

DEDPSY PROFESSIONAL TRAINING PROGRAMME



THESIS

**An Investigation Into the Experiences of
Adolescents Using Social Media Technology**

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This thesis is dedicated to my wonderful daughter, Ophelia.

Abstract

Social media technology ¹(SMT) has become central to adolescent life with 96% of teenagers having a SMT profile (Coughlan, 2016). Previous literature has either investigated the discretely positive or negative implications for adolescent development or adopted a broad, quantitative approach lacking depth and validity. This qualitative study examined the experiences of adolescents who use SMT in a balanced, yet rich and detailed way. A constructivist-interpretive approach was adopted and 12 semi-structured interviews were conducted using a sample of 14-18 year olds and analysed through the 6-stage process of thematic analysis outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). The findings present a balanced, yet complex interaction between positive (e.g. feeling connected to friends and able to express true/ideal self) and negative (e.g. destruction of self-esteem/self-image and long-lasting feelings of distress) implications for adolescent wellbeing and development and offer a nuanced perspective on the use of SMT within this demographic, with suggestions for holistic support and intervention.

¹ For example, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and Twitter.

Summary

Part I: Major Literature Review

Part one begins with an introduction providing context and setting the scene. The main body of the literature review starts with an overview of social media technology (SMT) and its prevalence in the adolescent population, followed by a critical discussion of contrasting perspectives on adolescent development. The following section analyses theoretical perspectives concerning the effect of SMT on friendship and belonging in adolescence. Subsequently, the review explores the positive and negative effect SMT may have on the *self* and adolescent identity. Next, the negative implications for social and emotional wellbeing and mental health (SEWBMH) are examined, including effects on psychopathology, sleep, SMT addiction and cyberbullying. Finally, the rationale for the current study is outlined along with its relevance to the role of the educational psychologist (EP). The chapter concludes with a set of research aims and questions.

Part II: Empirical Paper

Part two is an account of the current study, which explores the experiences of adolescents using SMT. It begins with an overview of relevant research, the rationale for the study and research aims. The methodology is outlined, which details the interpretative approach used, the 12 semi-structured interviews conducted and thematic analysis performed. Subsequently, the results and discussion section outlines the 5 main themes and subthemes identified and offers a critical discussion of the findings in relation to existing research. Finally, the study's contributions to knowledge are outlined, the limitations of the current study are proposed and considerations for future research and implications for the practice of educational psychology are summarised.

Part III: Major Reflective Account

Part three provides a reflexive account of the research process from the perspective of the research-practitioner. It explores the methodological issues encountered, outlines the researcher's contributions to knowledge in further detail and provides greater insight into the implications for future research and the practice of educational psychology.

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List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation in alphabetical order	Meaning
ASD	Autistic spectrum disorder
CBT	Cognitive behavioural therapy
DfE	Department for Education
EHCP	Education health and care plan
EP	Educational psychologist
HFA	High-functioning autism
HI	Hearing impairment/hearing impaired
IPA	Interpretative phonological analysis
MIU	Maladaptive internet use
PIU	Pathological internet use
PSHE	Personal, social and health education
SEN	Special educational needs
SEWBMH	Social and emotional wellbeing and mental health
SMT	Social media technology
TA	Thematic analysis

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Part I

Major Literature Review

1.0 The Literature Review

1.1 Structure of the Literature Review

The literature review will commence with a brief introduction to the ubiquity of social media technology (SMT) use in the adolescent population with relevant statistics to illustrate the prevalence and most popular SMT sites/applications (apps). This is outlined at the beginning in order to provide some context to the central role of SMT within the lives of adolescents, thereby asserting the relevance of the topic area and setting the scene. Following this, there is a critical discussion of contrasting theoretical models of adolescent development. This highlights the defining characteristics and equips the reader with a critical summary of the theoretical and psychological underpinnings of adolescence. This provides an appropriate background to the following section, which considers the centrality of friendship and belonging in adolescence and makes links with SMT use. In doing so, various theoretical perspectives are discussed which facilitates a more critical understanding of the relationship between SMT use and feelings of friendship and belonging in adolescence. The concept of belonging and group identity leads succinctly into the next section concerning the relationship between the development of the *self*/adolescent identity and SMT. This section critically discusses SMT as both a vehicle for healthy identity development and as a potential threat to positive self-image so that a balanced and informed perspective emerges. Finally, associated with the theme of self-image, the literature review addresses the wealth of research concerning the negative impact SMT may be having on social and emotional wellbeing and mental health (SEWBMH). Within this, implications for psychopathology, sleep and SMT addiction are evaluated, as well as research surrounding cyberbullying.

This review builds the argument that there is a gap in the literature with regards to exploring adolescents' views on their SMT-use in a balanced and holistic manner using rich and detailed qualitative research methods. It will culminate in the rationale for the current study alongside the relevance to the practice of educational psychology and the research questions and aims. The aim of the research is to contribute additional knowledge to the existing research base by exploring the positive and negative experiences of adolescents using SMT in the hope of uncovering possible considerations for adolescents, their families and educational professionals.

1.2 Searches and Sources of Information

The literature was reviewed and compiled through the use of various online search facilities including Google Scholar, Science Direct, PsyInfo and WileyInterScience. The key words entered were *social media*, *social networking sites*, *adolescence*, *social media and identity*, and *social media and mental health*. Other relevant documentation such as government papers and pertinent news reports were sourced using generic internet search engines. Key textbooks on adolescence, identity and social media were utilised. The literature search was completed in January 2017 so research conducted after this date is not included. Whilst the review provides an extensive overview of relevant research and documentation in the domain of adolescence and SMT, it was not possible to carry out an exhaustive review. Therefore, the research deemed most pertinent to the current study is presented.

1.3 Social Media Use in Adolescence

1.3.1 Ubiquity of SMT within the adolescent population

SMT can be described as “websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking” (Oxford Living Dictionaries, n.d.). Recent longitudinal research from Ofcom (2016a) suggested that use of SMT is almost ubiquitous in the adolescent population. They asserted that 91% of 16-24 year-olds have a social media profile and of those young people, 44% visit SMT sites more than ten times a day and 95% visit at least once a day. Furthermore, Ofcom (2016b) suggested that 72% of 12-15 year-olds who go online have a SMT profile. Indeed, this figure is likely to be larger in 14-18 year-olds. For example, Madden et al. (2013) suggested that approximately 82% of American online teenagers have a SMT account and Coughlan (2016) reported that 96% of UK 13-18 year-olds have a SMT profile and this is a large part of their every day life. Lenhart (2015) suggested that this is facilitated by the widespread availability of smartphones and asserted that 24% of American teenagers go online more or less continuously throughout the day.

It appears that SMT has become central to the lives of the majority of young people in the UK and beyond (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010; Maczewski, 2002; Pascoe, 2009; Subrahmanyam, Reich, Waechter, & Espinoza, 2008). SMT has certainly experienced a meteoric rise since the first application was launched in the late 1990's (Van Dijck, 2013) and its ubiquity may reflect the significant value society has placed on such technology. The following section will provide background information on the major SMT sites and/or apps and illuminate the key features of each.

1.3.2 Background information on SMT sites popular with the adolescent population

Facebook



Cambridge Dictionary (n.d.) defined *Facebook* as, “the name of a website where you can show information about yourself and communicate with groups of friends”. Facebook enables users to create online profiles and post information, updates, links to demonstrate areas of interest, photographs, videos and conversations (Knight-McCord et al., 2016). Posts can be public - available for all to see, semi-restricted - available for Facebook friends and friends of friends to view, or restricted - only available for Facebook friends to view (Facebook Help Centre, n.d.). Facebook also has a private messaging facility in which users can send private messages, links, photos and/or videos to one or more users (Messenger, n.d.). Facebook allows users to connect with friends and acquaintances by asking for and accepting *friend requests*. Knight-McCord et al. (2016) have suggested that many individuals feel a drive to add as many *friends* as possible in order to feel connected and well regarded.

Instagram



Knight-McCord et al. (2016) defined *Instagram* as “an application that allows users to take pictures and videos and share them on a variety of social networking platforms” (p. 22). Instagram also equips users with the ability to instantaneously share key moments in a visual way and manipulate photographs and videos through various filters and techniques (Hu, Manikonda & Kambhampati, 2014). Whilst it does not enable the range of sharing activities Facebook facilitates, Rainie, Brenner and Purcell (2012) have argued that photographs and videos are increasingly central to social media activity.

Snapchat



Similar to Facebook and Instagram, Snapchat is also a photo-sharing app. However, it also enables users to send photographs or videos privately to one or more friends with the unique feature that anything shared dissolves in a matter of seconds (Utz, Muscanell & Khalid, 2015). Utz, Muscanell and Khalid, (2015) suggested that Snapchat is associated with more personal and “intimate forms of sharing” and is therefore linked to “sexting” (p. 141). Indeed, the benefits noted by its users have included the elevated sense of privacy in comparison to Facebook or Instagram; however the photos or videos shared can be captured via screenshot before they dissolve meaning that privacy cannot be assured (Utz, Muscanell & Khalid, 2015).

Twitter



Twitter was conceived as a microblogging site, which enables users to send short messages or *tweets* to a networked audience of *followers* (Marwick & Boyd, 2011). Users can opt to *follow* as many other users as they wish and may *retweet* the posts of other users in order for their *followers* to read it (Knight-McCord et al., 2016). Unlike Instagram and Snapchat, Twitter encourages users to write a series of short messages to illuminate their thoughts or behaviour at that specific time. These can range from humorous reflections to commentary on news and current affairs (Marwick & Boyd, 2011).

The following section will provide data concerning the popularity of each of the sites presented in order to provide further context regarding the nature of adolescents’ SMT activities.

1.3.3 Popularity of various SMT sites and applications within the adolescent population

Research has suggested that adolescents now prefer to engage in a range of SMT activities and use different sites/applications (apps) in order to diversify their mode of interaction (Lenhart, 2015). Whilst Facebook is still popular, adolescents in the UK have begun to increasingly focus on Instagram and Snapchat since 2013. For example, Lenhart (2015) reported that Facebook usage by UK teenagers dropped 1% between 2013 and 2014; Instagram usage increased by 36% (from 16%) and 26% of teenagers used Snapchat in 2015. They also revealed that Twitter appeared to have lost popularity within this demographic with a decrease in usage of 9%.

It is argued that young people have been socialised into SMT (Best, Manktelow & Taylor, 2014) and, as a result, experience a less tangible perspective on the “choice” surrounding whether or not to sign-up to SMT sites and *conform* than older generations who grew up without such technology. However, given these statistics, it is suggested that the attraction of SMT appears so magnetic in adolescence that this cannot represent the complete picture.

The following section will provide a critical summary of differing perspectives on adolescent development. This will convey pertinent information concerning the defining characteristics of adolescence and provide a contextual framework for the exploration of adolescents’ SMT experiences.

1.4 Adolescence

Gross (1987) describes adolescence as time of considerable change:

Youth has a certain unique quality in a person's life; it is a bridge between childhood and adulthood. Youth is a time of radical change—the great body changes accompanying puberty, the ability of the mind to search one's own intentions and the intentions of others, the suddenly sharpened awareness of the roles society has offered for later life. (Gross, 1987, p. 47).

Indeed, there is a consensus among a number of psychological perspectives that adolescence is a *period of considerable change*. However, the way in which adolescence is contextualised and the main points of reference vary considerably between perspectives. This is explored in further detail below.

1.4.1 Theoretical Models of Adolescent Development

1.4.1.1 Steinberg's (2005) model of cognitive and affective development in adolescence

Offering a cognitive perspective, Steinberg (2005) suggested that adolescent development involves a gradually intensifying need to self-regulate emotions

and behaviour at an increasing distance from care-givers/other significant adults who, typically, would have provided and modelled structure and guidance in this regard during childhood. Steinberg (2005) explained that this is a period of particular vulnerability “because developing brain, behavioral and cognitive systems mature at different rates and under the control of both common and independent biological processes” (p. 69). He suggested that adolescence should be divided into three distinct stages (early, middle and late adolescence) each of which poses differing vulnerabilities and risks (Steinberg, 2005). This is illustrated in figure 1 below:

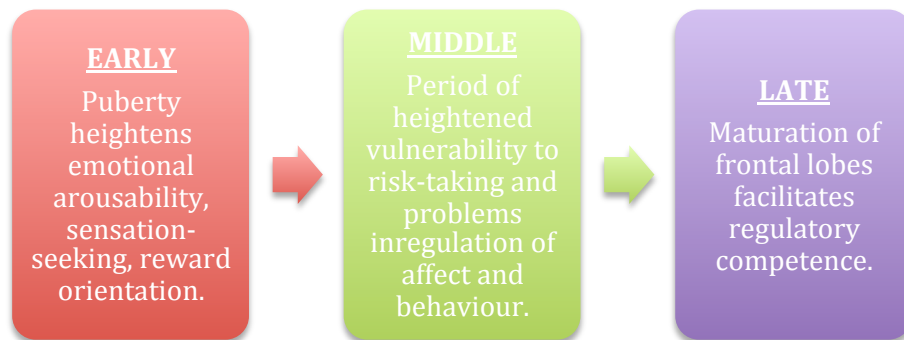


Figure 1. It has been speculated that the impact of puberty on arousal and motivation occurs before the maturation of the frontal lobes is complete. This gap may create a period of heightened vulnerability to problems in the regulation of affect and behaviour, which might help to explain the increased potential in adolescence for risk-taking, recklessness, and the onset of emotional and behavioral problems. (Steinberg, 2005, p. 70)

1.4.1.2 Ernst, Pine and Hardin's (2006) triadic model of the neurobiology of motivated behaviour in adolescence

Ernst et al.'s (2006) model built on the assumption that adolescence increases an individual's propensity to engage in risk-taking behaviours (Steinberg, 2004; 2005) and presented a neuroscience system-based model of adolescent decision-making to explain this shift. Ernst et al. (2006) reviewed the functional role and neurodevelopmental findings of three key structures in the control of motivated behaviour; the amygdala, nucleus accumbens and medial/ventral prefrontal cortex and found that “increased levels of reward/novelty seeking in the face of uncertainty or potential harm [in adolescence] might be explained by a strong reward system (nucleus accumbens), a weak harm-avoidant system (amygdala), and/or an inefficient supervisory system (medial/ventral prefrontal cortex)” (Ernst et al., 2006, p.20).

Furthermore, Ernst et al. (2006) suggested that disturbances in these systems might contribute to the development of psychopathology in adolescence, such as depression and anxiety.

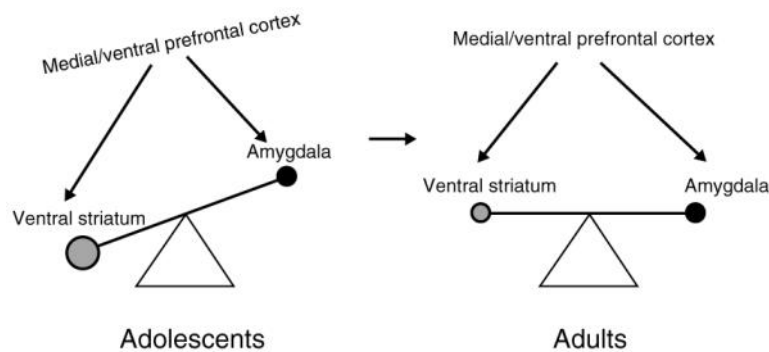


Figure 2. Triadic model of motivated behavior. The balance between reward-driven and harm-avoidant behavior is tilted toward reward-driven in adolescents compared to adults. This pattern may be the result of a stronger reward-related system, weaker harm-avoidant system, and/or poor regulatory controls. Distinct distributed neural circuits are associated with these systems, ventral striatum, amygdala and medial/ventral prefrontal cortex. (Ernst et al., 2006, p. 20)

1.4.1.3 Erikson's (1968) stages of psycho-social development

Prior to the 1960s, Sigmund Freud (1905) largely dominated the psychological debate surrounding child development with a focus on five fixed stages of psychosexual development and the resolution of conflict between the ID and Ego as a precursor to entering a new stage of childhood/adolescence. Expanding on Freud's work, Erik Erikson (1968) also proposed that psychological development takes place in a series of fixed stages. However, rather than solely focusing on sexual development during the period of childhood and adolescence, he was concerned with how a person interacts with his/her social environment throughout his/her lifespan and how this may affect his/her sense of self.

Stage	Psychosocial Crisis	Basic Virtue	Age
1	Trust vs. mistrust	Hope	Infancy (0 to 1 ½)
2	Autonomy vs. shame	Will	Early Childhood (1 ½ to 3)
3	Initiative vs. guilt	Purpose	Play Age (3 to 5)
4	Industry vs. inferiority	Competency	School Age (5 to 12)
5	Ego identity vs. Role Confusion	Fidelity	Adolescence (12 to 18)
6	Intimacy vs. isolation	Love	Young Adult (18 to 40)
7	Generativity vs. stagnation	Care	Adult hood(40 to 65)
8	Ego integrity vs. despair	Wisdom	Maturity (65+)

Figure. 3 Erikson's (1968) stages of psycho-social development

Erikson (1968) suggested that progression between each stage requires the successful negotiation of a *crisis*, such as *ego identity vs. role confusion* in the case of adolescence (stage 5). This negotiation reflects a period of instability before a positive self-image and adolescent identity are achieved. Erikson appeared to acknowledge the physiological and neurological changes that occur during adolescence and placed particular emphasis on this period as crucial for identity development.

Bee (1992) explained that according to Erikson's model, successful negotiation through the adolescent period should achieve a more refined sense of self, which includes clarity on ambitions for the future and sexual identity. Due to significant physiological, psychological and hormonal changes, many adolescents experience a tumultuous sense of body image. Erikson explained that successful transition through this stage involves an adolescent accepting and embracing these changes, which in turn, leads to the development of *fidelity* (the ability to commit and be accepting of others despite significant differences).

Whilst Erikson's theory appears to have pleasing face validity in its descriptions of lifespan stages of development, it is certainly lacking in empirical evidence and reliability. Indeed, critics of Erikson's model have provided evidence to suggest that such discrete stages are, at best, too generic (McCrae & Costa, 1997).

Furthermore, it is argued that Erikson is too vague in his description of how one resolves each crisis and moves from one stage to the next. For example, he does not describe specific experiences necessary or propose a process for such resolution and the subsequent movement between stages.

However, Erikson (1968) himself acknowledged that his theory provides an overview rather than a scientific examination of why human social and emotional development occurs. Accordingly, Erikson's model provides a theoretical framework in which to explore issues such as self-esteem, belonging and identity rather than offering a testable theory.

1.4.1.4 Bronfenbrenner (1979) and Bronfenbrenner and Ceci's (1994) ecological framework for human development

Urie Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological framework for human development remains one of the most recognised models in developmental psychology. He proposed that human development is shaped by the interaction between an individual and his or her environment. In line with Erikson, Bronfenbrenner suggested that a person's specific developmental trajectory was influenced by his or her direct (e.g. parents, friends, school or work) or indirect (e.g. culture, politics and religion) surroundings. Furthermore, in 1994 Bronfenbrenner and Ceci added the chronosystem to his ecological model, which incorporates major

life, environmental and/or historical events that occur over the course of an individual's lifespan. Bronfenbrenner and Ceci's (1994) model is illustrated in figure 4 below.

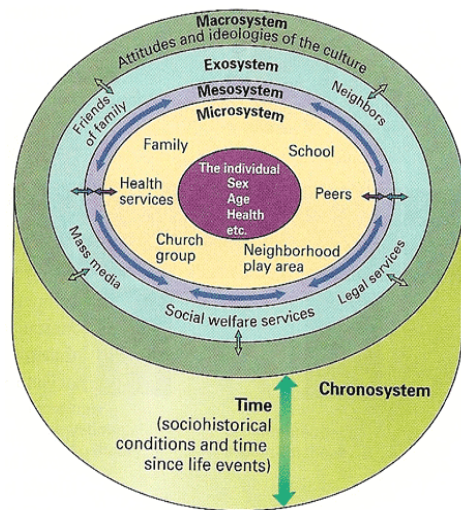


Figure 4. Bronfenbrenner and Ceci's (1994) ecological framework for human development

Rather than focus on fixed stages of development, his ecological perspective sought to examine how systems around a person interact and thereby influence development whilst acknowledging the role of cognitive and neurological maturation. Therefore, this model appears to present an effective framework in which to contextualise a holistic review of adolescent development. Accordingly, each system within the framework (the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, the macrosystem and the chronosystem) will be summarised with reference to relevant contemporary literature.

The microsystem

Bronfenbrenner (1979) suggested that the primary microsystem for adolescents usually consists of parents and friends. However, research has suggested the importance and value of each changes throughout the adolescent period. Friendship groups often begin to displace parental relationships as the most significant form of social support in adolescence, as the process of separation individuation progresses (Boyd & Bee, 2012; Lapsley, 1993; Coleman, 1974; Mahler, 1972). A possible explanation for this is provided by Nelson, Leibenluft, McClure and Pine (2005), who found a change in the social networking process in the brain of individuals during adolescence.

Despite the neurobiology of adolescence proposing a vulnerability to risk-taking behaviour (Ernst et al., 2006; Steinberg, 2005), research has suggested that peer groups can ultimately determine whether an adolescent will take part in risky behaviour or choose not to (Marcoux & Shope, 1997). Commanding social rewards such as status and acceptance (Prinstein & Dodge, 2008) may increase an adolescent's propensity to take, for example, sexual risks (Henrich, Brookmeyer, Shrier & Shahar, 2006). However, Bronfenner (1979) suggested that this is a result of an unhealthy set of microsystems such as dysfunctional relationships with friends and family.

The mesosystem

Bronfenbrenner (1979) suggested that an adolescent's microsystem is influenced by their mesosystem. De Goede, Branje, Delsing and Meeus (2009), suggested that a mesosystem and a microsystem would ideally work in a congruent way to achieve a suggested *healthy* and *balanced* microsystem for the developing adolescent. For example, a peer group and family microsystem who are congruent in their views on alcohol consumption are likely to pass on such values to the adolescent, whether they are healthy or unhealthy values.

Conversely, when such microsystems are divergent and there is not a healthy mesosystem in place, adolescents may become increasingly influenced by their peer group (as previously discussed), and undertake behaviour which is viewed as divergent to the family microsystem's status quo. This may, for example, involve risky behaviour (De Goede et al., 2009), which may (or may not) adversely affect an adolescent's developmental trajectory (Henrich et al., 2006).

