Exploring Adolescents' Experiences of Self-Disclosing on Facebook When Distressed

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Abstract

Facebook provides adolescents with multiple opportunities to self-disclose information about themselves, one of the most prominent ones being a status update. This qualitative study expanded on existing research related to adolescent self-disclosure on Facebook by exploring ten adolescents' experiences of self-disclosing on a Facebook status when upset or distressed. Using thematic analysis, prominent themes emerged which included the decision making process in making such a post, concerns of privacy, impacts on peer relationships, perceptions and feelings of others, sense of community and support systems. Limitations of the study, clinical implications and suggestions for future research are also discussed.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The Problem and Its Setting

People commonly self-disclose on the Internet as evidenced by the proliferation of popular social networking sites (Rogers, Griffin, Wykle & Fitzpatrick, 2009). Social networking sites are designed to encourage self-disclosure and typically provide privacy options which users control at their own discretion. Social networking sites such as Facebook are popular forums for online communication, especially among adolescents and emerging adults (Subrahmanyam, Reich, Waechter & Espinoza, 2008). Self-disclosure is an important hallmark of adolescent friendships (Valkenburg, Sumter & Peter, 2011). Adolescents are now frequently self-disclosing to others on various social networking sites, as opposed to communicating in-person or through other forms of technology (e.g., phone conversation, text messaging). One way in particular that adolescents are self-disclosing on Facebook is by posting status updates on their profile page. A status update allows users to post brief updates, which are then easily shared with other users. This study seeks to expand on current research about adolescent's self-disclosure on social networking sites by specifically exploring the experience of an adolescent posting a status update on Facebook when distressed or upset.

Facebook was founded on February 4th, 2004 (Facebook.com). Facebook's mission statement is as follows: "Facebook's mission is to make the world more open and connected". People use Facebook to stay connected with friends and family, to discover what's going on in the world, and to share and express what matters to them. Facebook has an unprecedented amount of members, when compared to any other social networking site. Facebook reported

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having over one billion monthly active users as of December 31, 2012, including 618 million daily active users.

Facebook offers users numerous functions. It allows users to create a public or semi-public profile, to create and view their own and other users' profiles and online social networks, and to publicly or privately interact with people in their social networks (Subrahmanyam et al., 2008). Some of these interactions include sharing photos, posting statuses or messages and instant messaging through the site. Facebook reports that there have been more than 104.3 billion friend connections since 2004. Currently, Facebook's servers are storing 219 billion photos from users.

Facebook users have multiple opportunities for self-disclosure. Self-Disclosure refers to the information that individuals voluntarily and intentionally reveal about themselves to others, including their thoughts, feelings and experiences, and it plays an important role in forming and maintaining interpersonal relationships (Tang & Wang, 2012). Self-disclosure has been more simply defined as "an interaction between at least two individuals where one intends to deliberately divulge something personal to another" (Park, Jin & Jin, 2011). On Facebook, disclosure of personal information may be done explicitly (e.g., written statements of users' thoughts and feelings) or implicitly (e.g., pictures uploaded to their Facebook page) (Special & Li-Barber, 2012). On a social networking site such as Facebook, shared pictures, status updates and web links (e.g., to news articles or videos) posted keep users interested and increase page views (Stutzman, Capra &Thompson, 2011). Social network site users provide their personal information (e.g., profile, photos, stories) acknowledging that their Facebook friends and even other people who do not know the users can see their postings (Park, Jin & Jin, 2011).

Significance

An abundance of research has been completed on both adults and adolescents and their use of social-networking sites. In particular, many research studies have focused on communication and self-disclosure through the use of these sites. In one such study, Christofides, Muise and Desmarais (2012) examined the differences between adolescents and adults' online disclosures. These researchers found that adolescents are more likely to disclose personal information on Facebook than adults and that age and time spent on Facebook predicted disclosure for adolescents but not adults. Interestingly, this study also found that adolescents and adults who had a greater need for popularity and less awareness of the consequences of disclosure were more likely to disclose personal information. Another study of Facebook users found that people who made frequent status updates and wall postings on Facebook reported feeling high-levels of emotional support (Hampton, Goulet, Marlow & Rainie, 2011). Further research done in other studies has shown that adolescents communicate through self-disclosure on social media sites such as Facebook for a variety of reasons. Some of these reasons include: promoting and maintaining intimacy, connecting with others, and enhanced controllability of self-presentation (Reich & Subrahmanyam, 2012, Whitlock, Powers & Eckenrode, 2006, Valkenburg & Peter, 2010).

Online communication has become a centerpiece in the social life of adolescents (Valkenberg & Peter, 2011). One of the most prevalent ways that adolescents are communicating online is through the use of social networking sites such as Facebook. Three-quarters of the teenagers in America use social networking sites, and Facebook by far is the most popular of the sites (pewinternet.org, 2012). One of the primary goals of social networking sites is to encourage the disclosure of personal information to other online users (Nosko, Wood & Molema, 2010).

The use of the social networking site Facebook provides adolescents with many ways to communicate and self-disclose online. As mentioned above, one of the ways in which adolescents can do this is through the use of posting a status on their Facebook profile. Posting a Facebook status is a reciprocal action between Facebook Friends; feedback about a status post can be given by leaving a comment or "liking" the post. "Liking" the post generally signifies that you identify with or are in support of the user or the comment.

The formation of intimate, paired and clique relationships with peers is a fundamental developmental task in adolescence (Courtois, All & Vanwynsberghe, 2012). Self-disclosure has been identified as one of the key concepts that increase during relationship development (Tolstedt & Stokes, 1984). Many adolescents are using Facebook as a way to self-disclose information about themselves to peers. While research on self-disclosure between adolescent friends has long been confined to offline settings, such as face-to-face or telephone conversations, this is no longer true of the present generation of adolescents (Valkenburg, Sumter & Peter, 2010). With the recent explosion in the number of adolescents who use Facebook and are self-disclosing on the site and the implications of such self-disclosures, it is imperative to continue to research usage trends, specifically pertaining to the use of self-disclosure on Facebook statuses.

Adolescence is a time that is filled with a multitude of changes. Some of the changes that adolescents experience include becoming closer to their peer group than their parents, biological changes such as puberty as well and defining their sexual identity (Steinberg, 2008). This maturation process often causes distress among typical adolescents, including emotional suffering, interpersonal conflicts, psychological stress and various other, sometimes severe difficulties (Gould & Kramer, 2001). Although it is clear that adolescence is a time period that

has a high potential for distress, research exploring adolescents' self-disclosures on social

networking sites when distressed is limited. Much of the research on adolescent self-disclosures

on social networking sites is generalized to studying the act of self-disclosing on a social

networking site as a whole. This study sought to lessen the gap in research by exploring an

adolescent self-disclosing on a social-networking site when distressed.

Rationale

This research study employed qualitative research methods. Obtaining data in such a way

allowed for a clear, in-depth understanding of an adolescent's experience of posting a status on

Facebook when distressed. The data was collected by interviewing a sample of adolescents

individually with semi-structured interviews. The purpose of in-depth interviewing is to get an

understanding of the lived experiences of other people and the meaning they make of that

experience (Seidman, 2006). This study consisted of semi-structured interview questions to

ensure that the experience of this phenomenon is accurately captured. Semi-structure interviews

allow the interviewer to ask follow-up questions for clarification or more detail. This allowed for

a clear and comprehensive understanding of adolescents' experiences of posting status updates

on Facebook when distressed.

Theoretical Framework

Social penetration theory (Altman & Taylor, 1973) will guide the current study by providing a framework for understanding the use of self-disclosure in the development and maintenance of interpersonal relationships. Social penetration theory concentrates on the reciprocal behaviors that occur between individuals when developing and maintaining interpersonal relationships (Taylor, 2010). Self-disclosure is one of the types of reciprocal behaviors focused on in social penetration theory (Daher & Banikiotes, 1976). Examples of types of self-disclosures applicable to the theory include exchanging information between parties, exchanging expressions of positive and negative affect between one another and engaging in mutual activities (Altman & Taylor, 1973).

