-20)

From a '*horrible cold feeling'* to a '*glow'*, Summer explains how simple online interactions can, in fact, have a powerful effect. The choice of a rather adult pastime of fishing also projects the idea that Summer has quite a mature approach to life and that her lived experiences thus far have helped to be shaped by the mostly adult interaction she has at home through the lack of siblings.

Summer's relationships with her parents may suggest a less-domineering authority or hierarchy, and interestingly there are no clear examples of authoritarian obedience in Summer's narrative. One powerful and very present social force in Summer's life, however,

in shared in the following section.

> *At playtime, I really like playing running around games. Before people loved to play imaginary games, like games where you pretend to be things, but no-one really likes that anymore, and now everyone likes running around games, so I like those now. (T1, P1, L9-13)*

Interestingly, Summer's comment on how the choice of games has shifted as '*no one really likes that anymore'*, and instead '*everyone likes running around games, so I like those now'* shows that she wishes to align with the crowd and may also change her preferences along with the consensus in order to fit in or perhaps be liked. Although perhaps not a strong example of authoritarianism in terms of Marcia's usual definition, the obeying of authority, Summer's desire to go with the consensus may suggest a weakness of character when it comes to identity exploration. This extract also deals with backstage, with Summer's interactions in the 'real' rather than 'virtual' world. Most of the lived experiences shared in the narratives concern online interaction on the front stage, but seemingly offline experiences are relevant too.

4.3.4.3 A stable identity with autonomy

> *What I really like about chatting online is you can just say what you think, and you can use more fun language and emojis. Like if I'm happy, or if I like something, I can put smileys or thumbs up, and everyone knows what it means. And that makes sharing how you feel really easy, but like if I was in school and I would have to say whole sentences, like 'I am feeling really happy today'. On the class wiki, if something was funny, I would type LOL, and everyone knows that I'm laughing. Or the laughing smiling emoji face. It is quick and easy to share how I feel. (T2, P4, L2-14)*

The use of the 'I' position is prevalent here, suggesting that despite the desire to conform to social pressures offline, Summer can command some autonomy online on the front stage. It could be suggested, however, that Summer is trying to portray herself as having a positive disposition; she gives the example of wanting to say she is '*feeling really happy'* or using the '*smiling emoji face'*, yet some of her narrative shares experiences of feeling '*stressed', 'cold', 'alone'.* This desire to put forward a happier self links to Goffman's theory of front and backstage (1959); Summer may be aiming to present a more positive identity the researcher

during her interviews than is apparent from her other opinions and experiences. Also, unlike the other participants, Summer discussed the class wiki page. All classes at Fairtrees Primary School have a class wiki, but for Summer it seems especially significant.

> *I like being able to write down my thoughts, it is a space to express my ideas, and no-one even knows it is me. I keep checking if people like what I wrote, and sometimes they do. That makes me feel happy. It makes me feel proud. I also like reading what other people are discussing, and it makes me think without having to speak or share my ideas in return. Well, unless I want to. (T2, P4, L16-20)*

Here, Summer's experiences have allowed her to take ownership of her actions, and it is through this autonomy and independence that Summer has constructed a positive self-concept, feeling able to choose and control her behaviours. She mentions feeling 'happy' and 'proud' as her comments are 'liked' by others online. The issue of anonymity is not important; it is the action of being 'liked', regardless of by whom, that affirms Summer's self-concept and fuels her self-esteem.

> *I guess it feels like it's my thing. It's my space, my iPad, in my bedroom. I suppose it feels like you can go online and just live in there for a bit. I can't explain it. (T3, P8, L20-22)*

To conclude, Summer seems to enjoy taking ownership of the device, her offline space and her online space. This opportunity for responsibility and autonomy has helped Summer to feel more confident with her identity as she begins to understand how online communications feature in her daily life to stay in touch with both family and friends.

Summary of Summer's idiographic case study

 For Summer, navigating online spaces has provided both positive and negative lived experiences. Positively, Summer explains that being able to talk to others online combats 'isolation' and is a 'way of not feeling alone'. Summer also talks about how she found her class wiki page useful during a school examination week, where she could anonymously read and share tips in a safe space that she felt could not be conducted the same way in the real world. With no siblings, Summer regards SNS and email as crucial to keep in touch with people and feel connected.

Negatively, Summer's fishing analogy shares feelings of stress and worry as she posts something online and waits for the 'fish', the response and comment from others. Seemingly, however, her encounter with experiences of this kind seemed to have fuelled Summer's resilience in online spaces and made her more confident and comfortable with her identity as a result; crises are helping Summer to explore and inform possible identities.

4.3.5 Diya
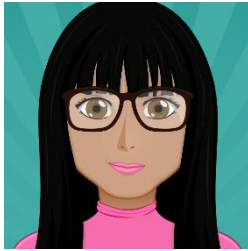
Author: Diya- eleven years old- Instagram and private messenger.
Diya talks about how friends make up who she is, and the ability to keep in touch with past friends makes up her history.
Primary uses for Diya are her WhatsApp Messenger and private messenger on Instagram.

Figure 4.6: Diya's avatar

4.3.5.1 An affirmed identity

Self-esteem

Diya's narrative begins with good-natured humour; this shows contentment with who she is, and portrays the pleasure that Diya finds in her 'quirky' personality:

> *Interviewer: Tell me about yourself; your favourite things, hobbies, about your family…anything you want to share.*
>
> *Diya: Horses. Ponies. Glasses. Dogs. Maths. Anime. Weird. Horse-obsessed. Quirky. Parents. Sister. I live in a garden suburb. (pause) Do you need more? Horses, ponies, horses, ponies (laughs) yep, that's me. (T1, P1, L4-9)*

The confidence that Diya portrays in labelling herself as 'weird' and 'quirky', yet the threading through of also her interests and her family members, suggests a balance in her life and an established view of who she is. A key theme from Diya's narrative is around how the Internet helps to keep her connected to family and friends.

> *Interview: So, would you say you're the same at home as at school?*
>
> *Diya: Am I the same? It's hard to explain because my Nan doesn't speak English. So, I speak Hindi to her. Not with my mum and my sister. My dad, at the moment, isn't living here in London. He's living in Dubai and Delhi for his work. I use Skype a lot, so I get to see him and talk to him because he won't be back until December. (T1, P1, L12-17)*

Diya seems to have a high ethnic identity here as the first experience she shares is that of speaking Hindi to her grandmother. Diya's father being away for business is also a

prominent issue that she wishes to share as she brings it up very early in her narrative. This may show insecurity about being away from one parent, or just that she is proud of the role model her father provides through his business; this is part of the 'making sense' of IPA, and thus her extract is open to interpretation in numerous ways. Here, the ability to contact her father while he is away for a further six months is significant, but as Diya's narrative goes on to explain, it isn't only for present relationships that online communication is useful.

> *For year 4 and year 5 I lived in Dubai. We had a WhatsApp group for all the girls in my class, about 11 of us. There were about ten classes per year group. We still talk quite often. There's still nine of us in the group, and we still message every day or every other day. Through WhatsApp and on Instagram, we have private message systems. (T1, P1, L19-24)*
> *That's how we stay in touch. It means a lot to me that we are still in touch. It's part of my history. (T1, P2, L1-3)*

Diya's identity, therefore, is founded in her past lived experiences and the connections and friendships she has made. By still supporting these relationships through SNS, Diya's identity is grounded and may be why she seems so content and confident in herself.

> *It makes me affirm who I am because all of these girls have been part of my life and known me, in different places, so I have my Dubai friends, and now my London friends. It's like, it's amazing how I can look in my contacts and just see a list of people who have had an impact on my life. My contacts though... it's all people I've met. It will be friends, or family, or people from school. (T1, P2, L4-10)*

Diya's expression of her contacts as having 'an impact' on her life shows that she values the roles of others very strongly. Self-esteem and autonomy are both at elevated levels here, but there are still underlying characteristics of moral reasoning and authoritarianism below the surface of this extract, where Diya states 'it's all people I've met', almost as if trying to defend her contact list to the interviewer and acknowledge the need for safety.

4.3.5.2 An informed identity

A further aspect of authoritarianism is apparent when Diya discusses an anecdote shared by her mother that outlines the need for safety online:

> *Might someone act differently online to real life? Of course! That's how children get,*

*like, **stolen** through the Internet. My mum told me about this thing, someone we know, I'm not going to say who, they were in year 4. They were in a group chat somewhere somehow with their friends from out of school. They were talking to my friends. They all had their profile pictures as small girls. And it was just 'heart heart good night'. And someone else came into the chat. And the original girls said, 'who are you and why are you on this chat?' And… (pause)… this sounds really, really appalling…And this person said, 'I'll only leave this chat if one of you sends me a naked picture'.*

Interviewer: How does that story make you feel?

Diya: It makes me mad. And sad. And actually, I think it's wrong that a person would actually say something like that to girls whom they didn't know. I think it's wrong that, just because they are kind of anonymous, because it's online, I mean, that that person thought they could do that. Like, I don't think that someone could just go up to a group of girls and ask them, just on the street or whatever. At least I don't think a person would do that- I HOPE they wouldn't! But I think that…I don't know what those girls did; I think they told their moms because it was wrong, but, I don't know what happened to that person. I really hope that the police caught them and stopped them from doing that. (T2, P4, L1-22)

Diya here reveals her strategy for how she may deal with this situation- speaking to her mother, and appropriate agencies perhaps needing to be notified. It is interesting to note that this part of Diya's narrative does not show anxiety, and this absence of crisis aligns with her coherent and stable identity. Part of her coherence comes from her ability to use moral reasoning around the lived experiences Diya encounters on the front stage.

For example, under this second theme of 'informed' identities, Diya is aware of the dangers of online communications:

If you meet people online, that's never safe. If you meet them face to face first of all, and then keep in touch online. You just need to check someone is who they say. It's easy for people to hide online, to just put up a profile picture of someone else, or just an object or whatever. You need to be careful. (T1, P2, L11-19)

Diya's warning about needing to be careful shows she is not naïve when it comes to communicating with others online. From her confident identity, it is interpreted that her words 'you need to be careful' is more a warning for the interviewer and prospective users of the

Internet, rather than the presence of anxiety.

4.3.5.3 A stable identity with autonomy

The language used to describe how people 'hide' online may suggest a fear of this for Diya, but as the next part of her narrative goes on to share, she is aware of ways to keep safe and avoid such behaviours online:

> *I have Instagram, but it's a private account. I will talk to my friends, but I don't really talk to people I don't know. I only talk to my friends via text or private message on Instagram if I need to know something for the homework, or I need to know the time of something.*

Here **autonomy** is apparent, as Diya has her own profile but is confident in managing her behaviour on this SNS. Diya continues to present a somewhat balanced and mature view of technology in her following statement:

> *You use slightly different language when you're texting compared to in real life. You will use abbreviations of sorts like instead of by the way you will say btw, or instead of saying I really like that, you might just put the smiley emoji. (T2, P2, L22-24)*
> *But kind of like eBooks versus real books, you kind of like to have the real books. The traditional ways can be better, or technology can take over.* (T2, P3, L1-2)

The idea that technology 'can take over' suggest that Diya is aware of how people can become addicted to technology, and that she appreciates the need to balance online versus offline practices.

Diya is very reflective in her narrative. The constant availability of online spaces and the ability to connect with friends or family whenever needed is of crucial significance for Diya.

> *But it's kind of like your friends are always with you, on your device or whatever. So, if you get lonely, you can go on and say 'heart' and someone will always put something back to you. (T2, P3, L17-20)*

As she has experienced moving from London to Dubai and back again, in a time of change, the constancy of SNS has remained the same, which provides comfort for Diya and builds her confidence as a result. Strangers online are not the only danger that Diya mentions, as

she brings in a dark anecdote about bullying and suicide:

> *There was something on Answers, or something, where kids would type in 'does my hair look ok' or something, and some people would give really horrible comments. I think there was like an eight-year-old kid who ended up killing themselves. (T3, P5, L13-17)*

Just as with the earlier anecdote of a stranger asking for naked photographs, Diya has also been subject to a story of child suicide, but this is said in a rather matter-of-fact way and has not deterred her online use. Diya's behaviour suggests that she accepts terrible things may happen online, such as trolling and cyberbullying. Without specific names or dates, it is unclear whether this was a reported tragedy or perhaps another story aiming to keep Diya safe online, such as the previous anecdote from her mother.

> *I think some people are all alone out there. And when people bully them, I think they don't know who to talk to about it. The Internet is kind of like this web. Like a spider web, but it's a social web. And if you know the people in the web, it's good. But if you don't know the people, well I suppose it could be like a trap. Overall, though, I think it's good knowing, even if they just send you a heart, it's good to know that friend is out there. (T3, P6, L1-7)*

This final comment from Diya shows her awareness of dangers, portraying dangers and dangerous users as predatory spiders, while she and her friends are presumably the flies that must not get caught in the web. This rather haunting analogy shows the underlying fear that Diya harbours, but it seems the positive experiences and comfort that is held from being able to stay connected to friends and family, particularly her father who is away for months at a time, outweigh the fears of these dangers. Diya's self-report hints at a confident and resilient character who is emboldened to brave online spaces and navigate with autonomy and independence, strengthened through the forewarning of such dangers through parental storytelling.

Summary of Diya's idiographic case study

For Diya, the opportunity for social communication that the Internet can provide has been well received. The continuity that has been provided through the platform of private messaging as Diya has moved from country to country has helped her to feel confident and brave in new situations, as she holds on to her history and identity through the friendships in her life. Commitments to identities seem strong and stable, with a lack of anxiety around social media use although the use of various platforms to build her identity.

Despite being aware of several online dangers through the sharing of anecdotes, such as strangers asking for naked photographs, and cyberbullying leading to child suicide, Diya does not seem perturbed and matter-of-factly speaks about these issues, which suggests an acceptance that bad experiences may happen online. Diya talks about ways to deal with online dangers, such as alerting a parent, and through the knowledge of such dangers seems to feel comfortable in talking about and navigating through them.

4.3.6 Magdalena

Figure 4.7 Magdalena's avatar

Author: Magdalena – nine years old- animal lover.
Magdalena's definition of the Internet: I would say that it is a place you could get information and find images without having to move. Magdalena talks about her love of animals and being able to play animal games as she isn't allowed pets at home. Magdalena is hesitant to use the Internet and cautious of dangers that may be lurking. Skype is one of the few platforms used.

4.3.6.1 An informed identity

Anxiety

Throughout Magdalena's narrative, anxiety seems a key personality characteristic, as she warns against Internet use and dismisses online communication on several occasions. The below extract highlights Magdalena's fear over trusting others online:

> *I think people sometimes can get a bit too confident online. They can go around lying because people don't know who you are, or if you're telling the truth or not. If you know them, you'd think that's not true, why are you saying that? But when they're hiding behind the computer screen, you can believe their lies. (T1, P3, L1-6)*

Magdalena's use of the phrase 'you can believe their lies' seems to be almost an utterance of what she has heard elsewhere; more like a parental warning than a child's experience, an indication that she is wary of online communications. Magdalena's wariness may be as a result of lack of autonomy due to strong authoritarian influence on Magdalena's life.

> *Interviewer: Do you think you act differently at home compared to at school?*
> *Magdalena: I think I act a bit different. At home, it's different rules as to when I'm at school. For example, we don't really have beds here. Like at home I'm allowed to jump on my bed, but we're not allowed to jump on the tables at school. At playtime, I'm not that sensible. (T1, P2, L10-14)*

This comparison, and suggestion of 'jumping on beds' appears to be a childlike response to rules and rule-breaking; this suggests that Magdalena may lack a more mature understanding of the world and may have been quite well-protected from the dangers of the real world or the concept of more severe rule breaks.

She goes on to talk about dangers of online use:

So, you might maybe play on an online game, or, think you are talking to a girl and talking about favourite animals, music, and it might actually not be a girl. It might be a man. And the problem is if someone can get your details and track you down. So, you should never say your school, or give out your address to someone you don't know. Don't use your real name or just have the first part of your name but not your surname or age. I think it is important children are careful and are safe online, and I don't think parents always know what children are doing... That is the main problem. Children need to know about eSafety. (T3, P5, L10-27)

This reeling off of command-style statements almost seems to be a channelling of parental warnings or school eSafety advice: *'don't do this', 'don't do that'*. Again, this seems to be Magdalena almost adopting the guise of a teacher from school, whereas her previous warnings seemed to be her adopting the stance of her parents. These two examples suggest that Magdalena is not yet committed to her own identity and thus is adopting the face of her parents and teacher to disguise her insecurity, yet this also prevents her voice from coming out, which is one factor of authoritarianism. The idea that someone's true identity *'might be a man'* again seems to reflect most common eSafety videos for children which often show a child's avatar being employed by a man (thinkuknow.co.uk, 2018). This above extract also seems to link to Magdalena's self-esteem; if an individual continually seeks approval from authority, self-esteem is externally funded, whereas when autonomy is granted, self-esteem can be internally developed. The crisis that entails from wanting to please those in authority positions can create anxiety, and also erode autonomy. There are links, therefore, between self-esteem, anxiety, authority and autonomy, which supports the earlier discussion (Section 4.2) that there is an interplay between personality characteristics, and also that identities will, therefore, change over time as relationships- such as the parent-daughter dynamic- also change over time.

The role of authority and lack of autonomy is again supported in the following extract where Magdalena's shares how her use of the Internet seems only to be employed where there is a specific purpose:

My grandma and grandad, they live in Poland. And my step-cousins, they're in Poland as well. Sometimes I Skype them. I Skype my uncle quite a lot- he's a photographer and so is my mum. (T1, P1, L19-22) I like doing newspaper reports and doing pictures with shapes and things on Pages. I like finding pictures on the Internet as well to put on things that I do. And I find it much more fun to do more pictures than typing. (T1, P2, L1-4)

Magdalena's Internet use, as state above, seems quite simplistic and basic compared to some of the other participants. Her mentioning of contacting family first shows a strong bond with her family ties and perhaps again hints at a protected childhood. Her use of the Internet independently seems only to extend as far as using an online search engine to find pictures for school projects. Magdalena shows a strong priority of primary school work, perhaps to the detriment of other activities or desires. It may be through this lack of autonomy of online use that Magdalena seems to uphold a disdain for the Internet. It may be the fact that she is not aware of many tools and applications that can be used online that fuels her idea that the Internet is something we do not 'need':

> *I think you can use the Internet too much and I think that isn't actually always a good thing. I think it is good for information, but I don't think we need it. Humans didn't always have the Internet. But now some people think if they don't have their phone it is like a disaster! I actually don't think that it is healthy to have technology around you all the time. (T3, P6, L17-23) Because there are other things you can do, like actually TALK to people or explore the world around you! (T3, P7, L1-2)*

The closing sentence in the extract above suggests that Magdalena does not regard talking on the online, front stage in the same way as offline, backstage interactions. Magdalena's behaviour may be fuelled by the lack of confidence in her online persona, which is due to lack of autonomy and experience in online spaces, which, in turn, is due to strong authoritarianism. Magdalena's narrative concludes with almost an optimism for the downfall of the Internet:

> *Actually, I don't think it would be that bad if we didn't have the Internet any more. I think everyone might speak to their family and friends more… you can still use the phone. (T3, P7, L17-19)*

Strangely, Magdalena mentions that people can still 'use the phone' to contact others, which suggests that she understands the importance of social interaction, but that somehow, she distinguishes between the phone and the Internet for this purpose. Magdalena's idea that, on the one hand, without the Internet we would perhaps communicate more with friends and family, yet on the other, we can use the telephone for this, makes me suspect it is more the dangers of online use that is making her wary and unwilling to use the Internet, and perhaps creating a nervousness around online communication. Perhaps part of Magdalena's timid presentation during her interviews is down to general anxiety that has been built up by the rumour of online dangers.

Summary of Magdalena's idiographic case study

Magdalena's narrative differs from the previous five as not all of the three themes emerged. Although elements of an informed identity can be drawn out, it was not deemed possible by the researcher to see reflections of either 'affirmed' or 'stable' identities.

Magdalena's somewhat reserved manner during her interviews, despite her projection that someone who met her for the first time might say she 'talks too much', seems to be based in a general wariness of the world around her. This wariness also seems to be fuelled by lack of experience online. The online stages seem to be felt as abstract, undiscovered places that do not play a daily part in Magdalena's life, and that is only used when required for a set purpose, such as to research for a school project, or connect via Skype to family overseas.

Interestingly, unlike all five other participants, Magdalena does not suggest a metaphor or simile for online communication. She is the only participant who does not use this creative tool to help portray her lived experiences, which I take to suggest that her experiences online have been more restricted and less open-ended, therefore have not inspired creativity in her in the same way as some of the other participants. Similarly, Magdalena does not mention future scope or ambition, which hints at a desire to continue living in the present, content with being a child and with the concept of childhood as her current stage.

4.4 Chapter summary and reflection

This chapter presented an IPA analysis for the six participants. This thesis aims to provide an insight into how girls' identities may be developed through on-line interactions, yet so far, only personal views about their perceptions of their on-line identity have been shared. Elements of identities were identified under these broad terms on the analytical framework (Figure 2.2., Chapter 2).

Although the girls' self-reports suggest a significant amount about their online experiences, they are just that: their views of their experiences. To ascertain the nature of the interactions from a more objective perspective (to inform my role as a teacher and parent) the next two chapters consider 1. What the blog exchanges look like and 2. Whether there are discernible developments as the girls become more practiced in using the blogs.

This chapter has helped to answer **RQ1: How do the girls, who regularly go 'online', report they perceive their identities?** But leaves RQ2 and RQ3 unanswered.