The exosystem

Bronfenbrenner (1977) described an exosystem as a larger community in which the adolescent lives and in which he or she may be influenced directly or indirectly without having control over decision-making or strategy. For example, economic austerity initiated by government policy (or other economic forces) may influence the meso and microsystems around an adolescent, thereby impacting on an adolescent's development. Conger, Ge, Elder, Lorenz and Simons' (1994) *family stress model* illustrated how family financial instability can have a profound effect on the psychological health of parents and functionality of family relationships, which may impact negatively on the healthy development of children and adolescents due to inconsistent caregiving and/or disciplinary practices (Conger, 1994; Conger et al., 2002).

The macrosystem

Bronfenbrenner (1979) described the macrosystem as the cultural environment in which a person resides. With specific reference to adolescence, the macrosystem may influence what is considered attractive within a culture and research has suggested that there is some cultural variety in how beauty is constructed. For example, Cheng and Frith (2006) suggested that in the US beauty is constructed around body image and in East Asian cultures, beauty is more concerned with facial features.

The focus on body image within western culture and the unrealistic depiction of body image ideals in the media (Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2004) may reflect the significantly higher rates of eating disorders in western countries (Pike & Dunne, 2015). This element of an adolescent's macrosystem may or may not have a detrimental influence on an adolescent's development. However, Bronfenbrenner (1979) argued that congruent, healthy micro, meso and exosystems should help an adolescent remain less vulnerable to such dysfunctional cultural ideals.

The chronosystem

Bronfenbrenner's (1979; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994) final and most outward system within his tiered model is the chronosystem. This system, added in 1994, was a later addition to his original 1979 model and incorporated major life changes (such as moving cities/countries), environmental events (such as droughts) and historical events (such as the recent European Union (EU) referendum result, or World War II) that occur during a person's lifespan development. Bronfenbrenner and Ceci (1994) suggested that the same principal applied in that such incidents tend to influence other, closer systems around an adolescent, which ultimately impacts on his/her development.

With specific reference to adolescent development and the European Union Referendum result, for example, a British adolescent may have held a specific ambition to live, work or study with the EU, prior to June 23rd 2016. Due to the implications of the United Kingdom leaving the EU and the likely restrictions upon the free movement of people, an adolescent's developmental trajectory may be altered.

This appears in line with social constructionism in that a person understands the world is dependent on where and when in the world they live (Burr, 1998). Indeed, the implications are that adolescent development is not only culturally specific (as described in the macrosystem) but also specific to the period in time in which the individual is living (as described in the chronosystem).

Accordingly, it could be argued that the development of SMT and smart phone devices is a significant historical event within the chronosystem of contemporary adolescents creating a significant ripple effect within their ecological systems.

Overall, the literature presented suggests that Bronfenbrenner and Ceci's (1994) model provides the most flexible, holistic and culturally inclusive model of adolescent development.

The contextual information presented regarding the defining characteristics of adolescent development provides a suitable background for the following section. This offers a more in-depth critical discussion on the centrality of friendship and belonging in adolescence and explores the significance of SMT from this perspective.

1.5 Adolescence, Friendship and Belonging

1.5.1 Need to belong/need to form attachments

Baumeister and Leary's (1995) comprehensive literature review into theories of social attachment and belonging supported the existing hypothesis that the need to belong and form human attachments "is a powerful, fundamental, and extremely pervasive motivation" (p. 497). Furthermore, Rigby (2000) suggested a correlation between low levels of social support and poor mental health and, more recently, Lambert et al. (2013) suggested that social interaction that promotes a sense of belonging is likely to evoke a feeling that an individual's life is meaningful, thereby supporting SEWBMH.

1.5.1.2 Significance of friendship groups

There is some consensus that the formation of friendship networks is a crucial developmental process during adolescence (Hartup, 1996; Manago, Taylor, & Greenfield, 2012; Strasburger, Wilson, & Jordan, 2009). Research has suggested that friendship groups often begin to displace parental relationships as the most significant form of social support in adolescence, as the process of separation individuation progresses (Boyd & Bee, 2012; Lapsley, 1993; Coleman, 1974; Mahler, 1972). Therefore, if the hypothesis that young people have been socialised into using SMT (Best et al., 2014) and the formation of friendship groups improves SEWBMH is to be accepted, it is important to consider to what extent the prominence of SMT within this age group supports this process in a positive way. Specifically, the following section explores and evaluates whether the differences and complexities surrounding online versus offline social realities serve to enhance or inhibit adolescents' SEWBMH. In doing so, various theoretical perspectives and empirical research are discussed.

1.5.2 Theoretical Perspectives on SMT and Social Connectivity

1.5.2.1 The martini effect and belonging

Quinn and Oldmeadow (2013b) suggest that the recent phenomena of being relentlessly connected to people through SMT could be referred to as “the martini effect - any time, any place, anywhere” (p. 238). Since adolescents have a predisposed drive to feel connected to their peers and belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), it is suggested that the martini effect has a positive impact on an adolescent’s sense of connectedness and belonging (Quinn & Oldmeadow, 2013a; Quinn & Oldmeadow, 2013b). This reinforces Valkenburg and Peter’s (2007) findings, who proposed that there is a positive correlation between online communication with friends and feeling connected to those friends, whilst extending this line of discussion by suggesting the onset of the martini effect serves to heighten and facilitate such feelings (Quinn & Oldmeadow, 2013b).

Seo, Houston, Knight, Kennedy and English’s (2014) research suggested that an adolescent’s desire to belong and feel connected correlates with the time spent on SMT. Furthermore, this finding was significant across culture, race, sex and background and they indicated that this reflected the fact that SMT appears to fulfill a strong, fundamental need. It also introduced the theory that some adolescents may experience a higher level of *need* or *desire* for social connectivity than others, which *may* indicate a contributory risk factor for pathological use of SMT. This is discussed in further detail later in this review.

Nevertheless, some research has suggested that mobile phone contact with friends is linked to increased face-to-face contact, which has indicated a more positive and healthy perspective. Specifically, Blair and Fletcher (2011) suggested that smartphone technology facilitates offline gatherings. However, this may not explicitly apply to SMT as Quinn and Oldmeadow’s (2013b) research indicated that adolescents using SMT on smart phones do not necessarily socialise offline with friends more than those who do use SMT on smart phones. This presents some confusion, however it is pertinent to note that Quinn and Oldmeadow’s (2013b) research is rather more up-to-date and may, therefore, present a more contemporary and accurate reflection of current usage of SMT. Overall, it appears most useful to acknowledge that whilst SMT fosters feelings of connectedness and belonging, these feelings may or may not be reflected in offline relationships.

For additional clarity, further theoretical frameworks will be examined in order to investigate more fully the effect of habitual SMT-use on off and online friendships and SEWBMH.

1.5.2.2 Displacement hypothesis

Kraut et al. (1998) suggested that time spent online displaces the time that young people would be spending with family and friends and weak connections online may replace stronger connections offline. This is based on the assumption that people have limited time, thus time spent on one pursuit interferes directly with time that would be spent on another pursuit. Whilst some activities are not impacted, various studies have suggested that face-to-face social interaction is one valuable activity that is displaced by internet-use (Kraut et al., 1998; Mesch, 2003; Nie, Hillygus, & Erbring, 2002).

However, some caution should be taken with the regards to the validity of these studies. Given the speed of technological development in this field it could be argued that the studies discussed above are now significantly outdated. Specifically, the quality of SMT has improved drastically with face-to-face communication now possible through mediums such as *Facetime* and *Skype*, alongside the ability to share videos and photographs so easily. Furthermore, the studies largely omit the quality versus quantity debate surrounding relationships, with the assumption that the *quantity* of time spent physically interacting with family and friends is preferable to the *quality* of time spent with them. Furthermore, if the argument that offline communication is, on balance, superior to online communication (despite technological developments in this area) is to be accepted, it is suggested that online communication may serve as an additional line of connectivity rather than acting as an obstruction to offline relationships (Lee, 2009). Indeed, in certain circumstances, such as long-distance relationships and young people who have limited access to face-to-face interaction (such as those without siblings and/or local friendship networks), online communication may be constructed as wholly functional rather than obstructive to a young person's social development.

1.5.2.3 Social Compensation Hypothesis

Early research tended to focus on an apparent link between increased internet-usage and loneliness (Kraut et al., 1998; Nie & Ebring, 2000; Nie, Hillygus & Ebring, 2002). However, in 2003 Morahan-Martin and Schumacher suggested that while lonely people use the internet more and tend to be more sociable online than offline, overall the social behaviour of lonely people is enhanced by online interactions, leading to positive effects on wellbeing. Furthermore, McKenna, Green and Gleason's (2002) *Social Compensation Hypothesis* suggested that SMT enables adolescents who lack the confidence and/or social skills to interact effectively with peers offline, to meet their social needs by eradicating the complexities of face-to-face interaction such as intonation, body language and facial expressions. They concluded that SMT provides a unique benefit for

this population, whereas those who are socially adept offline may not directly benefit (McKenna et al., 2002).

However, more recent research conducted by Amichai-Hamburger and Hyat (2011) revealed that internet usage can actually enhance the social lives of its users in general - not only those who are perceived to be lonely. Indeed, their research suggested “a significant correlation between internet usage and increased [offline] social interaction” (p. 585). It is acknowledged that this research does not specifically refer to SMT usage, however it appears consistent with Blair and Fletcher’s (2011) research discussed above.

1.5.2.4 Self-disclosure and the stimulation hypothesis

McKenna and Bargh (2000) have argued that online communication may have another more generic benefit. Their *Stimulation Hypothesis* suggested that adolescents in general find self-disclosing in online communication easier than face-to-face interactions due to feeling less inhibited and able to share personal information more freely. McKenna and Bargh (2000) suggested that self-disclosure enables friendship intimacy and therefore online communication can have a positive affect on the quality of offline friendships among young people. However, the notion of *liberalised* self-disclosure/self-presentation is not without its complexities, which are discussed in further detail later in this literature review.

1.5.2.5 Rich-get-richer hypothesis

This bilateral theory suggested that, for highly sociable adolescents, there are added benefits from intensified communication through electronic means (Kraut et al., 2002). Lee (2009) suggested that more online communication relates to more cohesive relationships overall. Simultaneously, this theory posited that adolescents with less access to offline friendship networks and/or those with poor social skills may seek to overcompensate by engaging in low-quality connections online rather than developing more tangible real-life relationships (Shapiro & Margolin, 2014). Moreover, this is compounded by the suggestion that spending excessive amounts of time on SMT may lead to or exacerbate symptoms of depression, which, in turn, may encourage social isolation (O’Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011).

The research above appears to directly contradict McKenna et al.’s (2002) *Social Compensation Hypothesis*, and, given that the research above was conducted more recently and therefore relates to both contemporary SMT and contemporary adolescents more credibly, it may be pertinent to assume its superior validity.

However, Sherman and Greenfield's (2013) research also appears to (somewhat) contradict Shapiro and Margolin's (2014) research discussed above. For example, Sherman and Greenfield's (2013) examination of social media message boards for pregnant teens indicated that social support gained from like-minded others enhances overall wellbeing, suggesting that SMT facilitates social support to the benefit of its users. Whilst caution should be taken in generalising the niche population of pregnant teens to other populations, this may provide some insight into how adolescents with social and/or communication difficulties may find SMT a functional vehicle with which to meet their social needs.

However, Sherman and Greenfield's (2013) research also revealed that SMT message boards that were open to the general adolescent population and not limited to pregnant teens/teenage mothers, tended to have more negative influence on the wellbeing of the pregnant teens as messages were described as "significantly more negative" (p. 75). This suggests that while SMT has the ability to facilitate social networks for like-minded others, generic message boards/applications may serve to expose vulnerable groups to unnecessary distress due to the comments made by misinformed, unsympathetic and unkind users.

In summary, these theoretical perspectives provide contrasting frameworks for examining the relationship between SMT and the intricate nature of adolescents' social worlds. However, whilst the development of social/group identity is a key characteristic of adolescent development (Boyd & Bee, 2012; Lapsley, 1993; Coleman, 1974; Mahler, 1972; Nelson et al., 2005), the process of adolescence is also concerned with achieving a more refined sense of self, including personal characteristics such as ambitions and sexual identity (Erickson, 1968; Bee, 1992). Therefore, it appears useful to explore the relationship between SMT, the self and adolescent identity development. Accordingly, the following section will begin with a brief summary of theoretical perspectives on the self, before discussing research that considers the relationship between the development of the self and SMT-use in adolescence.

1.6 SMT, the *Self* and Adolescent Identity Development

1.6.1 Theoretical perspectives on the self

Over time, the hypothesis that the self is a multi-faceted construct has become well established. Early Psychologists such as Jung (1953) posited that there is difference between an individual's public and private personas and Goffman (1959) suggested that humans adopt *front stage behaviour* for public interactions with others and *backstage behaviour*, which involves the private preparation work completed in order to present a positive self-image.

Furthermore, Markus and Nurius (1986) suggested that we have a variety of multiple possible selves; some of which we hope to become and some of which we fear becoming.

More recently, Bargh, McKenna and Fitzsimmons (2002) and McKenna et al., (2002) recognised the *true self*, which they described as characteristics that a person may possess but is unable to express in day-to-day life. McKenna et al. (2002) argued that this construct is similar to the one proposed by Rogers (1951), who suggested that the true self may contain identity-important characteristics that are not acknowledged by significant others.

1.6.2 Research examining the self and SMT

Consistent with Erikson (1968), Subrahmanyam and Šmahel (2011) noted that constructing a cohesive and stable identity is a key developmental task in adolescence, thus exploring multiple aspects of the self during this period is of great relevance. They suggested that the use of SMT during this period “allows adolescents to ‘try on’ or ‘play’ with alternative identities as they continue to develop a sense of self-identity” (p. 5).

Similarly, Hughes, Morrison and Thompson (2016) examined the off/online identities of adolescents using SMT and found that the adolescents in question conveyed multiple versions of their online selves, with their interactions varying according to the particular audience.

Furthermore, Seidman (2014) examined the expression of the *true self* on the SMT site Facebook using a sample of undergraduates. Her results suggested that undergraduates who felt more able to express their true self online, were more active on Facebook. Seidman (2014) concluded that SMT could facilitate expression of the *true self*, thereby promoting the opportunity to seek validation of hidden aspects of self from a wide-ranging audience (Seidman, 2014).

1.6.3 Self-presentation

Research into SMT and self-presentation has suggested that SMT encourages its users to promote their ideal or preferred self (Chua & Chang, 2016; Hogan, 2010; Mendelson & Papacharissi, 2010), which is somewhat consistent with Goffman’s (1959) original theory of self-presentation. Chua and Chang (2016) noted that Goffman (1959) used *dramaturgical* vocabulary - *front* and *backstage* - to describe the way in which people may *act* in order to convey their *preferred* self. Hogan (2010) argued that within the contemporary context of SMT, users are not bound to simply acting on a stage, but are free to create “artifacts” of lasting value in “exhibition spaces” to present to friends, acquaintances and the

world (p. 377). Accordingly, it is suggested that SMT may eliminate some of the pressure to *perform* in real-time and therefore adolescents can work hard to present a preferred identity, whether that be through a carefully selected photograph or a lengthy wall post.

Chua and Chang (2016) indicated that self-presentation enables a person to please his/her intended audience by matching performance to audience expectations and preferences. This is consistent with Baumeister and Hutton (1987) who suggested that the possibility of projecting an ideal or preferred self to an evaluative, selected and receptive audience motivates such behaviour.

With specific reference to SMT, Mendelson and Papacharissi (2010) reported that SMT has become a platform for users to convey their preferred/ideal self and thus present a “highly selective version of themselves” (p. 4). Furthermore, since SMT serves adolescents a wider circle of friendships and acquaintances, self-presentation enables this population to promote their best qualities whilst simultaneously complying with peer standards/cultural norms - thus facilitating a sense of group identity and belonging (Bargh & McKenna, 2004; Livingstone, 2008; Chua & Chang, 2016).

1.6.4 SMT, body-image and social comparison and feedback-seeking

In relation to the self-presentation behaviour mentioned above which facilitates group identity, interpersonal feedback-seeking and social comparison behaviour can also be seen as an important to the construction of personal identity. Harter, Stocker, and Robinson (1996) explained that this is because adolescents attempt to conceptualise normative expectations of behaviour and appearance by participating in reciprocal feedback with peers. However, Nesi and Prinstein (2015) suggested that habitual SMT-use could be facilitating rising levels of social comparison and feedback-seeking behaviours among adolescents leading to depressive symptoms due to a perceived failure to meet idealised cultural norms. Indeed, Perloff (2014) suggested that SMT encourages negative social comparisons, which can significantly influence body image concerns. Nevertheless, Williams and Ricciardelli (2014) argued that there is a lack of evidence to suggest that SMT has a more harmful affect on body image than other forms of media.

In summary, it is apparent that the body of research in the area of SMT and identity presents a mixed and complex picture for adolescents. There is significant evidence to suggest that the use of SMT facilitates adolescent development in a positive way through the opportunity to play with alternative identities (Subrahmanyam & Šmahel, 2011) and/or opportunities to present a preferred/ideal self (Chua & Chang, 2016; Mendelson & Papacharissi, 2010).

However, this is balanced with the potential negative impact of excessive social comparison and/or feedback-seeking behaviour on adolescent identity development, particularly with regards to body-image and self-esteem (Mendelson & Papacharissi, 2010). The following section discusses further concerns regarding adolescents' use of SMT and the possible implications for SEWBMH.

1.7 SMT and Negative Implications for SEWBMH

1.7.1 SMT and psychopathology

It is argued that a negative sense of self is increasingly apparent in the adolescent population. For example, a recent survey of 14 year-old girls conducted for the Department for Education (DfE) (Department for Education, 2016) reported that the mental health of 14 year-old girls is worsening with the percentage who report feelings of anxiety and/or depression rising from 33% in 2005 to 37% in 2016. The DfE (2016) highlighted that SMT pressures and an addiction to mobile devices may be contributory factors.

Indeed, the research base surrounding SMT and SEWBMH difficulties in adolescents has gathered considerable momentum. Frequent use of SMT is thought to be associated with certain emotional and behavioural changes, with possible detrimental effects on self-esteem (Gonzales & Hancock, 2011) and mental health (Rajani, Berman & Rozanski, 2011). Since adolescence may induce an increased risk of low self-esteem and the onset of depression and anxiety (McLaughlin & King, 2015; Orth, Maes, & Schmitt, 2015), it seems pertinent to review this area in greater detail.

Pantic et al. (2012) investigated the relationship between SMT use and depression indicators in an adolescent population of 160 high school students and results suggested a link between the two. Interestingly, Jelenchick, Eickenhoff and Moreno (2013) undertook a similar study with a sample of older, undergraduate adolescents and did not find any evidence to support this hypothesis. It is noted that different methodologies were used (e.g. differing depression inventories) so it is not possible to form any robust conclusions. However, overall this indicates that secondary-aged adolescents might be more susceptible to the detrimental affects of SMT than older adolescents. This resonates with Stenberg's (2005) theory that adolescence is period of particular vulnerability due to neurological, cognitive and behavioural processes developing at independent rates.

1.7.2 Sleep, SMT and SEWBMH

Woods and Scott (2016) recently undertook a project on a larger scale that investigated how SMT-use related to sleep quality, self-esteem, anxiety and depression in 467 Scottish adolescents. Results indicated that adolescents who used SMT more frequently both overall and at night and those who were more emotionally invested in SMT experienced poorer sleep quality, lower self-esteem and higher levels of anxiety and depression. Specifically, the authors noted that night-time SMT-use predicted poorer sleep quality. This is consistent with a large-scale longitudinal study conducted by Horton, Taylor and Power (2015), which examined the sleep behaviour of 12-15 year-olds. Results revealed that over a fifth of 12-13 and 14-15 year olds report always waking up at night to contact friends using SMT. The authors reported that night-time SMT use was a significant predictor of whether adolescents go to school feeling tired and that those who are less tired within school are, typically, happier with themselves and their school life (Horton et al., 2015).

A similar study by Lemola, Perkinson-Gloor, Brand, Dewald-Kaufmann and Grob (2015) conducted with the participation of 362 twelve to seventeen year-old adolescents, suggested that electronic media use was negatively related with sleep duration and positively with sleep difficulties, which, in turn, were related to depressive symptoms. This reinforces a theoretical model proposed by Cain and Gradisar (2010), which suggested that increased electronic media use, particularly in the bedroom before sleep, is related to sleep disturbance. In summary, these studies indicate that the more an adolescent uses SMT, the more he/she is likely to experience sleep disturbance and the negative implications that ensue.

In view of these findings, the following section will critically discuss and explore the notion of increased, extreme or *pathological* use of SMT in the adolescent population. This is in order to consider the relevant contributing factors to developing such behaviours and understand the holistic implications.

1.7.3 SMT/mobile phone addiction and pathological internet use (PIU)

It has been noted by various researchers that SMT-use is a contributory factor to *mobile phone addiction* and *internet addiction* (Durkee et al., 2012; Kuss, Griffiths, Karila & Billieux, 2014; Kaess et al. 2014). *Internet addiction* or *pathological internet use* (PIU) is often conceptualised as an impulse control disorder, sharing characteristics with gambling and other such behavioural addictions with natural rewards (Durkee et al., 2012). However, as a relatively recent phenomenon, it currently lacks a universal definition and diagnostic criteria.

Durkee et al. (2012) used a cross-sectional survey to explore the frequency PIU and maladaptive internet use (MIU) within the adolescent population in a wide

range of European countries. A total of 11,956 adolescents with a mean age of 14.9 were recruited and results revealed that the overall prevalence of PIU was 4.4% and higher among males than females - 5.2% versus 3.8% (Durkee et al., 2012). However, results also revealed significantly higher rates of SMT-use in females and single-user online gaming in males. Other results suggested that “students not living with a biological parent, low parental involvement and parental unemployment all had the highest relative risks of both MIU and PIU” (Durkee et al., 2012, p. 2210). The research concluded that adolescents lacking support for their SEWBMH are at highest risk (Durkee et al., 2012).

It should be noted that the results varied considerably between European countries and since the United Kingdom did not take part in the study, the results cannot be generalised to a British population. Furthermore, the diagnostic criteria – whilst adapted to incorporate the distinctive conditions of PIU (Siomos, Dafouli, Braimiotis, Mouzas & Angelopoulos, 2008) - was actually specific to gambling addiction diagnosis and therefore somewhat imprecise. However, it is argued that it is important to consider such research in relation to the psychopathological outcomes of an adolescent population who appear increasingly attached to SMT (Coughlan, 2016; Ofcom, 2016a).