As research indicates, an abundance of adolescents are actively using social networking sites, particularly Facebook. Along with beginning to develop and maintain relationships offline, there is an overlap between offline and online relationships for adolescents. For example, in conjunction with a Facebook friend being someone that an adolescent has an online relationship with, often adolescent Facebook users may have a relationship with their Facebook friends offline as well. A relationship can be nourished and maintained through the use of online modalities in addition to typical offline communications (Iacovelli & Johnson, 2012). According to social penetration theory, one of the ways in which a relationship is maintained is through self-disclosure. This theory also supports the idea that self-disclosure is a key method for increasing the development of relationships.

This study examined adolescents who self-disclose on their Facebook statuses while feeling upset or distressed. Social penetration theory proposes that an adolescent will engage in self-disclosure with friends as a part of the process of creating and maintaining relationships.

Due to the fact that many of today's adolescents are commonly creating and maintaining relationships online, particularly through the use of social networking sites, an adolescent disclosing information on a Facebook status is in keeping with social penetration theory. Facebook provides adolescents with multiple opportunities to self-disclose information, one of the most prominent ways being through a status update. This study further explored the act of an adolescent self-disclosing on a Facebook status in order to create and maintain a relationship by taking an in-depth look at an adolescent self-disclosing about a distressing event and examining what purpose or effect doing so may have for an adolescent and their relationship with their online and offline friends.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to gain an in-depth understanding of adolescents' public self-disclosures on Facebook when feeling distressed or upset. This study expanded upon current research that focused on adolescents' self-disclosure on social networking sites by specifically looking at the social networking site Facebook and posting statuses on this site while feeling distressed. This study explored self-disclosure related to distress due to the fact that adolescence is a period of tremendous change biologically, physically, and socially (Reich, Subrahmanyam & Espinoza, 2012) and is often fraught with emotional challenges. Thus, the prevalence of both adolescent Facebook usage and self-disclosure along with the potential for emotional distress during adolescence is one reason why this study focused on adolescent self-disclosure while distressed on a Facebook status. This research aimed to provide insight into the motivations behind adolescent's self-disclosure on Facebook when feeling distressed. The following research questions were addressed in this study: 1) What prompts or precludes adolescents to self-disclose on a Facebook status when distressed; 2) How are adolescents' peer

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relationships affected by self-disclosing or choosing not to self-disclose on Facebook when distressed ; and 3) What do adolescents experience after having self-disclosed or choosing not to self-disclose on Facebook when distressed.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this literature review is to explore previous research related to the current study. It is imperative to understand Internet usage trends, specifically of the social media site Facebook as well as research concerning general self-disclosure, self-disclosure on the Internet, and self-disclosure specifically on Facebook. These topics will be discussed next.

Facebook Usage

Half of the adults and three-quarters of the teenagers in America use social networking sites and Facebook is by far the most popular of these sites (Hampton, Goulet, Marlow & Rainie, 2012). This statistic has sparked many research studies on Facebook usage of both adolescents and adults. Hampton, Goulet, Marolow and Rainie completed a study in 2012 that examined what they identified as Facebook "power users". The Facebook users that were selected for this study were a sample of participants from a study done in 2011 by The Pew Research Internet and American Life Project. The Pew Research Internet and American Life Project fielded a nationally representative phone survey about the social and civic lives of social network site users and reported their findings in June 2011 in a report entitled "Social networking sites and our lives". That survey consisted of 877 respondents, of which 269 were Facebook users. These 269 Facebook users gave Hampton et al. (2012) permission to access data on their use of Facebook so that it could be matched with their survey responses in the Pew study. Hampton et al. then partnered with Facebook to match individual responses from the survey with profile information and computer logs of how the sample used Facebook over a given period of one month. The average age of participants in this study was 44 years old.

The results of this study provided many interesting findings. One of the most prominent findings was that the average Facebook user received more from their friends on Facebook than they gave to their friends. For example:

- On average, Facebook users in the sample received more friend requests than they made: 63% received at least one friend request during the one month period but only 40% made a friend request.

- It is more common to be "liked" than to like others. Users in the sample pressed the like button on a friend's content an average of 14 times per month and received feedback from friends in the form of a "like" 20 times per month.

- On average, users received more messages than they sent. In this sample, users received an average of nearly 12 private messages and sent 9.

- Users in this sample commented more often than they updated their status. Users in the sample made an average of 9 status updates or wall posts and contributed 21 comments.

- Users were tagged in more photos than they tagged others. In the sample, 35% of users were tagged in a photo, compared with just 12% who tagged a friend in a photo.

Along with finding results that indicated users in this sample received more from their friends than they gave on Facebook, this study also found that women make more status updates than men (Hampton et al. 2012). In the sample, the average female user made 21 updates to their Facebook status in the month of observation, while the average male made six. This study also found that, of the users in this sample, 19% initiated friendship requests at least once per week. Out of these friend requests, 80% were reciprocated. Lastly, the study discovered that the more

time that had passed since a user started using Facebook, the more frequently he or she made status updates, used the "like" button, commented on friends' profiles and tagged friends in photos. Similarly, the more Facebook friends someone had, the more frequently they contributed to all forms of Facebook content and the more friend requests they tended to send and accept.

In another study, Wise, Alhabash and Hyojung (2010) took a closer look at the emotional responses during social information seeking on Facebook. From existing research, Wise et al. (2010) conceptualized Facebook use as serving two primary goals: passive social browsing (e.g., on newsfeeds) and extractive social searching (e.g., on friends' profiles). Their study explored whether these categories adequately reflected Facebook use and whether they moderated physiological indicators of emotion. The study recruited thirty-six undergraduates from an introductory advertising class at a large Midwestern university to participate in the study. Due to experimenter error, the final analyses reflected data from twenty-nine participants. The results of this study concluded that while navigating Facebook, participants devoted most of their time to either social browsing or social searching. Of these two ways to navigate Facebook, participants spent more time on pages that were devoted to social searching. Participants showed greater physiological evidence of pleasantness during social searching than they did during social browsing. This study expanded on existing research that explored the uses and gratifications of Facebook.

Yang and Brown (2013) completed a study that explored late adolescents' motives for Facebook use and the types of Facebook activities that they were partaking in and how this related to their social adjustment in college. This study consisted of 193 participants who were between the ages of 17 and 26. Self-report responses from the adolescents on multiple questionnaires were collected. Findings suggested that late adolescents are intentional about their

use of Facebook, and their activity on Facebook is connected in complicated ways to their psychosocial well-being (Yang & Brown, 2013). Specifically, two distinct motives were found for using Facebook. Motives included pursuing new relationships and maintaining existing relationships. Interestingly, the study also found that for late adolescents, their online life was integrated with their offline life. The more study participants were inclined to use Facebook to maintain and nurture existing relationships, the better their social adjustment was, and such participants were also more likely to report lower scores on the loneliness scale. Posting status updates was related to poor social adjustment and higher levels of loneliness. However, this connection was moderated by the motive of relationship maintenance. Specifically, posting status updates was negatively associated with social adjustment and positively related to loneliness only for those who were less motivated to use Facebook to maintain existing relationships. The findings suggest that late adolescents use status updates to either vent their emotions and frustrations or to post messages about their whereabouts and activities.

Since its debut in 2004, Facebook has achieved remarkable growth as one of the world's leading social networking sites. Along with usage trends, this high level of growth has led researchers to investigate the effects that using Facebook may have on individuals in a variety of ways. In 2011, Kim and Lee investigated whether and how Facebook increased college-age users' subjective well-being by focusing on the number of Facebook friends and self-presentation strategies (e.g., positive vs. honest) used. Three hundred and ninety-one college students with a Facebook account at a large Midwestern University participated in the study. Results yielded a thought-provoking look into the dynamics of friendships on Facebook and the effect that they may have on a person's well-being. The study revealed that the number of Facebook friends along with using self-presentation strategies such as posting statuses and

photos that reflected positivity and happiness on Facebook had positive associations with social well-being. This study also found that perceived social support did not mediate the positive association between the number of Facebook friends and social well-being. Therefore, researchers inferred that happiness derived from the number of Facebook friends may be due to visualization of Facebook friends, which reminds users of their social connections, and may lead to subsequent affirmation or enhancement of self-worth. Interestingly, researchers in this study also found a negative curvilinear association between the number of Facebook friends and perceived social support. Thus, Facebook friendships, just as traditional friendships, may serve as a meaningful source of social support, but only up to the point in which Facebook users can devote a sufficient amount of time and effort to developing and maintaining close connections with friends. Another interesting finding was a direct positive effect of positive self-presentation on social well-being, suggesting that Facebook users' happiness would be enhanced when their positive self-images are better preserved and affirmed through self-presentation.