As indicated earlier, the two other data sets gathered- namely the screenshots of the blog interactions, and the written responses on the questionnaires can now be analysed to respond to RQ 2 & 3.

CHAPTER 5 ANALYSIS OF QUESTIONNAIRE DATA

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will explore the impact of role of membership in an online community through looking at dialogic exchanges (written responses) in three rounds of questionnaires answered by the six participants in this study. The chapter will begin by presenting recent and relevant literature about the nature of communities, such as the blog created for this study, and will consider the work of Lave and Wenger (1991) concerning novices, as 'newcomers', and more experienced individuals, as 'old-timers'. Lave and Wenger's theory of 'situated learning' (1991), of a community of learners, CoL, that resonates with 'community of practice' will be adopted as the framework for this chapter.

The questionnaire data can be seen to help answer *RQ1: How do girls, who regularly go 'online', report they perceive their identities?* Data from the questionnaires will be shared and analysed across the three rounds (pre-blog in March, mid-blog in May and post-blog in July), and explicit references will be made to raw data (see also Appendices K, L, M and N). Thematic analysis will provide a suitable approach due to the allowance for identifying emerging themes across the dataset (see Section 3.7). The chapter will then consider how the analysis of the blog posts themselves will provide insight into the linguistic features used by blog members. A framework for exploring these linguistic features will be presented (Section 6.4) in preparation for the next chapter of dialogical analysis.

Limitations that must be acknowledged here are around the unnatural existence of the blog, namely that it was set up purely for the purpose of this study, the limited length of the blog due to the research degree nature, as well as the main issue that blogs are not primarily the first choice of platform for these young girls when communicating online. The idea of the blog as a CoL is used hedgingly and with caution due to these limitations.

5.2 The nature of communities

The notion that 'learning' involves a strong social influence through the deepening process of membership in a CoL has increased in popularity in recent decades (McLellan, 1995; Hookway, 2008; Byington, 2011), although elements can be seen in older seminal work such as that of Vygotsky's social learning. Vygotsky (1978) believed strongly that the role of community is central to 'making meaning', and thus viewed learning as social-cultural and co-constructed between the individual and the other. Anthropologists Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger coined the term 'community of practice' while studying apprenticeship as a learning

model (1991), stating that learning is involuntary, 'situated' in the same context in which it is applied. Learning is viewed here as a function of the activity, context and culture in which it occurs (Lave, 1988). CoL are not simply groups of people but are groups of people with a shared passion or interest that are developing their knowledge of skills through social interaction with the others in the group. Social interaction is, therefore, a critical component of situated learning; learners become involved in a 'community of practice' which embodies certain beliefs and behaviours to be acquired. The two guiding principles of situated learning are, therefore:

- Information and knowledge should be shared in an authentic context
- Learning is achieved through social interaction and member collaboration

I argue that blogs can be seen as a place of situated learning, where the knowledge and skills discussed and shared may concern emotional learning as well as practical computational skills. Examples of emotional learning including strategies for dealing with the stresses of test week at school on the class wiki page (see Chapter 2), while computational skills may involve how to change a profile picture or create new web pages. To meet the two principles above, the blog used for this study was of similar design to the class wikis already used at Fairtrees Primary School, and a large sample of participants (thirty-four) were given access to the blog, as having only six participants using the platform may have been considered to reduce the opportunities for social interaction and collaboration. This chapter will present relevant questionnaire data and analyse how, through the written responses on the three questionnaires, each of the six participants has evolved on their learning journey through their participation in the blog CoL. Again, as noted at the start of this chapter (Section 5.1), it is with caution that this journey can be considered in light of CoL due to the unnatural existence and membership of the blog, and the time limitations imposed due to the nature of this study.

5.3 The CoL process from newcomer to old-timer

Perhaps the most poignant feature of Lave and Wenger's seminal work on situated learning (1991) is that of the process from 'newcomer' to 'old-timer'. This evolution involves the journey of the individual through the influence of the community within this 'Community of Learners' (CoP). As the beginner, or 'newcomer', moves from the periphery of this community to its centre, they become more active and more engaged within the culture. Through this activity and engagement, individuals can assume an 'expert' role or the role of 'old-timer'. Novices learn from experts in the context of everyday activities. This process is labelled by Lave and Wenger (1991) as 'legitimate peripheral participation'.

This study considers how blogs can present a zone for socio-cultural learning, within which both skills and identity develop through the support and interaction with others. Figurative or narrative identities draw on social categories of how people 'figure' in the world and the signs that invoke this (Holland et al. 1998); this affirms the notion that 'identities are collectively shaped, even if individually told' (Sfard and Prusak, 2005: 14). The first question asked in Questionnaire 1 reveals an insight into the frequency of Internet use by these young girls. The data show that this sample, although a small, homogenous group, are fairly representative of the UK demographic for pre-adolescent girls (see national data shared in Chapters 1 and 2). Four out of the six participants admit to accessing the Internet at least twice per day. The data from the second question on Questionnaire 1 show that the three most popular reasons participants report using the Internet are 'To talk to friends', 'To play games' and 'To watch YouTube' (Figure 6.2). Again, these motivations for online use reflect the national data gathered (NSPCC, 2017). While these questions asked about general 'Internet' usage, this was to provide a context for the questions which then focused on blogging, and the lived experiences the participants encountered on the blog, as is the aim of this study. To better understand the girls' perceptions of the 'Internet', a key question in Questionnaire 1 asked how they would define the Internet to an alien who has just landed on our planet. The responses are shared in the table below (Table 5.1).

Participant	Definition of the 'Internet'
Bella	If someone had never used the Internet before I would tell them that it is a giant system where you can look at pictures, watch videos, listen to music, play games, read facts and so much more.
Charlie	It is a way to talk to your friends, play games, look up people/things, you can do school related things, you can make Keynotes and do things on social media. There are so many things to do so I might not have listed all of them.
Daisy	The Internet is where you find out information. It is also a place where you can interact with other people from the other side of the world, or maybe your neighbour (instead of walking up to them and talking to them). You can also play games, listen to music and check your emails.
Summer	The Internet is a thing that allows you to access information from anywhere as long as someone has written it on there before.
Diya	On the Internet, you can play games, watch videos, connect with friends, find out facts and so much more. To access the Internet, you usually need Wi-Fi, which is sometimes hard to connect to. I use the Internet a lot, but you have to be careful because some stuff is inappropriate.
Magdalena	I would say that it is a place you could get information and find images without having to move.

Table 5.1: Definitions of 'Internet' (pre-blog)

Looking at the girls' definitions of the Internet (Table 5.1 above), only Charlie, Daisy and Diya mention the role of the Internet as facilitating connections. It must be highlighted, however, that there are many different ways users can interact with others online, and many platforms they can choose to employ (discussed earlier in Chapter 2), each providing different forms of community and levels of membership. For Bella, Summer and Magdalena, their views of the Internet are of a bank of information.

To begin to explore how the role of the online community, as presented by the blog, may have helped participants to shift from newcomer to 'old-timer', the statements around usage can be analysed (raw data available in Appendix K). The participants were asked to read some statements about the Internet and online use, and to decide if they agreed with each statement, disagreed with the statement, or were unsure if they agreed or disagreed. In the below table (Table 5.2), a tick represents 'agree', a cross represents 'disagree', and a hyphen represents 'unsure'.

	Bella	Charlie	Daisy	Summer	Diya	Magdalena
The Internet helps people to connect with each other	✓	✓	-	✓	✓	-
The Internet is a good way for me to keep in touch with my friends	✓	✓	-	✓	✓	✗

Table 5.2: Participants' feelings about the Internet (pre-blog)

	Bella	Charlie	Daisy	Summer	Diya	Magdalena
The Internet helps people to connect with each other	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
The Internet is a good way for me to keep in touch with my friends	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	-

Table 5.3: Participants' feelings about the Internet (post-blog)

Reflecting upon this data, 'connecting with others' is not agreed with by all six participants before the running of the blog, yet in the final questionnaire, all six participants showed they 'agree' with the first of the statements post-blog (see Table 5.3 on the previous page). The

change here may be small, but it seems that for Daisy and Magdalena, their opinions have shifted after their participation in the study. Although Magdalena did not interact with others on the blog, she has begun to accept that this could be an opportunity presented by the blog. To better understand how, for example, Magdalena's knowledge and beliefs have shifted, more detailed written responses from the questionnaires can be shared.

In the first questionnaire (see Appendix L), sent out before participants accessed the blog, in April 2016, question 3 asked '**what is a blog**?' This same question was asked in the third questionnaire (see Appendix M), sent out in July after the girls had been members of the blog for four months. For contrast, extracts are shown from Summer and Bella, who reported during their interviews that they were active users on the blog, and Magdalena, who admitted to logging on but not posting, a 'lurker' (Gong et al., 2015). The answers below (in Table 5.4 (pre-blog) and Table 5.5 (post-blog) show how the girls' opinions changed.

Participant	Questionnaire 1 (pre-blog): What is a blog?
Summer	I think a blog is a place like a website where you can write things.
Bella	A blog is like an online diary.
Magdalena	Like a website.

Table 5.4: What is a blog? (pre-blog)

Questionnaire 3 (Appendix M) was sent out four months later (see Table 5.5 below).

Participant	Questionnaire 3 (post-blog): What is a blog?
Summer	A blog is an area where you can log onto, and you can read what other people have put. You can say what you think; you can enjoy learning new things or sharing information with others, you can give people advice. It is nice to be able to talk to people on it at any time rather than on the phone, so you can use it, e.g. in the evening.
Bella	A blog is a group where people can talk, write, read, say things and connect with other people. You can learn about others and what other people are doing.
Magdalena	It is where people post things, and you can read. You can see what other people say. Lots of things to read about + photos, news.

Table 5.5: What is a blog? (post-blog)

There is a difference between these answers, from Summer's expression of the blog as a place you can actively 'enjoy learning new things or sharing information with others', through Bella's comment of being able to 'learn about others and what other people are doing', to the

more passive response of Magdalena, who defines the blog as somewhere 'you can see what other people say'. Magdalena's knowledge has changed significantly when considering that the definition has moved from the more singular description of a blog as 'like a website' to being something dynamic and active where people can post and share comments and ideas. From these answers alone, it is clear that the participants' definitions and understanding of what a blog is have developed, but has this development- and the participation on the blog had an impact in such a short space of time? To help answer this question, one question in all three questionnaires (both pre-blog, during the blog (Appendix N), and post-blog) asked for the participants to reflect on how they experienced being a member on a blog. Pre-blog data are shared in Table 5.6 below:

Participant	**Questionnaire 1 (pre-blog):** Have you ever participated on a blog? If so, please describe your thoughts and feelings below.
Bella	No.
Charlie	No, but I know vlogs/vloggers which is a video blog.
Daisy	No, my friend had one once, and I read it, but she doesn't do it anymore.
Summer	No, I'm not sure.
Diya	No.
Magdalena	No.

Table 5.6: Blog participation (pre-blog)

The participants were asked the same question five weeks later (see Table 5.7).

Participant	**Questionnaire 2 (mid-blog):** Have you ever participated on a blog? If so, please describe your thoughts and feelings below.
Bella	Yes, I really REALLY enjoy the blog. I think it's really fun! I love writing on it and also I like when I can learn new things like I learnt how to change my picture. I am really excited to see what else we talk about!
Charlie	Yes, I like the school blog we are doing for this experiment. It's fun to share things and see what people say on there.
Daisy	Yes, I have participated on your blog, and it's really good. The crazy news is really funny, and I liked being able to change my profile picture which I found out how to do. I like not being me on there because it's quite fun. I can see what people think and say what I think.

Summer	It's really nice going on it with everyone which makes me happy.
Diya	Yes. I have been enjoying the blog. I have logged in each day apart from at the start because my login didn't work but it is sorted now.
Magdalena	I have been on it.

Table 5.7: Blog participation (mid-blog)

After only five weeks of having access to the blog, it is clear that ideas and opinions around the blog are shifting. During the pre-blog stage, for these six participants, blogs were a relatively unchartered territory (Table 5.6). Already, from the pre-blog Questionnaire 1 to the mid-blog Questionnaire 2, it is apparent that the participants have quickly embraced the new platform presented by the blog. Both Charlie and Daisy mention 'people' and being able to share or say what they wish, showing that the feeling of community is becoming present and that within this community it is recognised that experiences and feelings can be shared. Daisy also mentions how, within the blog CoL, she learnt how to change her 'avatar', or profile picture, and this supports Lave and Wenger's (1991) idea of the role of the others in the learning process, as it was through the guidance of another that Daisy's knowledge transformed. Charlie and Daisy are beginning to interact within this CoL, developing their roles from 'newcomer'. For Diya, however, who mentions an issue with logging in at the start, there is no mention of community yet, showing that her journey from a beginner, or 'newcomer', has not yet had opportunity to move from the periphery of this community to its centre (Lave and Wenger, 1991). This has changed again when, two months later, post-blog, the question is asked again in Questionnaire 3 (Table 5.8 below).

Participant	**Questionnaire 3 (post-blog):** Have you ever participated on a blog? If so, please describe your thoughts and feelings below.
Bella	Yes, it was interesting and fun, and I also liked seeing what other people put – it was fun, and I enjoyed being a part of it.
Charlie	Yes, I loved it! I think I will set up my own blog because it was good getting to see people's reactions to things, so I would like my own.
Daisy	Yes, it was really fun, and I will miss it and everybody.
Summer	YES, and I feel very sad that the blog is now finishing! I keep going on in case there is something new, but no one is really putting anything on now! I did really enjoy it, and I want to go on more blogs, and I might start my own one day.
Diya	It was very interesting to be able to use the blog because I hadn't before, and I think I learnt how blogs can be a place where you can read (or write)

	depending on the blog. I liked being an animal and no one knew my real name, so that was quite fun. I will definitely use blogs again and also the class wiki because I didn't much before.
Magdalena	I went on it, and I read the blogs.

Table 5.8: Blog participation (post-blog)

A keyword that can be drawn from these answers is 'new'; both Bella and Summer highlight their excitement over either viewing 'new things' (Summer) or learning 'new things' (Bella). This translates to Lave and Wenger's model of CoL where the members are still learning, and this learning comes through the everydayness of these interactions and utterances on the blog. Bella's third response, post-blog, shows how a presence of community was felt, and she 'enjoyed being a part of it'. From these questionnaire data, a key purpose seems to be to 'connect' with others, but, more than that, it seems to be that's a blog can provide something that participants felt 'part of' (Bella), a 'micro figured' world that introduced some of these participants to the experience of a new online blogging community.

In Questionnaire 2, Daisy mentioned that an attraction of the anonymous blog was *'I liked not being me on there'*. Diya agrees in Questionnaire 3 (Table 5.8), commenting *'I liked being an animal and no one knew my real name'*. I speculate that for these young girls, who may be submissive to family and school routines throughout most the day, the blog may offer an opportunity for development of identities in this new 'figured world', where the girls can figure out more about themselves through interactions and collaborations without the added pressure of friendship groups and peer dynamics. It seems that one's true identity is not necessarily relevant in an online community of other anonymous users.

The indifference to the role of anonymity is supported by recent research into online communities (Massa, 2017; Guerin et al., 2015; Justice et al., 2013). Indeed, one of the most famous online communities, 'Anonymous', for whom secret identity is vital, transitioned from being a small gathering of contributors to becoming a community of trolls, activists and hackers through the platforms provided for online communication and networking (Massa, 2017). Research by Guerin et al. (2015) into blogs as CoL for doctoral students found that a blog, initiated in 2012, grew to support a broader, diverse audience through the connectivity and establishment of communities.

Research by Justice et al. (2013), building upon the previous work with in-service teachers by Luehmann (2008), examines the affordances of blogging on establishing communities of practice within an elementary teacher education program. Justice et al. (2013) found that as the pre-service teachers interacted within the community over the course of the academic

year, discussions took place involving shared practice, helped to develop meaning, and-through this community- the teachers transformed their identity over time (Justice et al., 2013), linking back to the theory of Vygotsky (1987) that social interaction has a key role in learning and meaning-making.

The final questionnaire data to be presented is from the final question in Questionnaire 3, post-blog. The girls are asked to reflect upon their experience using the blog. These responses are shown in the next table (Table 5.9).

Participant	What was the highlight of using the blog? Were there any aspects you didn't like about using the blog?
Bella	The highlight for me was being part of the group. We could all share all of the things on there, and I liked logging in and having my own username and password.
Charlie	It was really fun joining in with the threads and seeing all the stories and articles. I probably liked the questions that made you think, like 'would you be a dog or a cat', because you have to try and think about why you would choose something, and then see what everyone else puts.
Daisy	I think the highlight was being in the group. It was exciting to see the new things and share that with everyone.
Summer	It was so fun all being together on it. I loved checking it and writing on it.
Diya	Yes, I really loved looking on it, and all the posts were good. The highlight was someone liked my answer.
Magdalena	The news articles.

Table 5.9: Highlights of blog (post-blog)

Interestingly, five out of the six participants mention the role of others in the learning process or the membership of a community. Bella talks about 'being part of the group', with the use of 'we' showing attachment to the group. Charlie is talking about 'joining in', and 'everyone else'. Summer shows significant alignment with the online community, stating that 'the highlight was being in the group'.

The prevalence of words such as 'share', 'everyone' and 'part of the group' show that, even in the few months that the blog was running, most of the participants began to feel part of the CoL. For Diya, this was affirmed when 'someone liked [her] answer', stressing the role of group affirmation. The only participant who does not mention group membership is

Magdalena, who states that 'the news articles' were the highlight of the blog. With reference back to Magdalena's narrative from her interview (Chapter 4), it has already been noted that she is hesitant to embrace the online spaces that the Internet can provide. It is of significance, now, to triangulate these questionnaire responses with observations of the blog 'conversations', or comments. The process for this is detailed in the next chapter.

5.4 Next steps: dialogical analysis

It is expected that, due to this nature of communities (Cuddapah and Clayton, 2011), and the platform of blogs as a zone for socio-cultural learning (Hookway, 2008; Byington, 2011), there will be particular kinds of linguistic features in the blog posts themselves that can be analysed to better answer the three Research Questions for this study:

RQ1: How do girls, who regularly go 'online', report they perceive their identities?

RQ2: What is the nature and motivation of young girls' online interactions?

RQ3: How can online interactions be seen to contribute to the development of identities and overall well-being?

Chapter 4 shared the girls' self-reports, this chapter has shared the questionnaire data, and the following chapter will allow for observation and analysis of the blog 'conversations', or 'comments', to permit triangulation and better consider how online spaces can offer 'figured worlds' for individuals (Holland et al., 1998; Urrieta, 2007). There are two strands of linguistic features that will be examined through dialogical analysis in the following chapter (defined further in Section 6.3).
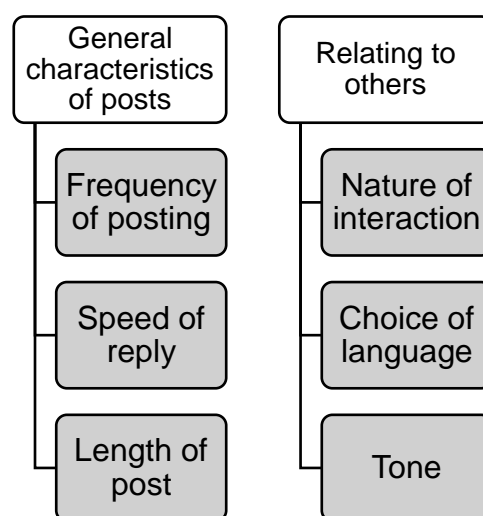
Figure 5.1 Linguistic features of blog interactions

5.5 Chapter summary

This chapter has discussed the nature of communities, and the role of communities of practice in 'situated learning' of a CoL This chapter has also defended the parallel of a school blog as presenting a community of practice for the young girls in this study.

Questionnaire data revealed how, during this study, the participants' knowledge and understanding around 'blogs' and online communication developed. The chapter stressed the logical need for a systematic analysis of the blog posts and presented a framework in preparation for the following chapter of dialogical analysis.

CHAPTER 6 BLOG ANALYSIS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter will present a dialogical analysis of the blog that the six participants were involved with (thirty-four participants accessed the blog in total, see Section 3.1 for clarity), illustrated with numerous screenshots from the blog to facilitate colourful and accessible data for the reader. As discussed in the previous chapters (Chapter 2 and 3), although the blog was initially set up for this project for the participants to reflect upon, it is now of importance to analyse the blog interactions first-hand. This data will supplement the participants' self-reports (Chapter 4) and questionnaire responses (Chapter 5).

It must again be highlighted that the blog was a means to the research rather than a reflection of broader social media practice and was employed to complement the interview and questionnaire data (see limitations discussed previously in Section 5.1). There are obvious limitations of the blog as an analogue for broader social media activity (as discussed in Chapter 2). There are other ways that this information could have been captured, such as analysing the interactions on the girls' own chosen platforms (which, as shared in Chapter 4, varied from YouTube, to Instagram, to WhatsApp), but to avoid ethical complications or any invasion of privacy, the blog was utilised. Essentially any platform wherein two or more users communicate could have been used, and this is considered in Chapter 8 Limitations, Section 8.3). It is also acknowledged that, although social interaction has been captured on the blog, the power of this experience as a 'community' cannot be overstated due to both the time limitation and design of the blog itself.

The analytical framework for exploring linguistic features (presented earlier in Section 5.4 and shared again here in Section 6.2) will be used to structure the analysis. These findings are of relevance as the voices of 'globally mobile children' have been little explored in research (Hannaford, 2018).

The chapter will conclude with a reflection on the three Research Questions for this study in light of this shared data, and consider how, through triangulation, the questions have now been answered.