Accordingly, Kaess et al. (2014) conducted a large-scale research project to investigate the psychopathology and self-destructive behaviours associated with PIU among European school-based adolescents. Their findings indicated that “suicidal behaviours... [as well as] depression, anxiety, conduct problems and hyperactivity/inattention were significant and independent predictors of PIU” (p. 1093). The authors noted some interesting gender differences describing links between PIU, conduct problems and hyperactivity/inattention as stronger in female adolescents and links between depressive symptoms, anxiety and peer relationship difficulties more significant among male adolescents (Kaess et al., 2014). However, overall the findings suggested that identifying adolescents at risk of PIU (such as those with the symptoms mentioned above) and providing suitable intervention could lead to improved SEWBMH outcomes and a reduction in suicidal behaviours (Kaess et al., 2014).

To enrich the breadth of the findings above, the following section focuses on a rather different and, arguably, more generic and commonplace contributing factor to the pathological use of SMT – *leisure boredom*.

1.7.3.1 Leisure boredom as a factor contributing to pathological use of SMT

Iso-Ahola and Weissinger (1990) defined leisure boredom as the conflict between a person’s perception of there being too much available time with too few satisfying pursuits or activities to undertake. They also posited that an

individual's mismanagement of leisure time is positively correlated to leisure boredom.

Harrison (2005) suggested that experience of leisure boredom usually encourages individuals to engage in various activities to eliminate such feelings. However, with particular reference to adolescents, many individuals find these feelings difficult to manage or relinquish positively so the outcomes of leisure boredom are often perceived to be negative within this population, with adverse effects on mental health (Weissinger, 1995) and drug and alcohol-related behaviours (Iso-Ahola & Crowley, 1991; Patterson et al., 2000).

There is some consensus that high levels of leisure boredom are significant predictors of PIU, mobile phone/tablet/ SMT addiction (Leung, 2008; Lin et al., 2009; Zhou & Leung, 2013; Huang, 2014; Leung & Zhang, 2016). Moreover, Huang (2014) noted that as well as significant link to SMT addiction, leisure boredom also correlates positively with "all four addiction symptoms, namely, preoccupation..., adverse consequences..., alleviation of negative emotions... and loss of interest in offline social activities" (p. 83). Huang (2014) concluded that this suggests a worrying breadth of addictive behaviours in that adolescents who use SMT to combat high levels of leisure boredom are more likely to become preoccupied with it, use it as a crutch to manage negative emotions and become so immersed in it that face-face social interactions become less commonplace.

It is useful to note that there is a lack of research in this area using a British population. For example, the literature above is concerned with a largely urban Chinese population and, therefore, some caution should be taken if attempting to generalise these findings. However, in view of the concerns regarding the significant psychopathological outcomes for adolescents with PUI/SMT/mobile phone addiction, this research appears to highlight the importance of healthy leisure time management in adolescence.

In relation to the negative implications for SEWBMH noted in this section thus far, the final subsection will conclude with a critical discussion of the research into *cyberbullying*. This has, arguably, the most eminent and significant colloquial reputation for affecting SEWBMH in a negative way. Accordingly, the following section will critically discuss the empirical evidence to date in order to provide an informed commentary on the effects of cyberbullying.

1.7.4 Cyberbullying

Sticca and Perren (2013) defined cyberbullying as an aggressive behaviour that is repeatedly and intentionally carried out against a defenseless victim using electronic forms of contact. Whilst some aspects of cyberbullying may be

comparable with more traditional forms of bullying, the specific medium of cyberbullying brings about some additional implications:

...an increased potential for a large audience, an increased potential for anonymous bullying, lower levels of direct feedback, decreased time and space limits, and lower levels of supervision.. (Sticca & Perren, 2013, p. 739)

As a consequence of these additional associations, Campbell (2005), Dooley, Pyżalski and Cross (2009) and Tokunaga (2010) suggested that cyberbullying frequently leads to heightened negative implications for the SEWBMH of its victims in comparison to traditional forms bullying. Furthermore, Montgomery and Shaw (2014) reported that a *gang-effect* is often present in cyber bullying, which means that the negative impact can gather momentum with an increasing number of people joining the attack. Worryingly, Lenhart et al. (2011) suggested that two thirds of teenagers have reported observing such a gang effect on SMT and Montgomery and Shaw (2014) indicated that the consequence this effect is highly detrimental to SEWBMH by significantly increasing the victim's sense of safety and belonging.

Lilley, Ball and Vernon's (2014) large-scale study also reported some concerning statistics with regards to cyber-bullying and its effects. They surveyed 1024 eleven to sixteen year-olds in December 2012 in order to investigate children's experiences of using SMT. Their study was quantitative in nature and participants completed an online questionnaire that took approximately seven minutes to complete. Lilley et al.'s (2014) study included a multiple-choice question concerning likes and dislikes and then focused on upsetting experiences on SMT, the emotional impact of these experiences and actions taken in response. These questions were also multiple-choice. Lilley et al. (2014) reported that over one in four 11-16 year olds have experienced something upsetting online in the last year and 11% of those teenagers noted that they are dealing with such circumstances daily. In their sample, 28% of teenagers in the UK identified themselves as having been a victim of cyber-bullying in 2013 and only 11% of those teenagers felt able to talk to their parents about it (Lilley et al., 2014).

This certainly appears a robust study given the considerable sample size and its findings are therefore noteworthy. However, it could be argued that the research lacks validity since the participants were required to choose a multiple-choice answer and were deprived of the opportunity to validate their responses. Furthermore, given the neutral title of the study *The experiences of 11-16 year-olds on social networking sites* (Lilley et al., 2014), it does not appear to report the positive experiences of participants in as much depth. Therefore, one could argue that the study lacks balance and perspective.

Conversely, Ackers (2012) mixed-methods research entitled, *Cyberbullying: through the eyes of children and young people*, sought to investigate the negative effects of SMT from the outset and included questionnaires and semi-structured interviews in order to try and gain an in-depth and ecologically valid perspective. Her research suggested that the psychological ill-effects of cyberbullying can be more profound than more traditional face-to-face bullying due to several factors including the ability to reach huge audiences, the constant availability of the victim due to smart phone technology and, crucially, the opportunity for the bully to remain anonymous and escape punishment (Ackers, 2012).

In summary, the research presented in this section indicates that cyberbullying is a very real and pervasive phenomenon across the adolescent population. Furthermore, its specific and significant effects can have negative implications for SEWBMH, which are heightened in comparison to more traditional forms of bullying (Campbell, 2005; Dooley et al., 2009; Tokunaga, 2010). However, it is argued that the research in this domain lacks balance by focusing solely on Cyberbullying and its negative implications (e.g. Ackers, 2012; Montgomery & Shaw, 2014; Lenhart et al., 2011), and/or an in-depth perspective by adopting a broad quantitative approach (e.g. Lilley et al., 2014).

1.8 The Current Study

The current study is concerned with exploring 14-18 year-olds' experiences of using SMT in a balanced, yet rich and detailed way. This age group is relevant since the literature revealed that this demographic is particularly vulnerable to the effects of SMT (Pantic et al., 2012; Lilley et al., 2014). The research aims to address gaps in the literature with regards to reporting a balanced view of the experiences of adolescents in a qualitative manner due to the dominance of quantitative studies (e.g. Lilley et al., 2014; Lenhart et al., 2010; Pantic et al., 2012), which lack the insight and depth of meaning facilitated by personal perspectives. Furthermore, due to the body of literature in this field largely suggesting that SMT either has a discretely positive (e.g. Quinn & Oldmeadow, 2013a, 2013b; Valkenburg & Peter, 2007) or negative (e.g. Ackers, 2012; Pantic et al., 2012; Horton et al., 2015; Lemola et al., 2015) impact on adolescents' SEWBMH, the current study intends to gain a balanced viewpoint which might indicate opportunities to provide holistic support. Such support would be in line with the National Institute of Clinical Excellence's (NICE, 2013) strategy to improve SEWBMH in schools and the Department for Education's (DfE) (2014) recommendation that schools are required to be *inclusive communities* that can offer pertinent graduated services to meet the needs of its children and young people.

1.8.1 The current study and educational psychology

This study is salient to educational psychology practice as EPs are increasingly concerned with supporting SEWBMH in a therapeutic way due to the rising prevalence of such difficulties in young people (MacKay, 2007). For example, longitudinal studies have found that over one third of adolescents are classed as having at least one diagnosable mental health problem by the age of 15 or 16 years (Costello, Mustillo, Erkanli, Keeler, & Angold, 2003; Kim-Cohen et al., 2003). More recently, Bor, Dean, Najman and Hayatbakhsh (2014) suggested that this number is continuing to increase. For example, suicide rates in youths where self-harm is reported as the main cause are rising and increased by 15% between 2009 and 2014 (NCPCC, 2014). Indeed, the NSPCC (2014) reported that Childline have experienced an increase in young people requesting counselling sessions due to suicidal feelings and/or self-harm.

Furthermore, gaining an in-depth perspective of adolescents' positive (as well as negative) experiences and reasons for using SMT so voraciously is also considered pertinent to the practice of educational psychology. This is in view of the research discussed which suggested that SMT may foster feelings of friendship and belonging (Quinn & Oldmeadow, 2013a, 2013b; Valkenburg & Peter, 2007) and, arguably, facilitate positive expressions of self and identity development (Subrahmanyam & Šmahel, 2011; Chua & Chang, 2016; Mendelson & Papacharissi, 2010).

It is argued that equipping educational professionals with knowledge of the benefits as well as the potential detrimental implications for adolescent SEWBMH will inform practice holistically and enable a balanced viewpoint and in-depth understanding of adolescents' personal perspectives. Furthermore, since positive psychology is a growing field within educational psychology with evidence to suggest its powerful impact (Seligman, Ernst, Gillham, Reivich & Linkins, 2009; Carr, 2011), the researcher hopes that gaining a more profound insight into how SMT fosters happiness might help inform the practice of positive psychology – specifically, its four major topics: positive experiences, enduring psychological traits, positive relationships and positive institutions (Peterson, 2009).

1.8.2 The research questions and aims

The current study aims to explore adolescents' experiences of using SMT, in the hope of uncovering possible considerations for young people, their families and educational professionals. In doing so the following research questions will be addressed:

1.	What are adolescents' reasons for using SMT?
2.	What do adolescents perceive as the advantages of using SMT?
3.	What do adolescents perceive as the disadvantages of using SMT?
4.	What are adolescents' positive experiences of using SMT?
5.	What are adolescents' negative experiences of using SMT?

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Part II

Empirical Paper

1.0 Abstract

Social media technology ²(SMT) has become central to adolescent life with 96% of teenagers having a SMT profile (Coughlan, 2016). Previous literature has either investigated the discretely positive or negative implications for adolescent development or adopted a broad, quantitative approach lacking depth and validity. This qualitative study examined the experiences of adolescents who use SMT in a balanced, yet rich and detailed way. A constructivist-interpretive approach was adopted and 12 semi-structured interviews were conducted using a sample of 14-18 year olds and analysed through the 6-stage process of thematic analysis (TA) outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). The findings present a balanced, yet complex interaction between positive (e.g. feeling connected to friends and able to express true/ideal self) and negative (e.g. destruction of self-esteem/self-image and long-lasting feelings of distress) implications for adolescent wellbeing and development and offer a nuanced perspective on the use of SMT within this demographic, with suggestions for holistic support and intervention.

1.1 Introduction

Adolescence is a time of extensive physiological and psychological change in which peer groups adopt increasing centrality (Ernst, Pine & Hardin, 2006). Such changes cause vulnerability as coping mechanisms are in a state of flux (Frydenberg, 2008), with the potential to intensify the implications of adverse circumstances (Manago, Taylor, & Greenfield, 2012). Table 1 provides an overview of the significant theoretical perspectives on adolescent development:

Table 1. Theoretical perspectives on adolescent development

Author/s	Name of theory	Description and analysis
Steinberg (2005)	<i>Model of cognitive and affective development in adolescence</i>	Steinberg (2005) suggested that adolescence should be divided into three distinct stages (Early, Middle and Late Adolescence) each of which poses differing vulnerabilities and risks. This model acknowledged the physiological, neurological and cognitive changes that occur in adolescence; however, it ignored the impact of the environment on adolescent development.
Ernst et al. (2006)	<i>Triadic model of the neurobiology of motivated behaviour in adolescence</i>	Ernst et al. (2006) proposed that, “increased levels of reward/novelty seeking in the face of uncertainty or potential harm [in adolescence] might be explained by a strong reward system (nucleus accumbens), a weak harm-avoidant system (amygdala), and/or an inefficient supervisory system (medial/ventral prefrontal cortex)” (p. 20). This model acknowledged the physiological and neurological changes

² For example, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and Twitter.

		that occur in adolescence; yet ignored the impact of the environment on adolescent development as well as cognitive changes that occur.
Erickson (1968)	<i>Stages of psychosocial development</i>	Erikson (1968) was concerned with the interaction between adolescent and the environment and how this may affect identity and sense of self. He proposed that psychological development takes place in a series of fixed stages and suggested that progression between each stage requires the successful negotiation of a “crisis”, such as “Ego Identity vs Role Confusion” in the case of adolescence (stage 5). This negotiation reflects a period of instability before a positive self-image (including body-image) and adolescent identity are achieved. Erikson acknowledges the physiological and neurological changes that occur during adolescence and places emphasis on this period as crucial for identity development. However, critics of Erikson’s model have provided evidence to suggest that such discrete stages are, at best, too generic (McCrae & Costa, 1997).
Bonfenbrenner (1979)	<i>Ecological framework for human development</i>	Similar to Erikson, Bronfenbrenner (1979) suggested that a person’s direct or indirect environment influences his or her specific developmental trajectory. However, his ecological perspective also sought to examine how many systems around a person interact and thereby influence development whilst also acknowledging the role of cognitive and neurological maturation. Therefore, this model appears to provide the most holistic framework for adolescent development.

Currently, 96% of teenagers have a SMT profile on one or more sites/apps³ (Coughlan, 2016). The influence of SMT on adolescent development appears inevitable, however the nature of such influence has not been examined in a balanced and in-depth manner. For example, many studies have focused discretely on the positive (e.g. Quinn & Oldmeadow, 2013a, 2013b; Valkenburg & Peter, 2007) or negative (e.g. Ackers, 2012; Pantic et al., 2012; Horton, Taylor & Power, 2015; Lemola, Perkinson-Gloor, Brand, Dewald-Kaufmann & Grob, 2015) implications for adolescent development and social and emotional wellbeing and mental health (SEWBMH), or have used broad, quantitative methods, which lack depth and insight (e.g. Lilley, Ball & Vernon, 2014; Lenhart, Purcell, Smith & Zickuhr, 2010; Pantic et al., 2012). The following section synthesises the current research body to provide a suitable context for the holistic and balanced nature of the current study.

1.2 Adolescence, Friendship and Connectedness

Baumeister & Leary (1995) noted that the drive to feel connected to others is a fundamental human motivation. Lambert et al. (2013) suggested that

³ Please refer to Appendix A for a contextual summary of relevant SMT sites/apps.

meaningful social interaction that promotes belonging is likely to support SEWBMH and Rigby (2000) suggested a correlation between low levels of social support and poor mental health. Since friendship groups begin to displace parental relationships as the most significant form of social support in adolescence (Boyd & Bee, 2012; Lapsley, 1993; Coleman, 1974; Mahler, 1972) and the formation of friendship networks is a crucial developmental process (Hartup, 1996; Manago et al., 2012; Strasburger, Wilson, & Jordan, 2009), it appears pertinent to consider to what extent the prominence of SMT is functional in adolescence.

1.2.1 SMT, connectedness and belonging

Quinn and Oldmeadow (2013b) referred to the relentless connectivity facilitated by SMT as “the martini effect - any time, any place, anywhere” (p. 238), which has a positive impact on an adolescent’s sense of belonging. This is consistent with research conducted by Valkenburg and Peter (2007), whilst Seo, Houston, Knight, Kennedy and Inghis (2014) posited that an adolescent’s desire to feel connected correlates with the time spent on SMT, suggesting that SMT activity may fulfill strong fundamental need.

Nevertheless, whilst *smartphone technology* may facilitate offline gatherings (Blair & Fletcher, 2011), there is some indication that online connectedness is not necessarily reflected in offline relationships (Quinn & Oldmeadow, 2013b). Table 2 critically examines three theoretical frameworks in order to evaluate the effect of SMT on *off* and *online* friendships and SEWBMH in further detail.

Table 2. Theoretical perspectives on SMT and adolescent social development

Theory	Author/s	Discussion
<i>Social Compensation Hypothesis</i>	McKenna, Green and Gleason (2002)	McKenna et al. (2002) suggested that electronic communication enables adolescents, who may lack the skills to interact effectively with peers offline, to meet their social needs by eradicating the complexities of face-to-face interaction. They concluded that electronic communication provides a unique benefit for this population, whereas those who are socially adept offline may not directly benefit (McKenna et al., 2002). This is reinforced and extended by Morahan-Martin and Schumacher (2003), who add that electronic communication has positive implications for SEWBMH.
<i>Rich-get-richer hypothesis</i>	Kraut et al. (2002)	Contrary to McKenna et al. (2002), Kraut et al. (2002) posited that highly sociable adolescents benefit from intensified communication through electronic means, yet less socially adept

		adolescents may seek to overcompensate by engaging in low-quality connections online rather than developing tangible real-life relationships (Shapiro & Margolin, 2014).
<i>Self-disclosure and the stimulation hypothesis</i>	McKenna and Bargh (2000)	McKenna and Bargh (2000) suggested that adolescents find self-disclosing in online communication easier than face-to-face interactions due to feeling less inhibited. They argued that self-disclosure enables friendship intimacy and therefore online communication may have a positive affect on the quality of offline friendships.

These theories present contrasting frameworks for examining the complex interaction between adolescents' SMT use and social development. However, adolescence is also concerned with achieving a more refined sense of *self* (Erickson, 1968; Bee, 1992). Therefore, the following section will discuss the interaction between SMT and identity development.

1.3 SMT and Adolescent Identity Development

1.3.1 True self and SMT

Seidman (2014) examined the expression of *true self* (see Bargh, McKenna & Fitzsimmons, 2002; McKenna et al., 2002; Rogers, 1951) on Facebook⁴ using a sample of undergraduates. Her results suggested that those who felt more able to express their *true self* online, were more active on Facebook. Seidman (2014) concluded that SMT could facilitate expression of *true self*, thereby promoting the opportunity to seek validation of hidden aspects of self from a wide-ranging audience (Seidman, 2014). However, caution should be taken if generalising these findings to an adolescent population due to the sample of undergraduates used.

1.3.2 Self-presentation and SMT

Mendelson and Papacharissi (2010) suggested that SMT profiles give adolescents a platform for their preferred identity and are likely to convey a "highly selected version of themselves" (p. 4). It may also facilitate the construction of *in-group* identity as a result of compliance with peer standards (Chua & Chang, 2016). Indeed, Boyd (2014) suggested that self-presentation on SMT could be highly influenced by an adolescent's perception of likely peer reaction and feedback. This is in line with Baumeister and Hutton's (1987) *self-presentation* theory and constructing an *ideal self*. It also resonates with Goffman's (1959) theory that humans adopt *front stage behaviour* for public

⁴ A popular SMT site/app. Please refer to Appendix A for further information on Facebook.

interactions with others and *backstage behaviour*, involving the private preparation work completed in order to present a positive self-image. Thus, SMT may facilitate two subtly different aspects of identity development – presentation of the *true self* and *ideal self* - with the latter also serving to support group identity development.

1.3.3 SMT, body-image and social comparison and feedback-seeking

Harter, Stocker and Robinson (1996) noted the importance of interpersonal feedback-seeking and social comparison behaviour for healthy identity development as adolescents attempt to conceptualise normative expectations. Nesi and Prinstein (2015) suggested that habitual SMT-use could be facilitating rising levels of these behaviours among adolescents leading to depressive symptoms due to a perceived failure to meet idealised cultural norms. Indeed, Perloff (2014) suggested that SMT encourages negative social comparisons, which can significantly influence body image. Nevertheless, Williams and Ricciardelli (2014) argued that there is a lack of evidence to suggest that SMT has a more harmful affect on body image than other forms of media. However, in view of these findings, further exploration into negative SMT associations will be provided.

1.4 SMT and Psychopathology

1.4.1 SMT, psychopathology and sleep disturbance

Research has suggested that adolescence induces an increased risk of anxiety and depression (McLaughlin & King, 2015; Orth, Maes, & Schmitt, 2015). Frequent SMT use is increasingly associated with exacerbating negative implications for self-esteem (Gonzales & Hancock, 2011) and SEWBMH (Rajani, Berman & Rozanski, 2011; DfE, 2016). For example, Pantic et al. (2012) investigated the relationship between SMT use and depression indicators in an adolescent population of 160 high school students and the results suggested a link between the two. Woods and Scott's (2016) reported that adolescents who used SMT more frequently overall and at night-time, as well as those who were more emotionally invested, experienced poorer sleep quality, lower self-esteem and higher levels of anxiety and depression. Specifically, the authors noted that night-time SMT use predicted poorer sleep quality. This is consistent with larger-scale studies conducted by Horton, Taylor and Power (2015) and Lemola et al. (2015) and reinforces a theoretical model proposed by Cain and Gradisar (2010). Thus, the implications discussed appear robust.

1.4.2 Leisure boredom and pathological use of SMT

There is some consensus within the literature that high levels of *leisure boredom* are significant predictors of pathological internet use (PIU)/mobile phone/tablet/ SMT addiction (Leung, 2008; Lin, Lin & Wu, 2009; Zhou & Leung, 2013; Huang, 2014; Leung & Zhang, 2016). Huang (2014) posited that adolescents who use SMT to combat high levels of leisure boredom are more likely to become preoccupied with it, use it as a crutch to manage negative emotions and become so immersed in it that face-face social interactions become less commonplace. This research was conducted on a largely urban Chinese population, thus its ability to be generalised to UK adolescents is questionable. However, it may indicate the importance of a healthy balance of leisure-time activities.