This study seeks to understand the phenomenon of adolescents who post statuses on Facebook when they are feeling distressed. This type of posting is considered a form of self-disclosure. Self-Disclosure refers to the information that individuals voluntarily and intentionally reveal about themselves to others, including their thoughts, feelings and experiences, and is important for interpersonal relationships (Tang & Wang, 2012). Prior research has highlighted that the Internet has invoked a high level of self-disclosure regarding online interpersonal relationships (Tang & Wang, 2012). In order to understand self-disclosure on both the Internet and social media sites such as Facebook, it is important to explore the research done on the topic of self-disclosure.

Self-Disclosure

Davis (2012) investigated adolescents' use of digital media to engage in casual conversation with their friends as well as more intimate communications involving self-disclosure of personal feelings. This study then specifically studied how these forms of online peer communication shape adolescents' experiences of two identity-supporting peer processes: sense of belonging and self-disclosure. The purpose of this study was to explore these identity-supporting peer processes in the context of digital technologies that have become an integral part of adolescents' lives. In-depth interviews of thirty-two adolescents between the ages of thirteen and eighteen provided the data for this study. Findings indicated that adolescents use intimate online exchanges to engage in self-disclosure with their close friends. Intimate online exchanges were defined in this study as conversations through instant messaging, cell phones, and private messaging features on Facebook. This type of intimate self-disclosure was discussed by sixty-nine percent of the sample. Nearly half of the participants in this study said that they feel as though it is easier to share personal feelings online than offline. Participants explained that online disclosures felt easier because of a perception of reduced non- verbal cues and the feeling of being in control of one's communications. Girls were more likely to engage in self-disclosure online than boys. The intimate exchanges and disclosures made by adolescents online reflect a defining characteristic of adolescent friendships that plays an important role in helping adolescents to articulate and receive feedback on their identities.

Vanlear (1987) completed a longitudinal study informed by social penetration theory to specifically examine the formation of social relationships in emerging adults. The study investigated three levels of self-disclosure (i.e., public, semiprivate, private-personal) in the social penetration process. The following research questions were addressed in the study: 1)

What is the nature of changes in the three levels of disclosure over time?; 2)Is self-disclosure reciprocated at the three levels of intimacy?; and 3) Does reciprocity vary over time, and if so how does it vary? The subjects in this particular study were undergraduate student volunteers recruited from two large universities. There were thirty participants total. Participants were randomly paired with another volunteer of the same sex with whom they had no previous acquaintance, which made fifteen dyads. The dyads then met once a week for half an hour for six weeks. The researcher did not provide tasks or instructions on what to talk about. Each meeting between dyads was audiotaped. Findings were based upon the analysis of seven dyads. Only seven dyads were analyzed due to scheduling problems and recording error with the other dyads that began participation in the study. This study yielded many interesting results concerning self-disclosure in emerging adults. Data suggested that more intimate (and therefore more risky) disclosures followed a normative sequence, whereas disclosures of public and semi-private information are less subject to normative constraints. The researcher also found that as the relationship between individuals in a dyad progressed and trust was possibly established, communicators began to share more private-personal disclosures until they reached a zenith (usually towards the end of the relationship), which was followed by a sharp decline, primarily during the last conversation. The researcher found that the gradual increase in self-disclosure as the relationship progressed could be well explained by the social penetration process. The researcher attributed the decline in self-disclosure as either being due to the fact that the participants knew the study was coming to a close and that they may never see their dyad partner again, or due to the possibility that the exchange of private-personal information cannot, or need not, be maintained for an extended period of time once it has served its purpose in the function of

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the formation process. Another interesting finding indicated that the reciprocity of semiprivate

disclosure was more frequent and stronger than reciprocity of private disclosure.

Disclosure on the Internet

In 2011, Tang and Wang completed a study based on social penetration theory, which

explored the topics that bloggers disclose on their public blogs. A total of 1,027 Taiwanese

bloggers participated in this study. Bloggers who participated in this study self-disclosed on nine

topics (i.e., attitude, body, money, work, feelings, personal, interests, experiences and

unclassified.) Researchers then examined the depth and width of what bloggers self-disclosed to

three target audiences (i.e., online audience, best friends and parents). Concerning disclosure on

the Internet, this study found that bloggers appeared to express their personal interests and

experiences in a wide range of topics online to document their lives or to maintain their online

social networks. Researchers found that bloggers seemed to be aware of the risks of extensive

disclosure on their blogs, and were more willing to disclose their interests and experiences rather

than personal and money matters.

Disclosure on Facebook

In 2010, Nosko, Wood and Molema took an extensive look at self-disclosure on

Facebook. This study consisted of a sample of 400 randomly selected, accessible, personal

profiles from eight Canadian Facebook networks. Of these 400 profiles, 328 indicated gender

(116 females, 155 males). Female ages ranged from 19-47 years and males ranged in age from

17 to 61 years. This study included three major steps. First, a scoring tool was developed in order

to comprehensively assess the content of the personal profiles. This scoring tool was needed in

order to summarize what information could be disclosed on Facebook profiles. From this tool,

the researchers then examined the frequency for which each piece of information was posted in

order to determine what is and is not likely to be found on Facebook profiles. Second, grouping categories (e.g., default/standard information, sensitive personal information, and potentially stigmatizing information) were developed to examine information pertinent to identity threat, personal and group threat. Third, a grouping strategy was developed to include all information present in Facebook, organized into a meaningful way as a function of the content that was presented. This study found that, on average, people chose to display approximately 25% of possible information for other users to view. Facebook users who included information about their gender, relationship status and age disclosed more in all three disclosure categories than people who did not indicate this information at all. Age and relationship status were important factors in determining disclosure. As a user's age increased, the amount of personal information in profiles decreased. Those seeking a relationship disclosed the greatest amount of highly sensitive and potentially stigmatizing information.

A study exploring the effects of self-disclosure on relational intimacy in Facebook also produced many findings that contribute to the research done on this topic. This study was completed by Park, Jin and Jin (2011) and examined the association between self-disclosure and intimacy in the context of Facebook from the perspective of interpersonal relationships. This study consisted of 317 students at a University in Southwestern United States who responded to an online survey. Findings indicated that self-disclosure honesty and intent were not significantly associated with intimacy in Facebook. Rather, it was found that more frequent posts and more positive self-disclosures played an important role in enhancing feelings of connection and intimacy in Facebook. The study also found that motivation for relationship initiation led to self-disclosure. These researchers concluded that Facebook users upload and edit their personal information and make posts or comments in hopes of forming new relationships, yet this does

not mean that a user will be revealing of themselves to the extent that newly-met people can see their truthful and intended information.

In 2009, Christofides, Muise and Desmariais explored undergraduate students' information disclosure and information control on Facebook and the personality factors that influence levels of disclosure and control. This study included an online survey of 343 undergraduate students who were current users of Facebook. Results of this study indicated that participants perceived that they disclosed more information about themselves on Facebook than in other forms of communication. General tendency to disclose and desire for popularity were the only significant predictors of information disclosure on Facebook. Popularity on Facebook and disclosure are inextricably linked (Christofides, Muise & Desmariais, 2011).