6.2 Analytical framework

Language is a critical component of the blog analysis framework. Digital devices are part of everyday life for many children and can be some of their earliest literacy experiences

(Gibson and Smith, 2018). Essentially, the skills that children need to utilise to navigate their way through the texts they encounter online are evolving, and thus children need specific skills to engage with these digital texts. Burnett and Merchant (2012: 45) argue that a 'more nuanced understanding of the relationships between texts, audiences, information and power has emerged' as it is harder to identify positionality and ideology in digital texts as they are more fluid; this can make the consideration of digital texts problematic for children (Gibson and Smith, 2018). Burnett and Marchant (2011) share a model involving 'practice, networks and identity'. Within identity, as linked to this study, children can explore who it is possible to be in different contexts. Through exploration in digital spaces, children can establish their online identities.

Language learning is a continuous process that takes place not only in the classroom but also beyond the walls of the classroom with the help of technological tools. With a focus on blogs, research by Zarei and Supyan (2016) found that blogs can be employed as 'an easily accessible gadget that can facilitate learners' language learning and improve their autonomous learning' (Zarei and Supyan, 2016: 313). Also, the findings of the study revealed that the students were eager to get involved in online interactions and develop different language skills and language patterns as well.

There are key features of both discursive and behavioural nature that can be looked for in the blog postings. These are brought together in Figure 6.1 below.
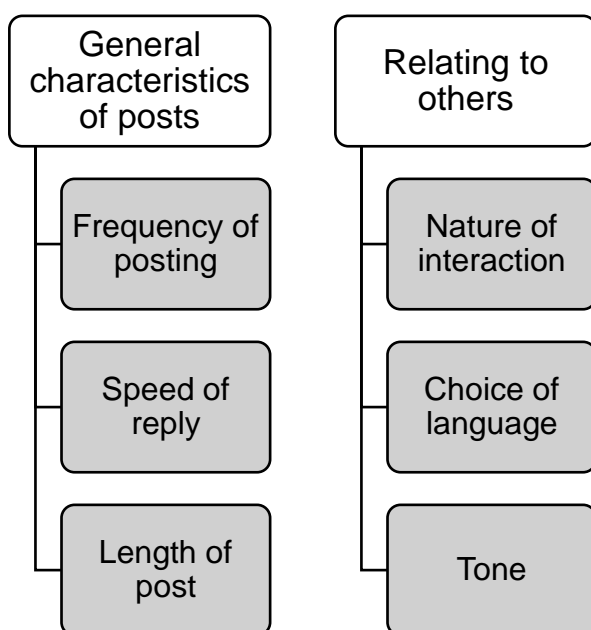
Figure 6.1: Linguistic features of blog interactions

6.2.1 General characteristics of posts

The left column of this linguistic features framework involves three elements associated with 'general characteristics of posts': 'frequency of posting', 'speed of reply' and 'length of post'. These general characteristics reflect the behavioural patterns of the participants, and as shown in a large-scale, longitudinal blog analysis by Hou et al. (2011) it is by observing interactions that behaviour can be analysed.

6.2.2 Relating to others

The right column of this framework (Figure 6.1) will analyse 'relating to others', with a focus on 'nature of interaction', 'choice of language' and 'tone'. This links to works (as discussed in Chapter 2) by Urrieta (2007), Holland et al. (1998), and Brook et al. (2009) whom all consider our possession of several identities, each performed in different 'figured worlds'- or social spaces- that we encounter in our lives. Using the linguistic features framework, insight can be gathered into how the participants wish to interact and engage with the other members on the blog, and the way in which they chose to present themselves in this community. Social network sites provide people with a unique opportunity for self-presentation (Huang et al., 2018). Individuals may build online identities that are partly or even completely different from their identities in the real world. This study involves solely female participants to respond to current debates around young girls' identity crises in the media, so although gender differences cannot be revealed, it is hoped that these findings can provide an insight to girls' motivations for virtual identity construction. An exploration of gender differences is instead considered for future research (see Chapter 8, Section 8.5). As Brook et al. (2008) explain, we can each have multiple identities in several different figured worlds, and the blog created for this study can provide just one of these many figured worlds for the participants. Here, current issues arise such as 'voice studies' and 'authenticity'.

6.4 The blog for this study

Thirty-four participants (aged between eight and eleven years old) took part in the secure blog created for this study. Each participant was allocated an anonymous username and password; this is discussed more with the participants on the welcome post (see Figure 5.1) and in the participant information form (see Appendix E). In this chapter, screenshots from the blog will be shared, comments from the six girls in this study will be analysed along with some supporting comments from other users, and behaviour will be compared to the inferences made through the self-reports shared in Chapter 4 of this thesis. In the case that

more than one Figure is needed to show extensive comments, the demarcation 'a', 'b', 'c' and so on will be used. The full list of blog posts (BP) can be found in Appendix O, ranging from the initial welcome post of BP1 to the final post of BP23 (screenshots of each post are viewable in Appendix P). The six girls who were interviewed are identified with their usernames as in the box (Table 6.1) below.

Name	Blog username
Bella	Duckling
Charlie	Angelfish
Daisy	Emu
Summer	Bear
Diya	Dragonfish
Magdalena	Panda

Table 6.1: The six participants' usernames

All girls in Years 4, 5 and six were invited to take part in the blog if they wished. Information and consent procedures, as outlined in Chapter 3, involved both child and parental consent before usernames were allocated. In total out of the thirty-four participants, although all thirty-four accessed the blog at various times and with varying frequency (visible via the administrator page), only twenty-five of the participants commented on the BP. In total, 201 comments were made. The frequency with which the six participants from Chapter 4 commented on the blog is shown in Table 6.2.

Name	Blog username	Total blog comments
Bella	Duckling	27
Charlie	Angelfish	17
Daisy	Emu	12
Summer	Bear	39
Diya	Dragonfish	21
Magdalena	Panda	0

Table 6.2: The six participants and total comments

This first post (shown in Figure 6.2) aimed to share the basic blogging protocol (as stated to the University Research Ethics Committee, Oxford Brookes University, 2016), as well as to act as the front end to the blog. As shown in Figure 6.2, the toolbar on the left-hand side of the screen shows links to 'Recent Posts', 'Recent Comments', as well as 'Archives' and 'Categories', acting as a navigating bar to allow for ease of use by the participants. Administrator settings required a user's comment to be permitted by the administrator to avoid any sharing of inappropriate material, either by participants or in the unlikely case of a non-participant entering the secure blog and posing something upsetting. Participants were made aware of this process so that they understood any delay in their comment being visible; to reduce this time lapse, notifications were set up to my email address to alert me of any new posts for approval. My administrator username was 'mrsgibson2016' to allow for ease of identification.

All images used on the blog were from the royalty free stock photo bank 'Pixabay' to allow for publication.

Hello everyone!
April 24th, 2016 at 11:51am

WELCOME

Welcome to our blog!

Firstly- thank you for agreeing to take part in this project- I hope you will find it fun, interesting, and enjoy talking to others on here and sharing your thoughts!

Secondly- you have been given an anonymous username. If you choose to say what your real first name is (or not!) that is up to you. You are welcome to stay anonymous and just be called 'Badger' etc! **Please do not share personal details, e.g. surnames, phone numbers or address on here.**

Thirdly- feel free to read, write, share images on here- and if you have any questions, just come and see me or you can write me a note and put it in the green box outside my classroom.

Fourthly- Be kind. If you don't agree with someone, that's fine, but please respect each other and don't type anything on here that might upset someone else. If anything on here upsets you, come and talk to me and we can sort things out together. I will approve comments before they are 'published' (appear) on the page, so please be patient if you write something and it does not appear straight away.

Your first question is now available to answer- click HERE in order to read it and share your answer!

Your second question is also posted- click HERE to read and share your answer!

(There will be 10 questions/discussions altogether).

I look forward to hearing your ideas!

From Mrs Gibson

Figure 6.2: BP1: 'Hello everyone!'

Dialogical analysis will be used to examine the **201 comments** on the blog posts in light of the linguistic features as presented in the blog analysis framework (Figure 6.1), exploring for meaning within the text. In the previous chapter, Lave and Wenger's theory of 'newcomers' and 'old-timers' (1991) proved relevant when analysing questionnaire data and exploring how the participants' knowledge had evolved through interactions with others online. As Wenger (1998) states, it is the role of community that is key, and communities are established when members of a specific domain **interact and engage** in shared activities, **share information** with each other, and **help each other**. These three components will frame this chapter as all three components were visible during the blog analysis. It must be acknowledged that it is with some caution that this thesis discusses the blog as a CoL, as this blog was not a naturally occurring community, and was a space set up for the purpose of

complimenting the research. Time limitations on the study also mean that there is lack of a longitudinal element to the blog interactions (see further Section 8.5).

6.5 Interacting and engaging with others

Out of the six participants interviewed, Summer ('bear') is the first to comment on the first BP (Figure 6.3). Summer shows a keenness to **connect** and interact with me as the administrator, yet she chooses not to reveal her name.
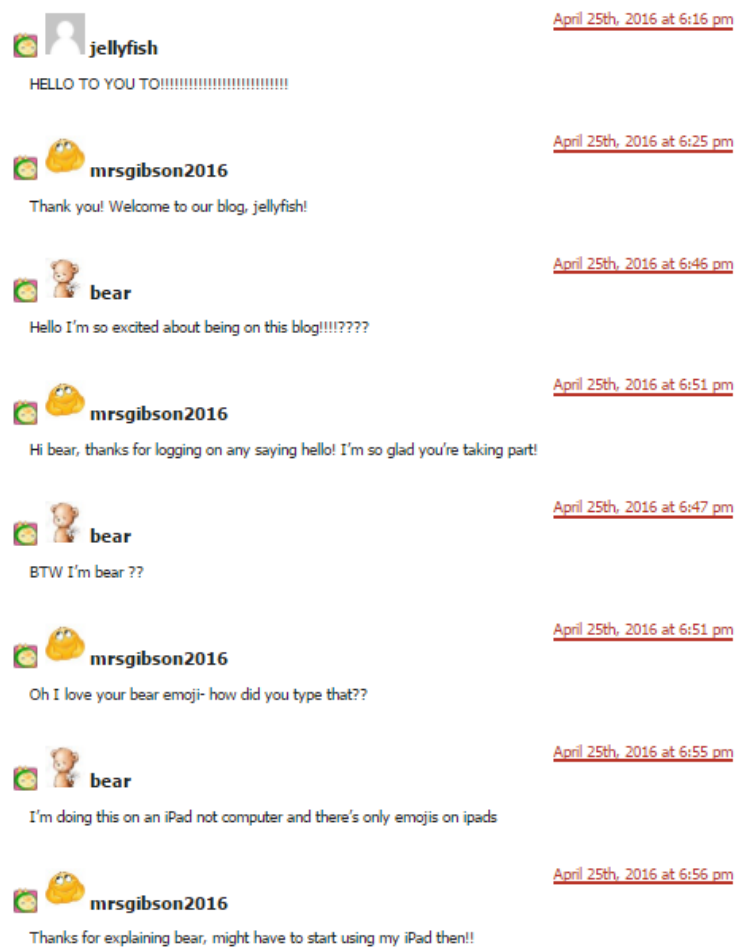
Figure 6.3: Comments on BP1a

With regards to behaviour, the timely responses (between 6.25-7.58pm) align with Summer's comments in her case study (Section 4.6) where she mentions that talking online provides company in the evening. As the comments continue on BP1, we see Summer ('bear') discussing how one of her 'friends' told her about using emojis; this could be interpreted as a statement to hint at popularity.

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Bella ('duckling'), another confident user of technology, joins the thread and has also changed her avatar. With her comment 'I agree with bear. It's so exciting!' (Figure 6.4 on the following page), Bella is showing allegiance to another user.
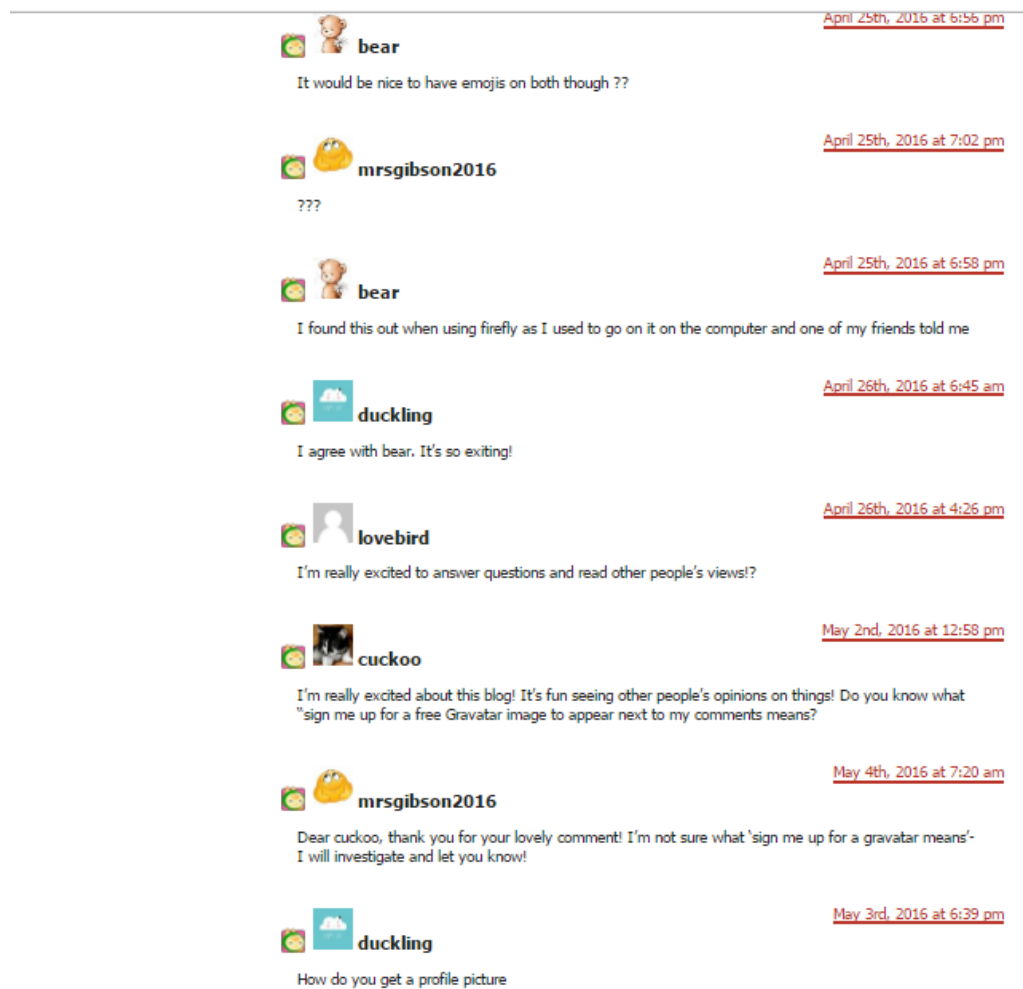
Figure 6.4: Comments on BP1b

The participants were not all novices to online communities, yet for each, 'blogs' were a new entity. To explore this first community component of connecting with others in greater depth, the interview data must also be considered. As revealed through the IPA analysis (Chapter 4), the need for a support network is shown not only to be rooted in the social identity theories that define the basic need for social contact and communication but also as a way of individuals as affirming their identity. Summer's extract below explains her keen behaviour to post on the blog frequently:

> *Summer: When someone gets in touch online, it makes me feel good about myself…*
> *When you look, and you see you've got that little message notification, it feels very*

good. Like someone cares and they are reaching out to you. It makes me feel really good (smiles). (T3, P3, L8-19)

Here, Summer discusses how through feeling connected online, she 'feels good'; this reaffirms the theoretical statement of this section, that online lived experiences can help participants also to feel confident in offline spaces. Summer's experience also links to Bella's narrative, in which Bella states how seeing the audience's reactions to her online posts is 'really, really good'.

A tacit issue observed in the blog comments is that of confidentiality, however, and the role that eSafety plays in the behaviours adopted when connecting with others online. Although participants had the option of revealing their real name on the blog, none of the users did so. Reasons behind this behaviour may be down to either the users seizing the opportunity to assume an anonymous role in an online space, or as a form of self-protection against the relatively unknown 'others' in the newly-established blogosphere.

Diya discusses an anecdote shared by her mother that outlines the need for safety online (shared in full in Section 4.3.5):

> *Diya: My mum told me about this thing, someone we know, I'm not going to say who, they were in year 4... They were talking to my friends…And someone else came into the chat…And this person said, 'I'll only leave this chat if one of you sends me a naked picture'. (T2, P4, L1-22)*

Magdalena, Daisy and Bella all share reservations about trusting others online. This reflects an acceptance that, while online 'figured worlds' such as blogs allow for their own self-making and self-presentation, others are undergoing this same process and may equally choose to present a self of their making.

> *Magdalena: So, you might maybe play an online game, or, think you are talking to a girl, and talking about favourite animals or music… and it might actually not be a girl. It might be a man. And the problem is if someone can get your details and track you down. (T3, P5, L10-13)*

> *Daisy: But I know when it gets weird, I should turn it off and stuff. (T2, P4, L8)*

> *Bella: So, I think you just have to be careful and just think, if something doesn't feel*

right, then it probably isn't right. And then just tell someone, like your mum or
something. (T2, P6, L16-17)

Clearly, as these extracts taken from the interviews show, an '**informed'** identity is central- and crucial- for successful and safe navigation online.

It is also worth considering that the blog set up for this study only ran for a limited period due to the nature of the project. As outlined later (see Chapter 8, Section 8.5), future research could involve running a longitudinal study for a significantly more extended period, such as twelve months, to allow for meaningful relationships and incidents to develop.

This first section has shown, however, that with the innate desire to connect with others, regardless of anonymous stature, there are significant processes of self-making and self-presenting, and that our identities- both on the online platform and in the non-virtual world- can develop through these interactions.

A summarising statement for this section, therefore, is:

Connecting with others in online spaces can affirm both online and offline identities.

A further purpose behind those connections is explored in the next section.

6.6 Sharing information with each other

Wenger (1998) defines a second component of a community as the process of members sharing information with each other. The motivation to 'share' is reflected in the blog data where participants share feelings and experiences in the 'figured world' that the blog provided. Autonomy and independence were key themes as drawn from the interview data, and these will also be considered in the role of this community component. As previously discussed in the literature review (Chapter 2), through blogging, research with adult users shows that they can take ownership of the virtual space and the work they publish; linking back to identity development, taking ownership can help to affirm identity and create a stable alignment of an identity (Brook et al., 2009).

Interestingly, or it may just be a matter of timings as to when blog posts were posted, from the range of questions, articles and poetry challenges shared, it was the emotive questions, such as the one below, that prompted the most responses. It may be suggested that, in line with this motivation, sharing experiences is one of the most favoured opportunities that blogs present. An example of participants sharing personal feelings and experiences is shown in the blog thread (Figure 6.5: BP9) below.

May 6th, 2016 at 5:24 pm

puppy

No

May 6th, 2016 at 6:43 pm

bear

Yes because you could feel like you don't know anyone but it's in a crowded room or you could be alone in a room and feel alone

May 6th, 2016 at 6:45 pm

bear

Yes because you could feel like you don't know anyone but it's in a crowded room or you could be alone in a room
and feel alone

May 6th, 2016 at 6:46 pm

bear

Sorry my iPad keeps posting the same thing

May 6th, 2016 at 6:48 pm

bear

But lonely and alone aren't exactly the same but they're similar

Figure 6.5: BP9 and Comments on BP9a

Summer ('bear') again continues to be an avid poster on the thread- by the end of the study, Summer had posted on every thread from BP1 through to BP23 (see Appendix P)- reinforcing the motivation to 'interact and engage with others'. 'Connection' is a core stimulus to use blogs. This is also the first time we see a post from 'peacock', an anonymous user who is not one of the six interview participants:

May 6th, 2016 at 7:47 pm

peacock

There is a difference between being lonely and alone. If you are alone, you just don't have anyone to talk to or be with or don't want to for that matter and sometimes it is quite calming or peaceful to be alone. if you are lonely it means you are sad about being alone.
It is possible to feel alone in a crowded room. Maybe if your friend from out of school invited you to their birthday party as well as all of their school friends that you don't know they may feel alone in a crowded room.
I have felt alone in crowded rooms sometimes, but often I don't mind. I like the rare moments of peace in which I am in complete solitude.

May 6th, 2016 at 8:15 pm

mrsgibson2016

What a thoughtful answer, thank you very much for sharing this.