1.4.3. Cyberbullying

Lilley et al. (2014) surveyed 1024 eleven to sixteen year-olds in December 2012 in order to investigate children's experiences of using SMT. Findings reported that 28% of teenagers in the UK identified themselves as having been a victim of cyberbullying with daily implications for their SEWBMH and only 11% of those teenagers felt able to talk to their parents about it (Lilley et al., 2014). Whilst this is a robust study in terms of sample size it may lack validity as participants' views were not analysed in depth.

Ackers' (2012) mixed methods approach conveyed a more ecologically valid perspective due to the inclusion of semi-structured interviews alongside quantitative methods. Her findings suggested that the psychological implications of cyberbullying are more profound than face-to-face bullying due to factors including the range of audience and the faceless nature of the bully (Ackers, 2012). Furthermore, Montgomery and Shaw (2014) and Lenhart et al. (2011) considered the *gang effect* facilitated by SMT, to be a considerable problem in cyberbullying.

1.5 The Current Study - Purpose and Academic Rationale

This study explores the experiences of 14-18 year-olds using SMT in a balanced, yet rich and detailed way. This is relevant due its prevalence in adolescence (Coughlan, 2016) and a perceived vulnerability to the effects of SMT within this population (Pantic et al., 2012; Lilley et al., 2014). The research addresses gaps in the literature by reporting a balanced view of the experiences of adolescents using a qualitative methodology and indicating opportunities for holistic support. This is in line with the National Institute of Clinical Excellence's (NICE, 2013) strategy to improve SEWBMH in schools and the Department for Education's (DfE) (2014) recommendation that schools are required to be *inclusive communities* that can offer pertinent graduated services to meet the

needs of children and young people. Further information regarding the current study's relevance to educational psychology can be found in Part III.

1.5.1 The research questions and aims

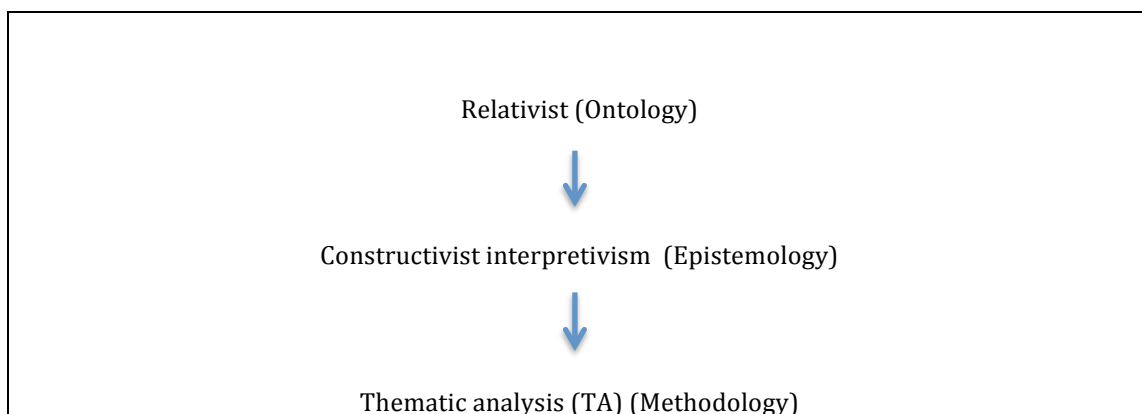
The current research explores the experiences of adolescents using SMT, in the hope of uncovering possible considerations for young people, their families and educational professionals. In doing so, the following research questions are addressed:

1.	What are adolescents' reasons for using SMT?
2.	What do adolescents perceive as the advantages of using SMT?
3.	What do adolescents perceive as the disadvantages of using SMT?
4.	What are adolescents' positive experiences of using SMT?
5.	What are adolescents' negative experiences of using SMT?

2.0 Methodological Orientation

Table 3 broadly outlines the methodological approach adopted within the current study.

Table 3. An overview of the philosophical foundations underpinning the research



This qualitative study operated within the paradigm of constructivist-interpretivism, in order to explore the participants' unique interpretations of reality (Willis, 2007) in the context of a "subjective world of human experience"

(Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007, p. 21). Since constructivist-interpretivism assumes that research is a socially constructed activity (Willis, 2007) the findings were co-constructed between participant and researcher. TA was adopted in order to add depth to the current literature through its ability to identify and report themes within the data systematically and interpret the data in rich detail (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis was conducted in an inductive, *data-driven* (Braun & Clarke, 2006) fashion to suit the exploratory nature of the study. Whilst this approach lacked the reliability of a positivist design due its lack of replicability (Cresswell, 2013), it enabled the complex interaction between researcher and participant to be examined, thereby promoting the validity of the study (Atieno, 2009). Table 4 summarises TA in further detail:

Table 4. Key features of TA

- TA is a tool for reporting themes within data in a systematic way (Braun & Clarke, 2006)
- It is a flexible tool which can be applied across a range of theoretical and epistemological approaches (Braun & Clarke, 2006)
- It is able to organise and interpret a data set in rich detail even within a complex data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006)
- Equips the researcher with the tools to understand the potential of any issue more widely (Marks & Yardley, 2004)
- Enables the researcher to examine relationships between themes and compare them within the data (Alhojailan, 2012)

2.1 Participants

Consistent with Gest, Bunce and Johnson's (2006) recommendations for robust sample sizes in TA, twelve 14-18 year-old participants were purposively sampled to ensure certain criteria (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls & Ormston, 2014). Table to 5 describes this process in further detail:

Table 5. Purposive sampling methods used to recruit the current sample

The purposive sampling methods used:

- Promoted an equal spread of ages.
- Ensured the inclusion of both gender.
- Provided a somewhat proportionate representation of special educational needs (SEN).
- Ensured participants were regular users of SMT platforms.
- Enabled participants to be recruited from two contrasting secondary schools (one rural and one urban) within the UK, in order to establish a sample that was at least *somewhat* representative.

It is acknowledged that the current sample is not sufficiently large or representative to enable the findings to be generalised to the wider adolescent population (Cresswell, 2013).

A summary of the demographic information of participants can be found in Table 6 with pseudonyms given for the purpose of confidentiality:

Table 6. Demographic characteristics of participants

Name	Age	Gender	School Urban/R ural	Ethnic Origin	SEN Details	SMT Platforms
P1	14	Female	Urban	White British	None	Facebook Facebook messenger Snapchat
P2	14	Female	Urban	White British	None	Facebook Facebook messenger Snapchat Instagram
P3	15	Female	Urban	White British	None	Facebook Instagram Snapchat Twitter
P4	14	Female	Urban	White British	None	Facebook Facebook messenger Snapchat Instagram
P5	15	Female	Urban	White British	None	Facebook Snapchat Instagram
P6	16	Male	Urban	White British	Diagnosis of high- functioning autism (HFA), specifically, Asperger's syndrome. Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) in place.	Facebook Twitter Youtube

P7	17	Female	Urban	White British	None	Facebook Snapchat
P8	17	Female	Urban	White British	None	Facebook Snapchat Instagram
P9	17	Male	Urban	White British	None	Facebook Facebook messenger Snapchat Instagram
P10	15	Female	Rural	White British	Hearing impairment (HI). Occasional support from HI specialist in school. No EHCP in place.	Facebook Snapchat Instagram
P11	16	Female	Rural	White British	Diagnosis of HFA. Academically high-achieving. No EHCP in place.	Snapchat Instagram
P12	16	Male	Rural	White British	None	Facebook Snapchat Discord

2.2 Data Collection Methods

In line with Cresswell's (1998) recommendations, one-to-one semi-structured interviews (Appendix R) were used in order to report the detailed views of the participants and create an intricate representation of their subjective realities, facilitated by the ability to probe noteworthy matters as they arise and obtain further clarification (Camino, Zeldin & Payne-Jackson, 1995). Open-ended questioning allowed participants to express themselves openly, attaching expression and meaning to their experiences (Sparkes & Smith, 2014) and the opportunity to qualify their responses (Barker, Pistrang & Elliot, 1994). Questioning was neutral, did not lead participants by encouraging certain responses and did not presuppose certain values (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009).

2.3 Procedure

Each stage of the procedure is described in Appendix B including details of the pilot study and changes that were subsequently made.

2.4 Analysis of Data

Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim and transcripts were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phase process for TA outlined in Appendix C. Due to the exploratory nature of the study, the data was analysed in an inductive

manner, with themes emerging in a data-driven fashion rather than as a result of any preconceived coding frames⁵ (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

2.5 Ethics

The current study presented various ethical considerations⁶, which were addressed in accordance with the British Psychological Society's (2014) *Code of Human Research Ethics*. An overview of the ethical considerations is presented in Appendix S and examples of gatekeeper letters, consent forms and debrief sheets in Appendices H to Q.

2.6 Reliability and Validity Issues

Verification strategies used to promote reliability and validity in the current study were consistent with Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olsen and Spiers' (2002) suggestions and are outlined in Appendix D.

3.0 Results and Discussion

TA of the data collected from twelve participants enabled the identification of the key themes outlined in table 7. Five main themes were identified together with subthemes for each main theme. A thematic map is also provided in Appendix F.

Table 7. Master list of main themes and subthemes

Theme number	Theme Name	Subthemes
1	<i>Feeling connected</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Friendship intimacy</i> • <i>Strengthening family ties</i>
2	<i>24/7</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Morning, noon and night</i> • <i>Keeping in the loop (belonging)</i> • <i>Without it I'd be bored</i> • <i>Striving for a healthy balance</i>
3	<i>Expression of self</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Confidence and freedom of expression</i> • <i>Misconstrued meaning</i> • <i>Self-conscious selfies</i>
4	<i>Cyberbullying</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The hidden bully</i> • <i>Gang mentality</i> • <i>Lack of control</i>

⁵ An illustrative example of the coding process is provided in Appendix E.

⁶ For example, due to the age of the sample and the sensitive nature of some of the discussion.

5	<i>Emotional rollercoaster</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Construction of self-esteem and identity</i> • <i>Destruction of self-esteem and feeling anxious</i> • <i>Transient happiness, long-lasting distress</i>
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The presented themes convey the salient concepts across the entire data set and provide a balanced, yet vivid and intricate representation of the experiences of adolescents using SMT. The following section will illuminate the current themes using relevant quotations from the data set⁷. Key findings will be discussed with reference to existing literature and psychological theory in order to examine the significance of each theme and consider the potential impact for young people and their families as well as educational professionals.

3.1 Theme 1: *Feeling Connected*

The first theme relates to the powerful sense of connectedness participants conveyed as a result of their social media use. All participants interviewed referred to this as a main advantage of SMT, with two subthemes emerging: *Friendship intimacy and Strengthening family ties*.

3.1.1 Friendship intimacy

Participants gave unanimous accounts of the importance of feeling connected to their friends and how SMT facilitates this connection. For example, P3 noted that the most important reason for using SMT for her, was “to keep in touch with friends” (line 52-53) and P12 explained that SMT is central to his life:

...because I like talking to people... it’s more important... in my opinion than other things... (line 59-60)

Participants also discussed the way in which SMT facilitates friendship intimacy despite physical separation and distance. For example, P11 conveyed her appreciation at being able to keep in touch with a friend on a daily basis despite her having moved continents:

Umm talking to my friend who moved to New Zealand that’s made me quite happy as I thought when she’d moved I wouldn’t be able to see her and I was sad about that but now I can talk to her every day its kind of happy that I can do that... (line 59-63)

⁷ An exhaustive list of supporting quotations from across the data set can be found in Appendix G.

P11 also discussed the fun ways in which SMT engages its users in communication and facilitates connectivity:

You take a photo of yourself so they can see you and then put text in a photo, she goes on snap chat more than email so it's more direct... (line 68-69)

Some participants conveyed a sense of gratitude for the improved friendship intimacy SMT facilitates. Indeed, SMT appeared a particularly valuable vehicle in this sense for P10, who experiences a HI:

...if I didn't have social media I wouldn't really have many friends as I would have now... (line 161-162)

3.1.2 Strengthening family ties

Many participants also discussed the importance of feeling connected to family members through SMT. For example, P1 noted that SMT is important to her as it enables her to “[make] sure my family is ok” (line 32-33) and P5 explained that she appreciated being able to “get in touch with... family and stuff” (line 31-32).

Participants suggested that SMT has facilitated the strengthening of family bonds through ease of communication:

I don't really see much of my Auntie so I can talk to her.. (P1, line. 39)

...[some of my family] live away [so] they can message you every now and again (P3, line 80-81).

Furthermore, P10 provided a detailed description of the way in which she is able to use SMT to facilitate communication; thereby strengthening family ties on her mother's behalf:

...[SMT has the ability to] keep me happy by giving me confidence by not losing someone and I can always find they're alright if they're ok, like my family I can check if you're alright, and like my mum doesn't have the social media so... if she really needs to know something's I'd let her know it in advance and all of that.. (line 150-159)

The positivity conveyed by participants concerning SMT's ability to facilitate connections resonates with existing theory regarding adolescents having a predisposed drive to be connected to their peers and belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). The fact that participants also valued connection to family members reflects Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory that family and friends are of primary importance within an adolescent's immediate environment

(microsystem). However, participants conveyed family connections as secondary to the value of friendship intimacy, which is consistent with existing theory that friendship groups begin to displace parental relationships as the most significant form of social support in adolescence, as the process of separation individuation progresses (Boyd & Bee, 2012; Lapsley, 1993; Coleman, 1974; Mahler, 1972). These findings are partially consistent with McKenna and Bargh's (2000) *Stimulation Hypothesis*, which posited that online communication stimulates friendship intimacy. This appears particularly applicable to P10 and her HI, as SMT eradicates the necessity for speaking and listening. However, it is not clear whether such friendship intimacy is reflected in offline friendships, as suggested by McKenna and Bargh (2000).

Nevertheless, overall these findings indicate that SMT promotes an increased sense of social connectedness and belonging in the present sample, which in turn may suggest improved SEWBMH (Lambert et al., 2013).

3.2 Theme 2 – 24/7

The notion of connectedness is also apparent in the second main theme *24/7*. Participants discussed their habitual, ritualised and incessant SMT usage within the context of there being a need to *keep in the loop* and be connected at all times. This was a key theme, with four subthemes emerging: *Morning, noon and night, Keeping in the loop, Without it I'd be bored* and *Achieving a healthy balance*.

3.2.1 Morning, noon and night

This subtheme describes the habitual SMT usage reported by the participants and the prominence of it in their daily lives. Each participant described checking his/her SMT first thing in the morning and last thing at night as well as multiple times during the day. This is highlighted in P2's response:

I always check it for like an hour in the morning, usually at school break times and lunch then basically all night when I get home... (line 19-20).

Furhermore, P8 described the pattern of her ritualised SMT usage in quite some detail:

Snapchat I wake up and read my snapchats and then send like any back. Umm facebook if I've got notifications I'll go on it but if I haven't I wouldn't bother going on it, Instagram I look as well, I go through it on my way to school and then just before I get to the door I check snapchat again, and then after school I usually have a couple of notifications on fb so I check that, I don't know really know how many hours just whenever I get notifications through, I don't know.... Night-time before like just I go to sleep, that's when I read through everything, you know when you can't get to sleep so you check it until you get tired (line 21-33)

Some participants even described their usage as being ubiquitous throughout the day (if not in school or college):

...obviously on the weekends I'm on it pretty much all day (P9, line. 15-16)

This resonates with Quinn and Oldmeadow's (2013) "martini effect – any time, any place, anywhere" (p. 238) who argued that this promotes adolescents' sense of connectedness and belonging (Quinn & Oldmeadow, 2012; Quinn & Oldmeadow, 2013). Furthermore, it is reinforced by Valkenburg and Peter's (2007) study, which suggested a positive correlation between online communication and a sense of connectedness and belonging. Since belonging is strongly linked to improved SEWBMH (Lambert et al., 2013; Rigby, 2000; Baumeister & Leary, 1995), these findings also indicate that SMT has the potential to promote SEWBMH in adolescents.

Other participants reported keeping their phones on whilst in bed to enable notifications/messages to be checked as they appeared throughout the night:

...if I hear my phone go off I'll wake up and look at it (P2, line 266-267)

...if I wake up it's the first thing I do, check it [SMT] (P9, line 165)

Furthermore, P11 reported staying awake until a reasonably late hour due to "talking to friends until about 11ish" (line 24-25) via Snapchat which suggests that such SMT behaviour could be having a detrimental effect on sleep quality. This may highlight a cause for concern since Woods and Scott (2016) and Horton et al. (2015) suggested that frequent SMT use both during the day and at night-time may also promote lower self-esteem and higher levels of anxiety and depression.

3.2.2 *Keeping in the loop*

The second subtheme, *Keeping in the loop*, partially explains the 24-hour presence of SMT in the lives of its adolescent users. Participants expressed a desire to *keep up* with SMT in order to be aware of arrangements:

I use it practically every day just when I get home just to message my best friend to see when we are meeting and that because we meet every day. (P5, line 19-21)

Other participants also expressed a desire to stay abreast of new updates and posts. For example, P6 reported that he would “feel a bit wound up a little bit” if he wasn’t able to access SMT (line 220). This sense of anxiety was echoed by P2 who described her fear of missing out on SMT activity:

I had no clue what was going on then when I got my social media back I had loads of messages and things... I’m so used to using it every day for ages and catching up with everyone and things but when you don’t have it you just feel like you are missing out and you don’t know what’s going on... (line 116-119)

Seo et al.’s (2014) research suggested that an adolescent’s desire to belong and feel connected correlates with the time spent on SMT, a finding that was consistent across culture, race, sex and background. This indicates that SMT appears to fulfill a strong fundamental need, however it also indicates that an adolescent’s drive to ensure he/she is *kept in the loop* may be exacerbating and, at worst, pathologising his/her use of SMT.

3.2.3 *Without it I’d be bored*

The third subtheme may also help explain the ritualised and habitual usage conveyed. Most participants plainly expressed the value they place on SMT for providing entertainment and avoidance of boredom:

...[without it] you’d have nothing to do, when you have nothing it’s kind of like the only thing you can go on, keep checking.. (P3, line 58-61)

...you go on your phone to go on things like that [SMT] don’t you, so if you didn’t have that it would be boring (P7, line 38-46)

Other participants played down the significance of SMT to their lives by dismissing SMT as something to pass the time:

It doesn’t [make my life better] it’s just something to do when you are bored really (P4, line 46)

I wouldn’t say it makes my life better, I could go without it, umm I dunno it just gives me something to do when I’m bored and have nothing else to do... (P8, line 67-67)

However, this was despite both participants admitting to being habitual, daily users and P8 even stating that the main advantage of SMT was having something

to do “when I’m bored” (line 70). This may suggest an element of denial or lack of awareness surrounding the extent of SMT’s influence and centrality. Research has suggested that high levels of *leisure boredom* are significant predictors of mobile phone/tablet/ SMT addiction (Leung, 2008; Lin et al., 2009; Zhou and Leung, 2013; Huang, 2014; Leung & Zhang, 2016). Moreover, Huang (2014) indicated that as well as a significant link to SMT addiction; leisure boredom also correlates positively with the four symptoms of general addiction:

Preoccupation..., adverse consequences..., alleviation of negative emotions... and loss of interest in [offline] social activities” (Huang, 2014, p. 83)

This suggests that excessive use of SMT has the potential to enter into a spiral of significant dysfunction with negative implications for SEWBMH. In light of the previous discussion, it is suggested that the probability of this happening is dependent on the level of innate drive to feel connected and belong (Seo et al., 2014) as well as the extent to which alternative appealing offline social activities are available to avoid leisure boredom⁸.

3.2.4 Striving for a healthy balance

However, despite all participants describing the dominance of SMT in their lives, this subtheme reflects participants’ concerns regarding the extent of adolescents’ SMT usage and a desire to temper this. For example:

I wish it wasn’t so like, a lot of people think social media is like the main thing I wish it wasn’t, I think it’s taking over like too many people use it all the time people are constantly using it....It’s taking over people’s lives like people use it too often I think.. (P8, line 213-220)

Furthermore, some participants acknowledged that a preoccupation with SMT maybe restricting certain areas of their life and expressed aspirations to achieve a more healthy balance:

...ummm I would say that I wish I wasn’t too addicted to the social media it can be benefit in some ways but being too overly on it, it can affect you in your overall life because if you’re on it too much you’re making your outside life worse, then so because if you’re think of reality on the outside world you’ll probably be better on the

⁸ It is acknowledged that many other variables such as culture, quality of family environment and caregiving, adverse experiences during childhood and quality of offline friendships, may also be influential factors.

outside... (P10, line 406-410)

It is important to note that this mature outlook *could* have been influenced by an experimenter effect⁹, if participants perceived this as something the researcher would find desirable. Nevertheless, this could reflect a level of aspiration to engage more readily in offline activities, suggesting that some adolescents *may* have reached saturation point with SMT and feel ready to engage in alternative pursuits.

3.3 Theme 3 - *Expression of Self*

Theme 3 reflects the overarching theme of self-expression that participants discussed both in relation to their online and offline identities. There was significant variance within this theme, with three discrete subthemes emerging: *Confidence and freedom of expression*, *Misconstrued meaning* and *Self-conscious selfies*.

3.3.1 Confidence and freedom of expression

The first subtheme reflects the participants' discussions regarding their online and offline identities and the differences between the two. Many participants regarded their online self as preferable, allowing for greater freedom of expression and subsequently having a positive affect on self-esteem:

[I prefer] my online self... because I'm more confident in myself (P1, line 191-3)

I can be more uplifted on [the] internet but obviously, you are behind the screen and you think to can do anything, you don't get as much of it in life (P2, line 171-173)

I don't know, I don't really like expressing myself, I just find it a bit embarrassing so I'd rather do it online (P7, line 168-169)

This is consistent with Rogers (1951) and, more recently, McKenna et al.'s (2002) theory that the *true self* is constructed of identity-important characteristics that are not acknowledged by significant others in every day life. With specific reference to SMT, research conducted by Seidman (2014) concluded that SMT could facilitate expression of the true self, thereby promoting the opportunity to seek validation of hidden aspects of self from a wide-ranging audience.