Summary

Existing research informs us that Internet use is at an all-time high, particularly in regards to the use of social networking sites. Three quarters of adolescents are using social networking sites and of the social-networking sites available today, Facebook is the most widely used. Studies show that having a Facebook profile can serve many purposes some of which include having a reciprocal relationship with Facebook friends, providing a supplement to offline relationships, social browsing and social searching. Along with these purposes being served, a Facebook profile offers many opportunities for a user to self-disclose. Studies indicated that Facebook users may self-disclose on Facebook positively to feel more connected and intimate with Facebook friends, self-disclose on Facebook more than they do through other forms of communication and that as a Facebook users age increases, their amount of self-disclosure on Facebook decreases. Existing research also indicates that adolescents self-disclose with one another as a way to facilitate their developmental task of creating and maintaining interpersonal

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relationships. When the abundance of adolescents who are actively using Facebook is coupled with the opportunities for self-disclosure on the site, self-disclosure on Facebook by adolescents has become a common occurrence. A review of this literature has revealed that adolescents who self-disclose on a Facebook status when distressed has not been an area of research that has been specifically explored. This study seeks to close this gap in research.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Design

Qualitative methods were used to gain an understanding of adolescents' experiences of posting a status on Facebook while distressed. Qualitative methodology was best suited for this study because the study sought to gain a more complex, detailed understanding of the issue (Creswell, 2007). It was hoped that by understanding the common experiences of several adolescents, a deeper understanding about the features of an adolescent posting a status on Facebook when distressed would be developed.

After completion of a screening and consent process, adolescents who were recruited for the study participated in semi-structured interviews, which were audiotaped and then later transcribed. The goal of the semi-structured interview was to gain a description of the meaning of the event for a small number of adolescents who have experienced it (Creswell, 2007).

Participants and Recruitment

Fliers were used to recruit participants. Fliers were placed on local community boards in various places in the community and distributed to organizations that were rich with adolescents such as church youth groups. Some participants were recruited through snowballing methods in which previous participants informed their peers of the study and how to contact the researcher. The fliers solicited adolescents between the ages of 14 and 17 who were members of Facebook and used the posting status option on their Facebook profiles. Fliers also solicited adolescents who were interested in talking about their experiences of their usage of Facebook. An incentive for participating, a ten dollar gift certificate to a fast food restaurant was also advertised on fliers. The researcher's email and contact information was listed on the flyer, and potential participants, along with their parents or legal guardian, were asked to contact the researcher.

Once contacted, the researcher spoke with potential participants' legal guardians to explain the study, its purpose and the procedures. The researcher then spoke with the responding adolescent, explaining the same information that was just explained to the parent. The researcher then conducted an eligibility screening. The eligibility screening consisted of asking the adolescent's age, whether or not they had a Facebook profile and whether or not they used the function of posting statuses on Facebook.

The participants in this study consisted of ten adolescents ranging in age from 14-17 years old. Six participants were female and four were male. At the time of the interview, all participants had Facebook profiles that were active.

Procedure

After each adolescent had been successfully screened and had agreed to participate in the study, a time and location was determined for each adolescent to meet with the researcher for an interview. Each participant's parent was required to come to the beginning of the interview to fill out consent forms. A consent form was provided for both adolescents and parents. The researcher reviewed the consent forms, asked if either the adolescent or parent had questions or concerns and then addressed potential questions or concerns. The researcher then asked both the adolescent and parent to sign respective consent forms. After receiving the signed consent form, the researcher then asked the parent to leave the room, and began the interview with the adolescent. The interview with the adolescent was audio-taped and then transcribed. The interview was conducted using a semi-structured format. At the conclusion of the interview, the participants were given their gift cards.

Instrument

A semi-structured interview was used in this study. The questions contained structured sub-questions, which allowed the researcher to obtain a more in-depth and clearer picture of the adolescents' experiences. Specifically, the interview questions were designed to elicit responses about the experience of posting a status on Facebook when distressed. The style of semi-structured interview questions was chosen for a specific purpose. First, it allowed for the structure of pre-thought out questions, while at the same time provided the flexibility for the researcher to probe with follow-up questions or ask for clarification if needed in order to increase the depth of response for certain questions. This may be particularly important given that adolescents may provide less initial data than other age groups. Before beginning the interview, the researcher stated the purpose of the interview to the adolescent. The following interview questions were then asked:

1. How often would you say that you log on to your Facebook profile?

2. How do you decide when or what to post on a Facebook status?

    a. What type of effect do you think posting Facebook statuses has on your relationships with your peers?

3. Do you remember a time when you felt upset or distressed?

    a. Can you tell me about it?

    b. How did you know that you were upset or distressed?

4. Have you ever posted a Facebook status when you were feeling upset or distressed?

    a. If so: (Please tell me about a specific time that you can remember doing so)

        i. Was posting this status the first way that you decided to express your distress?

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ii. Were there other options or ways for you to express yourself or to let people know how you were feeling than posting on Facebook?

iii. What led you to the decision to post about being distressed on your Facebook profile?

iv. When you posted this status, did you limit who had the ability to see the status? (control settings)

1. Who did you allow to see this status?

v. Were you expecting a response from Friends on your status?

1. What kind of response were you expecting? (Like, comment, phone call..etc)

vi. What kind of response did you receive?

vii. If this did not meet your expectation for a response, what was your reaction to the type of response that you did receive?

viii. After posting while distressed on your Facebook profile, did it change the way that you were feeling?

1. If so, in what way?

2. What do you think was the cause of your change in feelings?

ix. What were you hoping would happen in your relationship with your friends by posting a status when you were upset?

x. Please describe how having the ability to post a Facebook status while distressed has impacted your offline communication with your friends.

xi. Has posting a Facebook status while distressed created new relationships for you? If yes, please explain.

xii. Do you see yourself continuing to post statues on Facebook when distressed in the future?

b. If not

  i. Have you ever thought about posting a status when you were feeling upset or distressed?

  ii. What stopped you from doing so?

  iii. What did you decide to do instead?

    1. Did you express being upset or feeling distressed in another way? If so, what way did you choose to do so?

  iv. How do you feel choosing not to post Facebook statuses when distressed affects your relationships with your friends?

5. Has there ever been a time when you were upset or distressed and specifically decided not to post on Facebook?

  a. How did you come to that decision?

  b. What did you do instead?

6. When you are feeling upset or distressed, how do you decide whether or not to post a Facebook status about it?

  a. Please tell me about times when you were upset and decided not to post, and times when you were upset and decided to post.

  b. How do you determine whether or not to make a post?

7. Is there anything else that you would like to add about your experience of posting a status on Facebook when you are feeling upset or distressed or your decision not to post on Facebook when feeling upset or distressed?

This interview was designed to last no longer than thirty minutes, and no less than ten. The researcher chose this length for the interview in order to be able to obtain the information needed from the adolescents while at the same time not overwhelming the participants with a lengthy data collection process.

Analysis

Thematic analysis was the method used to analyze the qualitative data that was gathered. Thematic analysis is a method that identifies, analyzes and reports patterns or themes the emerge from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this study, the data that was analyzed included the responses to the interview questions. As previously mentioned, this study sought to explore and better understand an adolescent's experience of posting a status on Facebook when distressed. Thematic analysis fit well with this study because the researcher searched for connecting threads and patterns among excerpts from the transcribed interviews that were placed within categories, and then continued to find connections between the various categories, which were called themes (Seidman, 2006).

To begin this process, the researcher first became familiar with the data by transcribing the interviews and reading the transcriptions multiple times. While doing so, the researcher marked excerpts from that data that were of interest. Once the researcher was familiar with the data, creating initial codes of the data then began. Coding is a part of the analysis process because it organizes the data into meaningful groups (Braun & Clarke, 2006). These initial codes were derived from the researcher placing excerpts from the data into these meaningful categories, which were then called codes.

Next, the researcher began to search for themes within the codes. This phase re-focused the analysis to the broader level of themes rather than codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The

researcher did this by looking for connective threads among the experiences of the participants that had been interviewed in the study. Essentially, in this step, the researcher started to analyze the identified codes and consider how different codes may combine to form an overarching theme.