May 8th, 2016 at 6:13 pm

duckling

Definitely not because lots of people can be alone and not lonely and lots of people can be in a crowded place and feel lonely

Figure 6.6: Comments on BP9b

When considering the length of a post, this emotive question posted in BP9 has provoked not only the first responses from some users, but also some of the longest posts on the blog

posts so far. Again, with regards to behaviour and connections, we see 'duckling' (Bella) keen to contribute to the post.
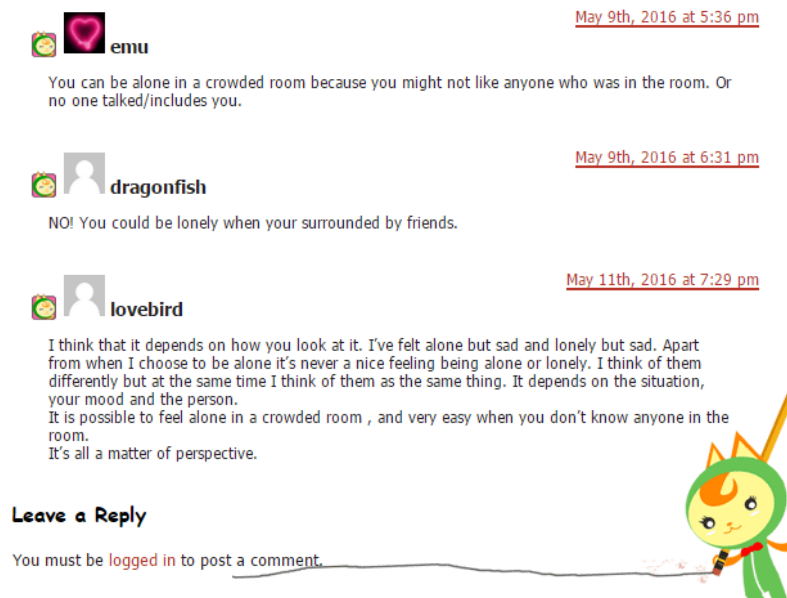
Figure 6.7: Comments on BP9c

As the comments progress (Figure 6.7 above) we see 'lovebird', another anonymous user, respond to the question, and there appears to be a reflection between the structure and length of the answers of 'lovebird' and 'peacock'. This similar post length and format may suggest a desire to emulate others' behaviour in order to feel group membership

This second community component links to some of the themes and issues presented in Chapter 4 around connecting with others: once children are aware of dangers that the Internet may present- as well as the positive uses and reasons for doing so- there must be opportunities for the user to indulge in independent online use.

> *Summer: I guess it feels like it's my thing. It's my space, my iPad, in my bedroom. I suppose it feels like you can go online and just live in there for a bit. I can't explain it…I like being able to write down my thoughts, it's a space to express my ideas and no one even knows it is me.*

Summer, who is 'bear' and a frequent poster on the blog, clearly sees online spaces as very separate, almost magical, figured worlds from her non-virtual spaces. There is also something in the possibility of anonymity, as Summer expresses comfort in being able to share ideas without being identified.

Charlie, who is 'angelfish' on the blog, states that going online is '*like an electric bubble'*.

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This extract, like Summer's above, implies that the girls consider online spaces as very separate from non-virtual worlds.

As discussed earlier (Section 2.5, Chapter 2), Soja (1996) suggests another way of thinking about the spaces we inhabit as 'spaces'. The first space is a place where we behave in one way, such as when at home, and the second space is a different, possibly conflicting, place or spatial group, such as at school or work, where we may behave differently. This theory seems ideally compatible with Goffman's dramaturgical analogy of front and backstage; however, we must be aware of limitations that can arise from thinking of spaces as such insular commodities. To consider the works of Holland et al. (1998), individuals may be part of several different 'figured worlds', and for each individual, the range of worlds will vary. While online platforms, such as blogs, may present a third space, equally an individual may be participating in fourth and fifth and sixth spaces on a frequent basis, such as when playing football with friends or attending a music lesson, or a meeting with a social group such as Scouts or Brownies. For this study, blogs are considered as just one more of these worlds that individuals can participate in; as identified in the following chapter (Section 7.6), research into the different 'spaces' that participants communicate and interact with others within to develop an identity besides online spaces is considered of particular interest for future research (see Chapter 8, Section 8.5).

These findings support the idea that it is not only this particular 'figured world' between home and school that is of significance for these girls, but also the opportunity to have independence when exploring such spaces. Daisy comments *'it's just about knowing the rules'*. This behaviour could also be interpreted as conformity, or- from experience- being aware of how to interact or communicate with others, and how to manipulate the cultural artefacts modern technology presents.

This component of community involves sharing information with others, but also having the autonomy- like Bella in the extract below- to decide when *not* to share:

> *Bella: But you can choose if you want to talk to someone or not. Like, if you go out, you're going to see people you know, and you have to talk to them. But, if you go online, you don't have to chat you can just maybe look at things or…you don't have to talk to someone if you don't want to (T1, P3, L19-24).*

As the backend statistics for the blog show, although all thirty-four participants logged in to the blog interface at least once (and some several times), not all users chose to post or

make themselves visible to the rest of the group by posting. This 'lurking' (Gong et al., 2015) suggests that communication is not always symmetrical and can be asymmetrical with the ability to read others' posts and not have to reply (or even be noticed) in the process; research shows that this practice is surprisingly common in social media, not just blogs. These users are often called the invisible participants or 'lurkers' (Gong et al., 2015), yet these participants are often not engaged with in research as they are not seen as 'active users' and thus it is considered that they do not generate sufficient content. This leads to a biased representation of topical interests and sentiments. This asymmetrical balance of active users versus lurkers has arisen as an area of interest from this study and is outlined further in Future Research (see Chapter 8, Section 8.5).

Linking this back to blogging, an illustrative example of participants' exercising their autonomy, and creativity, on the blog is shared through the 'Five Sentence Challenge' posts, which encouraged users to look at a photograph stimulus and write a five-sentence story, poem or description about it.

One example of such posts is shared on BP5 (see Figure 6.8 on the following page).

Figure 6.8: BP5

Figure 6.9: Comments on BP5

An interesting observation in the above comments is how after comments have been made on the contributions of 'jellyfish' and 'duckling' (Bella) about their rhyming poems, 'bear' (Summer) follows suit with another rhyming poem. This behaviour may be coincidence, or that this sample of girls enjoy writing poetry, or this could hint at Lave and Wenger's 'socio-cultural learning' (1998) where Summer is negotiating her place in the group and wishing to conform to unspoken expectations. This behaviour may also be linked back to the urge to connect with others and to seek a positive response from the readers with the knowledge that other rhyming responses have been praised.

Summer, in her interview, presents the simile of waiting for a fish to bite to describe her lived experience of social media.

> *Summer: I think writing something on social media...it's like catching a fish. You put out your idea, like the bait. And then you wait. Actually, I get a bit stressed, sometimes, when I am waiting and wondering if anyone is reacting to what I've said. And sometimes if I look, and no one has liked my idea or said anything at all, I get*

this horrible cold feeling. It's like I wish I hadn't written anything at all. And then suddenly, next time I check, maybe there is a comment saying, 'yes I agree' or something like that. And suddenly I felt like a glow. Well, I guess that is like when you catch the fish!

From a '*horrible cold feeling'* to a '*glow'*, Summer explains how simple online interactions can have a powerful effect. The choice of a rather adult pastime of fishing also projects the idea that Summer has quite a mature approach to life and that her lived experiences thus far have helped to be shaped by the mostly adult interaction she has at home through the lack of siblings. Summer also discusses the class wiki page. All classes at Fairtrees Primary School have a class wiki, but for Summer it seems especially significant.

Summer: But, I think perhaps the most useful, was the exam blog. We had exam week, and the page said people could share revision tips or how they were feeling... that felt like we were all in the same boat. And you realise you are not the only person who is feeling like 'my head's going to explode'. Because sometimes you don't really talk about these things at school, except maybe 'did you revise?'. But when you are sat at home, on your iPad, you have space to think and to say these things. And the page meant you could write down what you were feeling without actually having to say those things out loud. I can't really explain it, but it's different. Writing on a page... it feels personal, somehow, like it's still just your thoughts. You can say things without making a sound.

In the above extract, Summer offers practical examples for how online communications have supported her in the past. She states that online platforms give 'space to think'. It seems, therefore, that having a 'stable' identity involves creating a foundation based in the membership of an online community, yet also the independence to navigate this third space.

After the blog had been running for approximately a month, bonds appeared between some of the posters on the threads. An example is shown between 'duckling' (Bella) and 'bear' (Summer) in the screenshots below, on another 'five-sentence challenge'. Having already posted on a similar thread the previous month, it could be said that Bella and Summer are, with caution, in Lave and Wenger's terms (1998), 'old-timers' in this practice.

Figure 6.10: BP10

Comments for this post are displayed on the following page (see Figure 6.11 and Figure 6.12).

May 6th, 2016 at 7:02 pm

bat

I'm lonely by my poor self

May 8th, 2016 at 6:22 pm

duckling

A girl's sitting on the swing and she on her own
She says she swings fast or she feel alone.
Sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't .
Sometimes she thinks the loneliness must end
But the biggest cure, that she's discovered, is to always swing with a friend!

May 8th, 2016 at 6:23 pm

duckling

Oops I meant she's in the first line

May 8th, 2016 at 6:46 pm

mrsgibson2016

Dear bat, I like your line! You're allowed up to 5 sentences so feel free to add 4 more! 🙂

May 8th, 2016 at 6:47 pm

mrsgibson2016

Dear Duckling, what a fantastic piece- very good work! I think you must have quite a flair for creative writing! 🙂

Figure 6.11: Comments on BP10 a

May 10th, 2016 at 3:37 pm

bear

I'm on my own but i don't mind or do I
I hope i make a friend who's lovely and kind
So i swing and swing still on my own
just waiting and waiting until I moan
But then here she comes and we stay together as if we will always be alone

May 11th, 2016 at 6:11 pm

duckling

Thank you ????
To Bear
Your poem is very good !

Leave a Reply

You must be logged in to post a comment.

Figure 6.12: Comments on BP10 b

'Duckling', above, praises 'bear' with the comment 'To Bear Your poem is very good !' Although this may be a small marker regarding this discourse analysis, this is the first time that one user praises another on the blog so seems significant in representing that it takes time to build up an alliance between members.

Following this, over subsequent blogs, the interaction between 'duckling' and 'bear' becomes more frequent, yet they do not- on the blog at least- reveal their true identities.

When considering connections and behaviour, this step shows that group membership on a

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blog does not instantly initiate community, but that it takes a period of time- here it took from April 24th until May 11th, two and a half weeks, before members began to comment on each other's writing.

Related to this, one fascinating observation on the blog posts arose when an anonymous user posted for the first time some six weeks into the blog (see Figure 6.13 below). This anonymous user is 'gerbil'. This interaction reflects, again, the relationship between 'old-timers' and 'newcomers' (Lave and Wenger, 1998) as discussed in more depth in the previous chapter.

May 19th, 2016 at 6:27 pm

duckling

Two victorians sitting in a chair
Nothing over here, nothing's over there
It's centuries ago so it's actually quite rare
But there's two victorians sitting in a chair
Though so many things are happening it's enough to make you stare

May 23rd, 2016 at 7:43 pm

mrsgibson2016

Haha Bear and Duckling, these are both FANTASTIC!! You both have quite a talent for creative
writing!! Is that a subject you normally enjoy at school?

June 7th, 2016 at 3:41 pm

gerbil

I'm furry and cute,
I'm playing the flute,
My eyes are open wide,
As i look outside,
I'm staring out,
As i shout,
WAIT,
I'M LATE,
Cats and dogs,
Have Blogs,
But what about me,
I'm bored as can be,
CAN'T ANYONE SEE,
THETS BLOG YOU AND ME

Figure 6.13: BP17 and comments on BP19 a

As the 'newcomer', 'gerbil' misreads the task and posts a poem that does not link to the
photograph stimulus. Old-timers 'duckling' and 'bear' use the same rhyming couplets as in
the previous 'five-sentence challenge' post, showing familiarity with the task. However,
whereas on other posts we see users help and describe things to those who make mistakes,
the only response to the comment from 'gerbil' is from me as the administrator.

Gerbil also makes the mistake of posting her poem twice, and the following interaction takes
place:

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June 7th, 2016 at 3:41 pm

gerbil

I'm furry and cute,
I'm playing the flute,
My eyes are open wide,
As i look outside,
I'm staring out,
As i shout,
WAIT,
I'M LATE,
Cats and dogs,
Have Blogs,
But what about me,
I'm bored as can be,
CAN'T ANYONE SEE,
THETS BLOG YOU AND ME

June 7th, 2016 at 3:42 pm

mrsgibson2016

Dear gerbil, thank you so much for contributing this entry! How funny!! 😃 😃

June 7th, 2016 at 3:43 pm

gerbil

OOPS I've typed the poem more than once

June 7th, 2016 at 3:44 pm

gerbil

How do you get a picture for a face i will just do an emoji

Figure 6.14: Comments on BP17 b

'Gerbil' asks how to 'get a picture for a face', but there is no response, yet the administrator statistics show other users were logged in to the blog at 3.44pm when 'gerbil' posted her comment. In Figure 6.15 (below) 'gerbil' realises her own error in not writing about the image shared in the post:

June 7th, 2016 at 3:47 pm

gerbil

OOPS i did not do it for the picture i just made it up the poem

DO I NEED TO DO ANOTHER ON

June 7th, 2016 at 3:50 pm

mrsgibson2016

Dear gerbil, no don't worry, you don't need to do another- I loved your poem, it made me laugh!
I did wonder how it linked to the photo haha! :p

Leave a Reply

You must be logged in to post a comment.
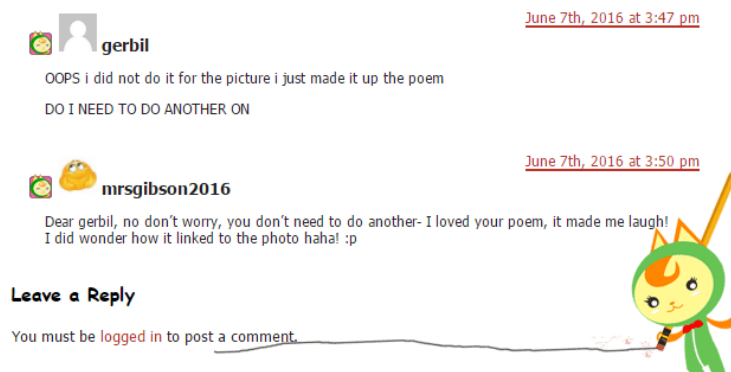
Figure 6.15: Comments on BP19 c

Other users are aware of this newcomer. Administrator statistics show that other users logged in around the time that 'gerbil' posted and viewed her post. The lack of response may also reflect something in the experience of community. Not having commented on the post for the first seven weeks means that 'gerbil' has not yet negotiated her membership in the community. As Lave and Wenger (1998) suggest, newcomers must find their way and develop their identity in the process. Linking this back to other theory on identity, such as

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Brook et al. (2009), this lack of affirmation from peers in an online space may lead to some discord, depending on how the other identities in other worlds perform and are responded to by the 'others'.

Another blog post that saw several users comment on was on 'Test week', BP18, a week during May in the summer term where the children in Key Stage Two (Years Four, Five and Six) have exams in the three subjects of Mathematics, English and Science.

With regards to this first motivation of 'connecting with others', being able to connect with others in the same situation presenting a unifying experience.

Figure 6.16: BP18

May 18th, 2016 at 4:43 pm

angelfish

I've done English comprehension, spelling, maths, science, French and Spanish

May 18th, 2016 at 4:44 pm

angelfish

And on Friday I have creative writing

May 18th, 2016 at 5:29 pm

mrsgibson2016

Wow angelfish thank you for commenting- sounds like you have been VERY busy! Good luck with creative writing on Friday! How do you think you've done so far?

May 19th, 2016 at 3:45 pm

peacock

I've done all my tests! Yay! I'm quite confident with how I've done on my tests. my advice is to not be stressed. I was going to use flashcards and bought a pack of fifty, but I never used them. ?

May 19th, 2016 at 4:50 pm

bear

I've done all my tests including French Spanish creative writing maths mental maths science English ?

Figure 6.17: Comments on BP18 a

When looking at the **language** used here, we see 'angelfish' beginning the thread with 'I've done…', 'peacock' adds 'I've done all my tests', and then 'bear' repeats 'I've done all my tests'. This progress to see 'bear' post again, as the 'old-timer', offering advice to the rest of the group. This related to this second motivation of 'sharing'.

May 19th, 2016 at 4:51 pm

bear

My advice is to say to your self I'm going to be fine I'm going to do well etc i find it really helps
Also try not stress yourself out about it it will only make things worse

May 19th, 2016 at 6:19 pm

duckling

I FINALLY FINISHED THE TESTS!
I finished the tests and my advice is to revise lots but don't get stressed because the tests are usually easier than you expect!

May 23rd, 2016 at 7:42 pm

mrsgibson2016

Well done everyone! You survived test week 2016! Thank you for sharing some helpful advice on dealing with tests 🙂

June 19th, 2016 at 5:43 pm

angelfish

I think I did well

July 6th, 2016 at 6:11 pm

dragonfish

Same

Leave a Reply

You must be logged in to post a comment.

Figure 6.18: Comments on BP18 b

Blogs can provide an open space to share information (Luzón, 2017). Regarding the two discussed components of both 'connecting' and 'sharing', an interesting example of social interactions arose when one of the anonymous users, 'toucan', created her own blog post. 'toucan' was the first user to create a page (shown in figures 6.19 and 6.20 below).

Figure 6.19: user Toucan creates a blog- BP12

In response to the first post by 'toucan', we see 'duckling', and established and frequent user, giving a positive comment, perhaps to help affirm 'toucan's behaviour. No other users comment, which may link back to the behaviour noted earlier in this chapter where 'gerbil', a newcomer to posting, was met with no response from users due to the lack of bonds between 'gerbil' and the 'others'.

Three days later, 'toucan', possibly encouraged by receiving 'duckling's positive response, adds a second blog post (shown in Figure 6.20 on the following page). This time we see 'bear', another established 'old-timer', commenting on the post, but no other users comment. The motivation of 'toucan' to add these two blog posts seems to be to share her news with others. The behaviour of other group members towards 'toucan's posts reveals that there is a hierarchy within online communities and that until a newcomer is established within that community, response towards them may be limited.
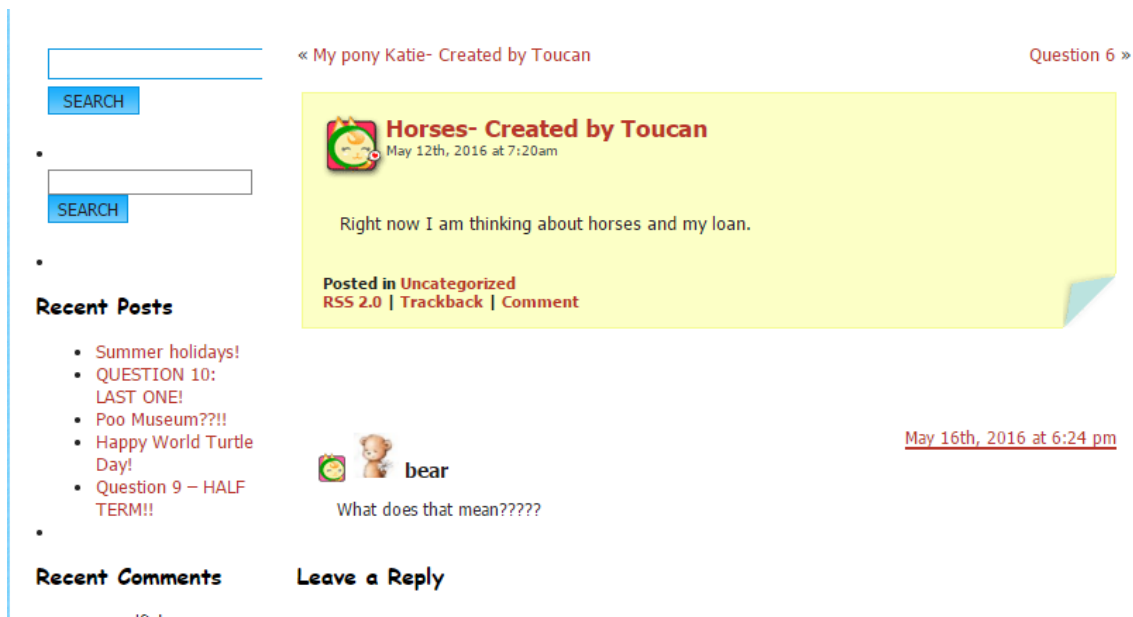
Figure 6.20: user Toucan creates a second blog post- BP13

A summarising statement for this section is:

Sharing feelings and experiences in online spaces, such as blogs, can help to support the development of stable real-world and digital identities.

The final third section sees sharing personal opinions and comments shifting into a more purposeful and supportive role, as the blogging platform shows to be a place for socio-cultural learning to take place.

6.7 Learning from others and helping others to learn

As explored in Lave and Wenger's approach, there is a collegial element to a community, and a 'spiral character' to the changes in the community as members join, leave, and interact with each other; changes also occur in both old-timers' and newcomers' identity as each individual develops their own identity and also contributes to the future of the group (Lave and Wenger, 1998; Matusov et al., 2013).

In the blogosphere, opportunities for socio-cultural learning can thrive. Individuals may be motivated to teach others or learn from others as blogs have the power to change users from 'consumers to contributors of information' through the interactive interface (Sun, 2009). An example of this motivation is shown in the following blog screenshots (Figure 6.21) where users wished to change their avatars (profile pictures).

How to Change Profile Picture
May 5th, 2016 at 6:18pm

Dear all, can anyone please explain how to change your profile picture on here?

Posted in **Uncategorized**
RSS 2.0 | Trackback | Comment

May 6th, 2016 at 6:49 pm

bear

I'm not sure sorry miss Gibson ??

May 6th, 2016 at 7:03 pm

bat

Apparently cuckoo knows

May 6th, 2016 at 7:55 pm

peacock

Go into 'Site Admin' under 'Meta' then choose the tab 'Profile' and then the instruction for changing your profile picture will be under 'Change Avatar'.
Hope this helped!

Recent Posts

- Summer holidays!
- QUESTION 10: LAST ONE!
- Poo Museum??!!
- Happy World Turtle Day!
- Question 9 – HALF TERM!!

Recent Comments

- angelfish on Summer holidays!
- dragonfish on QUESTION 10: LAST ONE!
- dragonfish on Summer holidays!
- mrsgibson2016 on Question 7
- mrsgibson2016 on Poo Museum??!!