Indeed, P10 even described her online self as "the real me" (line 372) and "completely different to [how] people expect me to be" (line 313-314), due to the

⁹ A term used to describe a subtle influence or expectation passed subconsciously from experimenter to participant (Rosenthal, 1998).

fact that “on social media I can express myself more because offline I’m quite a shy person...” (line 306-307). P11’s discussions were also consistent with this:

I kinda feel like it gives me a more confidence than I’d have in real [life] so I can talk to someone I wouldn’t usually talk to... Maybe because you aren’t face to face with them, it’s less intimidating maybe... (line 44-49)

This suggests that SMT is particularly valuable for these participants - who have diagnoses of HI and HFA respectively – by validating hidden aspects of self. Furthermore, it is consistent with McKenna et al.’s (2002) *Social Compensation Hypothesis*, which suggested that SMT enables adolescents who lack the specific skills to interact effectively with peers offline, to meet their social needs by eradicating the complexities of face-to-face interaction.

3.3.2 *Misconstrued meaning*

The subtheme *Misconstrued meaning* demonstrates that this was not the absolute consensus. It relates to discussions surrounding difficulties with online self-expression. For example P8 and P9 both discussed a preference for expressing themselves offline due to a greater ability to convey tone and meaning:

I think It’s just better to talk to someone face to face because you can actually like express yourself and see how they react because if you send a message you don’t if they are like “why’s he sent me that” or “oh that’s nice” you can’t get the tones, sometime people take texts or whatever the wrong way... (P8, line 178-183)

Because there is always somebody who has something to say about it whereas offline you can discuss it properly in private but online you have everybody saying something about it and it just gets into an argument... (P9, line 137-140)

Furthermore, some participants described specific problems they have encountered or feelings they have experienced with regards to misconstrued online expression:

...Occasionally I feel slightly suppressed, I can’t really show what I’m actually thinking about something as it can be taken the wrong way or just seems annoying (P12, line 172-174)

...I did have a conversation with a friend of mine and the problem is you're just texting you're not..you have these emojis or something just to show your emotions but some people can take it the wrong and then you appear to school and then... they're like not

your friend, they're just ignoring you because of a statement and you're trying to be clear to them that's not what you meant.. (P10, line 208-213)

Despite such reservations and P10 even intimating that her experience of misconstrued meaning led to an episode of bullying, participants still discussed the centrality of SMT in their lives. Thus, the present study extends the literature on adolescents' perceived difficulties with SMT and offers a new dimension on the powerful and prevailing influence of SMT.

3.3.3 *Self-conscious selfies*

The final subtheme relates to the participants' discussions of their *physical* expression of *self* online. Some participants admitted to spending time taking and choosing a flattering photo to ensure the best possible expression of their physical self is made public. For example, P1 explained that she posts a flattering photo in order to prevent nasty comments and preserve self-esteem:

...[I] just make sure I post a good picture... it's something I like to make sure is done (line 141-144).

Moreover, P4 admitted that posting a flattering picture is important to her:

...It's nice to know you have friends who like your photos (line 154-55).

Some participants discussed a sense of pressure and anxiety associated with the need to post a perfect, almost idealised version of themselves online in order to *conform* with cultural norms:

Umm I think there is a lot of pressure and I have kinda felt pressure from people on Instagram kind of posting pictures of themselves in the mirror, or a lot of people wear really skinny crop tops and tight jeans and post a photo revealing quite a lot, I know my friends have kind of felt like they have had to conform to that but I've always tried to not doing anything but there is that pressure I think ...(P11, line 135-142)

Whilst Harter et al. (1996) asserted that social comparison and feedback-seeking behaviour is viewed as central to an adolescent's identity construction, this finding suggests that this process may not always be wholly functional. This sense of *pressure* resonates with Nesi and Prinstein's (2015) theory that the ever-increasing centrality of SMT may be facilitating rising levels of these behaviours in adolescence, leading to depressive symptoms. These findings also reveal anxieties surrounding body-image, a concern which is already heightened during adolescence (Erikson, 1968; Bee, 1992), whilst also indicating a sense of burden and pressure to meet idealised cultural norms.

However, P8 conveyed a more intuitive perspective:

No I don't think people post the reality, I think they post the good, only the good some people... (P8, line 139-140)

Consistent with Goffman's (1959) *front stage, back stage* theory, this supports the notion that SMT's *selfie* culture facilitates the promotion of one's "ideal self" (Chua & Chang, 2016) by allowing its users to present a "highly selective version of themselves" (Mendelson & Papacharissi, 2010, p. 4). However, it is important to note that P8 is 17 years of age and her rather more mature/intuitive perspective may not be representative of a typical spread of adolescents.

Overall, these findings suggest that SMT presents a complex picture for identity development. SMT appears to have a unique and valuable benefit through its ability to facilitate expression of *true self* (Seidman, 2014), *ideal self* (Chua & Chang, 2016; Mendelson & Papacharissi, 2010) and *social comparison and feedback-seeking behaviour* (Harter et al., 1996). However, the current study also highlights the dangers associated with dysfunctional online behaviour, such as excessive social comparison and feedback-seeking (Nesi & Prinstein, 2015), and the negative affects on SEWBMH that might ensue.

3.4 Theme 4 – Cyberbullying

The large and significant theme of *cyberbullying* reflects the prevalence and gravity of this issue as all participants had either directly or indirectly experienced it. Indeed some intimated that they witness it on SMT on a daily basis but just *scroll past it*. This appears consistent with Lilley et al.'s (2014) assertion that 28% of teenagers in the UK identified themselves as having been a victim of cyber-bullying in 2013.

This theme is divided into 4 subthemes: *The hidden bully, Gang mentality, Lack of control and Management of cyberbullies*.

3.4.1 The hidden bully

This subtheme captures participants' responses regarding the cowardly nature of cyberbullies. There was notable discussion surrounding the "hidden" nature of a cyberbully and participants conceptualised the computer/smartphone as a "weapon" and "shield" in the hand of a cyberbully, enabling him/her to cause an incredible amount of damage without having to do so in person.

You don't see a lot of bullying face to face its usually behind the screen anyway ...They feel more like up there, they can think of what to say and they don't have to go through it face to face (P2, line 146-151)

Participants discussed a sense of *empowerment* that cyberbullies experience behind a screen:

That people kind of think that they can put anything on there because they are behind the screen but like bad things, but then when you see them and they just act like nothing's happened... (P3, line 117-120)

Yeah it can be like if they keep doing it and you say to them about it and they won't say nothing because they are just doing it all behind the screen and stuff, it's stupid really... (P5, line 94-96)

This is partially consistent with Ackers' (2012) study, which suggested that the prevalence of cyberbullying is somewhat facilitated by the bully's increased ability to remain anonymous and escape punishment. However, it is suggested that the current study adds depth to this perspective with its conceptualisation of a typical cyberbully.

3.4.2 *Gang mentality*

The second subtheme relates to participants' descriptions of the way in which the cyberbullying can increase in scale and severity due to a *gang mentality*, facilitated by key features of SMT, such as group chats and public profile pages. For example:

Umm, just picking on people because of their profile pictures and stuff...Like, name calling.... then everybody starts joining in.... (P1, line 119-124)

Normally what happens is something happens in school or college then it gets sprung up on facebook and then it all starts on facebook again so it's both really, they start face to face and then it gets onto the internet and then everybody gets involved (P9, line 109-113)

Bullying, like group chats being made of me (P1, line 150)

This is consistent with Lenhart et al. (2011) and Montgomery & Shaw's (2014) discussions surrounding the *gang effect*. Worryingly, Lenhart et al. (2011) reported that two thirds of American teenagers have witnessed cyberbullying where groups of people have joined in the bullying. Furthermore, it is likely that such a figure has only increased with the prominence of smartphones and tablets since 2011.

3.4.3 *Lack of control*

The third subtheme is particularly robust. Most participants interviewed described the way in which SMT facilitates a lack control over how they wish to present themselves online. Participants conveyed a sense of personal violation,

distress and anxiety at having videos and photographs posted of them without their permission:

Well its happened recently, but that's cos he was taking pictures of me when I was like year 7 and then using it on other people's status' and photos and snapchat... (P3, line 126-8)

...They just pretend they're doing a selfie but they're not they're actually videoing you without your permission and they're posting that on snapchat and they have these effects and all that on snapchat they put it on your face and it can effect me in a way and that's happened (P10, line. 335-339)

...it could be something personal and they could travel it on the next day or say something bad, something bad about me and show a very bad reputation of me.. (P10, line 241-243)

This aspect of cyberbullying appears less notorious with a lack of literature pertaining to it. Therefore, it is suggested that the current study highlights the issues associated with such personal violation. Participants' descriptions reflect a direct attack on self-concept and identity - deconstructing the *true* or *ideal self* participants wish to convey online with possible implications for SEWBMH.

3.5 Theme 5 – *Emotional Rollercoaster*

Theme 5 reflects the considerable range of emotion described by participants as a result of their SMT activity, from feelings of love and belonging to anxiety and despair. Four subthemes emerged: *Construction of self-esteem and identity*, *Destruction of self-esteem and feeling anxious* and *Transient happiness, long-lasting distress*.

3.5.1 Construction of self-esteem and identity

The first subtheme relates to participants' descriptions of feeling loved and appreciated in relation to their SMT correspondence. Participants noted that these feelings were particularly evident on their birthdays with public displays of friendship and adoration demonstrated on sites such as Facebook, resulting in positive affirmation of self and construction of self-esteem:

[I feel happy]...when people write paragraphs on your birthday about how much you mean to them and that, like ***** had that the other day because it was her birthday (P2, line 93-95)

On my birthday when people post on my wall, I like that... [it makes me feel] ...happy, it makes you feel like people actually are bothered 'cos they take the time to post on your wall (P8, line 73-77)

I do feel good because of the amount of people that write and say happy birthday (P9, line 60-61)

Other participants noted feeling more confident and uplifted due to more general positive affirmation and interaction with peers:

With social media I was starting to express myself more, I was starting to send pictures and people were starting to like them and getting more positive feedback and I was getting confident and all that... (P10, line 81-83)

It generally keeps me up in spirits normally... Cos I like to talk to people, I like talking to people (P12, line 78-82)

3.5.2 Destruction of self-esteem and feeling anxious

Participants discussed some of the negative emotions associated with their adverse experiences on SMT, including feelings of anxiety, low mood and self-esteem difficulties in relation to pressures and implicit expectations imposed/facilitated by SMT:

...I dunno if you are having a conversation and maybe they don't reply it kind of makes you feel sort of down because you think maybe I've done something wrong or maybe they don't want to reply to me (P11, line 98-102)

I said about the anxiety if I leave a conversation early, I can not sleep if that happens, I'm literally incapable of sleeping, if it doesn't end on either a good note or ends suddenly I will become an insomniac...(P12, line 222-226)

[I would prefer] less of the pressure to wear the crop tops and do that kind of thing, 'cos not only is there pressure to conform to that but the people like me who don't really want to be a part of that are kind of battered with images of it and you don't really want to see that (P11, line 164-168)

I think it [negative comments concerning appearance in photographs] affects girls more because they are always under pressure to make themselves look good (P1, line 169)

3.5.3 Transient happiness, long-lasting distress

The final and perhaps most interesting subtheme reflects participants' descriptions of the lasting effects of the positive and negative emotions experiences on social media. Overall, participants reported relatively transient feelings of happiness of a day or less:

P3: Yeah because everyone just wishes you a happy birthday and then puts up like pictures or something...

JH: Does that make you feel good?

P3: Yeah.

JH: Right, how long do those feelings generally last?

P3: I suppose not long... (P3, line 87-92)

JH: Ok how long do those feelings [of happiness] generally last?

P7: About 10 minutes. (P7, line 64-65)

JH: So how long have those feelings [of happiness] lasted?

P9: Until my birthday is over (P9, line 60-63)

Conversely, participants reported significantly longer-lasting effects of negative emotions:

JH: How long did those feelings [of distress] last?

P3: They still last now (P3, line 159-60)

JH: How long did those feelings of unhappiness last?

P1: A few weeks (P1, line 159-161)

[The feelings lasted] ...very long when I say it, it was continuously through quite a bit of my primary school and a couple of years of my secondary school (P6, line 322-326)

This suggests that the negative emotions facilitated by SMT may override its positive effects on self-esteem, indicating deeper and more profound negative implications for SEWBMH. It is suggested that this may be exacerbated by the public and permanent nature of SMT, for example, the fact that cruelties posted on SMT sites cannot be deleted by the victim him/herself, leading to a public permanence of the bullying.

These findings contradict Stauffer, Heath, Coyne and Ferrin's (2012) study, which "examined sixty-six high school teachers' perceptions regarding the effect of cyberbullying on students" (p. 352) and revealed rather different perceptions:

Almost one fourth of teachers indicated cyberbullying does not have long-lasting negative effects and that cyberbullying "prepares students for life." (Stauffer, Heath, Coyne and Ferrin, 2012, p. 352)

It should be acknowledged that this study was conducted in 2012 using a population of American High School teachers, therefore such findings cannot be generalised to a population of British teachers in 2016. However, it is suggested that the current study may highlight a need for the long-term consequences of cyberbullying to be highlighted by educating teachers about such issues and equipping them with the skills to support victims within the school setting.

The current study also revealed the positive effect SMT may have on adolescents SEWBMH. As previously discussed *staying connected* plays a considerable role in this, but participants also noted positive and uplifting experiences such as public

displays of affection facilitated by birthday wall posts which have made them feel loved and enabled the construction of self-esteem through a positive affirmation of self. Nevertheless, participants noted that the effect of these positive experiences did not last as long (in relative terms) as the negative experiences encountered, despite the similarly public and permanent nature of them being on SMT. This resulted in the subtheme *Transient happiness, long-lasting distress* and reflects the lasting impact the negative aspects of SMT may have on adolescents' SEWBMH.

4.0 Strengths and Limitations

A strength of the current qualitative study is its sample size of twelve. Research suggests that this is an appropriate number of interviews for qualitative research as it is likely to bring about saturation of themes (Gest et al., 2006). The current study presented appropriate saturation of themes within its twelve interviews, which reinforces the strength of this research.

It is acknowledged that the existence of an experimenter effect may have been present in the current study due to a perceived power imbalance between researcher and participant, exacerbated by the interviews being conducted in the school setting. The researcher sought to address this by attempting to "democratise the power relations" (Karnieli-Miller, Strier & Pessach, 2009, p. 280). On reflection, further efforts to address this imbalance may have proved beneficial. Please refer to Part III for further detailed discussion of the strengths and limitations of the current study.

4.1 Suggestions for Future Research

Research suggests that adult metadiscourses¹⁰ are often in danger of misinterpreting the contemporary media practices of young people (Jones & Schieffelin, 2009; Thurlow, 2006; 2007), partly through their own distance from such practises (Thurlow & Bell, 2009). Accordingly, future research might usefully replicate this study using participatory techniques such as the production of daily journals of SMT habits and participant-led focus groups to inspire critical thinking and the co-construction of new knowledge (Vaughn, 2014). This would provide an autonomous mouthpiece for adolescents, ensure their specific realities are accurately conveyed and minimise demand characteristics within the study. It would also be insightful to compare the results and see what similarities and differences might ensue due to the altered methodology.

¹⁰ For example, adults writing about and directing discourse.

The adoption of a more homogenous sample might also prove interesting in order to gain a narrower, yet deeper and richer perspective. In consideration of the discussion surrounding P10 and P11's specific needs and views on SMT, a sample of adolescents with diagnoses of HI and/or HFA would be interesting, particularly as McKenna et al.'s (2002) research (suggesting that electronic communication is particularly functional for such individuals) is now significantly out-dated. Please refer to Part III for a further more detailed discussion.

4.2 Implications for Educational Psychology

Educational Psychologists may wish to harness the knowledge that adolescents' voracious appetite for SMT is, to some extent, functional to their SEWBMH, framed within the context of the negative implications and risks to young people, in order to gain a holistic view of the nuanced implications for adolescents' SEWBMH. For example, within the framework of cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), the promotion of coping mechanisms encouraging young people to cognitively focus on and harness the positive affirmations presented on SMT whilst paying less attention to the maladaptive negative experiences could prove useful. A suitable positive psychology intervention is also outlined in Part III.

The study also highlights a need to educate young people to maintain a balanced perspective with regards to their *selfie* habits and feedback-seeking behaviour by promoting an awareness of the negative impact it may be having on their body image and self-esteem. It is suggested that the promotion of pro-social and positive SMT behaviour (i.e. behaviour that promotes a positive view of others) alongside anti-cyberbullying rhetoric during personal, social and health education would be of benefit. These approaches may contribute to helping adolescents achieve a healthy perspective with regards to SMT. Further, more detailed discussion surrounding suitable therapeutic and systemic interventions can be found in Part III.

4.3 Contribution to Knowledge

The present study addresses gaps in the literature by gaining a balanced, yet rich and detailed perspective on adolescents' experiences and the impact on SEWBMH and identity development. The current study makes a material and progressive contribution to knowledge in this area as previous quantitative research looking at positive and negative experiences lacked depth and validity (e.g. Lilley, Ball and Vernon, 2014).

Furthermore, the present study provides a nuanced perspective with regards to SEWBMH absent in the research conducted to date. Specifically, the study assimilates the positive and negative implications for the SEWBMH of

adolescents and identity construction and proposes suggestions for harnessing the positive aspects and minimising the negative implications of SMT-use in adolescence.

The current study certainly lacks the generalisability of the quantitative studies present in the existing literature due to its comparatively small sample size. However, it is argued that the exploratory, rich and in-depth perspective facilitated by the qualitative design and one-to-one semi-structured interviews has enabled a more unique and intricate picture of the social media realities of the adolescents in the current sample. Please see Part III for extended discussion regarding the study's unique contribution to knowledge.

4.4 Conclusion

This study explored the experiences of adolescents using SMT in a balanced, yet rich and detailed way. The research addresses gaps in the literature with regards to reporting a balanced view of adolescents' experiences in a qualitative manner. The findings present a balanced, yet complex interaction between positive (e.g. feeling connected to friends and able to express true/ideal self) and negative (e.g. destruction of self-esteem/self-image and long-lasting feelings of distress) implications for adolescent SEWBMH and development and offer a nuanced perspective on the use of SMT within this demographic, with suggestions for holistic support and intervention. It is hoped that this paper will stimulate further exploration into this increasingly salient area.

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Part III

Major Research Reflective Account

1.0 Introduction

The current study extends the existing literature on the experiences of adolescents using social media technology (SMT). This reflective account provides a critical review of the research process. The rationale for choosing the topic and the methodological decisions are discussed which include the philosophical underpinnings of the chosen research paradigm, ethical issues, measures and methods of analysis. The strengths and limitations of the research are reviewed and distinct contributions to knowledge, future directions for research and implications for Educational Psychologists (EPs) are discussed. Throughout the account, arguments are made for the originality and relevance of the current study. Finally, there is a personal reflection of the research process and how this has impacted on the professional development of the researcher.

1.1 Rationale for Topic

The aim of the research was to explore the experiences of adolescents using SMT in a balanced, yet rich and detailed way. This topic area became a particular area of interest for the researcher over a period of years. Having worked with the adolescent population since 2005, the researcher experienced the meteoric rise of SMT both personally and through the eyes of young people themselves. She became fascinated by the increasing centrality of SMT within the lives of teenagers and how it appeared to be changing the social landscape and psychology of adolescence. Anecdotal remarks regarding the positive and negative experiences of young people she worked with precipitated a review of the literature in this area and the direction and methodological orientation of the research was formulated accordingly.

The research aimed to address gaps in the literature with regards to reporting a balanced view of adolescents' experiences in a qualitative manner due to the dominance of quantitative studies (e.g. Lilley, Ball & Vernon, 2014; Lenhart, Purcell, Smith & Zickuhr, 2010; Pantic et al., 2012), which lack the insight and depth of meaning facilitated by personal perspectives. Furthermore, due to the content of the body of literature in this field largely suggesting that SMT either has a discretely positive (e.g. Quinn & Oldmeadow, 2013a; Quinn and Oldmeadow, 2013b; Valkenburg and Peter, 2007) or negative (e.g. Ackers, 2012; Pantic et al., 2012; Horton, Taylor & Power, 2015; Lemola, Perkinson-Gloor, Brand, Dewald-Kaufmann & Grob, 2015) impact on the social and emotional wellbeing and mental health (SEWBMH) of adolescents, the current study intended to gain a balanced viewpoint which could indicate opportunities to provide holistic support in line with the National Institute of Clinical Excellence's (NICE, 2013) strategy to improve SEWBMH in schools and the Department for Education's (DfE) (2014) recommendation that schools are required to be

inclusive communities who can offer pertinent graduated services to meet the needs of its children and young people.

This was conceived as salient to educational psychology practice as EPs are increasingly concerned with supporting SEWBMH in a therapeutic way due to the rising prevalence of such difficulties in young people (MacKay, 2007). For example, longitudinal studies have found that over one third of adolescents are classed as having at least one 'diagnosable' mental health problem by the age of 15 or 16 years (Costello, Mustillo, Erkanli, Keeler, & Angold, 2003; Kim-Cohen et al., 2003). Furthermore, more recently Bor, Dean, Najman and Hayatbakhsh (2014) suggested that this number is continuing to increase. Suicide rates in youths where self-harm is reported as the main cause are rising and increased by 15% between 2009 and 2014 (NCPCC, 2014). Indeed, the NSPCC (2014) report that Childline have experienced an increase in young people requesting counselling sessions due to suicidal feelings and/or self-harm.

Moreover, gaining an in-depth perspective of adolescents' positive (as well as negative) experiences and reasons for using SMT so voraciously was considered pertinent. This was with a view to equipping educational professionals with knowledge of the benefits as well as the negative implications for adolescent SEWBMH, inform practice holistically and gain a balanced viewpoint and understanding of adolescents' specific realities. Furthermore, since positive psychology is a growing field within educational psychology, with evidence to suggest its powerful impact (Seligman, Ernst, Gillham, Reivich & Linkins, 2009; Carr, 2011), the researcher hoped that gaining a deeper perspective into how SMT fosters happiness might help inform the practice of positive psychology - specifically its four major topics: positive experiences, enduring psychological traits, positive relationships and positive institutions (Peterson, 2009).

1.2 Critical Discussion of Methodological Decisions

1.2.1 Research paradigm and philosophy of science

Guba and Lincoln (1994) described a research paradigm as a "basic belief system or world view that guides the investigation" (p.105). Krauss (2005) suggested that paradigms are constructed through ontological assumptions (the ways in which the researcher views reality), which influence the epistemological position (the relationship between the researcher and the unknown and how the researcher knows what they know) and ultimately informs the methodology (decisions regarding methods and measures).