Lastly, the researcher then reviewed the themes that were identified then named each theme. In reviewing the identified themes, there were some themes that did not have enough data to support them and other themes that needed to be grouped together given their similarities (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The step of reviewing the identified themes provides the researcher with an opportunity to narrow down the data in order to understand the shared experience of multiple participants. Naming and defining the themes identified the essence of each theme and determined what aspect of the data each theme captured (Braun & Clarke, 2006). At the end of this process, clearly defined themes emerged from the data that was collected. These themes gave a detailed, comprehensive look at the experience of adolescents who post Facebook statuses when distressed.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

This study explored adolescents' experiences of posting statuses on Facebook when they were upset or distressed. To capture this experience, ten adolescent participants completed a semi-structured interview. The interview questions were designed to answer the following research questions: 1) What prompts or precludes adolescents to self-disclose on a Facebook status when distressed; 2) How are adolescents' peer relationships affected by self-disclosing or choosing not to self-disclose on Facebook when distressed ; and 3) What do adolescents experience after having self-disclosed or choosing not to self-disclose on Facebook when distressed.. Thematic analysis was used to code and analyze the data. The data was coded by transcribing the interviews, reading the transcriptions multiple times to become familiar with the data, organizing the data into meaningful codes, combining the codes into themes and then naming the themes. At the end of this process, clear themes from the transcripts were evident. These themes were related to the decision making process in posting statuses, concerns of privacy, impacts on peer relationships, perceptions and feelings of others, sense of community and support systems.

Decision making process in posting statuses

Seven out of ten participants stated that they decided what to post based on a scale of how important the event was. Many of the participants spoke about deciding to post a Facebook status if they considered an event to be big or important. Whether or not an event was considered big or important seemed to be unique to each participant. Events that were considered to be big or important by participants ranged from interesting experiences, visiting a new and interesting place or an event that resulted in feeling extremely happy.

Participant 10, Male: "I usually decide what to post whether it's like a big- not necessarily a big thing but something that's noteworthy. Or, an experience that I had"

Participant 9, Female: "When I do, it's usually just something like, it's like a big thing that just happened and I want to let people know."

Participant 6, Female: "…only if I went somewhere really great and I took pictures. Or, I'm just like extremely happy or something big happened I would usually use that"

Participant 5, Female: "Like, if it's important I guess. If it's an important event that happens, I'll post it."

When the question about posting Facebook statuses was focused specifically on doing so when upset or distressed, a decision making process was an evident theme as well. Five out of 10 of the participants stated that they had posted a Facebook status when upset or distressed. Of these five,, four were female. In contrast, five participants stated that they do not post statuses on Facebook when upset or distressed, and two of these participants were Female. Four out of five of the participants that posted a Facebook status while upset or distressed did not use posting a status as their first way to express themselves. For these participants, posting a status on Facebook about their distress was a supplemental way to express their distress. One participant stated that they posted on twitter about being distressed before doing so on Facebook and another spoke about texting friends about what was distressing them before self-disclosing on a Facebook status. Wanting to inform others of what was going on in their lives emerged as a factor in the decision making process of a participant posting a status on Facebook when upset or distressed. Participants revealed that self-disclosing on a Facebook status was an effective way to let multiple people know what was upsetting them.

Participant 9, Female: "I don't know, I guess I wanted to let people know what was going on."

Participant 6, Female: "Well, if I was like, to lose a game or something, maybe my family that I don't see much would see it and they'd know the status of what I'm doing."

Privacy

Privacy arose as a theme in the instances of those participants who did post on Facebook when feeling distressed or upset. For example, four of the participants who did post on Facebook when upset or distressed limited the ability of who was able to see this post. In order to limit who is able to view a status post, a user must customize the settings on their status post before publishing the post. A user has the option to block certain users or groups of users from seeing any particular status of their choosing. Participants discussed doing this as a way to preserve their privacy.

Participant 5, Female: "Yea, I don't let my family see it because they would freak out. They would be like, "What's wrong, are you OK?".

Participant 6, Female stated: "Yea, I only allow my [Facebook] friends to see it." When asked to elaborate she stated, "It's just privacy. I don't want strangers or like worldwide people seeing it."

Of the five out of ten participants decided not to post a Facebook status when distressed or upset, privacy was also a common theme in their decision to not make such a post. A majority of the participants who did not post this type of status on Facebook cited not wanting to have their private business on a large network such as Facebook.

Participant 10, Male: "It's just um, the- I guess like my line between public and private things" When asked to clarify this participant continued by stating "It's usually like

family. Family issues are really private, unless it's like a big thing and um, public is basically just like, um, like little small tidbits of things." He went on to further state, "I guess I thought of it, and then I thought that they don't need to know all about my life and stuff. It doesn't need to be that inclusive"

Participant 8, Male: It's my private business. I don't want to put that on Facebook."

Participant 3, Male: "I didn't want to like, you know, bring my problems into a big network where everyone could see that". This participant continues to say "Yea, just trying to keep private".

Impact on peer relationships

Nine of the participants discussed the impact that posting statuses on Facebook in general has on their peer relationships. Five participants discussed a positive impact. Participants considered positive impacts as being able to express your feelings to your peers, being able to share what you are doing outside of school with your peers and the facilitation of staying connected with friends.

Participant 5, Female: "I guess they can see if you, like, indirectly say something about them. They can figure it out. So, it's kind of a way of getting out your feelings without them having to know." She went on to further elaborate, "That's a positive effect, I guess."

Participant 10, Male: "I think that it has a pretty big impact because I get to see all of the things that you do in and out of school. Because, like if you go to DC and you go to a museum, they get to see that if you take pictures and post stuff."

Participant 7, Male: "…I would say that it brings you closer because they just know what you're doing and what you're thinking."

Participant 6, Female: "…that's the way we [friends] stay connected and a way that once you post something I know what's going on and I post something, we communicate through that sometimes."

Participant 9, Female: "I think it's [relationship with peers] better because you can get to know what they're doing and like stuff that's important to them."

Participant 3, Male, discussed the possibility for both a positive and negative impact on peer relationships. "I guess, if you post something really nice about somebody, it could brighten their day, make them a lot happier. If you post something really mean about somebody, they might get really sad." In this instance, whether or not the status had a negative or positive effect on a peer relationship was dependent on whether or not what was posted on the status was something nice or something mean.

Two participants then discussed the possibility of posting Facebook statuses having a negative impact on peer relationships.

Participant 4, Female: "Well, I mean if you say something like, dumb or something they don't agree with they obviously don't agree with it and say something about it, and maybe like argue about it or something."

Participant 1, Female: "…if you're going to post something bad, and like, tag their names and they see it, it can like, ruin your friendship. And, sometimes if you like, have really close friends and if you post something bad like, if you post a picture and they don't feel pleased with it, it can also, like, affect your friendship with them, because you both will have arguments about it because they don't feel comfortable."

All of the participants in the study spoke about the impact that deciding to post statuses on Facebook when distressed or the decision not to post had on their relationships with their

peers. All of the participants who posted a status on Facebook when distressed stated that doing

so increased their offline communication with their peers. Offline communication included any

type of communication that participants had with their peers that was not on the Internet. For

example, this may have included conversations in person, phone calls or text messaging.

> Participant 7, Male: "…I mean somebody posts something and they like, ask you about it
>
> in person and it becomes a conversation like, if there was a problem like definitely they
>
> would ask more in detail."
>
> Participant 6, Female: "Increased it [offline communication] a lot. Because, besides me
>
> and my friends posting it, we see peoples post, and other peoples days so it just gives you
>
> so much to talk about."
>
> Participant 9, Female: "…usually like something will happen, but I won't tell them and
>
> then I'll post and they'll be like "oh want went on?" Or something like that."

Similarly, all of the participants who reported that they do not post on Facebook when

distressed spoke about increases in offline communication with their peers. The offline

communication here differed from that of those who did post statuses on Facebook when upset

or distressed because the offline communication was occurring in the place of posting a status on

Facebook when upset or distressed. In the former situation, offline communication increased

after posting a status on Facebook when upset or distressed, as a result of doing so.