Figure 6.21: How to change profile picture post

Again, as with previous posts, we see 'bear' is keen to connect and comment on this post, despite not being able to answer the question directly. Anonymous user 'peacock' gives clear instructions, and interestingly most users (including 'lurkers', or 'invisible participants' (Gong et al., 2015) as discussed in the previous section, who have not posted any comments but are still active users of the blog, just not active posters) change their profile picture. In fact, following 'peacock's comment shown in Figure 6.21, nineteen out of the thirty-four participants on the blog change their profile picture. In Figure 6.22 (on the next page), we see 'duckling', 'bear' and 'angelfish' all thanking 'peacock' for her help.

Another point to mention is that both 'angelfish' and 'bear' choose profile pictures that match the random username they were given, just as 'peacock' initially does. This also shows willingness for these girls to conform, and perhaps an influence of authoritarianism from me as the administrator assigning the name, and a desire to remain anonymous and personifying their allocated animal.
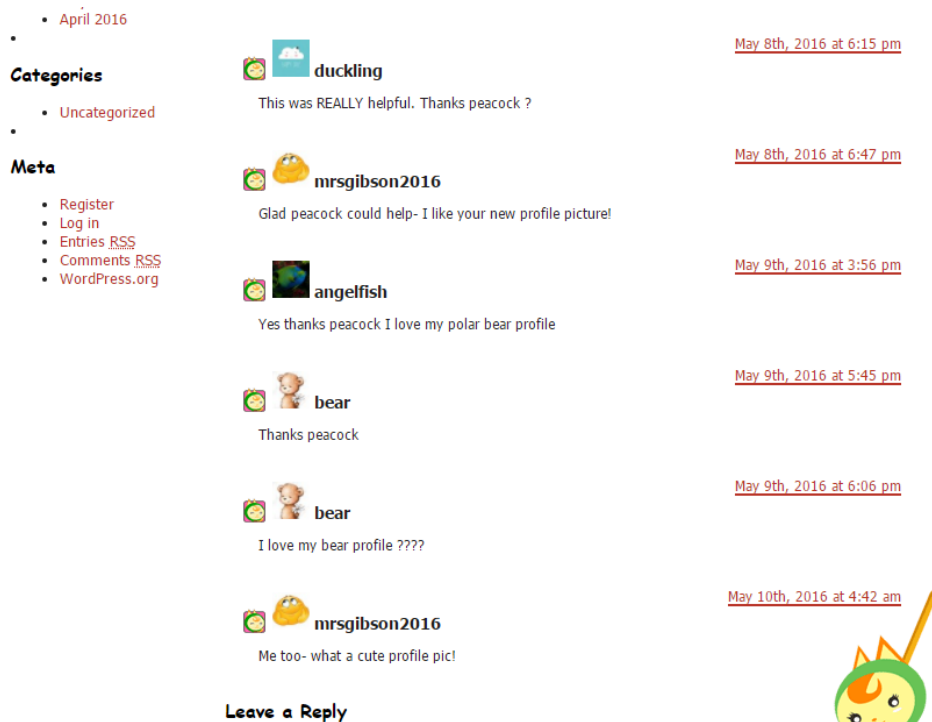
duckling   May 8th, 2016 at 6:15 pm

This was REALLY helpful. Thanks peacock ?

mrsgibson2016   May 8th, 2016 at 6:47 pm

Glad peacock could help- I like your new profile picture!

angelfish   May 9th, 2016 at 3:56 pm

Yes thanks peacock I love my polar bear profile

bear   May 9th, 2016 at 5:45 pm

Thanks peacock

bear   May 9th, 2016 at 6:06 pm

I love my bear profile ????

mrsgibson2016   May 10th, 2016 at 4:42 am

Me too- what a cute profile pic!

Leave a Reply

Figure 6.22: Comments on How to change profile picture

If this third component within a community is to learn from others and to help others to learn, this thread of interactions is a prime example of teaching and learning in practice.

This links back to Alexander (2007) (Section 1.2.3, Chapter 1) who warns that children should be taught the 'vitality' of the age they are growing up in, not the 'toxicity'. For Bella and Summer, two participants who actively grasped the opportunity to interact with others on the blog even in this brief time, their definition of this cultural tool is of a space for learning and sharing. For Magdalena, who, perhaps through fear and hesitancy and lack of experience communicating online, does not interact with others, the blog remains a passive space to 'read' information. Relating the identities of these participants to their behaviour and written answers, Bella and Summer present as having more confident identities, both in the online, figured world of the blog and in the offline figured world of the interview room, compared to Magdalena who is nervous in both. The harmony of these identities links back to the works of Brook et al. (2009), who warns that to have higher levels of self-esteem and self-efficacy, our multiple identities should be in harmony.

A summarising statement for this section is:

Skills and knowledge develop alongside identities as users negotiate their place in an online community.

6.8 Reflection on blog analysis

Having analysed the 201 comments on the blog posts, three key processes were identified:

Connecting, sharing and learning.

These three components are defined by Wenger (1998) and Lave and Wenger (1991) as being the components that define a community. These three processes seen as active in the blog also link to blog research findings (Technorati, 2008, discussed in Section 6.2) in which users voted the top reasons for blogging as 'speaking my mind on areas of interest', 'sharing my expertise and experiences with others' and 'meeting and connecting with like-minded people' (Technorati, 2008: 1).

I conclude that as these three processes were present in the blog 'conversations' that the blog did indeed provide a community for the participants. Several users employed the blog as a space to **connect** with others, either only by reading, or reading and posting to connect with both me as the administrator and also with other users. Secondly, users utilised the blog as a space for **sharing** their feelings and experiences with others. Thirdly, users also invested time in **learning** from others and offering advice to help others learn.
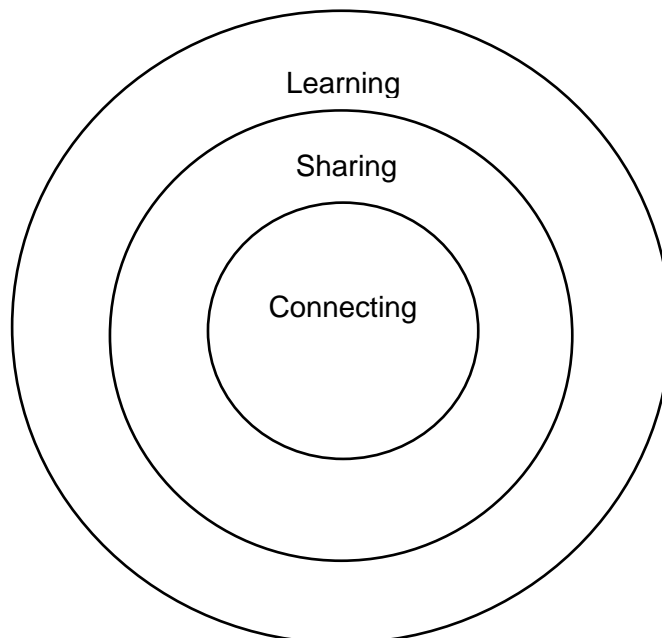

Figure 6.23: Three motivations for using blogs

These three community components have been explored in this chapter, analysed through the framework of the blog analysis model (Figure 6.1) into general characteristics of posts and an exploration of how participants related to others. This chapter of analysis was

supported through the inclusion of appropriate extracts from the participants' interviews.

Each of the three sections on community components summarises with a theoretical statement around how the lived experiences have been seen to contribute towards identity development. Smith et al. (2009) suggest that a summarising statement can be drawn up to summarise the theoretical statements created during analysis. The summarising statement for this seventh chapter is as follows:

> ***Summarising statement: Positive identities can be developed through opportunities to connect, share and learn online.***

Reflecting upon the three Research Questions for this project

RQ1: How do the girls, who regularly go 'online', report they perceive their identities?

RQ2: What is the nature and motivation of young girls' online interactions?

RQ3: How can online interactions be seen to contribute to the development of identities and overall well-being?

This chapter has helped to answer RQ2 and RQ3 by allowing for observation of the raw data- as presented through screenshots. For RQ2, the girls interacted on the blog with a range of frequency, length of a post, and speed of reply. Some girls logged on but did not post any comments at all. For RQ3, through triangulation of the interview data (Chapter 4), the questionnaire data (Chapter 5) and this chapter of blog data, it has been surmised that through membership within an online blogging community that positive identities can be developed, chiefly through affirmation by others, and the opportunities to share, to learn and help others to learn.

6.8 Chapter summary

This chapter presented a discourse analysis of the blog threads that the six participants were involved with, using an analytical framework for exploring linguistic features. It must be emphasised that although the CoL framework helps to articulate what took place on the blog, and to make sense of the blog activity, the blog activity does not necessarily represent a CoL. This chapter reflected upon the three Research Questions and established how the data collected through three different methods have helped to answer each of the questions. The following chapter (Chapter 7) will review the three Research Questions asked in this study in greater detail, while the closing chapter (Chapter 8) will reflect upon the study as a whole, including research quality, contributions of the thesis, and limitations. Future research suggestions will be shared, and Chapter 8 concludes with a reflective authorial summary.

CHAPTER 7 DISCUSSION

'Identities are collectively shaped, even if individually told'

(Sfard and Prusak, 2005: 14)

7.1 Introduction

The aim of this thesis was to gather insight into how young girls, who regularly go 'online', perceive their identities, and to consider how these girls interact in online social spaces such as blogs, and the contribution this may have on the development of their online and offline identities.

The findings have been presented through analyses using three different methodological approaches; firstly, through an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of six idiographic case studies created from interview data (Chapter 4), secondly through analysis of their journeys within questionnaire data (Chapter 5), and thirdly, through a framework examining the linguistic features of the girls' blogs to explore the nature of their online interactions (Chapter 6).

This chapter will discuss each of the three Research Questions in turn, with reference to relevant literature, to show how the questions have been answered by the design, implementation and findings of this research project. This chapter will also reflect upon the three different methodological approaches taken to make sense of the three different datasets.

7.2 RQ1. How do girls, who regularly go 'online', report they perceive their identities?

7.2.1 Informed identities

From the IPA analysis, this study proposes that those participants who are constructing positive and stable identities online are those who have an **informed** identity. Surprisingly, one of the most commonly talked about themes, in each of the six individual narratives and the data set overall, involved the idea of underlying threats or dangers online. Although nearly all of the participants mentioned some rather shocking rumours and risks (identified in Chapter 2, Table 1.1) and seemed aware of several dangers that they could encounter online such as false identity, 'catfishing', isolation online, addiction and cyberbullying, this still did not hamper their online use. The girls would rather utilise the somewhat risky and

slightly dangerous social networking sites to 'be in touch' and 'know about' others' activities and be 'seen' as an active member of the online community, rather than be left out, not knowing what is 'current', such as fashion or the latest news.

This behaviour raised the need to look into the lived experiences of these children to try to establish how they are navigating these online spaces, and how their ownership of this navigation is linked to their identity. It is proposed that the exposure to, and awareness of, these online risks helps the participants to construct informed identities that are prepared for performances online.

There is a clear link between the awareness of online risks (Table 1.1) and the subsequent development of strategies to deal with such dangers, as shown in Bella's interview where she warns about 'catfishing', users with fake profiles (Chapter 4). Bella warns that 'you just have to be careful and just think, if something doesn't feel right, then it probably isn't right. And then just tell someone like your mum or something' (T2, P6, L1-17). Reflecting upon the IPA analysis (Chapter 4), findings suggest that individuals need to make decisions on whether to connect with strangers online, and this can be achieved through reflection and resilience, as Bella highlights (Section 4.3.1). By knowing about 'catfishing', Bella has an informed identity; she emphasises how she has been prepared offline, in the non-virtual world, through her viewing of the television show. This show has acted as a warning, in an offline space, to help Bella be aware of an issue she may encounter online, and as a result she talks about the need for informed self-judgement when going online, the need for a guarded performance, to use Goffman's dramaturgical analogy, when interacting with other performers and observers on the online stage.

Diya discusses an anecdote shared by her mother that outlines the need for safety online (shared in entirety in Section 4.3.5):

> *Diya: And this person said, 'I'll only leave this chat if one of you sends me a naked picture'.*

> *Interviewer: How does that story make you feel?*

> *Diya: It makes me mad. And sad. And actually, I think it's wrong that a person would actually say something like that to girls who they didn't know. I think it's wrong that, just because they are kind of anonymous, because it's online, I mean, that that person thought they could do that. Like, I don't think that someone could just go up to a group of girls and ask them, just on the street or whatever. At least I don't think a person would do that- I HOPE they wouldn't! But I think that…I don't know what those*

> *girls did; I think they told their moms because it was wrong, but, I don't know what happened to that person. I really hope that the police caught them and stopped them from doing that (T2, P4, L1-22)*

Again, this extract, as with Bella's extract previously, shows how information gained in the offline, non-virtual, world has equipped Diya with information to help build her online and offline identities. Diya feels ready to take to the stage to perform, knowing that there may be dangers ahead. Diya here reveals her strategy for how she may deal with this situation which is speaking to her mother, and appropriate agencies, external to the online community, perhaps needing to be notified. Despite the knowledge that such experiences may be encountered, however, did not deter Diya's online use; this can be seen to suggest that informed identities offline support stable digital identities online. These identities are inter-related.

Across the datasets, possible dangers were frequently discussed. Lived experiences that had happened to participants were interwoven with anecdotal stories shared by friends or family members. Offline were brought to bear online and vice versa. Interestingly, however, awareness of dangers does not appear to be linked to the amount of Internet use. The one participant, Magdalena, is the girl who least uses the Internet and sees the least potential for online platforms. In her IPA case study (Chapter 4), Magdalena warned that the person you are talking to online 'might be a man' (T3, P5, L10) who can 'get your details and track you down' (T3, P5, L12).

Whereas the other participants reported they perceived their identities as being enhanced through the connections provided by online networks, recognising the potential in Internet use, Magdalena talks about the Internet as being problematic, such as resulting in less interaction with others in the real world. It seems that the participants who have managed to navigate through online dangers have developed strategies to deal with such dangers, and as a result are committing to stable digital identities. As for Magdalena, although she knows the important eSafety rules, the lack of exposure to online social interactions means she hasn't experienced a crisis. Limited online activity means individuals are constrained in the extent to which they can relate to a wide range of experiences online and connect them to offline contexts or situations too. Again, the inter-play of these identities is revealed.

Relating to Lave and Wenger's CoP (1991), less participation in an online community may mean that individuals remain more on the periphery of understanding and consequently this may affect online identity development.

Magdalena's behaviour shows that her informed identity is hampered by lack of online time, as there has not been practical experience and practice to consolidate the information Magdalena has acquired. The inexperience of online interactions through lack of online time, and the nature of experiences when she has been online, leaves Magdalena without confidence to participate in CoP or CoL. This behaviour suggests that more experience is more likely to enable her to better commit to her 'online' identities through affirmation by group interaction and collaboration.

7.2.2 Connected and affirmed identities

The need for a support network is shown not only to be rooted in the social identity theories that define the basic need for social contact and communication, but also as a way of individuals affirming their identity (De Grove, 2014). For the participants in this study, there seems to be a value in the fact that the Internet is, necessarily, available at any time. 'Self-esteem' is a key personality characteristic in developing an 'affirmed' identity. By being able to be part of a virtual, online community in times of isolation or loneliness- times of identity crisis- identity can be reaffirmed through social interactions with others, such as the sending of a 'heart' (Diya, page 3:2).

For Summer, it appears that engagement online can help to provide support in a time of crisis. For Bella, Charlie and Diya, membership of various online communities is threaded throughout their narratives and is seen as an accepted part of everyday life. For Magdalena, there is no mention of an online community. This behaviour concurs with the discreditation of Prensky's term of 'digital natives' (2001), as detailed in Section 1.2.2, as even within this small data set of six participants, the Internet is not seen as integral by all. These participants may be growing up in a digital age but, as Magdalena's narrative shows, there is a deeper connection between upbringing, personality, identity and Internet use. It should not be assumed that because all children are digitally 'native', born into a digital world, that they are digitally active.

Several of the participants talk about the enjoyment of being able to look back at 'likes' or comments on online statuses or shared images. A key example of how engagement with online spaces can affirm identity is through Diya; Diya's identity is clearly founded in her past lived experiences and the connections and friendships that she has made while living in other countries. Diya mentions that these connections 'makes me affirm who I am' (T1, P2, L4) and stresses how her contact list is essentially 'a list of people who have had an impact on my life' (T1, P2,10).

This idea of being able to see a visible list is an interesting one; from view statistics on video sharing sites such as YouTube, to friend lists on SNS, the Internet can provide measurable totals. For Diya, this list provides a visual reminder and affirmation of her life network, which helps her to feel connected to those she knows, even when, in the case of many, they may be overseas in other countries. Similarly, Summer talks about how the Internet offers a connection to others, and this connection makes her. This links to the theoretical statement which shows an affirmation of her offline identity because of her online experiences. This affirmation also links to Bella's narrative, in which Bella states how seeing the audience's reactions to her online posts is 'really, really good'. For Magdalena, in Foreclosure, she has not experienced the online dialogue with peers, and could not comment on the respect felt through online commendation of her words or actions. The only online communication Magdalena mentions is **Skype** (see Appendix A) which she uses to speak to her grandparents in Poland, and her uncle on occasion. This type of online phone call does not facilitate the 'looking back' that Bella, Diya and Summer all mention.

7.2.3 Stable identities and the role of autonomy

To first deconstruct and analyse the achievement of 'stable' identities, it will be useful to consider extracts from Bella and Charlie in greater detail, having shared the fuller extracts in their IPA cases in Chapter 4.

When discussing when Bella uses the internet, she states 'I'd have to say it depends on my mood, on the time and place…'(T1, P3, L2). Bella can identify if she wishes to use the Internet, when and how she wishes to use it, and can independently identify her purpose for going online. She sees engagement with this third space as a way to gather information that cannot be gathered as quickly in the real world, stating 'otherwise you can't know about these things'. Independence is key. Bella discusses, in her previously shared narrative (Chapter 4) how 'you can choose if you want to talk to someone or not' (T1, P3, L19). Again, being able to take control of her actions, Bella shows she owns a stable identity that does not need to constant crutch of her online community. Interestingly, Charlie accepts that online responses may not be real but is not fazed by this.

> *Charlie: That's the cool thing about the Internet as well- what I'm putting out there… are my jokes. I don't need to know my audience, I just want their response. The likes or the reactions. Or the comments. I can send out a video on my WhatsApp group and see what my friends say. Do you know what they say- in comedy- it's all about timing? And I think also, the thing is that, with the timing, I can post a video or a joke or whatever what it is a good time for me. The Internet or the WhatsApp group…they're there all the time for when it's the right time (T1, P2, L16-18)*

Here, Charlie's stable identities are founded in the social communications she has established when engaging with online spaces, and this foundation is supporting her future ambition of wanting to be a comedian or scriptwriter. Unlike Bella, however, Charlie shows less control over switching off from online spaces:

> *Charlie: The people from my class, we all email each other. We have an email thread, and we're all on it. But you know when you're stuck in a group thread, and it's like "blah blah blah", and you're getting notifications constantly and it's all just pointless? I still read it. Every time (T2, P4, L7-9)*

Charlie's confession of still reading threads 'every time' shows not only the frequency of such conversations, but also hints at an addictive dependence upon needing to stay in the group and up to date with the conversation, despite her description of the conversations as 'pointless'. This behaviour shows how social relations play a part in Charlie's life, and she wishes to have the 'notifications'. Being part of the email thread helps Charlie to feel part of her real-world community even without having to respond or interact on the thread, it is more about knowing that her friends are there and reachable if needed, which provides comfort and security. Clearly, independence is linked to third space and community and the perceived ownership of the online stage.

Bella ends her narrative (Section 4.3.1, Chapter 4) by speculating about her future aspiration and ambition, which seems to link to her current Internet use, as shared earlier, around looking at online fashion pages and Instagram, where Bella discusses hopefully launching her own global fashion brand (see Chapter 4).

Charlie talks about the opportunity to be a performer on the stage; with the Internet as an entertainment platform and voices her desire to host a YouTube channel:

> *I would definitely have my own YouTube channel... Lots of the YouTube channels I watch, some have thousands of subscribers or more, and some of the videos have millions of views. It is really mad because you can see how many times a video has been viewed. I think if it is more than, 10,000 I think, then the YouTuber gets paid for it. And the more views, the more money. And then companies will pay you to advertise products or sponsor you (T3, P9, L21-26)*

Here, Charlie shows her understanding of social media as a business, and how people can use the Internet to replace traditional employment roles. Interestingly, it is the fact that she doesn't 'have time' for it rather than lacking the capabilities, knowledge or skills, which

Charlie explains as the reason for not currently being a 'YouTuber'. This reasoning shows that Charlie has confidence both in herself and her ability to host a YouTube channel, should she so wish. This confidence may stem from her encounters with online spaces and experiences. By having the opportunity to problem solve online, Charlie has built her confidence and as a result, begun to widen her creative horizons.

To summarise, although IPA was not a sufficient approach to answer all three Research Questions for this study, it provided a tool to analyse how girls report they perceive their identities. The self-reports of the six participants have offered an insight into how girls, who regularly go online, experience this phenomenon of creating identities in virtual spaces. Key themes of being informed, being connected, and being affirmed through the membership of online communities emerged from the interview data, and the role of autonomy was discussed.