A positivist ontology was not deemed appropriate because the researcher was not comfortable adopting the assumption that all scientific knowledge is objective and made up of single objective facts (Healy & Perry, 2000) and

rejected the view that objective truths about the social world can be ascertained using natural science methods (Robson & McCartan, 2016). Therefore, a relativist ontology was adopted due to the researcher's assumption that people hold individual beliefs about their social worlds and attach meaning to their experiences, which assumes that their behaviour must be interpreted in the context of these individual realities (Robson & McCartan, 2016). This resonates with Krauss (2005) who suggested that relativism assumes no objective reality but multiple subjective realities constructed by individual experience. This assumption inspired the adoption of a constructivist interpretive paradigm, which holds the belief that reality is subjective and reflective of an individual's experience within his/her specific context (Fox, 2003).

This, in turn, facilitated the qualitative methodology, which supported the research questions effectively by enabling a focus on the perceived subjective experiences of the participants and promoted the construction of an insider viewpoint without the expectation of generalising the data (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007).

Due to the researcher's ontological and epistemological assumptions, the notion of a quantitative design was rejected. It would have imposed substantial limitations such as designing the investigation to chosen variables and standardised measures whilst ignoring participant's specific views on reality (Creswell, 1998). Indeed, a quantitative design lacked the properties necessary to sit comfortably within the constructivist-interpretivism paradigm. The researcher acknowledged the benefits associated with adopting a mixed-methods approach and triangulating the data, thereby promoting depth and reliability (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie & Turner, 2007). However, since the epistemological assumptions were firmly grounded in constructivist-interpretivism, it did not seem appropriate to adopt this pragmatist approach. Furthermore, in line with constructivist-interpretivism, the researcher did not want a mixed-methods design to detract from the depth and profundity of the findings.

1.2.2 Choosing thematic analysis (TA)

TA was the chosen method of analysis for the current study due to its ability to report the specific experiences and views of the participants in a rich and detailed way, even within a complex data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Braun and Clarke (2006) noted that TA is a flexible tool that can be applied across a range of theoretical and epistemological approaches. Therefore, its compatibility with constructivist-interpretivism meant the method of analysis would remain consistent with the epistemological assumptions of the researcher.

Furthermore, TA was deemed appropriate for the exploratory nature of the current study by facilitating the profound examination of participants' specific realities and social experiences, across a broad framework of research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The six-stage process of TA proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) instilled confidence in the researcher as its comprehensive and prescriptive guidelines promoted quality and parity in analysis.

The researcher considered and subsequently rejected several other methods of analysis. This was an important process in ensuring TA was the most appropriate method of analysis for the current study. The process of evaluation is summarised below:

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA)

IPA has the ability to gain an in-depth insight into an individual's lived experience (Shaw, 2001) and reflect on how participants make sense of that personal experience (Smith, 2004). Similar to TA, IPA also seeks to identify patterns/themes in the data and was also attractive to the researcher due to its ability to ensure experience is considered central in the process of analysis as well as its extremely detailed method of understanding and interpreting participants' experience of reality (McLeod, 2001). Despite the current research having an experiential focus which lends itself to IPA, the researcher considered TA more appropriate due to its ability to work with a sample larger than 7/8 and focus on patterned meaning across a larger data-set rather than maintaining a more idiographic approach (Larkin, Watts & Clifton, 2006; Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009).

Discourse analysis

Discourse analysis focuses on how people construct identity and perspective through dialogue (Brown & Yule, 1983). It views language as social interaction, and is therefore concerned with the social contexts in which the discourse is embedded rather than simply the words of the participant themselves (Brown & Yule, 1983). It might have been interesting to analyse in more depth the social context between researcher and participant; indeed this may have highlighted an interesting dynamic (for example, alluding to a sense of power imbalance which will be discussed later in this critical review). However, this level of social analysis would not have answered the specific research questions of the current study. Therefore, discourse analysis was not deemed an appropriate or relevant primary method of analysis.

Grounded theory

Grounded theory is a systematic methodology involving the construction of theory through the analysis of data without the constraints of a predetermined research aims or objectives (Martin & Turner, 1986). Therefore, it proposes that no pre-study literature review takes place, data collection may be an on-going process and that researchers do not record or transcribe interviews (Glaser, 1992). Despite this approach suiting the exploratory nature of the project, this was deemed impractical due to constraints associated with the restricted availability of participants and the researcher's limited timescale for data collection.

1.2.3 Ethics

Cardiff University ethics committee raised a number of queries in response to the initial ethics proposal: more information needed to be provided on the inclusion/exclusion criteria of particular schools, the requirement to inform parents when the proposed interview will take place and if any lessons will be missed, more information required on the environment in which interviewing would take place – especially in relation to safeguarding, the fact that participants aged 16-18 would not require parental consent, making explicit the limits of confidentiality (disclosing information that causes concern for their safety or that of someone else), a recommendation that the debrief form was expanded, and, finally, making it clear that all recordings would be destroyed following transcription.

In order to address these concerns, the researcher provided further explicit information on exclusion and inclusion criteria for individual schools and pupils, adjusted all consent forms to include appropriate information regarding limits of confidentiality, time of interview, interview environment and proximity to a member of staff and ensured that participants' gatekeepers were clear that all recordings would be destroyed following transcription. Furthermore, the researcher expanded the debrief form as requested and also debriefed each participant as fully as possible verbally.

1.2.4 Participants

Twelve participants between the ages of 14 and 18 and from two contrasting schools (one rural and one urban), were purposively sampled to promote an equal spread of ages, the inclusion of both gender, a somewhat proportionate representation of special educational needs (SEN) and to ensure participants were regular users of SMT platforms (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls & Ormston, 2014). The sample size of 12 was consistent with Gest, Bunce and Johnson's (2006) recommendations for robust sample sizes in qualitative research. Gest et al. (2006) analysed "data from a study involving sixty in-depth interviews with

women in two West African countries” (p. 59), exploring how quickly themes within the interviews became saturated and found that, based on their substantial data set, “saturation occurred within the first twelve interviews” (p.59). The researcher, therefore, estimated that the recruitment 12 participants would equip the study with the breadth necessary to achieve saturation of themes within the data.

The researcher experienced some challenges in achieving this number. There were considerable obstructions in the recruitment of participants in one school due to staff illness and delays in gaining parental consent. This meant that the time-scale became very sensitive and the researcher considered whether she would have time to recruit the final three participants. However, it was concluded that, despite time limitations, the study would benefit from using at least 12 interviews to promote saturation of themes (Gest et al. 2006). Furthermore and perhaps more importantly, it was felt that the reliability of the data set would benefit greatly from interviews from the contrasting school, as planned, and equip the study with a sample and dataset that was at least somewhat representative of the wider population. Therefore, the researcher persevered by recruiting the final three participants from the contrasting school and thus completed her data collection.

Whilst this undoubtedly benefitted the quality of the data, the researcher is aware that despite her purposive sampling methods, the sample remained somewhat unbalanced. For example, due to availability of participants, the gender of the sample was heavily skewed towards girls (9 girls and 3 boys), which was not as uniformly balanced as initially intended. However, a large-scale mixed-methods research project conducted in Wales in 2014 suggested that adolescent girls tend to be more active on SMT than boys, with boys favouring online gaming over SMT (Bhullar et al., 2014), which would suggest that the present sample could be representative of the gender imbalance apparent in SMT activity. Indeed, such imbalance is corroborated in comparable qualitative research, such as La Sala, Skues, Wise, and Theiler (2016) who recruited a sample of 26 girls and 8 boys to “investigate how adolescents behave on social networking sites and how they interpret the feedback they receive online from others” (p. 102).

Moreover, the proportion of participants with SEN and, specifically, a diagnosis of high-functioning autism (HFA), within the current sample is rather too large to be representative of the general population. For example, the DfE’s (2016) report that 11.6% of pupils currently have a status of SEN, which is significantly less than the 25% of participants with SEN within the current sample. Additionally, the National Autistic Society (2017) report that the prevalence of diagnosed ASD within the UK population is approximately 1%, or just over. This

is considerably less than the prevalence of 16.6% within the current sample. It is acknowledged that this may have caused some bias in the findings presented (Creswell, 2013). However, where applicable, the potential impact of the SEN status of the relevant participants has been reflected upon, resulting in pertinent discussion. It is argued that this additional perspective has enriched the findings to some degree and highlights an area for further research, which is discussed in section 1.4.

1.2.5 Measures

A number of methods were considered when determining how best to elicit responses from participants. The use of questionnaires was considered due to the simplicity of data collection and greater availability of participants. A further benefit was the fact that the researcher would not need to be present, thereby minimising the potential for any experimenter effects (the effect of subconscious subtle cues from an experimenter influencing the responses of participants, Rosenthal, 1998). However, this method was ultimately rejected due to the lack of depth in the data and the inflexibility of the questioning. Structured interviews were also disregarded for their rigidity and lack of depth despite the fact that this method might have led to greater reliability of findings and increased the replicability of the study.

The use of focus group methodology was carefully considered due to its ability to obtain an understanding of a wide range of views whilst also reflecting on how people interact and discuss the issue (Liamputtong, 2011). The researcher also reflected on the fact that this methodology may have the benefit of reducing demand characteristics and any experimenter effects caused by the intimate nature of one-to-one interviews between an adult and young person (Kennedy, Kools, & Krueger, 2001). However, this was disregarded because of concerns surrounding the depth of information gleaned from a group discussion, disparity in contributions within the group and whether individual responses could be influenced by other views within the group and thereby potentially affecting the overall validity of the study (Liamputtong, 2011). Therefore, in light of these concerns and the sensitive issues that arose from the literature review (such as issues surrounding the self and cyber-bullying), it was decided that one-to-one semi-structured interviews would provide a more robust and ethically sound method of data collection.

The use of open-ended questioning was designed to elicit in-depth responses and suited the exploratory nature of the study. This method facilitated a sense of openness and freedom of expression whilst enabling the researcher to maintain an element of control (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Semi-structured interviews enabled the researcher to use prompts in order to guide discussion and gain

more depth and detail in responses and/or avoid confusion if any participant misunderstood a question. A pilot interview helped the researcher feel confident in the interview schedule and resulted in a few minor amendments to questions and prompts to ensure clarity of meaning. However, this is not to say that all questioning remained resolutely tied to the interview schedule. A considerable benefit of using semi-structured interviews was that the researcher was able to adapt and modify the interview appropriately in light of participants' responses, meaning that areas of particular interest were explored flexibly as they arose (Chapman & Smith, 2002).

However, the limitations surrounding semi-structured interview methodology are acknowledged. Elements of demand characteristics and experimenter effects may have been present in the current study due to a perceived power imbalance between researcher and participant, exacerbated by the interviews being conducted in the school setting. The researcher attempted to address this imbalance by promoting a feeling of empathy enabled by a relaxed atmosphere, introductions using first names, using informal language and a laid-back rapport-building session before the start of the interview. Karnieli-Miller, Strier and Pessach (2009) noted that these sorts of measures help to "democratise the power relations" (p. 280) and enable people to share personal stories and "open up about their feelings" (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, p. 48). However, despite these considerations, there was no way of ensuring absolute honesty. This is consistent with Baker's (1999) assumption that participants cannot be relied upon to give honest answers and are sometimes dishonest despite intending to remain truthful.

On reflection, further efforts to address this imbalance may have proved fruitful. For example, allowing participants to have a sense of full participation and ownership over the research may have improved the quality and reliability of responses (Shkedi, 2003). This could have been achieved by asking participants to produce daily journals noting their SMT experiences and/or facilitating participant-led focus groups to inspire critical thinking and the co-construction of new knowledge (Vaughn, 2014). However, Karnieli-Miller et al. (2009) argue that this can bring about considerable methodological and ethical issues as well as restricting the researcher's intellectual and academic autonomy. Therefore, the position is far from straight forward.

1.2.6 Analysis

The process of transcribing the twelve audio-recorded interviews conducted for the present study was very time-consuming. Indeed, this lengthy process led to a delay in analysis, which was challenging due to the researcher's personal

commitments. However, it enabled the researcher to get closely acquainted with the data, which was valuable.

Consistent with Braun and Clarke's (2006) assertion that qualitative psychologists should always provide clarity on how they analyse their findings, the present research followed their "Six Phases of Thematic Analysis" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 35), outlined in Appendix C and illustrated in Appendix E. This process was similarly lengthy, due to the volume of transcriptions and the various stages that it is necessary to adhere to. However, the researcher maintained this methodical approach, which resulted in the identification of some interesting and pervasive themes at the end of the process.

1.3 Distinct Contribution to Knowledge and Originality

The present study intended to explore the experiences of adolescents using SMT in a balanced, yet rich and detailed way. This was in order to address gaps in the literature and gain a nuanced and balanced perspective on adolescents' experiences and the impact on SEWBMH. It is suggested that the current study makes a material and progressive contribution to knowledge in this area. The literature review identified one study conducted by Lilley et al. (2014), which offered a balanced perspective in reporting the experiences of adolescents using SMT. However, this study was large-scale and quantitative in nature and utilised a multiple-choice survey as its method of data collection. Therefore, it is argued that its findings lack the depth and detail of the present study.

Furthermore, it is suggested that the present study provides a nuanced perspective absent in the research conducted to date. The existing literature provides interesting perspectives on how adolescents' use of SMT affects identity development (e.g. Seidman, 2014; Mendelson and Papacharissi, 2010; Nesi & Prinstein, 2015), and/or focuses on specific positive (e.g. Quinn and Oldmeadow, 2013a; Quinn and Oldmeadow, 2013b; Valkenburg and Peter, 2007) or negative (e.g. Ackers, 2012; Pantic et al., 2012; Horton et al., 2015; Lemola et al., 2015) implications for SEWBMH. Many of the findings of the current study are consistent with these previous notions. However, the present study extends the existing literature by presenting a balanced insight into the complexities of adolescents' social media-led realities and suggests a nuanced perspective on the impact for SEWBMH. Specifically, the study assimilates the positive (e.g. feeling connected to friends and able to express true/ideal self) and negative (e.g. destruction of self-esteem/self-image and long-lasting feelings of distress) implications for the SEWBMH and identity development of adolescents and proposes suggestions for harnessing the positive aspects and minimising the negative implications of SMT-use in adolescence.

It is argued that these findings are particularly salient given the fact that SMT use has become so voracious in adolescence (Coughlan, 2016) and its influence is continuing to grow in the UK and beyond (Lenhart et al., 2010; Maczewski, 2002; Pascoe, 2009; Subrahmanyam, Reich, Waechter, & Espinoza, 2008). The holistic and nuanced perspective presented enables an understanding of the opportunities and threats presented by SMT, which facilitates a more intimate and detailed understanding of contemporary adolescent behaviour. It is suggested that this is particularly important contextual information for educational and psychological professionals working in 2017, given that most will have not experienced SMT during their own adolescence.

Although the present study may lack the reliability and generalisability of the variety of quantitative studies within the existing literature, it is argued the exploratory, rich and in-depth perspective facilitated by the qualitative design and one-to-one semi-structured interviews enabled the present study to highlight a more unique and intricate picture of the social media realities of adolescents.

1.4 Future Research

Future research within this area could encompass many different directions. Firstly, it might prove useful to replicate this study using participatory techniques. This approach originated from Freire (1996) in the 1970's. His fundamental belief was that knowledge deemed as valid must be constructed through a democratic process of researcher and participant working together in a collaborative way. Pinter and Zandian (2012) noted that participatory methods have been popularised for their ethical and responsible way of involving young people and are endorsed by a variety of scholars in the twenty-first century (e.g. O'Kane, 2008, 2003; Punch, 2002; Tisdall et al., 2006). Furthermore, this approach is particularly relevant given research suggesting that adult metadiscourses¹¹ are often in danger of misinterpreting the contemporary media practices of young people (Jones & Schieffelin, 2009; Thurlow, 2006; 2007). For example, Thurlow's (2006; 2007) critical reviews of news reports concerning young people's media/internet discourse concluded the following:

...adult-debates about young people's use of new communication technologies are consistently negative and, for the most part, invariably overlook the meaningful, playful, and creative nature of young people's communicative practices (Thurlow & Bell, 2009, p. 1039)

Furthermore, Thurlow & Bell (2009) argued that contributory factors include adults' conflicted views on new technologies. Accordingly, future research could

¹¹ Adults writing about and directing discourse

harness participatory methodology in order to provide a mouthpiece for adolescents and ensure their specific realities are conveyed and reflected in the intended manner and minimise demand characteristics within the study. It would also be interesting to compare the results and see what similarities and differences might ensue due to the altered methodology.

Future research could also consider adopting a more homogenous sample given the interesting discussion surrounding P10 and P11's specific needs – a hearing impairment (HI) and HFA respectively - and SMT's particular ability to promote connectivity/belonging and expression of *true self* within these populations. This discussion resonates with McKenna, Green and Gleason's (2002) *Social Compensation Hypothesis*, which suggested that electronic communication enables adolescents who lack the confidence and/or social skills to interact effectively with peers offline, to meet their social needs by eradicating the complexities of face-to-face interaction. McKenna et al. (2002) concluded that electronic communication provides a unique benefit for this population, which is reinforced by Morahan-Martin and Schumacher (2003), who also suggested positive implications for SEWBMH. Accordingly, it might be useful to use a sample of adolescents with a diagnosis of HI and/or HFA and explore their experiences of using SMT in further detail. This would achieve a more contemporary perspective on the existing literature and extend the findings of the current study with the use of a more specific and homogenous sample, thus achieving a narrower yet deeper and richer perspective.

Finally future research could solely focus on SMT and the development of identity and the self in a more profound way, whilst maintaining the balanced perspective noted in the current study. Existing literature tends to focus on positive (e.g. Seidman, 2014) or negative (e.g. Chua & Chang, 2016; Perloff, 2014; Nesi & Prinstein, 2015) implications of SMT and identity development in adolescents. Furthermore, whilst the current research encompasses this area in a balanced manner it also looks at wider issues such as holistic affects on SEWBMH and feelings of belonging and connectivity. The current study highlights conflicting findings associated with the positive and negative implications of self-presentation and social comparison and feedback-seeking behaviour on SMT platforms. Therefore, it is suggested that a qualitative study could usefully explore these specific elements of adolescents' SMT behaviour in further detail, with a view to clarifying the extent to which these behaviors are functional to adolescent identity development and facilitating more profound findings. Moreover, the use of IPA could enhance this further by enabling the researcher to reflect on how participants make sense of their personal experiences (Smith, 2004).

1.5 Implications for Educational Psychologists (EPs)

The current research presents some interesting implications for EPs. The research provides a useful insight into the use of SMT by adolescents and implications for SEWBMH and identity development. EPs may wish to harness the knowledge that adolescents' voracious appetite for SMT is, to some extent, functional to their SEWBMH (e.g. ability to feel connected and belong, presentation of true/ideal self and ability to partake in reciprocal feedback seeking), framed within the context of the negative implications and risks to young people (e.g. cyberbullying, negative view of self in comparison to others and negative impact on sleep and emotional wellbeing), which should equip EPs with a holistic view of the nuanced implications for adolescents' SEWBMH.

With specific reference to EPs expanding role as a therapeutic provider (MacKay, 2007) and the fact that SEWBMH difficulties appear to be continuing to rise (Bor, Dean, Najman & Hayatbakhsh, 2014), EPs may wish to use the findings from the current study to inform appropriate therapeutic interventions. For example, the positive implications for SEWBMH found in the present study, could help inform a positive psychology intervention. After consultation with the young person concerned to discover what particular aspects of SMT promote happiness for him/her and thus ensuring the applicability of this approach, EPs could harness these particular aspects (e.g. staying connected and belonging) and explore how these experiences link to particular character strengths and virtues of the young person concerned, such as loyalty, love, kindness, social intelligence and humour (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

Moreover, if appropriate following consultation with the young person concerned, EPs could use cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) approaches to promote more healthy and adaptive thought processes in relation to pathological use of SMT and promote a healthy balance of SMT-use.

EPs might also wish to use the findings to help support young people with self-esteem issues related to cyberbullying, identity, appearance and body-image. CBT and mindfulness techniques could help equip young people with the skills and techniques necessary to reframe negative and maladaptive thoughts. For example, CBT approaches could help put negative experiences on SMT into perspective by focusing on offline strengths and positive experiences and mindfulness/meditative techniques could be used promote self-esteem and minimise social anxiety (Rasmussen & Pidgeon, 2011).

Finally, EPs may wish to engage in systems work within school and community settings in order to promote awareness of the positive and negative implications of SMT for adolescents and empower staff to address these issues at a strategic level. Kelly, Woolfson & Boyle (2008) note that systems work aims to penetrate structures at an organisational level in order to implement strategic

interventions that enhance the education and/or well-being of all children and young people within the particular school/setting. The training of school staff is often an important element of this process because it equips staff with the knowledge and expertise to promote and sustain such interventions (Fox & Sigston, 1992). However, research suggests that such training requires long-term planning and a framework of monitoring, follow-up and evaluation in order to be effective (Woodrow, 1991; Harland & Kinder, 1992; Harland & Kinder, 1994).

Consequently, EPs may wish to consider offering schools, clusters of schools and/or other community establishments, training and longer-term follow-up support in awareness of the experiences of adolescents using SMT and how to support them in the most effective way. It is suggested that this may include the promotion of pro-social and positive SMT behaviour (i.e. behaviour that promotes a positive view of oneself and others) alongside anti-cyberbullying rhetoric during Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE), ensuring students understand that school staff are aware of the pressures they face and have someone experienced in these matters to talk to. Furthermore, in view of the findings that suggest that leisure boredom may promote pathological SMT-use, such training and intervention may also involve encouraging students to enjoy the benefits of a wider variety of interests and pursuits.

1.6 Personal Reflections on the Research Process

This section will provide a personal reflection on the research process from the perspective of the researcher of the current study.

The process of completing this research has facilitated my development as a research-practitioner in a number of ways. I feel more confident in my ability to design, implement, report and reflect upon a piece of real-world research. However, my development in these areas has not been without significant challenge. With regards to designing the study, I found this process to be lengthy due to the large number of methodologies to consider. Ultimately, my decision to use broad and exploratory research questions helped narrow this field to qualitative techniques. However, I found the process of deciding between IPA and TA particularly challenging. In retrospect, I feel that choosing IPA as the method of analysis may have had several benefits: it would have fitted the exploratory nature of the study and my desire to examine the participants' specific realities whilst also developing my expertise in this field (which may have been more beneficial than using TA as I was already familiar with this technique).