> Participant 10, Male: "I kind of just talk to people about it like my closest friends, I talk
>
> to about it. Like my parents and people, other than just tell everyone [on a Facebook
>
> status]"
>
> Participant 2, Female: "Yea so I can talk to them [friends] about my problems instead of
>
> like posting them on Facebook"

Participant 1, Female: "Well, I talked to friends. I tried to socialize more and talked to family about stuff. Instead of not, like, keeping stuff to myself I try my best to like, express myself to my family, try to have a family relationship with them, and go outside and play instead. Or, I'll call someone like a friend. Yea, and talk to them.

When asked what he does rather than posting a Facebook status when distressed, Participant 8, Male stated: "I don't know, talk to somebody. My parents or my friends".

Three of the participants who posted on Facebook while distressed or upset described how doing so created new relationships for them. These new relationships were created as a result of participants building relationships with people that they did not already consider themselves to have a relationship with as a result of these people reaching out to the participant after he or she posted a status on Facebook when they were upset.

Participant 4, Female: "I guess because if people with the same problem, they'll talk to you about it and then you'll become new friends with those people."

Participant 5, Female: "Yea, because some people that I don't really talk to, they talk to, could see it and they'll be like "are you OK?" and I've had brief conversations with them"

Participant 6, Female: "…I may have friended someone, but totally forgot about them because in a way that when you stop talking to them, you become very distant, you have no relationship in a way. So, when you post something or they post something, and you have that connection you just get back into that relationship and start communicating again"

Perceptions of others/others feelings

Participants who chose not to post on Facebook when distressed and those who did post when distressed shared about their experiences of being concerned with how others would view or receive their posts. Four out of five of the participants who did post statuses on Facebook when distressed discussed other people's perceptions and feelings as a determining factor for times when they were distressed and made the decision not to post. It was common that if a participant felt as though another person would not care or would become upset about what was distressing or upsetting to them, then they would chose not to post about that particular distressing event.

Participant 9, Male: "…If it was definitely not nice and I wouldn't want anyone to like take it the wrong way or something.

Participant 6, Female: "I was just like, I was really mad and I was like the world doesn't need to know my problems. So, I just kept it in." This participant went on to further elaborate "…like if I get in a fight with my friend or my sister, you know with friends and siblings it can be resolved like, the next day, so the whole world doesn't need to know that I got in s fight with my sister."

Participant 7, Male: "If it's just like pointless or nobody's going to care about it nobody needs to know."

Participant 5, Female: "…I just see who it affects and who can see it. Like, if you can see it or not, if I don't want someone to see it then I won't say it or, if its more of a personal matter than I won't do anything. I'll tell people that I'm actually closer to." This participant went on to further elaborate: "…if I think of their point of view and they don't

care, then I won't do anything. If I'm probably like the only person that cares I won't do

anything."

When the participants who chose not to post on Facebook when distressed were asked about how

their peer relationships were affected, four out of five discussed their peers' perceptions.

Participant 1, Female: "…So, if you really have something bad I don't think you should

Post it on Facebook because it's not safe because other people can view it and they can

talk about it and it affects others because they can probably be facing the same thing as

you, and it can be a mockery to them and they can get upset about it and it also comes

back to you"

Participant 8, Male: "I don't know, that's just embarrassing for everybody if you make

that public".

Participant 3, Male: "It was, you know like, probably not for other people to see. Like,

you know, kind of uncomfortable for them to see that". This participant went on to

further elaborate: "Seeing other people post emotional statuses? It can be kind of

awkward when you see something like "So and So did this", and you're just kind of like

"Ok, I don't think that was for me to see, it was for somebody else". "That's why I kind

of use text, or something like that".

Participant 10, Male: "Um, I kind of just go through a check list. Like, public, private,

does it like apply to me or is it someone else? Like, not necessarily like cyber bullying,

but something I might know about somebody that they won't want people to know about.

Yea, stuff like that.

Sense of Community

Three out of five of the participants who posted a status on Facebook when they were upset or distressed stated that they were expecting some kind of response on their status from their Facebook friends. These participants stated that they were expecting responses varying in forms from likes, comments or phone calls. Four out of five of the participants who posted a status on Facebook when upset or distressed went into further detail about the type of responses that they did receive, how that made them feel or what they were expecting from their friends.

Participant 6, Female: "…the situation goes a lot better if you know someone is going through it as well. So, when you post a status and someone likes it that means that the situation has happened to them before or something of that type. It's just like you know that someone else has had it, so it sort of calms you down."

Participant 5, Female discussed how her friends texting her about her Facebook status met her expectation for a response: "I guess because it showed they cared" she then went on to further elaborate that "It just, like, shows that I feel like someone cares. So, I guess it kind of relives the stress." This participant then revealed that when she posted a status when she was upset she was hoping that her friends would "Like, just make it better I guess. Or, support me."

Participant 4, Female: "I remember one time, I posted bout getting my braces tightened and my mouth hurt so bad and then people were like laughing about it. It just, like, helped because they were, like, laughing about it and it made me laugh, it made the situation better I guess." This participant went on to further state that the responses that she got on her status met her expectations. "Yea, because it wasn't ignored. It was like, seen and stuff."

Participant 9, Female: "I guess they [friends] would come and she what was happening, have concern."

Support System

Four out of five of the participants who did not post a status on Facebook when upset or distressed discussed having either family or friends that they would express their distress to rather than posting a status on Facebook. These participants made it clear that they did not post statuses on Facebook when they were upset or distressed due to having family and friends that they were able to get support from.

Participant 1, Female: "…I didn't do it because I talk to my family a lot and they give me advice and all that, so I don't do that." She went on to further elaborate, "Well, I talked to my grandpa. And, he like, told me about Facebook and the dangers that can happen on it, and just by looking at it, I saw that he was right about that…".

Participant 2, Female: "Told them [offline friends] what happened, it was kind of like we had a sentimental conversation about it. Like, people that I trust, I'll tell you this and that. And, certain people I'll just be like 'well this happened and I'm feeling a certain way about it.' But, people that I trust, I'll go to them and I'll be like "hey, this happened and I'm feeling a certain way about it" and we'll have a conversation about it."

Participant 10, Male: "I kind of just talk to people about it like my closet friends, I talk to about it. Like, my parents and people, other than just tell everyone."

Participant 8, Male: "I don't know, talk to somebody. My parents or my friends."

Summary

After the data was coded using thematic analysis, multiple themes were evident. There was a clear decision making process that adolescents used in determining what to post on a Facebook status and whether or not to post a Facebook status when upset or distressed. The concept of privacy arose as a concern for both participants who did post statuses on Facebook when upset and those who did not. An impact on peer relationships was also a theme, as all participants spoke about how posting in this manner or choosing not to had some type of impact on their peer relationships, including connections to maintaining relationships. Perception of others, sense of community, and support systems were also themes that arose from the data collection.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

This study aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of adolescents' public self-disclosures on Facebook when feeling distressed or upset. It was hoped that in doing so, current research on adolescents' self-disclosures on Facebook would be expanded upon. As discussed in the results section, multiple common themes emerged that gave insight into what prompts or precludes adolescents to self-disclose on a Facebook status when distressed, how adolescents make the decision to self-disclose or not to self-disclose when they are distressed, and what adolescents experience after having self-disclosed or withheld from disclosing on Facebook when distressed Impact on peer relationships, privacy concerns, perceptions of others, and sense of community were themes that surfaced from both participants that did post statuses when they were upset or distressed along with those who did not. In this chapter, the findings of the study will be discussed and examined, as well as compared to existing literature on adolescents and self-disclosure and adolescent self-disclosure on Facebook. This chapter will also discuss limitations to the study, clinical implications and suggestions for future research.

Summary of Findings

The data collected in the study shed understanding on the decision making process that an adolescent goes through when posting a status on Facebook when upset or distressed, their experience of doing so, how doing so affects their peer relationships, and the support that they feel when they decide to do so. The data collected also captured the experience of the decision making process of adolescents who decided not to post a Facebook status when upset or distressed, their experiences with choosing not to post such statuses, how their peer relationships were affected as well as what they do instead of posting a status when upset or distressed. The use of social penetration theory as a guiding framework for this study aided in the understanding

of the motivations supporting disclosure on Facebook statuses, especially in regards to how doing so or not doing so affected the adolescent's interpersonal relationships.