7.3 RQ2. What is the nature and motivation of young girls' online interactions?

As presented in the previous chapter, three key motivations have been drawn from the data, namely **connecting, learning** and **sharing**. Several users employed the blog as a space to **connect** with others, either simply by reading, or reading and posting to connect with both me as the administrator and also with other users. Secondly, users utilised the blog as a space for **sharing** their feelings and experiences with others. Thirdly, users also invested time in **learning** from others and offering advice to help others learn (see Figure 7.1 below).
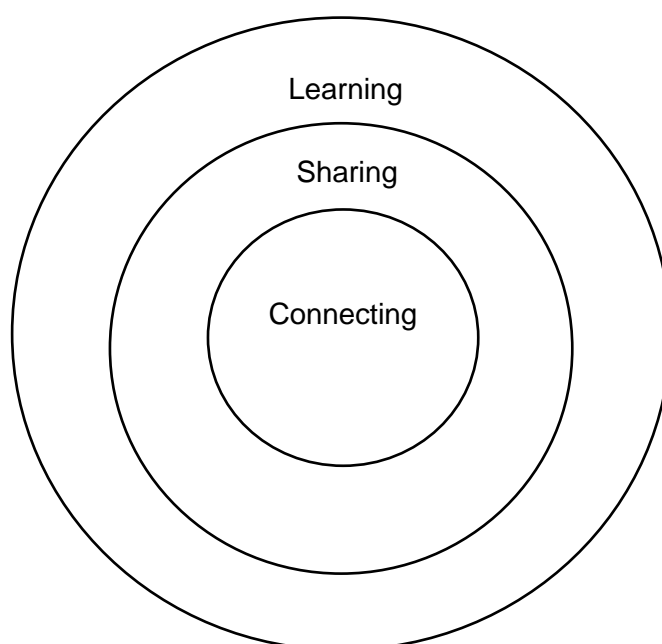

Figure 7.1: Three processes in a blog community

Although this is an original idea within this thesis, an inductive synthesis from my experience and my data, there is a clear parallel to Wenger's notion of a learning community (1998) and of 'domains' where individuals can interact, as discussed in Chapter 6. Lave and Wenger's CoP and CoL has informed my conceptualisation of this model (limitations acknowledged in Section 5.1). These motivations can be presented concentrically as the process for online communication, such as blogs, has connections at its core. The user must choose their platforms, such as an SNS or a blog, and this comes from a desire to connect with a particular audience. The audience, however, may not always be interactive. The audience may listen and 'lurk' in the rafters and may not even reveal themselves to the performer.

As shown in the previous chapter, the girls using the blog mostly preferred to share comments on more emotive and creative issues, such as the questions about loneliness, or the 'five sentence challenges' that I created having seen the girls' enjoyment of creative writing in their English lessons during the school week. This behaviour suggests that blogs can provide a safe space for emotions to be shared, allowing for presentation of self-referent terms (Benites et al., 2016) as 'I feel', 'I think', 'I believe' and often under the chosen guise of a pseudonym. As with Benites et al. 's study into adults' use of blogs, this study has offered an insight into how online communication through blogs may help to achieve dialogical self-clarification and facilitate the 'emergence of new perspectives or self-actualising' (Benites et al., 2016: 431). The implications of these behaviours for psychological well-being could be considered suitable for future study (see Chapter 8, Section 8.5).

7.4 RQ3: How can online interactions be seen to contribute to the development of identities and overall well-being?

Initial findings drawn from the participants' self-reports (Chapter 4) highlighted the role of the 'other' in helping to affirm and stabilise the identities being explored.

The mimicry shown in behaviour and language from the blog analysis (Chapter 7) demonstrates that there is a significant role that the 'others' have to play in the development of the individual. There is a process of 'self-making' (Urrieta, 2007: 118) that individuals undergo, both online and offline, as they hear a comment and engage with others' verbal interactions and adjust their behaviour accordingly. It could be summarised that, relating to perspectives of lived-experience both online and offline, two key relationships are at play- the individual's internal relationship with 'self', and their external relations with the 'others'. Blogs can help facilitate these relationships by providing a communication platform that offers the opportunity for verbalisation of 'internal dialogue' and sharing of emotions that they

present (Thomas et al., 2018: 579).

Online interactions impact upon identity development, not only through the single 'figured world' (Holland et al., 1998) that online spaces provide, but through the interplay between the individual and the 'others' (discussed in Section 8.2) as the individual aims to adhere to unspoken social norms to be accepted into the group. The position that a member holds within an online community also has implications for behaviour and community acceptance. Drawing upon Lave and Wenger's theory on 'newcomers' and 'old-timers', the findings in Chapter 7 (Section 7.7) show that blogs can present a zone for socio-cultural learning, within which both skills and identity develop through the support and interaction with others. Skills developed in this short study alone included how to change a profile picture on a blog profile, how to create a blog post, and also involving creating poems.

Figurative or narrative identities develop through the ways that people interact with each other, that socially define one another (Holland et al. 1998); this affirms the notion that 'identities are collectively shaped, even if individually told' (Sfard and Prusak, 2005: 14). It is also worth noting the informal language that could be used on the blog, despite the educational setting, Fairtrees Primary School, in which it was introduced. Participants seemed keen to embrace the informal language that can be employed with online communications, such as on a blog. This informal communication enables users to better make their thinking and feelings understood, and thus is part of building an active learning community (Beins, 2016). Moments of informality, in an otherwise busy and formally-schooled childhood, may help an individual to 'develop their social presence' (Beins, 2016: 157) in the online, figured worlds they spend time in.

One other significant finding from the blog analysis was that of 'invisible participants' or 'lurkers' (Gong et al., 2015), and the role that these less interactive, 'observing' members play in an online community. Although all thirty-four participants logged in to the blog interface at least once (and some several times), not all users chose to post or make themselves visible to the rest of the group by posting. This behaviour suggests that communication is not always symmetrical and can be asymmetrical with the ability to read others' posts and not have to reply (or even be noticed) in the process; research shows that this practice is surprisingly common in social media (Gong et al., 2015), not just blogs. The implications of this are something considered for future research and outlined in the following, closing chapter (see Chapter 8, Section 8.5).

7.5 Reflection on three different methodological approaches

The first methodological approach involved following Smith *et al*'s (2009) IPA guidelines (Chapter 4). The associated method of interviews was employed, the self-reported perspectives analysed and synthesized to inform the idiographic case studies. Within this approach, three key themes around 'informed', 'affirmed' and 'stable' identities were drawn out, along with dramaturgical references to Goffman's sociological theory of self-presentation (1959) where relevant.

Upon reflection, it became apparent that the participants' self-reports alone could not present a full picture of the motivations and role of online communications in identity development. When social interactions clearly play such a big part in the phenomenon of constructing identities in virtual spaces, some analysis of these interactions needed to be conducted to verify and validate the perspectives of the self-reported cases. This process also allowed for triangulation of the data, supplementing the self-reports from interviews with both blog and questionnaire data. By utilising mixed methods research, methodologies are combined to provide 'better answers' to our research questions (Turner et al., 2017).

The second stage of analysis (Chapter 5) drew on Lave and Wenger's theory of 'newcomers' and 'old-timers' within a 'community of practice' (CoP) or 'community of learners' (CoL) to explore how the girls' reported evolution of their knowledge and understanding, and the ways their online and offline identities, evolved over the length of the project. Data from three rounds of questionnaires (pre-blog, mid-blog, and post-blog) were analysed. The third methodological approach (Chapter 6) involved the creation of an analytical framework suitable for discourse analysis of the blog posts, and triangulation through the interview data and written questionnaire responses. Recent literature revealed that a consideration of online spaces, such as blogs, as 'figured worlds' (Urrieta, 2007; Holland et al., 1998) would provide an appropriate perspective for the approach, with Lave and Wenger's CoL as an adoptive lens for the analysis. The unique contribution that this study presents is highlighted further in the following chapter (Section 8.2).

7.6 Chapter summary

This chapter has reflected upon the three Research Questions, discussing and summarising the findings and linking to relevant research. Reflections have been shared on the three different methodological approaches taken during this study, and the triangulation that this provided. Areas for future research development have been highlighted and will be expanded in the next, final, chapter.

CHAPTER 8 CONCLUSION

8.1 Introduction

This closing chapter will present the conclusions to this study.

The original contribution to the field will be highlighted through a reflection upon the aims and design of the study, the main findings, in light of both older and newer literature on identity, and the methodological contribution. The research methods and quality of data collected will be evaluated, while the limitations of the research will also be noted. Potential areas for further research will be considered. This chapter ends with an autobiographical reflection upon how the doctoral research program has, in itself, provided a 'figured world' for the author for the past six years, and how a research degree is not simply a programme of study, but is a transformative process that allows the author to 'figure out' their academic identity.

8.2 Original contribution to the field

8.2.1 Aims and design of the study

The title of this thesis is '**Young girls' lived experiences of 'going online': an exploration into the relationships between social media use and well-being for primary age girls**'.

This study set out to explore how girls, who regularly go 'online' perceive their identities and to share the nature of lived experiences of these girls, both online and offline. The research was designed to observe how young girls interact on a blogging platform, and to consider how these interactions may contribute to young girls' identity development, or, as this study has shown, reification of *different dimensions* (Wenger, 1998: 57). This study also wished to provide an insight into young girls' reasons to interact with others in online spaces to better understand how modern cultural practices, such as online technologies, may sit in the 'toxicity' (Palmer, 2007) or 'vitality' (Alexander, 2007) of childhood debate (see Chapter 1).

8.2.2 Main findings

In this mixed methods study, a combination of IPA, questionnaire analysis and an examination of dialogic interactions through blogging was used to explore how young, pre-adolescent girls are making sense of their lived experiences through online communications with others. I analysed how they reported their perceived identities and the ways they

interacted with others in online spaces. The relationships between social media use and well-being were examined. Findings reveal that these six participants have experienced several crises, both online and offline, during their daily processes of developing identities that, at this point, they are performing in these particular 'figured worlds' (Holland et al., 1998). Recent literature explored from other key theorists in the field of identity (Urrieta, 2007; Brook et al., 2009; Lave and Wenger, 1991) revealed that at the core of our identity construction is the role of social interaction, and the process of self-making that we undergo as we perform in each of the 'figured worlds' we enter.

Findings show that the participants all developed their knowledge and understanding through membership in an online community of learners (CoP) even in the case of Magdalena who was more of a 'lurker' (Gong et al., 2015). Membership in a new CoP begins with the role of beginner, or 'newcomer', and evolves over time and with experience into the role of 'expert', or 'old-timer' (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Magdalena did not become fully interactive on the blog, so her journey did not progress to 'old-timer'. For participants who were more active on the blog, frequently posting and interacting with others, such as Bella and Summer, the journey from newcomer to old-timer was expedited. For participants, such as the anonymous 'gerbil' (see Section 7.7, and Figure 7.14) who posted after weeks of silence, the role of the newcomer was still apparent, and this influenced the behaviour of other members towards her.

Findings also offered a parallel, both to Lave and Wenger's communities of practice (1991) but also adult motivations to use blogs (Technorati, 2008), showing that the girls in the study had three key interests in using the blog: connecting and engaging with others, sharing information and experience, and learning and helping others to learn.

From exploring current research, a study of this nature has not previously been conducted. Several contributions to literature have been made, including:

- The use of IPA to explore children's perceptions of their identities through self-reports
- The use of IPA to explore the phenomenon of generating identities on social media
- An insight into the verbal interactions of these young girls in London to communicate with others on an online blog
- An adaptation of Lave and Wenger's 'community of practice' model (1991) to explore how a blog can provide a CoL for girls at a London primary school

8.2.3 Methodological Contribution

IPA was used to analyse the phenomenon of constructing identities online; this study has shown that IPA can be used with primary age children. Using semi-structured interviews with six pre-adolescent girls aged between eight and eleven years old, the analytical focus involved the hermeneutics of participants making sense of their lived experiences of using the Internet and social media as a part of their lives. The analysis was an 'iterative and inductive cyclical process' (Truelove, 2016: 201) whereby emergent themes were identified and ultimately clustered into a final structure of themes (Smith et al., 2009).

While there are both theoretical and methodological limitations to this research, one significant claim to current knowledge is that of the use of IPA in a primary school context. This study shows a clear model for using the IPA framework to analyse interview transcripts (see raw data in Appendix J and Appendix K), presenting idiographic case studies for the reader (Chapter 4). The study also revived Marcia's identity status theory and Goffman's dramaturgical concepts of 'front and backstage' over fifty years since their creations, within the modern phenomenon of social media. Giving participants' their voice was the key to gathering insightful data for this study.

This study also highlighted the need to be a 'reflexive' researcher. 'Reflexivity' involves the process of taking 'a step back from a situation' in order to reflect on it (Gabriel, 2018: 137). Reflexivity, in this instance, showed that other data gathered for this project should be revisited, namely the threads on the secure blog and the questionnaire data. From this, a second methodological approach was used. This study considered how blogs can be a 'community of learning' for young girls at a primary school, and how their roles evolve from 'newcomer' to 'old-timer' through interaction and collaboration with others in the community. This study also presents a framework suitable for discourse analysis on a blog, highlighting key linguistic features for exploration within the blogging community.

8.3 Limitations of the Research

The first half of this study closely followed the IPA principles and framework as constructed by Smith et al. (2009). The primary goal of this research was to understand how girls make sense of their lived experiences both on and offline and to relate these experiences to their identity development. As IPA is an idiographic approach, a limitation of this approach could be the small size of the sample that was consequent on the depth of the study in terms of the range of qualitative methods and the longitudinal nature of the study. The small sample size, from one Key Stage 2 setting at one primary school in London meant that other

attributes or settings were not able to be explored, such as rural primary schools, or Key Stage 1 children. However, this is in line with Smith's guidelines (1996) which state that a homogenous sample represents a perspective rather than a population.

This study represents the perspectives of six girls, from a primary school, living in London. Regarding generalisability, the findings of this study are bounded to the group level of these six participants in one primary school setting in London, and thus the lived experiences of these girls may not reflect experiences from other children across other areas.

The nature of this research also imposed time limitations as part of a doctoral research degree. As detailed later in Section 8.5, a future study could employ a longer timeframe for running the blog, allowing for relationships within the community to develop further. As Oxley (2016) warns, IPA studies tend to focus only on small samples, so there is no generalizability claimed. The founder of IPA, Professor Jonathan Smith (1996), claims that IPA studies should have no more than between three to six participants. However, it is intended that, by close examination and metaphorically shining a light on a small area, such as the six participants involved in this study, this may lead to the illumination of the whole. Bassey (1998) would claim that 'fuzzy generalisations might be made'.

IPA, therefore, involves finding a small homogeneous sample, for whom the Research Question can be meaningful (Smith et al., 2009).

The analysis clearly acknowledges the restriction of using the blog as opposed to more natural environments of SNS that the girls chose could have used independently, and also the conceptual development of 'newcomers to old-timers' (Lave and Wenger, 1998) must be used cautiously on a study that lasted but a few months.

A final reflection here upon my position; I aimed for a phenomenological approach but must acknowledge that, as both a teacher-researcher and parent, it was sometimes a struggle to maintain this approach without bias as my roles as teacher and parent have caused me to form and hold clear ideas about previous, current and appropriate behaviour for children of particular ages within this study.

8.4 Reflecting on Research

Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that, unlike quantitative research which relies upon validity and reliability, qualitative research must show the traits of confirmability, credibility, dependability, transferability and trustworthiness. This statement is not to say that qualitative research cannot be 'valid' or 'reliable', but that when dealing with data in the social sciences, other key elements can ensure research quality. Willig (2001:16) writes: 'validity can be

defined as the extent to which our research describes, measures or explains what it aims to describe, measure or explain', and I believe that, through the triangulation of the three research methods used, this study has described and explored what it set out to describe and explore. It has been possible, through this mixed methods study, to compare self-reports during the interviews, with observations of online social interactions through the blog posts, and support- or contradict- these findings with the written questionnaire data.

Through repeated interviews with each of the participants, professionally and ethically, credibility and trustworthiness are achieved. The transparency of the process of data analysis provides transferability of the IPA framework to other studies with young children, offering a clear model for presentation of idiographic case studies. Confirmability and dependability, again, are achieved through procedural reliability, and the replication of the interview instrument.

8.5 Potential Areas for Further Research

As this study has highlighted, there are several avenues for potential research that should be explored.

Replication of this IPA analysis: similar demographic
It would be useful to replicate this IPA study with other groups of children from primary schools to gain further insight into how engagement with online spaces is impacting upon children's identity nature and development.

Replication of this IPA analysis: gender studies
It is recommended that this IPA study could be carried out with a sample of pre-adolescent males or transgender children to offer a comparison to this study using female participants.

A longitudinal blog study
Due to the nature of this study, time restraints meant the blog ran for a limited amount of time. Future study could involve a blog running for a significant period of time (such as twelve months) to allow for significant relationships and incidents to develop.

Social media and adults
Now working in an HE setting, I currently run a private Facebook page for enrolled students on one of the degree programmes at the university, Future research could involve adult participants in order to compare how social media affects adults' self-perception, and the

implications for student engagement.

Implications for future policy and practice

Future research could also explore practical implications for parents, carers and educational institutions such as schools, with regards to both the offline preparation, such as eSafety, and the online support to ensure positive lived experiences online, and successful identity development, and the three key personality characteristics in Identity Achievement, 'self-esteem', 'autonomy' and 'moral reasoning'.

Study with a larger sample

This study worked within the IPA framework, which was the ideal framework for this small-scale research project. Future studies could aim to work with larger numbers of participants through other methods, such as online surveys and Thematic Analysis, allowing for a larger sample to be explored.

Links to well-being

Mental health is of paramount importance now more than ever as we see levels of poor mental health, anxiety, depression and identity confusion at an all-time high (Affleck et al., 2018; Evans et al., 2018). Future research should look further into the ways that mental health and well-being can be supported through online platforms, such as blogging forums, and through the opportunities for '**connecting'**, '**sharing'** and '**learning'** that these online, figured worlds can present.

8.6 Autobiographical reflection

Undertaking this small-scale research study has been an invaluable learning experience for me. The challenges of qualitative research- and the often complicated, exhausting steps in the research process- have opened my eyes to the need for an essential methodological framework to support a project. I have also realised the reward in conducting research when new data is gathered, and the highs and lows that cycles of analysis into this data can bring.

This study has also caused me to examine my own beliefs around children's Internet use, not only in the role of a practitioner and teacher trainer (as discussed at the start of this thesis in Section 1.2.2), but also with regards to my parenting of my own two children. The data has caused me to question my personal standards and allowances for screen time as I consider how the experiences that my children are having online, and will no doubt continue to have- may be affecting their development of identities.

Silverman stated that this closing chapter *'should function to stimulate your readers by demonstrating how your research has stimulated you'* (Silverman 2000: 250). I can honestly say that this study has been the most significant activity in both my professional and personal lives to date. This research degree has, in turn, been a 'figured world' in which I have existed for the past six years, self-making a young researcher in the competitive world of academia. I have seen the motivations of 'connecting with others', 'sharing' and 'learning' reflect in my own behaviours, both on email threads with fellow doctoral students, and in the offline world at the research workshops. As the door begins to close on this project, I am only further stimulated and enthused with ideas to take forward for future research projects around our engagement in both offline and online 'figured worlds'.

8.7 Final words

To conclude, although the experiences of growing up and engaging with the Internet offer several crises that must be navigated, this study argues that it is through these crises that personality characteristics are developed, that dialogic exchanges inform how identities are being shaped as individuals become more self-aware and develop their agency. When other members of the online community positively greet online performances, and interact dialogically in a supportive way, this kind of affirmation can inspire creativity, future-orientation and ambition in the individuals concerned.

Identities involve 'becoming' rather than 'being' (Urrieta, 2007: 119). Identities are not, as once thought, fixed and static, but are dynamic and fluid entities, shaped by our environment, the social interactions we engage in, and through the modern cultural artefacts we employ. It is only through continued research with such artefacts that the 'vitality' they offer can be revealed (Alexander, 2007).

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APPENDIX A GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Blog- Blog (as defined in Section 3.6.2), from the words 'web log', are publishing platforms on the Internet that continue to grow in popularity (Lee and Gretzel, 2014). Blogs allow for sharing of information, articles, images, photographs and many other media, with the ability for users to comment on posts to create 'conversation' threads.

Facebook- a social networking site aimed at individuals aimed 13+. Users create a profile and can 'add friends', sharing 'statuses' about how they are feeling, postings photos and videos, and also playing online games. There is also a private 'Messenger' add-on.

Instagram- a social networking site with a focus on the sharing of photographs. Recognised for the use of square images, Instagram encourages users to 'follow' others in order to see recent uploads. There is also a private message function.

Skype- an online tool for providing video calls and voice calls, particularly regarded by those who are communicating via distance, as it allows for data use through the Internet, rather than charging for a telephone call.

Snapchat- a video messaging app which allows users can take photos, record videos, add text and drawings, and send them to a controlled list of recipients. These sent photographs and videos are known as "Snaps".

Social Media Sites- Also referred to as social networking sites (SNS), or social networking services. A social networking service is an online platform which people use to build social networks or social relations with other people who share similar personal or career interests, activities, backgrounds or real-life connections.

Twitter - a microblogging site where users can post 'tweets'. Tweets were originally capped at 140 characters, but in November 2017, this limit was doubled for all languages except Japanese, Korean, and Chinese. Registered Twitter users can post tweets, but those who are unregistered can only read them.

WhatsApp - a messaging app used by many instead of the factory-installed text message service on mobile phones. This allows for easy creation of group chats which is one of this apps main appeals.