However, Gest et al.'s (2006) notion of using 12 semi-structured interviews in qualitative research to promote saturation of themes encouraged me to use TA.

This was because IPA typically uses between 6 and 8 participants and I was keen to use 12 participants and focus on patterned meaning across a larger data-set rather than maintaining a more ideographic approach (Larkin, Watts & Clifton, 2006; Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). This was a reasonable conclusion, however it is regretful that I missed the opportunity to develop my knowledge and experiences of using IPA. Nevertheless, the positive outcome is that my knowledge and expertise in using TA has grown immensely. The use of Braun and Clarke's (2006) "Six Phases of Thematic Analysis" (p. 35) helped support my analysis considerably and facilitated a systematic and in-depth approach.

The process of recruiting participants was equally challenging. Due to personal circumstances, the time-scale available to collect the data was reasonably tight. Whilst the first nine participants were recruited and interviews conducted reasonably easily, I experienced some difficulty in recruiting participants in the second contrasting school due to staff illness. This was particularly anxiety provoking as there was not enough time to recruit another school entirely, yet progress was not being made in recruiting participants in the school from which I had gained approval. During this period, I was also very busy with educational psychology service work and family illness proved logistically difficult in terms of having the time available to make progress. Fortunately, seeking supervision helped me overcome these issues. It was decided that collecting the remaining data was important for the credibility of the study so a plan of action was discussed which made this viable. On reflection, I am very pleased that I was able to recruit the remaining participants and feel proud that I was able to achieve this despite the obstacles discussed. This experience has certainly developed my resilience and tenacity as a researcher and enhanced the reliability and validity of my research.

Given the opportunity to conduct the research again, on reflection I would have adopted a greater range of *democratising* strategies (Karnieli-Miller et al., 2009) to help minimise demand characteristics and experimenter effects. Moreover, the addition of conducting focus groups before the individual interviews might have had the effect of helping participants to feel at ease and reduce anxiety surrounding responses before the individual interviews (Kennedy et al., 2001). It may have added an additional dimension to the research through the opportunity to compare the focus group data with the semi-structured interview data and examine the differences and similarities in themes. Nevertheless, this would have created an element of bias with views within the focus group potentially impacting on views of participants within the semi-structured interviews.

I believe the process of designing, implementing, reporting and reflecting upon the research has developed my skill in many areas of psychology and research

and has demonstrated the valuable contribution EPs can make to the research-base. Specifically, this reflective account has developed my evaluative and reflective skills in line with the Health Care Professional Council's standards of proficiency for practitioner psychologists (HCPC, 2015) by providing a critical review of the strengths and limitations of the current research.

1.7 Conclusion

The current study aimed to gain a balanced and in-depth understanding of adolescents' experiences on SMT. It addresses gaps in the literature by presenting a balanced, yet complex interaction between positive and negative implications for adolescent SEWBMH and development and offers a nuanced perspective on the use of SMT within this demographic. The study also suggests useful points of reference for EPs and other educational professional to inspire holistic support and intervention. The challenge of conducting this research within the time frame permitted has developed my efficiency and effectiveness as a research-practitioner and the criticality involved has illuminated the importance of this skill in all areas of educational psychology practice.

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Appendices

Appendix A

A Contextual Summary of Relevant SMT Sites/Apps

SMT Site/App	Background Information
<i>Facebook</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enables users to create online profiles and post information, updates, links to demonstrate areas of interest, photographs, videos and conversations (Knight-McCord et al., 2016). • Posts can be public - available for all to see, semi-restricted - available for Facebook friends and friends of friends to view, or restricted - only available for Facebook friends to view (Facebook Help Centre, n.d.). • Has a private messaging facility in which users can send private messages, links, photos and/or videos to one or more users (Messenger, n.d.).
<i>Instagram</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “An application that allows users to take pictures and videos and share them on a variety of social networking platforms” (Knight-McCord et al., 2016, p. 22). • Equips users with the ability to instantaneously share key moments in a visual way and manipulate photographs and videos through various filters and techniques (Hu, Manikonda & Kambhampati, 2014). • It does not enable the range of sharing activities Facebook facilitates; however photographs and videos have become increasingly central to social media activity (Rainie, Brenner & Purcell, 2012).
<i>Snapchat</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Snapchat is also a photo-sharing app. • Its unique feature is that it enables users to send photographs or videos privately to one or more friends with shared material dissolving after a matter of seconds (Utz, Muscanell & Khalid, 2015). • Snapchat is associated with more personal and “intimate forms of sharing” and is therefore linked to “sexting” (Utz, Muscanell & Khalid, 2015, p. 141). • Users note the elevated sense of privacy in comparison to Facebook or Instagram. • However the photos or videos shared can be captured via screenshot before they dissolve meaning that privacy cannot be assured (Utz, Muscanell & Khalid, 2015).
<i>Twitter</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A microblogging site, which enables users to send short messages or <i>tweets</i> to a networked audience of <i>followers</i> (Marwick & Boyd, 2011). • Users can opt to <i>follow</i> as many other users as they wish and may <i>retweet</i> the posts of other users in order for their <i>followers</i> to read it (Knight-McCord et al., 2016). • Unlike Instagram and Snapchat, Twitter encourages users to write a series of short messages to illuminate their thoughts or behaviour at that specific time. These can range from humorous reflections to commentary on news and current affairs (Marwick & Boyd, 2011).

Appendix B

Summary of the Research Procedure

September – November 2014

Research of the literature.

December – March 2015

Development of research and ethics proposal and specification of research methods (including development of information sheets and consent forms) and submission to Cardiff University Ethics Committee.

April 2015

Ethics Proposal accepted.

May 2015

The researcher using one adolescent participant, who was known to the researcher, conducted a pilot study. Subsequently, two minor changes were made to the interview questions to ensure clarity and richness of response. This was because the adolescent interviewed needed further probing/explanation in order to fully understand the words *advantages* and *disadvantages*. The changes were as follows:

Original question: Could you tell me a little about what you feel are the advantages of using SMT?

Revised question: Could you tell me a little about what you feel are the advantages of using SMT and in what ways it makes your life better?

Original question: Could you tell me a little about what you feel are the disadvantages of using SMT?

Revised question: Could you tell me a little about what you feel are the disadvantages of using SMT and in what ways it causes problems in your life or makes you feel sad?

July 2015 – July 2016

Interruption of study due to maternity leave.

August 2016

Permission to conduct the research was obtained from the local authority where the researcher works as a trainee educational psychologist. Gatekeepers (Principal EP, Headteachers and parents/carers) were contacted using letters containing information and opt-in consent forms (Appendix H to K).

September 2016

Following written consent, the young people were approached individually and consent was sought using differentiated information sheet and opt-in consent forms (Appendix L to O).

September - November 2016

Data collection – the researcher held individual, semi-structured interviews with seven participants. The interviews were audiotaped with permission from each participant, to ascertain an accurate account of the interview, which could be replayed for analytic purposes. Confidentiality was assured during the course of the recordings. All data was anonymised, with the use of pseudonyms, during the transcription phase. Participants and their parents if under 16, received a debrief form thanking them for their involvement (Appendix P & Q).

October - December 2016

All semi-structured interviews were transcribed.

December 2016

Analysis of data following Braun and Clarke's (2006) step by step guide to thematic analysis (Appendix C). An illustrative example of the coding process is also presented in Appendix E.

December 2016- January 2017

Write up of draft literature review, empirical paper and reflective account.

April 2017

Thesis submission.

Appendix C

Phases of Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 35)

Phase	Description of the Process
1. Familiarising yourself with your data:	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2. Generating initial codes:	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3. Searching for themes:	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. Reviewing themes:	Checking the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic map of the analysis.
5. Defining and naming themes:	On-going analysis to refine the specifics of each theme and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6. Producing the report:	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples; final analysis of selected extracts; relating analysis back to the research question and literature; producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

Appendix D

Verification Strategies used to Promote Reliability and Validity in the Current Study. Adapted from Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson and Spiers (2002).

Methodological coherence

The researcher ensured congruence between the research questions and the method. The qualitative approach, facilitated by semi-structured interviews and open-ended questioning was consistent with the exploratory nature of the research questions as well as the interpretivist paradigm in which the researcher operated.

Appropriate sample

Purposive sampling ensured the selection of participants who were regular users of social media and fell within the 14-18 age bracket. Sampling adequacy (Morse et al., 1991) was promoted through the recruitment of 12 participants to encourage effective saturation of categories (Gest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006), thereby promoting optimal quality and internal validity.

Collecting and analyzing data concurrently

The researcher maintained reliability and validity by ensuring “mutual interaction between what is known and what one needs to know” (Morse et al., 2002, p. 18).

Thinking theoretically

Reliability and validity was promoted through systematic verification of themes through checking and rechecking of the dataset to ensure any theorising was grounded and consistent with the data.

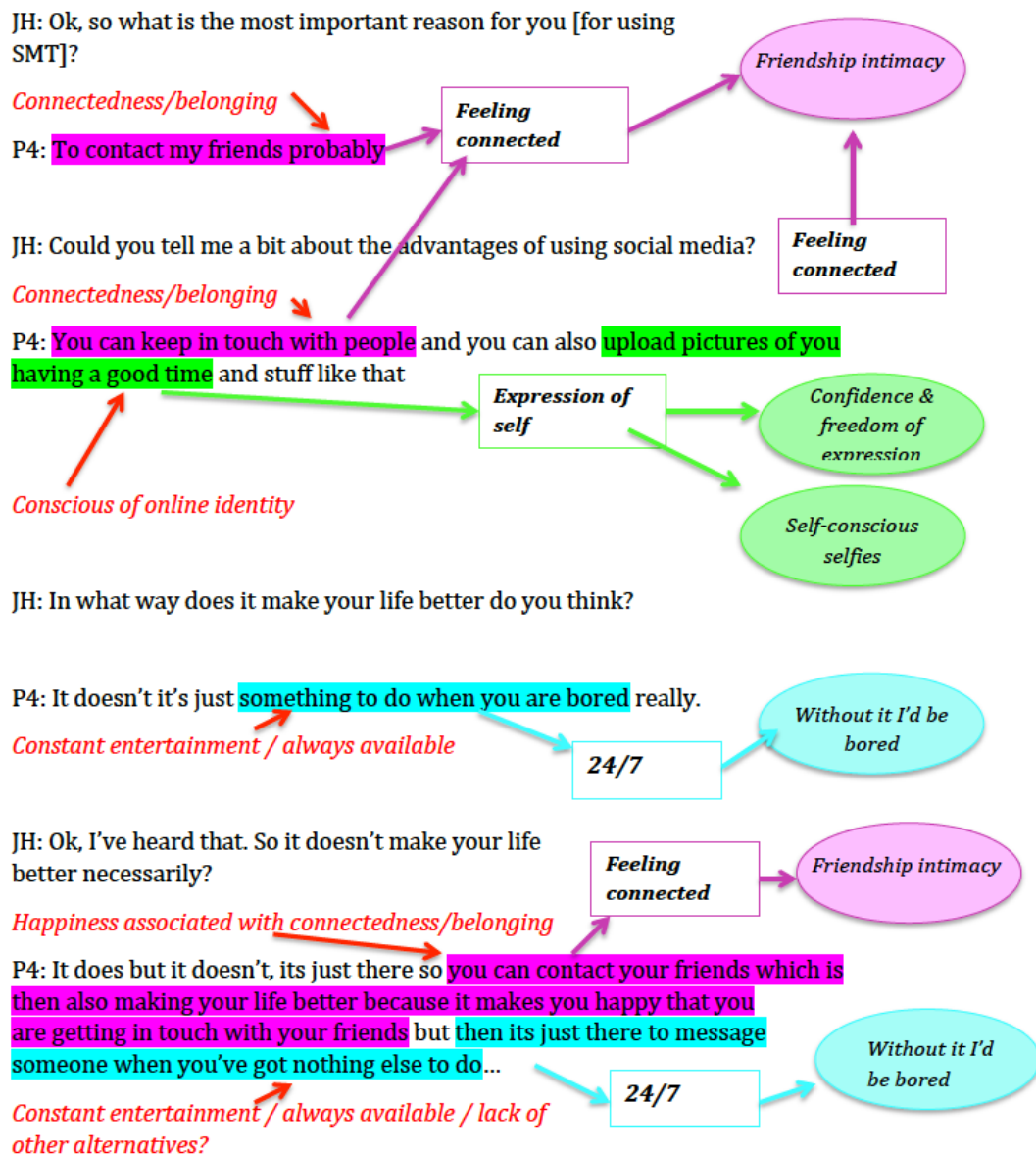
Theory development

To ensure theories were well developed and informed, the research ensured they were comprehensive, logical, and consistent (Morse et al., 2002) by moving between the “micro perspective of the data and a macro conceptual/theoretical understanding” (Morse et al., 2002, p. 18).

Appendix E

An Illustrative Example of the Coding Process

Excerpt from P4 Transcript



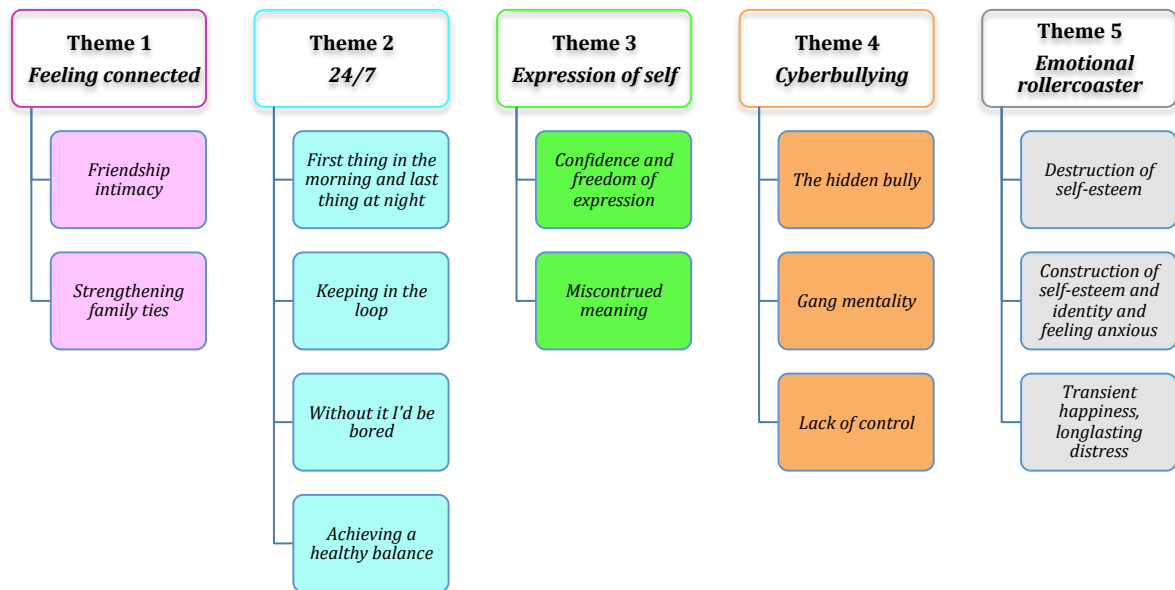
Key Red italic = Initial coding

□ = Main theme

○ = Subtheme

Appendix F

Thematic Map



Appendix G

Results – Table of Supporting Quotations

Theme	Subtheme	Supporting quotations
<p>1. Feeling connected</p>	<p><i>Friendship intimacy</i></p>	<p>P1: Because if you need to meet someone and you want to spend time with them for the day - umm - you can just message them and then they'll meet up. (l. 43-45)</p> <p>P2: All my friends had it in year 5 and 6 and were always talking about it, all the stuff on there and that. (l. 33-34)</p> <p>P2: Because all my friends I usually hang around with, I use it to contact them and meet them everyday (l. 47-48)</p> <p>P3: You get to talk to all your friends and like mainly the ones you haven't seen since primary school but sometimes that's it or have a look at things (l. 43-45)</p> <p>JH: What do you think is the most important reason to you? P3: To keep in touch with friends (l. 52-53)</p> <p>P4: Just to contact my friends really and my family in an emergency so if my texts weren't sending and I had no signal, but I had wifi (l. 39)</p> <p>P4: You can keep in touch with people and you can also upload pictures of you having a good time and stuff like that (l. 43-44)</p> <p>P5: To get in touch with friends like back from when I moved to Stoke friends from there, friends in general like at school and that if I don't have their number and that or if they aren't answering they family if they don't use a phone and some that live in Kent (l. 26-30)</p> <p>JH: Ok so what is the main advantage in your opinion? P5: Just being able to talk to my friends I don't get to see (l. 41-42)</p> <p>P5: About the same really but it's easier now because now that I've moved away from those friends I can still keep in touch with them but like I wouldn't have had to keep in touch with them because I lived there but it was easier when I lived there to get fb to talk to my one friend that I've known for ages so it's just the same really (l. 153-158)</p> <p>P6: Umm using social media, I would think it's a way of just contacting people that one, you've never met or people that you've met before but are really far away, for instance on the other side of the country umm it's just easier to talk to people and get involved in events (l. 140-144)</p> <p>P7: Just to see what my friends are doing and talk to them and yeah</p> <p>P8: Just to like socialise really, just makes it easier to contact with people (l. 36-37)</p> <p>P8: Its quick messaging, if you want to tell someone something quickly it gets it done, umm (l. 62-63)</p> <p>P9: Helps you keep in touch with people, that's it really (l. 40)</p> <p>P10: Uuummm, I use Snapchat so I can speak to my friends (l. 24)</p> <p>P10: Aah I think the advantage of using social media is that for me it's an advantage to keep contact with friends (l. 59-60)</p> <p>P10: But, if I didn't have social media I wouldn't really have many friends as I would have now (l. 161-162)</p> <p>P11: Snap chat is kind of talking to friends kind of and I guess catching up with people I don't meet up with in real life as much. I've got a friend who used to be in England but she's moved to New Zealand now but I can still be in contact with her on snapchat which</p>

		<p>is really useful. Instagram it's usually just sort of being up to date with everyone else and what they are doing day to day (l. 31-37)</p> <p>P11: I like it because you can talk to anyone wherever you are even if they are not with you. (l. 43-44)</p> <p>P11: Umm talking to my friend who moved to New Zealand that's made me quite happy as I thought when she'd moved I wouldn't be able to see her and I was sad about that but now I can talk to her every day its kind of happy that I can do that (l. 59-63)</p> <p>P12: Umm I don't know what to say, friends, talking to people you know, socialising... (l. 54-55)</p> <p>P12: Because I like talking to people because it's more important to do in my opinion than other things (l. 59-60)</p> <p>P12: Umm communication is the obvious one, being able to talk to people you wouldn't normally talk to so like abroad and stuff because you know you can't text, it costs loads, being able to do things together like through apps, play online games and things (l. 67-71)</p>
	<i>Strengthening family ties</i>	<p>JH: What do you think is the most important reason for you?</p> <p>P1: Making sure my family is ok. (l. 32-33)</p> <p>P1: I don't really see much of my Auntie so I can talk to her (l. 39)</p> <p>P3: Like family that lives away they can message you every now and again (l. 80-81)</p> <p>P4: Just to contact my friends really and my family in an emergency so if my texts weren't sending and I had no signal, but I had wifi (l. 39)</p> <p>JH: So what is the most important reason for you?</p> <p>P5: Just get in touch with my family and stuff (l. 31-32)</p> <p>P10: And Facebook, well most of my family live in south England I don't see them rarely, I see them very rarely sooo, therefore I can't speak to them very quick so I use Facebook. I've got this year in March so I did make a benefit for me to have more contact and keep that connection. (l. 28-32)</p> <p>P10: ummm I use Facebook for again looking at what my friends and family are up and as they live far away, some of my family live abroad..</p> <p>JH: Oh, wow...</p> <p>P10: Yeah they like to know what I'm up to, what I'm doing and as I'm now getting onto the stage of going to college soon and all that so they want to keep that connection so I don't have to rely on my mum to let her know how I'm doing, so she wants me to become more independent so I use social media to see how doing with my family... (l. 48-55)</p> <p>P10: Umm these experiences have affected because they again like they keep me happy by giving me confidence by not losing someone and I can always find they're alright if they're ok, like my family I can check if you're alright, and like my mum doesn't have the social media so she doesn't and as my mum doesn't have the social media she doesn't find out straight away so I'm always there to like check it as well on my family's side as my mum's still not agreeing with the social media very much because everyones all my family's on it apart from her so I'm just there to let her know all of that so if she really needs to know somethings I'd let her know it in advance and all of that.. (l. 150-159)</p>
2. 24/7	<i>Morning, noon and night</i>	<p>P1: Nearly every night, and when I wake up (l. 13)</p> <p>P1: [I check it] Til about 10 or half 10 [at night] (l.17)</p> <p>P1: [I check it from] 7 o'clock til quarter past while I'm watching</p>