Of the five participants who did post statuses on Facebook when distressed, four of these were female. Of the five participants who did not post statuses on Facebook when distressed, only two were female. Results indicated that female adolescents may be more likely to self-disclose about being distressed on a Facebook status than male adolescents. This finding is consistent with previous research that has explored gender differences in self-disclosing on Facebook. Hampton et al. (2012) found that women make status updates more often than men. While the Hampton et al. study did not specifically explore adolescent behavior on social-networking sites, these findings were in line with those in the current study. In a study exploring adolescents' experiences of belonging and self-disclosure online, Davis (2012) also found that adolescent females were more likely to engage in self-disclosure online than adolescent males.

It was evident from the data that there is a decision-making process that adolescents go through when deciding whether or not to post a Facebook status. It appeared that adolescents determine whether or not to post a Facebook status depending on how important they considered the event or topic that they are posting about to be. What makes an event important enough to post about was unique for each participant. When the question specified about posting a status on Facebook when upset or distressed, the findings in this study indicated that having a way in which to inform others of what was going on in their lives was a factor in the decision making process. What was going on in a participant's life when upset or distressed ranged from current emotional states, emotional states following events or reactions to events. There was also a range in the severity of distress that participants described. Some participants spoke about severely distressing events such as the loss of a family member, while some participants described

distressing events such as losing a sporting game. Prior research done by Mango, Taylor and Greenfield (2012) found that for college students, expressing one's current emotional state dominated the use of Facebook's status-update tool. While the study examined college students, the findings seem applicable to the current study, which examined a slightly younger population. The data also revealed that for those participants that did post on Facebook when distressed, self-disclosing on Facebook was not the first way that they expressed their distress. Posting on Facebook was a supplemental way that adolescents expressed themselves. Participants discussed expressing themselves to friends or self-disclosing on another social-networking site before posting a status on Facebook.

The ways that others perceive their posting of a Facebook status when they are upset or distressed was a topic that was raised by both participants who did post such statuses and those that did not. For those participants who did choose to post on Facebook when they were upset or distressed, how others would perceive or feel about the status was a determining factor for them when deciding whether or not they should make a post when they are feeling distressed and upset. For example, there were times when these participants would choose not to post when they were upset or distressed, although they stated that they do post on Facebook statuses when they are upset or distressed. This gave insight into the fact that participants who do post these types of statuses go through a process of deciding which statuses about being distressed or upset are actually posted. Participants discussed choosing not to post when they felt as though others would not care about whatever they were experiencing. Participants also talked about how before posting a status when they were upset or distressed, they would think about who the status would affect and whether or not another person's feelings would be hurt before making the decision to post a status.

Participants who did not choose to post a status on Facebook discussed being aware of how others may be uncomfortable seeing a status that they posted when they were upset or distressed. The fact that others may become uncomfortable or feel embarrassed about seeing such a status was a factor in these participants' reasoning for not posting a status when upset or distressed. Some participants also talked about how others may become upset from seeing their status posted when upset or distressed, and in order to avoid upsetting others, they chose not to make this type of status post. A previous study done by Baker, Psych and White (2011) explored why some adolescents choose not to use social-networking sites. This study discovered that one of the reasons that adolescents are not using social-networking sites is because of their friends' influences. While this study explored reasoning behind adolescents' not using social-networking sites in their entirety, the findings lend insight into how friends' influences affect adolescents' behaviors in regards to social networking, as evidenced by participants in the current study being concerned about how their friends would view their posting behaviors. This theme that arose from the data indicated that these adolescents were thoughtful about how their posts may affect their peers who are able to view their status post, and were not impulsively self-disclosing on Facebook.

Participants who did post statuses on Facebook when distressed highlighted the sense of community they felt after they shared on a Facebook status and received feedback. Feeling as though they were not alone, and that others could relate to them and what they were going through was a common feeling that participants expressed experiencing when they received responses to the status that they posted. Participants noted that their situation seemed to get better when they knew that others went through the same thing that they were experiencing. Previous research that explored adolescents' use of instant messaging as a means of emotional relief found

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that instant messaging between distressed adolescents and their peers may provide emotional

relief and contribute to the well-being of the individual (Dolev-Cohen & Barak, 2013). Although

the study explored the use of communicating online through instant messaging rather than

communicating through Facebook, in both the previous study and the current one it is evident

that for adolescents, expressing themselves when distressed online can provide emotional relief.

The act of friends commenting and liking the statuses of participants in the study let them know

that others understood what they were going through or perhaps had experienced the same

distress before. Participants also stated that it was evident that others cared about them when they

left feedback on the status that they posted. These findings support previous research done by

Davis (2012) which found that adolescents use intimate online exchanges to engage in self-

disclosure. Intimate exchanges in the previous study reflected a defining characteristic of

adolescent friendships that played an important role in helping adolescents to articulate and

receive feedback on their identities. Results of the current study reflected adolescents' using

intimate disclosures such as posting a status when upset or distressed to gain feedback, as

evidenced by the number of participants who spoke about receiving feedback on their statuses

that were posted during times they were upset. Kim, Eun and Lee (2011) discovered that

Facebook friends are more likely to provide support when they know that a user is in need of

support. Facebook friends are able to recognize this need for support only when such need is

properly communicated through self-disclosure facilitated by honest-self presentation. Users are

then likely to receive support from Facebook friends, which could be beneficial to their

subjective well-being. The current study upholds the prior findings as well. The present study

found that when participants honestly expressed being distressed or upset on Facebook, they

received feedback. Some participants spoke about how this affected their social well-being, by reporting that they felt better and less stressed after receiving feedback on their status.

Both participants who post statuses on Facebook when upset or distressed and those who do not spoke about the importance of privacy. The participants who did choose to post statuses on Facebook when they were upset or distressed stated that there were times when they were upset or distressed and chose not to post due to concerns of privacy. Essentially, these participants were comfortable with posting statues when they were upset or distressed on Facebook, but still were making a conscious decision about who they allowed to see the event. Participants protected their privacy on the statuses that they posted when they were distressed or upset by limiting people who could view the status. Participants discussed limiting their statuses from family members in order to not upset or alarm their family members as well as limiting their status to only being able to be seen by their Facebook friends rather than any member of Facebook. This finding was consistent with findings of a previous study that compared Facebook disclosure and privacy in adolescents and adults. The previous study (Christofides et al. 2012) found that adults were significantly less aware of the consequences of disclosure on Facebook than adolescents. The researchers in this study attributed this finding to the fact that adolescents are developing their identity and may be concerned about keeping certain aspects of themselves from parents and other authority figures, while still sharing with friends. The previous findings are in keeping with the current study, which found that some adolescents chose to limit the family members that were able to see their Facebook status when they were upset or distressed in order to protect their personal privacy.

For those who chose not to post a Facebook status when upset or distressed, wanting to protect their privacy emerged as a clear factor contributing in their decision not to make this type

of Facebook post. Participants discussed distressing events being private matters that they do not feel comfortable making public on a network such as Facebook. Multiple participants mentioned distressing issues or events that involved family members as something that they feel is too private to post on Facebook. Participants who chose to protect their privacy and not post a status on Facebook when upset or distressed utilized support systems as a way to express their distress. These support systems included family members, friends or both. Participants stated that they would reach out to friends and family and talk to them about what is distressing or upsetting them, and have a conversation about it. It was clear that these participants felt more comfortable talking to friends and family in person about being upset rather than posting a status where multiple people would have the ability to view it. These particular participants are able to get support and feedback through conversations with friends or family. Baker, Psych and White (2011) found that one of the reasons that adolescents choose not to use social networking sites is because they have a preference for other types of communication, a prominent one being face-to-face communication. While this study did not specifically look at communication through status posting on the social networking sites, these findings support the findings of the current study, which revealed that some adolescents prefer face-to-face communication rather than communicating online.