Wiki- a wiki is a collaborative web page, where upon content is often created by several users.
APPENDIX A CONTINUED

<u>Text speak abbreviations</u>

LOL – Laugh Out Loud

YOLO – You Only Live Once

ROFL- Rolling on the Floor Laughing

APPENDIX B INTERVIEW INFORMATION

<u>Interview Information</u>

<u>Location:</u> All interviews will be held in a secure environment within the school, between the researcher and the participant.

<u>Recording device:</u> I will be using a digital recording device (the App 'Voice Recorder' on an iPad) to record all interviews and will be transcribing all interviews myself.

<u>Introduction:</u> All interviews will begin with the reading of this paragraph:

"Thank you for coming and meeting with me today (name). I am looking forward to finding out more about your opinions on using the Internet to connect with your friends and teachers.

Remember that if I ask you a question that you don't wish to answer, or that makes you feel uncomfortable, you do not have to answer it, and can just say 'pass'.

Also, if you wish to finish our interview at any time, just let me know.

This interview should be around 15 minutes long, and I will be recording us on this iPad using a recorder app and making some notes in this notebook.

Does that all make sense? Do you have any questions before we begin the interview?"

APPENDIX C INTERVIEW PROMPT QUESTIONS

Questions: The following questions will be used as prompts.

N.B. The first two questions are of least importance, as I appreciate that it may take some minutes for the participant to feel at ease in order to answer fully and honestly. Although I will be recording all of the interview, I have planned for this event with the order of my questions.

- 1. Have you enjoyed using a computer at school so far this term? What has been something you have really enjoyed doing on the computer?

- 2. If your friends had to describe you in three words, what do you think they would say?

- 3. What are your favourite things to do at playtime?

- 4. Do you think that you act the same when you are at home and when you are at school? Or differently?

- 5. Do you think that talking to someone online, like on Firefly (the Learning Platform used at the school for the class wiki pages) is different to talking to someone face to face or not? How/ why?

- 6. Do you think you act differently or talk to different friends online compared to at school?

The interviews will follow a participant-led style (as is the approach of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis- see justification in Chapter 3: Methodology) so questions may vary leading on the participants' responses.

APPENDIX D INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

6 pupils will be selected at random to be interviewed.

Each pupil will be invited to have **three** interviews with the researcher.

The participant will be reminded that they can withdraw or stop the interview at any time, and only need to answer questions they wish to answer, with no repercussions and without explanation.

Each interview will consist of different questions, an outline of which is below. Questions will be formed based on the thread of conversation that is raised during the blog.

INTERVIEW 1: THE PRE-BLOG INTERVIEW (MARCH 2016)

Pupils will be asked about their current engagement in blogging, at school and at home, and how they feel communicating with others online.

INTERVIEW 2: THE 'DURING BLOG' INTERVIEW (MAY 2016)

Pupils will be asked about their participation in the blog so far, how it makes them feel, how the words and comments put out there have been created and the purpose behind them, if any.

INTERVIEW 3: THE 'POST-BLOG' INTERVIEW (JULY 2016)

Pupils will be asked about their overall views and feelings on the blog project. Pupils will be asked to reflect on how they have presented themselves online and consider whether there is a difference to their 'real-life' behaviours, and if so- why? How is our identity affected by our online self, if at all? What can this mean for schools and social communication online going forward?

APPENDIX E PUPIL INFORMATION SHEET

OXFORD
BROKES
UNIVERSITY

Dear Pupils,

Blogging in the Primary School

As a pupil in Year 4, 5 or 6, you *are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether or not to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.*

What is the purpose of the study?

I would to find out how sharing your ideas online makes you feel, and if you enjoy talking to your school friends online. I would be interested to explore if we act differently online versus in the 'real world', and how growing up with technology is affecting you as you grow and develop in terms of how confident or happy you might feel.

The study will run from February 2016 until July 2016 and will involve taking part in a secure, online 'blog' (forum) and reflecting on how being a 'blogger' (a writer on a blog) affects you as a primary school pupil.

Why have I been invited to participate?

All pupils in Year 4, 5 and 6 at your school will be given this opportunity to participate in the study.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. Don't worry about what your friends decide, think about if YOU want a chance to enjoy this opportunity!

If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked, along with one of your parents/guardians, to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

Please note, by choosing to either take part or not take part in the study will have no impact on your school marks or grades!

What will happen to me if I take part?

If you take part, you will be given a username and password to access the secure online blog that I have set up.

Every few days, I will post a new question or photo onto the blog, and you can choose if you wish to comment and/or discuss the question or photo with the other bloggers. I will be very interested to read the comments and discussions!

I will also be learning more about your opinions on blogs through the use of questionnaires and a series of THREE one-to-one interviews with you, but PLEASE NOTE, not all those who volunteer for interviews will be selected. Interviewees will be picked at random from those who register their interest to be interviewed.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Your participation in this research should be enjoyable and interactive, and you will hopefully have fun discussing the different images and questions I post online.

So, you are a teacher AND a researcher?

Yes, but when I interact with you either on the blog, or if you are randomly selected for interview, it will be as a researcher.

You can be honest with me about your opinions on technology and what it's like to grow up in such a busy world where the Internet is part of our daily lives!

Remember that you only have to say as much or as little as you want, and you only have to answer questions you are comfortable in answering.

Will what I say in this study be kept confidential?

All information collected about you will be kept strictly confidential (subject to legal limitations).

How will blog posts be monitored and by whom?

I will check all potential posts pre-posting in order to ensure that no unsuitable or upsetting material is posted on the blog.

What support will be offered to me if I feel upset at any point during or following this study?

If you feel you need talk through any of the issues raised during the study, you are most welcome to talk to our School Nurse, Mrs Franklin. If needed, Mrs Franklin can also provide you with contact information for free advice or information relevant to your questions or

issues that the study has raised for you.

What should I do if I want to take part?

If you would like to take part, please tick the relevant boxes on the Consent Forms (attached) and sign the Consent Forms and return it to me in the envelope provided.

There are 3 options for you:

<u>Take part in the blogs and questionnaires</u>

It is up to you if you want to take part in the blog and questionnaires.

<u>Register your interest to be one of the 8 pupils interviewed</u>

If you additionally would be willing to allow me to ask you some interesting questions in an interview, please sign the additional second consent form. The interviews are optional, and you can still take part in the blog and questionnaires even if you do not want to be interviewed.

<u>Choose not to take part in the study</u>

If you would not like to take part, you do not need to return the Consent Forms.

If you return your consent form/forms to me registering your interest to take part in this study, your parent or guardian will be asked to sign a consent form saying that they are happy for your participation to go ahead.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.

Mrs Gibson

February 2016

APPENDIX F PUPIL CONSENT FORM 1

| **Ask an adult to read this form to you if needed!** | **(FOR BLOG/QUESTIONNAIRES)** | OXFORD BROOKES UNIVERSITY |

Name, position and contact address of Researcher:

Mrs Gibson, Teacher, SCHOOL NAME REMOVED FOR ANONYMITY

Please tick box

I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.   ☐

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving reason.   ☐

I agree to take part in the blog and answer three questionnaires during the study.   ☐

Please tick box

Yes   No

I agree to the use of anonymised quotes in publications   ☐   ☐

I agree that my data gathered in this study may be stored (after it has been anonymised) in a specialist data centre and may be used for future research.   ☐   ☐

_____   _____   _____

Name of Participant (pupil)   Date   Signature

APPENDIX G PUPIL CONSENT FORM 2 (FOR INTERVIEW SELECTION)

Ask an adult to read this form to you if needed!

OXFORD
BROOKES
UNIVERSITY

'Optional: Interviews'

Name, position and contact address of Researcher:

Mrs Gibson, Teacher, SCHOOL NAME REMOVED FOR ANONYMITY

Please tick box

I would like to register my interest in being one of the pupils chosen for interviewing by Mrs Gibson. ☐

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving reason. ☐

If chosen for interview, I am happy for   my interviews to be audio recorded. ☐

Please tick box

Yes   No

	YES	NO
I agree to the use of anonymised quotes in publications	☐	☐
I agree that my data gathered in this study may be stored (after it has been anonymised) in a specialist data centre and may be used for future research.	☐	☐

_____   _____   _____

Name of Participant (pupil)   Date   Signature

APPENDIX H PARENT INFORMATION SHEET

OXFORD BROOKES UNIVERSITY

Dear Parents,

Project Title: Her, Herself and She: Girls' Constructions of
Identities Through 'Blogging'
(an EdD research project for the Doctor of Education at Oxford Brookes University)

As a pupil in Year 4, 5 or 6, your daughter is *being invited to take part in a research study. The study will run from February 2016 until July 2016. It is important for both you and your daughter to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and allow your daughter to read the 'Information Sheet to Pupils'.*

What is the purpose of the study?
This study aims to investigate how 'social' Internet usage, in this case 'blogging', influences identity formation and notions of self in young girls. This study will also explore what degree participating in the developing technology of 'blogging', an online diary-style forum, and being a 'blogger' (a writer on a blog), affects the pupils involved with regards to their confidence, self-esteem and social satisfaction.

Through analysing how girls present themselves both online and in the real world, and how this changes over time, unique contributions will be made to this under-researched, yet highly relevant field. The importance of the study of identity and self in young girls is evident when considering the well-established link between these and well-being (Fauth and Thompson, 2009) and the increasing concerns around Internet usage and well-being that are noted in recent educational and medical research (UKCCIS, 2014; DfE, 2012; NSPCC, 2015; Mental Health Foundation, 2015).

In addition to communicating with their peers on the blog, pupils will be asked to answer questions about their Internet use and how they interact with others by means of three questionnaires. One questionnaire will be given out before the blog runs, the second questionnaire will be given out while the blog is running, and the third questionnaire will be given out after the blog has finished running.
Additionally, six pupils will be selected for one-to-one interviews.

We know much about the risks and vulnerability of young children using the Internet; the media often reports issues of 'trolling' and 'cyber-bullying' where users purposely defame and write hurtful comments on social networks about others, but the possible benefits of culminating social networks in the primary school, specifically using blogs, remains relatively unexplored.
It is anticipated the results of this research will inform schools' employment of social and school-based Internet usage both in terms of policy and practice, equipping practitioners with a greater knowledge of girls' experiences of connecting with peers online.

Who is organising and funding the research?
I am conducting this research as a student at Oxford Brookes University, for my Doctorate in Education (EdD). I am funding the research myself.

Why has my daughter been invited to participate?
All pupils in Year 4, 5 and 6 at the school will be given this opportunity to participate in the study.

Does my daughter have to participate?
It is up to your daughter to decide whether or not to take part.
If she does decide to take part, please read through the two attached Consent Forms with your daughter. If your daughter decides to take part, she needs to sign and return the chosen form/forms to me in the SAE provided; she is still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

Please note that choosing to either take part or not take part in the study will have no impact on your daughter's academic marks, assessments or future studies.

What will happen to my daughter if she participates?
If your daughter takes part, she will be given a username and password to access the secure online blog that I have set up.
Every week I will post a new question or photo onto the blog, and your daughter can choose if she wishes to comment and/or discuss the question or photo with the other bloggers.
I will also be learning more about primary school pupils' use of blogs and thoughts on blogs through questionnaires, and some pupils will be selected to participate in one-to-one interviews with me should they so wish (there is a separate consent form if your daughter would like to register her interest for this additional part of the research study, but PLEASE NOTE, not all those who volunteer for interviews will be selected).

What are the possible benefits of participation for my daughter?
Your daughter's participation in this research should be enjoyable and interactive, and ultimately will be of great value in furthering our understanding of the topic. Your daughter will have the exciting opportunity to share and discuss her thoughts on a range of carefully selected images and thought-provoking questions with the other blog members.

Will what my daughter says in this study be kept confidential?
All information collected about your daughter will be kept strictly confidential (subject to legal limitations) and confidentiality, privacy and anonymity will be ensured in the collection, storage and publication of research material. The data generated in the course of the research will be kept securely at Oxford Brookes University, Oxford, for a period of ten years after the completion of the research project.

What should we do if my daughter wants to take part?
If your daughter would like to take part, please tick the relevant boxes on the consent forms (attached) and ask her to sign the consent forms and return them to me in the SAE provided.
If your daughter does not want to take part, you do not need to return the consent form.
Then you will receive a parental consent form for you to sign and return to me.
How will blog posts be monitored and by whom?
As the researcher, I will moderate all potential posts pre-posting in order to ensure that no unsuitable or upsetting material is posted on the blog. Any inappropriate posting will be dealt with and referred to the Head teacher if necessary.

What support will be offered to my daughter if she feels upset at any point during or following this study?
Should your daughter feel she needs to talk through any of the issues raised during the study, she will be referred to our School Nurse, Mrs Franklin. If needed, Mrs Franklin can also provide your daughter with contact information for free advice or information relevant to her issues.

What will happen to the results of the research study?
The results from my research will be used in my Doctoral thesis for my EdD (Doctor of Education) research degree with Oxford Brookes University. Upon completion of my research, a presentation will be given to pupils and parents, which you may attend if you wish to hear about the findings (July 2016).

Who has reviewed the study?
My research has been approved by the University Research Ethics Committee, Oxford Brookes University.

Who is supervising my studies?
I am currently supervised by my Director of Studies, Dr Richard Newton, a Co-Director of Studies, Professor Deb Macgregor, and a secondary supervisor, Dr George Roberts.

Contact for Further Information
If you would like to discuss this further with me, please contact me for further information; you can do this by letter, email pgibson@channing.co.uk or telephone via the School Office 0208 6482843. If you have any concerns about the way in which the study has been conducted, you may contact the Chair of the University Research Ethics Committee on ethics@brookes.ac.uk.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.

Mrs Poppy Frances Gibson
February 2016

APPENDIX I PARENT CONSENT FORM

(Following the return of Pupil consent forms, this Parental consent form will be sent to appropriate Parents/Guardians whose daughters have consented to participating in the project, in order to gain parental consent)

OXFORD BROOKES UNIVERSITY

Dear Parent/ Guardian/ Carer of ……. (Pupil name)……..,

Your daughter has expressed an interest in participating in a study that is due to shortly take place at your daughter's school and will run from February 2016 until the end of the Summer Term 2016.

You will find further information in the Information Sheet that has been provided to you.

Your daughter has returned a consent form/ two consent forms to me which show that she wishes to take part in the online blog/ in the online blog and- if selected- some 1:1 interviews with the researcher.

Please can you sign and return this form to me in the SAE provided if you consent to your daughter taking part in this study.

Your daughter will be repeatedly reminded that she may withdraw from participating in the study at any time, and that any data gathered will be kept confidential.

Kind regards,
Mrs Poppy Gibson

Name, position and contact address of Researcher:
Mrs Gibson, Teacher, SCHOOL NAME REMOVED FOR ANONYMITY

_____   _____   _____

Name of Parent/Guardian   Date   Signature

PLEASE RETURN YOUR COMPLETED CONSENT FORM TO MRS GIBSON IN THE S.A.E. (SELF ADDRESSED ENVELOPE) PROVIDED WITH THIS LETTER. THANK YOU.

APPENDIX J RAW DATA IPA ANALYSIS ON TRANSCRIPT (BELLA)

Researcher annotations	BELLA'S interview transcript- YEAR 4
	(A false name (Bella) has been used to protect the confidentiality of the respondent, the researcher's coding is shown in italics, and gestures and non-verbal communication are shown in bold)

Researcher annotations (left column):

Confidence, bold response

Family

Self-esteem

'very good at art'

Familiar with family history- strong networks in real life/ non-virtual world?

Chatty/loud/funny

-presenting confident identity to researcher

Positive view of these traits?

Transcript:

1 Interviewer: Tell me about yourself; your favourite things,
2 hobbies, about your family...anything you want to share.

3 Bella: My name is Bella. My favourite colour is neon lime
4 green. I really, really want a dog but my dad doesn't really
5 want to get one- or I would really like a cat, but my mum is
6 allergic to cats, so we can't really get one. And I don't really
7 go horse riding a lot, because my mum is allergic to horses.
8 But I love horse riding... (pause) I love drawing. I love ICT, I
9 absolutely love ICT. I am very good at art. My favourite
10 animal is a snake... and a wolf and a pig. Um, I like chocolate.
11 Italy, Israel, Greece or Cyprus. Best places to go on holiday.
12 And I'm always finding out a I have a trillion more cousins.
13 And I'm forever forgetting and re-finding out how my
14 grandpa, he had the longest surname in the world, and so
15 my grandma made him change it so it was shorter.

16 I'm chatty. I'm loud. And I'm funny. I have a sister-
17 sometimes she really likes pink and purple and she is
18 dressing up like a princess, and other times she is out playing
19 football, she is a really odd mixture. And I have a brother,
20 he's four. But he can change a lot in five minutes- happy, into
21 a monster, and back to happy again in five minutes. They're
22 both really different to me. My sister looks a lot like me.

23 Interviewer: Thank you very much, wow, what a lot of

APPENDIX K RAW DATA IPA ANALYSIS ON TRANSCRIPT (CHARLIE)

Researcher annotations	
	CHARLIE'S interview transcript- YEAR 5 (A false name (Charlie) has been used to protect the confidentiality of the respondent, the researcher's coding is shown in italics, and gestures and non-verbal communication are shown in bold)

Researcher annotations	Transcript
First comment is about brother not self- proud of brother? Suggests strong sibling bond offline?	1 Interviewer: Tell me about yourself; your favourite things, hobbies, 2 about your family…anything you want to share.
Brother user of tech- influences Charlie?	3 I have a brother. He's 14, turning 15. He's about to take his GCSEs. 4 He likes going on the computer and does digital stuff. He wants to 5 be a graphic designer- do you know Minecraft? He helped design
Role model?	6 banners for a YouTuber called Stampy. Stampy is quite famous, you 7 know, he actually has his own brand now and just brought out a 8 book.
Ambitious	9 I really want to write scripts for movies, or be a designer of clothes. 10 Or a script person, writing comedy films or stand-up comedy.
Confidence in self as comedian- sees as possible career	11 What am I like in real life? Funny, definitely, because I'm the class 12 clown. I'd say I'm quirky, or strange. And sporty. What am I like 13 online? I guess online is where I can put my funniness across. One
'funny'/'quirky'/'strange'/	14 day, I really want to write scripts for movies, or be a designer of 15 clothes. Or a script person, writing comedy films or stand-up
Internet as platform for career	16 comedy. Right now, I like testing out my comedy online. It's a good 17 way to put stuff out there and get feedback without actually being 18 face to face with people in case a joke doesn't work, and I'd be like
Suspicion of audience- mature consideration and approach	19 'facepalm'. Online, I can't tell if they're laughing or not, it just 20 depends what they type. And so, I suppose my friends might be 21 typing LOL even if they're not laughing. I hope not! **(laughs and pulls**

APPENDIX L QUESTIONNAIRE 1 (PRE-BLOG)

Stage 1 Questionnaire (pre-blog)

QUESTIONNAIRE ABOUT BLOGGING

Information to pupils: This questionnaire is all about SCHOOL, THE INTERNET and BLOGGING.
Don't worry if you don't understand a question, just answer as best you can.
It doesn't matter if you don't answer all of the questions, but please try to answer as many as possible!

Name: _____ **Age:** _____ **Form:** _____

1. **How often do you access the Internet, either at school or at home, on any device (e.g. computer, laptop, tablet, smartphone)? Please tick the box below:**

    ☐ MORE THAN ONCE A DAY

    ☐ ONCE A DAY

    ☐ TWICE A WEEK

    ☐ ONCE A WEEK

    ☐ ONCE A MONTH

    ☐ LESS THAN ONCE A MONTH

    ☐ NEVER

    ☐OTHER: …………………………

2. **Which of these do you use the Internet for- either recently or in the past?**
Tick as many boxes as you like:

☐ To find information e.g. facts for a school topic or a favourite band

☐ To check emails

☐ To buy a product/ Internet shopping

☐ To listen to music

☐ To play games

☐ To talk to friends

☐ To share photographs e.g. Instagram

☐ To watch programmes e.g. BBC iPlayer

☐ Other:…………………………………………………….

3. Have you ever heard the word 'blog' before (please tick the box)?

YES ☐   NO ☐   NOT SURE☐

4. What do you think a blog is? Tick the sentence below that you think best describes a 'blog', or write your own definition in the space provided:
*** _If you do not know what a blog is, and do not think you have used one before,_
you may wish to skip to question 7 ☺ ***

☐I don't know what a blog is

☐A blog is a website, like an online diary, where people type their thoughts

☐A blog is where lots of people can talk and interact with each other

☐A blog is where you can find information about things

I think a blog is…

5. Have you ever read or commented on an online blog before? (E.g. on WordPress)

YES ☐   NO ☐   NOT SURE☐

If yes, do you remember what you were reading/ commenting about? Give details if possible

6. Do you have your own blog, or have you had a blog in the past?

YES ☐   NO ☐   NOT SURE☐

If yes, what did you talk about?

7. Which THREE of the below do you think are the most important things about going to school? Read all the options before ticking the 3 boxes you <u>most</u> agree with.

☐ It is important to have a smart school uniform

☐ It is important to have friends who you can talk to and play with

☐ It is important to have lots of interesting books and resources for each lesson

☐ It is important to have access to the Internet

☐ It is important to have space to run and play outside

☐ It is important to learn about subjects I enjoy

☐ It is important to feel like I am valued and that my teachers care about me

☐ It is important to have rules that we all must stick to

☐ It is important to feel safe and secure, so I can learn best

8. Which of these statements sounds most like you at school? TICK ONE

☐ I try to put up my hand and answer as many of a teacher's questions as possible in each lesson- I think I usually get the answers right.

☐ I try to put up my hand and answer as many of a teacher's questions as possible in each lesson- I don't always get it right, but it's important to have a go!