Whether or not a participant chooses to post a status on Facebook when upset or distressed has an impact on their peer relationships. Findings in this study indicated that for those participants who do post statuses on Facebook when upset or distressed, doing so increased their offline communication with their peers, which contributed to having a positive impact on their peer relationships. In a previous study that looked at online and offline social networks of emerging adults, it was found that the use of social-networking sites was integrated with both the

concerns an emerging adult may be experiencing offline as well as people from emerging adults offline lives (Subrahmanyam et al., 2008). The emerging adults in the previous study seemed to be using social networking sites to maintain interconnections with people in their lives. The participants in the current study stated that when they post a status on Facebook when they are upset or distressed, their friends will often reach out to them offline, which will lead to having a more in depth conversation about the topic, which supports the previous research findings that using social networking sites can interconnect offline and online lives.

Findings from the current study indicated that the peer relationships of adolescents who do post statuses when upset or distressed are impacted due to the fact that new peer relationships are created. This finding supports previous research by Park, Jin and Jin (2011) which found that Facebook users upload and edit their personal information and make posts or comments with the hope of forming new relationships. The current study expands and supports this previous research by finding this can be true for adolescents who posted statuses on Facebook when upset. Participants in the current study discussed how when they did post a status on Facebook when they were upset or distressed, a Facebook friend that they may not necessarily be close with may comment on their status if they had gone through or experienced a similar event or feeling as what the participant posted on their status. Participants described how this facilitated conversation and the formation of new relationships based on the fact that they had experienced the same event or feeling that caused them to be distressed or upset.

Interestingly, those who did not post a status on Facebook when upset or distressed also talked about how their offline communications were strengthened with their peers. Unlike their counterparts who saw increased communication in talking about being upset or distressed after making a Facebook post, these participants discussed how they initiated offline conversations

with their peers when they were upset or distressed rather than posting a status on Facebook about it. These participants stated that they would rather initiate these conversations with their close peers than post on Facebook for a multitude of their peers to see. Increased socialization and strengthening of their close peer relationships was a result of choosing not to post a status on Facebook when upset or distressed.

The findings in this study related to the impact on peer relationships were supported by the social penetration theory (Altman & Taylor, 1973). The theory provides a framework to describe the development and maintenance of peer relationships. This framework theory was fitting for this study, because the development and maintenance of interpersonal peer relationships is a developmental task for adolescents. Social penetration theory states that one way in which a relationship can be created and maintained is through the act of self-disclosure, which this study chose to examine in the context of posting statuses on Facebook when upset or distressed. Both the maintenance and creation of new relationships as a result of self-disclosure on a Facebook status was evidenced by the data collected in this study. For example, participants spoke about maintaining their current peer relationships while self-disclosing on Facebook when distressed or upset due to the fact that they were able to inform their friends of what was going on with them, offline communication was increased and participants felt a sense of community with their peers who left them feedback. This study also evidenced the fact that new interpersonal peer relationships were created as a result of self-disclosing on Facebook when upset or distressed, as was discussed above.

Study Limitations

One limitation to this study was the diversity of the sample. This study was limited to high-school students in the Northern Virginia Area. All of these students lived in suburban areas, which could possibly indicate somewhat similar lifestyles. The recruitment of the participants for this study was not a random sampling, which may have also limited the diversity of the sample. This study employed criterion and snow-ball sampling. It is possible that random sampling may have provided more representative data of adolescents. Along with the diversity of the sample, the sample size was also a limitation to the study. The researcher chose to have a modest sample size of ten participants in the study in order to gain insight into a small sample of adolescents. The small sample size required generalizing the findings of the study to a larger population. It is possible that with a larger sample size, this study may have yielded an even more comprehensive understanding than what was evidenced by such a small sample size. Another limitation of this study is the fact that the data were collected by self-report from the participants. It is possible that the participants' responses may have been subject to biases, incorrect estimates, faulty memories, and other similar findings (Subrahmanyam et al., 2008). The length and depth of the answers that the participants provided is another limitation to this study. Many of the participants did not go into great detail with their responses, even with the prompting of the follow up questions that were made possible due to the semi-structured format of the interview questions. It is probable that this may be a result of the age and developmental stage of the participants. The final limitation of this study is the varying degrees of distress that the participants in the study described having experienced and posted about on a Facebook status. The semi-structured interview that was used allowed the participants to describe an event that they considered to be distressing. This permitted the participants to define an event that was distressing to them

personally. A wide spectrum of distressing events with varying severity was a result of allowing participants this freedom. For example, some participants described distressing events related to losing a sporting event or arguing with siblings, while some described things that could be considered more severely distressing such as a death of a family member. It is possible that the varying levels of distress that were described may have had an impact on the results and the way that participants chose to self-disclose about the event on Facebook.

Clinical Implications

This study can be particularly helpful to clinicians that work with the adolescent population. As stated earlier, online communication in the adolescent population is at an all-time high. One way in which adolescents are communicating online is by self-disclosing, often through the social networking site Facebook. This study found that the act of self-disclosing on Facebook is something that most if not all adolescents are partaking in in some form or fashion, and 50 percent of this sample stated that they were doing so when upset or distressed. Those that did not post Facebook statuses when upset or distressed had experienced their peers doing so. There is a high probability that a clinician who is working with adolescents will encounter a client who either self-discloses on Facebook when upset or distressed or has experienced it by seeing others who are doing so.

The findings of this study will help clinicians have an understanding of adolescent disclosure on Facebook when they are upset or distressed, and why they choose to do so or choose not to do so. It will be helpful for clinicians to know and understand the possible ways that their clients are expressing themselves and their distress, and how this can potentially impact the way that they are feeling and their peer relationships. Adolescents are working to create and maintain relationships at this stage in their lives, and self-disclosure has an important role in

doing so. It is important for clinicians to be aware of what tasks adolescents are completing at this time in their lives, and how today's technology, specifically social networking sites such as Facebook, are providing options for adolescents to accomplish these tasks.

Future Research

This qualitative study provided inclusive insight into the experiences of adolescents' in terms of their self-disclosures on Facebook when upset or distressed. However, there is a need for continued research to replicate these findings as well as to continue to gain understanding into this topic.

Future research should expand on the sample size to include adolescents from city and rural areas. This will allow researchers to gain a broader understanding of adolescents' experiences, and will give insight into how living in different types of settings may impact self-disclosure on Facebook. Without this diversity in the sample of participants, it can only be speculated that adolescents in different types of living areas may have similar experiences with self-disclosure on Facebook when they are upset or distressed.

It would be beneficial to conduct this research on a specific sample of adolescents who are currently in distress as well as have Facebook profiles and the ability to self-disclose on the site. This would help to gain even more insight on this experience by specifically looking at participants who consider themselves to be currently distressed and their experiences with self-disclosing on Facebook about their distress. It may be helpful to recruit from participants who are currently receiving therapeutic treatment related to distress. Future research can further expand the current study by having a universal definition of distress that is stated and used at the beginning of the interview which will help to decrease the varying levels of distress that were unique to each participant. Each participant will then have a clear understanding of what type of

distressing events the researcher is seeking to examine and would enable researchers to study on-line self-disclosure in the context of various levels of distress.

Another direction for future research would be to expand from the social networking site Facebook to look at new and upcoming social networking sites that adolescents are now using. Numerous participants in this study spoke about Twitter and Instagram and self-disclosing on those sites as well as seeing their friends on these sites self-disclose about their personal lives. These sites are not as well-known as Facebook nor have as many users at this point in time, however adolescents are beginning to use these sites more and more along with Facebook. It may be beneficial to understand the self-disclosure on these sites when upset or distressed as well as with status posing on Facebook.

Conclusion

There are a multitude of adolescents who are active members of the social networking site Facebook. This study examined the experiences of ten adolescents who self-disclosed on Facebook statuses when upset or distressed, or chose not to but had experienced this type of self-disclosure from their Facebook friends. The participants in this study offered valuable insight into the decision making process of posting or not posting a Facebook status when upset or distressed, privacy concerns surrounding doing so, the impact posting or not posting had on peer relationships, the importance of perceptions of peers when deciding whether or not to post when upset or distressed as well as the sense of community that can be created for adolescents when they chose to post on Facebook when upset or distressed.

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