☐ I sometimes put my hand up in each lesson- but only if I know the right answer.

☐ I sometimes put my hand up in each lesson- but I get embarrassed if I get an answer wrong in front of my classmates.

☐ I rarely put my hand up.

☐ I do not like to put my hand up. I wait for the teacher to pick me to answer a question instead.

9. Read the sentences below, then tick the face that matches how YOU feel about that sentence.

😊 😐 ☹️	The Internet can be dangerous if not used sensibly
😊 😐 ☹️	The Internet is an amazing invention
😊 😐 ☹️	The Internet makes our lives easier
😊 😐 ☹️	The Internet makes our lives more complicated
😊 😐 ☹️	I enjoy using the Internet in my free time
😊 😐 ☹️	The Internet is useful to support my school work
😊 😐 ☹️	The Internet helps people to connect with each other
😊 😐 ☹️	Children should not be allowed to use the Internet
😊 😐 ☹️	The Internet is a good way for me to keep in touch with my friends
😊 😐 ☹️	Using the Internet is enjoyable

10. If a person, who had **NEVER** used the Internet before, asked you to explain what the Internet is, what would you say to them?

11. Do you **feel** different using the Internet at school to when you are using the Internet at home? Please give details or examples if possible.

12. Do you think there is a **difference** communicating with people/friends face to face, and talking to people/friends online, for example by text/email, on an online game e.g. MovieStarPlanet, or when commenting on a blog/website page? Please give details or examples if possible.

APPENDIX M QUESTIONNAIRE 3 (POST-BLOG)

QUESTIONNAIRE 3: Following the Blogging Process
To be given to all participants in the study in May 2016 after the blog has been closed.
Here is your third and final questionnaire!
Please answer as many questions as you can, but feel free to leave blank any questions you do not want to answer.

1. **Did you prefer READING or WRITING on the blog over the past few weeks?**

2. **Do you think you acted differently online to how you act with your friends at school?**

   If so, can you please describe in what ways you think you acted differently?

3. **Do you think your friends acted differently online to how they act with you at school?**

   If so, can you please describe in what ways you think someone acted differently?

4. **Overall, do you think that communicating online with friends is a good or bad thing? Please give details**

5. **Can you think of a way that you could communicate with people online during the school day, maybe for a particular lesson or reason? Would this be a good idea? Please give details**

6. **Final question: Did you enjoy taking part in this study or not? Please give details**

APPENDIX N QUESTIONNAIRE 2 (MID-BLOG)

QUESTIONNAIRE 2: During the Blogging Process
To be given to all participants in the study during the blog, approximately March 2016

Here is your second questionnaire!
Please answer as many questions as you can, but feel free to leave blank any questions you do not want to answer.

1. **Have you been participating in the online blog?** YES _____   NO_____

   If yes, how often have you been logging onto the blog, either to read or write?

   ___Every couple of weeks

   ___Once a week

   ___Two or three times a week

   ___ Once a day

   ___Twice or more per day

   ___ Not sure

   If you have NOT yet logged onto the blog, please give reasons:

2. **If so, which discussion have you enjoyed participating in most? (Please add detail of the image of question if you can, so I know which discussion you are referring to)**

3. **Is there anything you posted or said on the blog that you then regretted?**

4. **Is there anything you wanted to say on the blog, but decided not to? Please give details if possible**

5. **Have you got a good idea for a question, statement or image you would like to see posted next week? If so, what is it?**

APPENDIX O BLOG LIST

Blog posts (BP) on the secure blog

Blog post	Title (Category)
BP1	Hello everyone! (Admin greeting post)
BP2	Question 1: Would you rather be a cat or a dog? Why? (Question)
BP3	Amazing animals (News article)
BP4	Question 2: Would you rather live without your TV or your bed? Why? (Question)
BP5	Five sentence challenge! (Creative writing)
BP6	6-year-old spends £2000 by accident! (News article)
BP7	Question 3: What do you think is the best age to be and why? (Question)
BP8	Huge stink! (News article)
BP9	Question 4: Is being 'alone' and 'lonely' the same thing? (Question)
BP10	5 sentence challenge NEW! (Creative writing)
BP11	Question 5: Would you rather skydive or swim with sharks? (Question)
BP12	'My pony Katie'- created by Toucan (user)
BP13	'Horses'- created by Toucan (user)
BP14	Question 6: Which job would you rather have- police or surgeon? (Question)

BP15	Create your own page
BP16	Question 7: Is it possible to be friends with someone you've never met?
BP17	Tricky Five sentence challenge (Creative writing)
BP18	Question 8: Test week (Question)
BP19	Question 9: Half term (Question)
BP20	Happy World Turtle Day!
BP21	Poo museum?? (News article)
BP22	Question 10: Last one (Question)
BP23	Summer holidays

APPENDIX P BLOG SCREENSHOTS

BP1.

SEARCH

SEARCH

Recent Posts

- Summer holidays!
- QUESTION 10: LAST ONE!
- Poo Museum??!!
- Happy World Turtle Day!
- Question 9 – HALF TERM!!

Recent Comments

- angelfish on Summer holidays!
- dragonfish on QUESTION 10: LAST ONE!
- dragonfish on Summer holidays!
- mrsgibson2016 on Question 7
- mrsgibson2016 on Poo Museum??!!

Archives

- July 2016
- May 2016
- April 2016

Categories

- Uncategorized

Hello everyone!
April 24th, 2016 at 11:51am

Welcome to our blog!

Firstly- thank you for agreeing to take part in this project- I hope you will find it fun, interesting, and enjoy talking to others on here and sharing your thoughts!

Secondly- you have been given an anonymous username. If you choose to say what your real first name is (or not!) that is up to you. You are welcome to stay anonymous and just be called 'Badger' etc! **Please do not share personal details, e.g. surnames, phone numbers or address on here.**

Thirdly- feel free to read, write, share images on here- and if you have any questions, just come and see me or you can write me a note and put it in the green box outside my classroom.

Fourthly- Be kind. If you don't agree with someone, that's fine, but please respect each other and don't type anything on here that might upset someone else. If anything on here upsets you, come and talk to me and we can sort things out together. I will approve comments before they are 'published' (appear) on the page, so please be patient if you write something and it does not appear straight away.

Your first question is now available to answer- click HERE in order to read it and share your answer!

Your second question is also posted- click HERE to read and share your answer!

(There will be 10 questions/discussions altogether).

I look forward to hearing your ideas!

From Mrs Gibson

BP2.

Y4&5&6 Research Project 2016

« Hello everyone!   Amazing Animals »

SEARCH

SEARCH

Recent Posts

- Summer holidays!
- QUESTION 10: LAST ONE!
- Poo Museum??!!
- Happy World Turtle Day!
- Question 9 – HALF TERM!!

Recent Comments

- angelfish on Summer holidays!
- dragonfish on QUESTION 10: LAST ONE!
- dragonfish on Summer holidays!
- mrsgibson2016 on Question 7
- mrsgibson2016 on Poo Museum??!!

Question 1
April 24th, 2016 at 1:38pm

First question: **Would you rather be a cat or a dog? Why?**

Wondering what the majority will say!!! Please share your ideas by commenting on this page!

Read about a dolphin and dog's story here!

Posted in Uncategorized
RSS 2.0 | Trackback | Comment

BP3.

SEARCH

SEARCH

Recent Posts

- Summer holidays!
- QUESTION 10: LAST ONE!
- Poo Museum??!!
- Happy World Turtle

Amazing Animals
April 25th, 2016 at 7:12pm

How's this for evidence that we really *can* all get along? A Labrador retriever named Ben and a dolphin named Duggie inexplicably became the best of friends a few years back, despite the fact that one lives on land and the other lives in the ocean.

Locals on Tory Island, off the coast of County Donegal in Ireland, first spotted Duggie the dolphin in the spring of 2006. The dolphin became popular with locals and tourists alike; Duggie was a frequent sight from the decks of incoming ferry boats.

Soon, Ben the Lab started swimming out to meet the dolphin, and the unusual pair would play   for   hours.   Other   local   dogs   even   joined   in.

BP4.
.

SEARCH

SEARCH

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- Summer holidays!
- QUESTION 10: LAST ONE!
- Poo Museum??!!
- Happy World Turtle Day!
- Question 9 – HALF TERM!!

Recent Comments

- angelfish on Summer holidays!
- dragonfish on

« Amazing Animals   Five Sentence Challenge! »

Question 2
April 26th, 2016 at 6:36pm

'Would you rather live without your TV or your bed? Why?'

As much detail as possible please- can't wait to hear your answers!!!

BP5.

Five Sentence Challenge!
April 26th, 2016 at 8:20pm

Right, here's the challenge! Have a look at the photograph below. Can you come up with five sentences about it- it could be:

- A short story (with five sentences) about the photo- why is the food there, who does it belong to, what's the event, etc?
- A poem (with five sentences)
- A description (with sentences).

I look forward to seeing if any of you can tackle this challenge! Just type your 5 sentences into the comment box below! And try to comment on other people's entries too 🙂

BP6.

6-year-old spends £2000 by accident!
April 27th, 2016 at 5:10pm

Well here's a crazy story of a 6 year old who ACCIDENTALLY spent all of the money on his grandfather's credit card!...

Little Will Smith, who's just six years old, managed to spend an astonishing £2000 whilst using an iPad. It seems that the boy had managed to access his grandfather's iTunes password to purchase virtual coins, food and unlock codes for a game on the iPad called 'Monster Island'!

The game features a lot of in-app purchases, and it seems that Will carried on buying additional features until the credit card associated with the iTunes account eventually hit the limit. It was only when his grandmother tried to use the card at Tesco that the family realised what was happening.

His grandfather told reporters that ..

"Will has just been pressing buttons buying baskets of food and coins for his monsters. I can't believe how easy it is for kids to buy things. Will's only six."

I imagine they will make sure the password is reset and locked in future!!!

Let me know what you thought of this story!

Posted in Uncategorized
RSS 2.0 | Trackback | Comment

226

BP7.

Question 3
April 30th, 2016 at 3:46pm

'What do you think is the best age to be and why?'

Posted in **Uncategorized**
RSS 2.0 | **Trackback** | **Comment**

May 1st, 2016 at 5:35 am

duckling

Maybe 4 because you don't have to do anything you don't want to do.

May 1st, 2016 at 7:23 am

bear

I say between 0-4 because your just playing at home or in a the park all the time but when you're older you can do more things

May 1st, 2016 at 7:24 am

BP8.

Mrs Gibson's Blog
Y4&5&6 Research Project 2016

« Question 3   Question 4 »

Huge Stink!
April 30th, 2016 at 3:48pm

The Eden Project is bracing itself for an almighty stink as three of the biggest, smelliest flowers in the world are due to blossom at around the same time.

The titan arums have the proper name of Amorphophallus titanum but are also known as corpse flowers because of their horrendous pong! Their strong smell is used to attract pollinators.

The trio now stand in giant pots in the Rainforest Biome at Eden ready to burst in the coming days. No-one can be certain when they will fully flower but when they do each one will be in its full smelly glory for about two days and then wilt and die!

Last year Eden had three titans side by side but only two went into flower – the other was at a fruiting stage so was not stinky.

Posted in **Uncategorized**
RSS 2.0 | **Trackback** | **Comment**

April 30th, 2016 at 7:10 pm

Recent Posts
- Summer holidays!
- QUESTION 10: LAST ONE!
- Poo Museum??!!
- Happy World Turtle Day!
- Question 9 – HALF TERM!!

Recent Comments
- angelfish on Summer holidays!
- dragonfish on QUESTION 10: LAST ONE!
- dragonfish on Summer holidays!
- mrsgibson2016 on Question 7
- mrsgibson2016 on Poo Museum??!!

Archives
- July 2016
- May 2016
- April 2016

227

BP9.

Question 4
May 4th, 2016 at 7:39am

Is being 'alone' and 'lonely' the same thing?

Is it possible to feel alone in a crowded room?

Posted in Uncategorized
RSS 2.0 | Trackback | Comment

BP10.

5 Sentence Challenge NEW!
May 4th, 2016 at 7:41am

I loved your entries to the tea-party 5 Sentence Challenge so much! Thank you to the girls who wrote us an entry to enjoy! Very creative! So here's another one: can you come up with five sentences for this photo- it could be a poem, a short story, etc!

Posted in Uncategorized
RSS 2.0 | Trackback | Comment

BP11.

SEARCH

Recent Posts

- Summer holidays!
- QUESTION 10: LAST ONE!
- Poo Museum??!!
- Happy World Turtle Day!
- Question 9 – HALF TERM!!

Recent Comments

- angelfish on Summer holidays!
- dragonfish on QUESTION 10: LAST ONE!
- dragonfish on Summer holidays!
- mrsgibson2016 on Question 7
- mrsgibson2016 on Poo Museum??!!

Archives

Question 5
May 8th, 2016 at 6:58pm

Would you rather skydive or swim with sharks???

Posted in **Uncategorized**
RSS 2.0 | Trackback | Comment

BP12.

🚩 Mrs Gibson's Blog
Y4&5&6 Research Project 2016

SEARCH

SEARCH

Recent Posts

- Summer holidays!
- QUESTION 10: LAST ONE!
- Poo Museum??!!
- Happy World Turtle Day!
- Question 9 – HALF TERM!!

Recent Comments

- angelfish on Summer holidays!
- dragonfish on QUESTION 10: LAST ONE!

« Question 5   Horses- Created by Toucan »

My pony Katie- Created by Toucan
May 9th, 2016 at 8:43pm

I loan a pony.She has a stable in Mill Hill.

She spits a 14.2hh mare.I started loaning

her on Friday 6th May.She is a

Welsh cob mix and is a chestnut.

All the stuff I bought for her is purple.

Posted in **Uncategorized**
RSS 2.0 | Trackback | Comment

May 12th, 2016 at 3:19 pm

duckling

BP13.

SEARCH

SEARCH

Recent Posts

- Summer holidays!
- QUESTION 10: LAST ONE!
- Poo Museum??!!
- Happy World Turtle Day!
- Question 9 – HALF TERM!!

Recent Comments

- angelfish on Summer holidays!
- dragonfish on QUESTION 10: LAST ONE!
- dragonfish on Summer holidays!
- mrsgibson2016 on Question 7
- mrsgibson2016 on Poo Museum??!!

Horses- Created by Toucan
May 12th, 2016 at 7:20am

Right now I am thinking about horses and my loan.

Posted in **Uncategorized**
RSS 2.0 | Trackback | Comment

May 16th, 2016 at 6:24 pm

bear

What does that mean?????

Leave a Reply

You must be logged in to post a comment.

BP14.

SEARCH

SEARCH

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- Summer holidays!
- QUESTION 10: LAST ONE!
- Poo Museum??!!
- Happy World Turtle Day!
- Question 9 – HALF TERM!!

Recent Comments

- angelfish on Summer holidays!
- dragonfish on QUESTION 10: LAST ONE!
- dragonfish on Summer holidays!
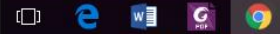- mrsgibson2016 on Question 7
- mrsgibson2016 on Poo Museum??!!

Question 6
May 12th, 2016 at 7:23am

A question submitted by one of our bloggers....

Which job would you rather have-

police or a surgeon?

Posted in **Uncategorized**
RSS 2.0 | Trackback | Comment

BP15.

SEARCH

SEARCH

Recent Posts

- Summer holidays!
- QUESTION 10: LAST ONE!
- Poo Museum??!!
- Happy World Turtle Day!
- Question 9 – HALF TERM!!

Recent Comments

CREATE YOUR OWN PAGE!
May 15th, 2016 at 7:34am

Thank you to Toucan who has created 2 pages for us about her pony!

Toucan please can you tell us how to create a page, incase any other members wish to create their own??

Bloggers, feel free to create your own page or question for us to comment on! Or it could just be a page of pictures, or a news article or story you've enjoyed reading?

HOPE TO SEE SOME NEW PAGES CREATED SOON!!!!

Posted in **Uncategorized**
RSS 2.0 | Trackback | Comment

May 16th, 2016 at 6:23 pm

BP16.

SEARCH

SEARCH

Recent Posts

- Summer holidays!
- QUESTION 10: LAST ONE!
- Poo Museum??!!
- Happy World Turtle Day!
- Question 9 – HALF TERM!!

Recent Comments

- angelfish on Summer holidays!
- dragonfish on QUESTION 10: LAST ONE!
- dragonfish on Summer holidays!
- mrsgibson2016 on Question 7
- mrsgibson2016 on Poo Museum??!!

Question 7
May 16th, 2016 at 6:46pm

Is it possible to be friends with someone who you've never met?

Give examples/ details please!

FRIENDS

Posted in Uncategorized
RSS 2.0 | Trackback | Comment

BP17.

SEARCH

SEARCH

Recent Posts

- Summer holidays!
- QUESTION 10: LAST ONE!
- Poo Museum??!!
- Happy World Turtle Day!
- Question 9 – HALF TERM!!

Recent Comments

- angelfish on Summer holidays!
- dragonfish on

TRICKY 5 Sentence Challenge!
May 16th, 2016 at 6:54pm

Can you come up with five sentences to match this picture- maybe a short story or little

poem??

Posted in Uncategorized
RSS 2.0 | Trackback | Comment

BP18.

Recent Posts

- Summer holidays!
- QUESTION 10: LAST ONE!
- Poo Museum??!!
- Happy World Turtle Day!
- Question 9 – HALF TERM!!

Recent Comments

- angelfish on Summer holidays!
- dragonfish on QUESTION 10: LAST ONE!
- dragonfish on Summer holidays!
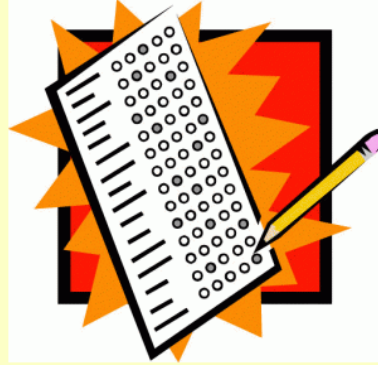- mrsgibson2016 on Question 7
- mrsgibson2016 on Poo Museum??!!

Question 8- TEST WEEK!
May 17th, 2016 at 7:58pm

Dear all, I hope that test week is going well for you!

Which tests have you done and how did they go?

Any advice for others? Any one been making flashcards??

Posted in **Uncategorized**
RSS 2.0 | Trackback | Comment

BP19.

Recent Posts

- Summer holidays!
- QUESTION 10: LAST ONE!
- Poo Museum??!!
- Happy World Turtle Day!
- Question 9 – HALF TERM!!

Question 9 – HALF TERM!!
May 23rd, 2016 at 7:40pm

Dear all, thank you to those who shared their feelings about Test Week! And thank you to those who shared their advice with others on how to handle tests and revision! Very helpful 🙂

I would now love to know what you all have planned for Half term next week? Relaxing, travelling, playing with friends, working on a project?... Please comment and share your plans or hopes with us!

Posted in **Uncategorized**
RSS 2.0 | Trackback | Comment

BP20.

SEARCH

SEARCH

Recent Posts

- Summer holidays!
- QUESTION 10: LAST ONE!
- Poo Museum??!!
- Happy World Turtle Day!
- Question 9 – HALF TERM!!

Recent Comments

- angelfish on Summer holidays!
- dragonfish on QUESTION 10: LAST ONE!
- dragonfish on Summer holidays!
- mrsgibson2016 on Question 7
- mrsgibson2016 on Poo Museum??!!

Archives

Happy World Turtle Day!
May 23rd, 2016 at 7:59pm

DID YOU KNOW 23rd MAY IS WORLD TUTRLE DAY??? The day was created by American Tortoise Rescue (ATR) but has grown so much that it is celebrated around the world now. Turtles are reptiles that have been swimming in our oceans for at least 110 million years. Sadly, experts predict that many species of turtle could disappear completely in the next 50 years.

There are many factors that are causing turtle numbers to drop. These include pollution in the seas, getting trapped in fishing lines, and the destruction of their habitats, both at sea and the beaches where they nest.

Last winter, more turtles than ever washed up on UK beaches. The Marine Conservation Society (MCS) is just one of the organisations around the world that helps to rescue and rehabilitate sea turtles. They work with international conservation organisations to learn more about the animals and how to help them survive. Find out how you can help at **mcsuk.org.**

Posted in **Uncategorized**
RSS 2.0 | Trackback | Comment

BP21.

SEARCH

SEARCH

SEARCH

SEARCH

BP22.

Recent Posts

- Summer holidays!
- QUESTION 10: LAST ONE!
- Poo Museum??!!
- Happy World Turtle Day!
- Question 9 – HALF TERM!!

Recent Comments

- angelfish on
- mrsgibson2016 on Poo Museum??!!

Archives

- July 2016
- May 2016
- April 2016

Poo Museum??!!
May 23rd, 2016 at 8:02pm

QUESTION 10: LAST ONE!
July 6th, 2016 at 7:37pm

Dear all, your final question!

Do you think we should use online communications more in school or not?

Would it be good to be able to communicate with other pupils at your school online?

What about being able to talk to pupils at other schools?

What about being able to talk/write comments online for your teachers when you are not at school?

THOUGHTS PLEASE 🙂 🙂 🙂

Posted in **Uncategorized**
RSS 2.0 | Trackback | Comment

Posted in **Uncategorized**

BP23.

Summer holidays!
July 6th, 2016 at 7:41pm

Can you believe we are really finishing on Friday?? This year has flown by!

I would love to know what you all plan to do over the summer holidays!

Please feel free to share below by adding a new comment!

I wonder if any of you will be doing the same thing or going to the same places??

Posted in **Uncategorized**
RSS 2.0 | Trackback | Comment