		<p>something on TV</p> <p>P2: I always check it for like an hour in the morning, usually at school break times and lunch then basically all night when I get home (l. 19-20)</p> <p>P2: probably 7 or 8 [hours in total] (l. 23)</p> <p>P2: I usually sleep through but If I hear my phone go off ill wake up and look at it (l. 266-267)</p> <p>JH: Really so you keep it on loud? So how often does it go off in the night?</p> <p>P2: 3 or 4 times (l. 273-275)</p> <p>P3: When I wake up and then when I get home (l. 19)</p> <p>P3: I stay on it for as long as I can</p> <p>JH: How many hours would that be?</p> <p>P3: A lot, probably until I go to sleep (l. 31-33)JH: What about the others things you need to do in the evening, do you try and do that at the same time?</p> <p>P3: Not when I have dinner but my homework I normally do but I normally use the internet and when I shower or have a bath I normally take my laptop in there, just to watch it (l. 34-38)</p> <p>P5: Umm I use it practically every day just when I get home just to message my best friend to see when we are meeting and that because we meet every day then I use it a little bit at night to watch a film and that. I don't use it loads just 3 hours a day, maybe 4 (l. 19-23)</p> <p>JH: How long before you go to sleep would you last check your phone?</p> <p>P5: I would normally be watching a film or tv or something so I would quickly check my phone for about 5 minutes or before then just go to sleep. (l. 188-192)</p> <p>P7: Most of the day, unless I'm at college or something, as soon as I get home I'm always on it</p> <p>JH: What about in the morning?</p> <p>P7: As soon as I wake up check my phone, go on it (l. 17-20).</p> <p>JH: A question about sleep, do you check your phone during the night?</p> <p>P7: It depends if I wake up during the night sometimes I'll go back to sleep and think no it's not worth it cos if I wake up and I go one my phone I'll be up for hours</p> <p>JH: Do you have notifications during the night, do you keep your phone switched on?</p> <p>P7: No I put it on silent</p> <p>JH: That's good, so sometimes then you check your phone during the night? What time do you go to sleep and what time do you stop checking?</p> <p>P7: Regularly I've been getting to sleep about 11 so before I go to sleep I put my phone down and then go to sleep</p> <p>JH: And what time do you check it in the morning?</p> <p>P7: As soon as I wake up (l. 204-219)</p> <p>P8: Snapchat I wake up and read my snapchats and then send like any back. Umm fb if I've got notifications I'll go on it but if I haven't I wouldn't bother going on it, Instagram I look as well, I go through it on my way to school and then just before I get to the door I check snapchat again, and then after school I usually have a couple of notifications on fb so I check that, I don't know really know how many hours just whenever I get notifications through, I don't know</p> <p>JH: So when would be the last time you check it?</p> <p>P8: Night time before like just I go to sleep, that's when I read through everything, you know when you can't get to sleep so you</p>
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		<p>check it until you get tired (l. 21-33)</p> <p>JH: ... So do you ever check your phone during the night?</p> <p>P8: If I wake up I like have a quick look because I find it makes me more tired at night (l. 237-240)</p> <p>P9: Depends what I'm doing, when I'm at college not a lot but obviously on the weekends I'm on it pretty much all day (l. 14-16)</p> <p>JH: No problem. Ok do you ever check your phone during the night?</p> <p>P9: Yes, if I wake up it's the first thing I do, check it</p> <p>JH: Yeah and what happens then? Does it draw you in?</p> <p>P9: Sort of, I do go on it and start replying but I just end up falling asleep so I don't end up replying so it doesn't really keep me awake I just fall asleep on it (l. 166-172)</p> <p>P10: Yeah, sometimes if I go sometimes I get really stressed out during the night let's just say during exams or something and then i just message and then I don't know why but i don't know how my friends pick it up straight away after like if it was midnight and I'm just messaging them like I can't get to sleep, how do I get to sleep because of like this, but the problem with exam or something or like they'll be prepared to like to talk to me for like half an hour and then I would drift off or i would watch a bit of youtube an all that. (l. 436-443)</p> <p>JH: Great, umm do you feel the need to check those through the night ever?</p> <p>P11: Umm snapchat I do, I'm usually talking to friends until about 11ish, Instagram I don't really check at night. (l. 22-25)</p> <p>P11: Instagram I don't really mind if I can't go on that but umm snapchat I quite like be on that all the time just if someone's trying to talk to me I kinda feel rude if I don't reply to them quickly (l. 23-26)</p> <p>P11: Ummm I can see it says sleep there and its quite interesting about that I think I read somewhere about blue light on your phone stops you from sleeping or something but I do find it more difficult to go to sleep if I've been on my phone talking to friends so I think that makes me more tired from being on my phone more from social media (l. 174-179)</p> <p>P12: Well if it's a school day then I pretty much won't because I don't have internet, I'd be on it all the time otherwise until I go to bed (l. 25-28)</p> <p>P12: Umm it depends when I got to bed to be honest, I'll be on it til I go to bed</p> <p>JH: On average what time might that be?</p> <p>P12: Maybe like 12, 1 ish, I dunno that's about as late as it gets normally, 11 will be the earliest normally as well (l. 39-43)</p>
	<p><i>Keeping in the loop</i></p>	<p>P2: yeah because I had no clue what was going on then when I got my social media back I had loads of messages and things</p> <p>P2: Because I'm so used to using it every day for ages and catching up with everyone and things but when you don't have it you just feel like you are missing out and you don't know what's going on (l.116-119)</p> <p>P5: I use it practically every day just when I get home just to message my best friend to see when we are meeting and that because we meet every day. (P5, line 19-21)</p>

	<p><i>Without it I'd be bored</i></p>	<p>JH: No, umm What would you miss about it if you weren't able to go on it? P3: Cos you'd have nothing to do, when you have nothing it's kind of like the only thing you can go on, keep checking (l. 58-61)</p> <p>JH: So when it's not there do you cope ok or would you prefer for it to be back? P3: Yeah id prefer for it to be back (l. 110-112)</p> <p>P4: It doesn't [make my life better] it's just something to do when you are bored really (l. 46)</p> <p>P7: I don't know, umm it doesn't really make my life better it's something to do though but umm like I said it's to keep contact with my friends and that</p> <p>JH: So could you imagine what life would be like without it? P7: Boring</p> <p>JH: Why do you say that? P7: I dunno, you go on your phone to go on things like that don't you so if you didn't have that it would be boring (l. 38-46)</p> <p>JH: Yeah exactly but umm for example if you were at home and it was the holidays and you couldn't access your fb and snapchat, how do you think you might feel? P7: Bored (l. 80-83)</p> <p>P7: [It makes my life] Better probably, it's something to do (l. 182)</p> <p>P8: It's something to do as well like during my free studies and as long as I've got no work on I have a browse through, see what's going on in the world if I'm at home and got no plans I have a read (l. 52-55)</p> <p>P8: I wouldn't say it makes my life better, I could go without it, umm I dunno it just gives me something to do when I'm bored and have nothing else to do</p> <p>JH: Ok umm right what is the main advantage then in your opinion? P8: When I'm bored (l. 69-70)</p> <p>JH: So why is it then at the weekends you use it all day? P9: I've got nothing else to do because I work in the evenings I've got the day to do nothing really (l. 70-72)</p> <p>P12: Umm I don't know what to say, friends, talking to people you know, socialising, because I don't have anything else to do, nothing else I'd rather do (l. 54-56)</p> <p>P12: Because literally after school and before school in the morning in that time frame I would have nothing to do what so ever, I'd literally come home do whatever homework I've got to do then go to bed (l. 191-194)</p>
	<p><i>Striving for a healthy balance</i></p>	<p>P8: oh I'm fine like when I go abroad and there's like reception in the hotel and it's got wifi, I don't really bother I just leave it, take my pictures and post them when I'm home, I sometimes facetime my Mum if I go on holiday with my Dad but I don't read anything, I literally just get off the facetime then go back to what I was doing, it's nice to have a break from it all, just get away from it</p> <p>JH: Whys that do you think? P8: I dunno, it's just relaxing, nobody needs to know everything all the time so it's nice just to be able to go [] and then just leave it (l. 82-92)</p> <p>P8: I wish it wasn't so like, a lot of people think social media is like the main thing I wish it wasn't, I think it is taking over like too many</p>

		<p>people use it all the time people are constantly using it</p> <p>JH: What do you think it is taking over?</p> <p>P8: Well its taking over people's lives like people use it too often I think, some people it's fine but others it's like constant (l. 213-220)</p> <p>P10: ummm I would say that i wish i wasn't too addicted to the social media it can be benefit in some ways but being too overly on it it can affect you in your overall life because if you're on it too much you're making your outside life worse, then so because if you're think of reality on the outside world you'll probably be better on the outside but in the inside of you you aren't without without that back up support form your friends and all that.. (l. 406-411)</p> <p>P11: Umm well because I feel like I have to use it really often to be in touch with people and that kind of takes up a lot of time when I could be doing other things like more revision, Mum's usually like oh you need to put the phone down so it kind of affects family life a bit sometimes (l. 94-98)</p>
<p>3. Expression of self</p>	<p><i>Confidence and freedom of expression</i></p>	<p>P1: [I prefer] My online self</p> <p>JH: Why's that do you think?</p> <p>P1: Because I'm more confident in myself (l. 191-3)</p> <p>P2: I can be more uplifted on internet but obviously, you are behind the screen and you think to can do anything, you don't get as much of it in life (l. 171-173)</p> <p>P7: I don't know, I don't really like expressing myself, I just find it a bit embarrassing so I'd rather do it online but like I said it depends who it is, when I'm talking to one person (l. 168-170)</p> <p>P10: Umm I would say I'm different in some ways because on social media I can express myself more because offline Im quite a shy person but with my friends I can be quite a shy person because we are very different interests and then I sometimes say something that doesn't make sense and they look at me are confused as to why I said that and then it's just gives me panic and all that and I think I've made it wrong again.. but offline but with online I can understand what they're saying cos I can read it, I understand it and we at ike were really, really good friends but I am a completely different to people would expect me to be.. (l. 306-314)</p> <p>P10: I prefer my online self as that's really the real me..(line. 372)</p> <p>P11: I kinda feel like it gives me a more confidence than I'd have in real so I can talk to someone I wouldn't usually talk to (</p> <p>JH: Why is that do you think?</p> <p>P11: Maybe because you aren't face to face with them, it's less intimidating maybe</p> <p>l. 44-49)</p> <p>JH: Ok</p> <p>P10: But, I'm very quiet offline and people may think I'm quite a boring person but online people just turn around and wondered why I was like being like that and not myself and very confused as to what's the real me and what but i think most people now what i am like and... (l. 372-377)</p> <p>P11: Umm I think I'm maybe a bit more confident online because I'm not face to face with them. I have Autism as well so kind of face to face is quite difficult but if you are texting or something it's easier to talk to someone, you haven't got to read their facial expressions</p>

		<p>or something (l. 128-132)</p> <p>P12: It depends on what the topic is, if it's something like important then I'm better talking to them through text chat, if it's about an issue and they are irritated or just a chat then I'm normally better in voice (l. 166-169)</p>
	<i>Misconstrued meaning</i>	<p>P8: I think It's just better to talk to someone face to face because you can actually like express yourself and see how they react because if you send a message you don't if they are like "why's he sent me that" or "oh that's nice" you can't get the tones, sometime people take texts or whatever the wrong way (l. 178-183)</p> <p>P10: Umm there is a point that we I did have a conversation with a friend of mine and the problem is you're just texting you're not. you have these emojis or something just to show your emotions but some people can take it the wrong and then you appear to school and then coming up and they're like not your friend, they're just ignoring you because of a statement and you're trying to be clear to them that's not what you meant.. (l. 208-213)</p> <p>P10: Aah well the negative stuff about social media is again that people would misread your comments and all that and then let's just say they block you, they ignore and they were your friends and then you're just like sitting there wondering why there did that... (l. 265-268)</p> <p>P12: Probably, umm but I don't know I know, occasionally I feel slightly suppressed, I can't really show what I'm actually thinking about something as it can be taken the wrong way or just seem annoying so yes I suppose so (l. 172-175)</p> <p>P12: Probably that I can convey what I actually mean</p> <p>JH: So you would find a way of being able to convey tone like you would in a normal conversation</p> <p>P12: Yeah text chat doesn't do that for me (l. 210-213)</p>
	<i>Self-conscious selfies</i>	<p>JH: What do you do to kind of stop yourself worrying about that?</p> <p>P1: Just make sure I post a good picture</p> <p>JH: Do you? Is that like a big concern, to make sure that it's a good picture and you look ok in it?</p> <p>P1: Its not really a concern it's just something I like to make sure is done (l. 138-144)</p> <p>P4: it's nice to know you have friends who like your photos (l. 154-55)</p> <p>P9: Sometimes, if like I'm in a bad mood then I think thats a rubbish photo but other times I just think if I like it then that's it, who cares what anyone else thinks (129-131)</p> <p>P11: Umm I think there is a lot of pressure and I have kinda felt pressure from people on Instagram kind of posting pictures of themselves in the mirror, or a lot of people where really skinny crop tops and tight jeans and post a photo revealing quite a lot, I know my friends have kind of felt like they have had to conform to that but I've always tried to not doing anything but there is that pressure I think (l. 135-142)</p> <p>P8: No I don't think people post the reality, I think they post the good, only the good some people... (l. 139-140)</p>
4. Cyberbullying	<i>The hidden bully</i>	<p>P2: You don't see a lot of bullying face to face its usually behind the screen anyway (l. 146-147)</p> <p>P2: ...They feel more like up there, they can think of what to say and they don't have to go through it face to face (l. 150-151)</p>

		<p>P2: Not being able to hide behind the screen and so if like you're going to send a nasty message to someone for it not to be allowed, so you wouldn't be able to send it (l. 240-242)</p> <p>P3: That people kind of think that they can put anything on there because they are behind the screen but like bad things but then when you see them and they just act like nothing's happened like bullying</p> <p>JH: Do you see that happening a lot?</p> <p>P3: Yeah</p> <p>JH: Has it ever happened to you?</p> <p>P3: Yeah</p> <p>P5: Yeah it can be like if they keep doing it and you say to them about it and they won't say nothing because they are just doing it all behind the screen and stuff, it's stupid really (l. 94-96)</p> <p>P6: Yeah because people can say sorry but you are an absolute annoying person and you make the worst videos in the world, that kind of bullying and those kind of tweets if you say the sentence "worse videos in the world" I think you tube automatically ban you from you tube for that (l. 116-120)</p> <p>P7: I don't know, I see a lot people like if they argue and stuff they will be like really horrible on fb or something and then in person they are all quiet and that, because it's behind the phone or whatever</p> <p>JH: So why do you think that is, why are they are a different person online to offline?</p> <p>P7: it's behind the phone isn't it then when they see the actual person they're like oh god... (l. 137-134)</p> <p>P11: Umm there was this one time I guess on snap chat where this other person in my year at school asked to have pictures sent to them of my body or something, it was kind of scary but I don't think they would do things like that in real life</p> <p>JH: Was that reported?</p> <p>P11: No I don't think so but they did apologise afterwards so (l. 113-120)</p>
	<p><i>Gang mentality</i></p>	<p>P1: Umm, just picking on people because of their profile pictures and stuff</p> <p>JH: Ok so what do you mean by picking on people?</p> <p>P1: Like, name calling</p> <p>JH: Right, do people actually write things under the picture?</p> <p>P1: Yeah, then everybody starts joining in.... (l. 119-124)</p> <p>P1: Bullying, like group chats being made of me</p> <p>JH: Yeah, gosh, that must have been awful</p> <p>P1: Yes it was (l. 150-2)</p> <p>P2: Some of the videos on there are offensive to other people and I've seen a lot of my friends and I've been through it myself before, like cyber bullying (l.125-127)</p> <p>P2: It was about like 3 months ago (l. 130)</p> <p>P6: Again the bullying as well, the same thing as the last question, continuously going on and on and on (l. 308-309)</p> <p>P7: Well, I don't know there's a lot of bullying on social media, not to me but like that I see it's like on fb a lot of the time it's like arguments and people being horrible to others and yeah, it like I don't want to go on fb and see that</p> <p>P9: Normally what happens is something happens in school or</p>

		college then it gets sprung up on fb and then it all starts on fb again so it's both really, they start face to face and then it gets onto the internet and then everybody gets involved (l. 109-113)
	<i>Lack of control</i>	<p>P2: It's like when other people write posts and other people get jealous of one another and they start writing comments when people have fell out, obviously you can add so many people you don't even know, obviously I've got over 1000 friends and I don't know half of them. (l. 138-142)</p> <p>P3: Well its happened recently, but that's cos he was taking pictures of me when I was like year 7 and then using it on other people's status' and photos and snapchat (l. 126-8)</p> <p>P4: You are a target for anyone on social media, say if they just looked on your fb profile, they could immediately start writing posts about you, take your photo put it somewhere, slaughter you all over the internet something like that (l. 98-101)</p> <p>P4: There's been one incident where this boy, we split up quite a while ago, he put a photo up of me and my friend saying about my weight saying I've got diabetes and my friend is fat stuff like that, and then there was a photo he put up of my other friend on fb and snap chat and said, do you know who is? It's a little girl and she has got problems, he was saying that she looked like her and everything, luckily he's stopped now (l. 105-111)</p> <p>P5: You get a lot of bullying on social media, for instance the other day my friend, this boy in our year he got a photo up of her from a while back when she was younger and was taking the mick out of her calling her and calling her names and stuff like that and he took some pictures of people in the street and called them names saying one of them was fat and it was me and the other was my friend, silly things like that (l. 63-69)</p> <p>P8: I'm not as open online because I don't know where it's going to end up, because a screen shot is easy, someone else could screen shot it and could go miles. (l. 155-158)</p> <p>P10: Yeah it's like social media like snapchat is that you can't delete that text. You have to go around and say sorry, that was supposed to go to.. Once it's on you can't really get rid of it, it's travelling, people hear once you're off like 10 people hear and screenshot it and pass it on.. (l. 221-224)</p> <p>P10: It happens and if you press something it just goes off and it sometimes 227 makes me feel I wish it wasn't on that!</p> <p>P10: Cos it's something, it could be something personal and they could travel it on the next day or say something bad, something bad about me and show a very bad reputation of me.. (l. 241-243)</p> <p>P10: so and they just pretend they're doing a selfie but they're not they're actually videoing you without your permission and they're posting that on snapchat and they have these effects and all that on snapchat they put it on your face and it can effect me in a way that that's happened (l. 335-339)</p> <p>P10: So people wouldn't really want to be... so you got to be careful around people with the phones if you know they're gonna take a picture, you've just 360 gotta you know... (l. 358-360)</p>
5. Emotional Rollercoaster	<i>Construction of self-esteem and identity</i>	<p>P1: Umm when I got lots of birthday messages...</p> <p>JH: That's nice isn't it - so how did that make you feel?</p> <p>P1: Quite happy</p> <p>P2: when people write paragraphs on your birthday about how</p>

		<p>much you mean to them and that, like ***** had that the other day because it was her birthday (l.93-95)</p> <p>P3: Yeah because everyone just wishes you a happy birthday and then put up like pictures or something..</p> <p>JH: Does that make you feel good?</p> <p>P3: Yeah (l. 87-89)</p> <p>P5: Just friends being nice and that like when I was getting angry last year they were just always there for me and just messaged me and make sure I was ok (l. 46-48)</p> <p>P7: No really no, only when I get like happy birthday messages or something</p> <p>JH: Ok yeah, so how do those messages make you feel?</p> <p>P7: Happy</p> <p>JH: And does it make you feel good because....</p> <p>P7: You are being thought about (l. 58-63)</p> <p>P8: Umm, I can't say, ummm. On my birthday when people post on my wall, I like that</p> <p>JH: How does that make you feel?</p> <p>P8: Happy, it makes you feel like people actually are bothered cos they take the time to post on your wall (l. 73-77)</p> <p>P9: I do feel good because of the amount of people that write and say happy birthday (l. 60-61)</p> <p>P10: with social media I was starting to express myself more, I was starting to send pictures and people were starting to like them and getting more positive feedback and I was getting confident and all that... (l. 81-83)</p> <p>P12: Umm nothing particularly uplifting but it's just generally keeps me, sorry I'm not doing well... nothing especially uplifting but it generally keeps me up in spirits normally</p> <p>JH: Why is that?</p> <p>P12: Cos I like to talk to people, I like talking to people (l. 77-82)</p>
	<p><i>Deconstruction of self-esteem and feeling anxious</i></p>	<p>P3: It made me feel really embarrassed coming to school because I'm not a confident person anyway so then when he puts things like that up it knocked me back down again, I didn't want to come in (l. 153-156)</p> <p>P1: It makes me worry..</p> <p>JH: Yeah, what do you worry about?</p> <p>P1: That if I post a new profile picture someone will do it to me.. [bully me...] (l. 132-4)</p> <p>P1: Yeah it affects lots of girls, and boys as well... (l.165)I think it affects girls more because they are always under pressure to make themselves look good (l. 169)</p> <p>P2: Yeah some of my friends I was with yesterday, my other friend uploaded a photo and because she had her cleavage out all the boys said stuff like bad and then some people said good about it so like people judge in different ways (l.194-197)</p> <p>P4: Its quite upsetting to know that people think that about you (l. 123)</p> <p>P10: And then people would think I'm a bad person</p> <p>JH: Yeah..</p>

		<p>P10: Which can affect in a way me using social media and then, cos that happened to me before and I didn't go on it for about 4 weeks cos it affected me that much cos people have been wondering if I'm alright, loads of my friends have been saying that and then I was like yeah but again I felt alone in my own away and it's just been hard during that time but yeah been trying to manage it. (l. 245-252)</p> <p>P11: Umm maybe a bit worried about what they might think about me if I'm not talking to them all the time</p> <p>JH: Ok umm why is this do you think? Do you feel under some kind of pressure?</p> <p>P11: Umm yeah a little bit, there this thing on snap chat called streaks where you kind of talk to someone every day and you get a streak and it tells you how many days you talked to them for and everyone does it so there is pressure to talk to someone everyday so you get a little streak thing but you have to talk to them like multiple times a day sometimes if you haven't got 3g you're like oh no I'm gonna lose my streak with someone (l. 79-90)</p> <p>P11: ...I dunno if you are having a conversation and maybe they don't reply it kind of makes you feel sort of down because you think maybe I've done something wrong or maybe they don't want to reply to me (l. 98-102)</p> <p>P11: Probably less of the pressure to wear the crop tops and do that kind of thing, cos not only is there pressure to conform to that but the people like me who don't really want to be a part of that are kind of battered with images of it and you don't really want to see that (l. 164-168)</p> <p>JH: So it would make you feel a bit stressed out? Why is that do you think?</p> <p>P12: I don't like letting people down, which is probably one of my largest fears</p> <p>JH: So you think that if you didn't reply they might....</p> <p>P12: Well I don't know, its rude to leave during a conversation, if it's about something important and I left then they'd feel irritated or bad and I have no way of knowing what they feel about it because there's no internet or anything (l. 90-99)</p> <p>P12: Not social media maybe the conversations I am having on them like you know earlier I said about the anxiety if I leave a conversation early, I can not sleep if that happens, I'm literally incapable of sleeping, if it doesn't end on either a good note or ends suddenly I will become an insomniac, that's not social media though it's the conversation I am having on them (l. 221-227)</p>
	<p><i>Transient happiness, long-lasting distress</i></p>	<p>P3: Yeah because everyone just wishes you a happy birthday and then put up like pictures or something..</p> <p>JH: Does that make you feel good?</p> <p>P3: Yeah</p> <p>JH: Right, how long do these feeling generally last?</p> <p>P3: I suppose not long ... (l. 87-92)</p> <p>JH: How long did those feelings [of distress] last?</p> <p>P3: They still last now (l. 159-60)</p> <p>P4: When your friends message you on your birthday that also makes you happy, like say if you have moved to a different school from your old friends and to know they still want to be friends with you by them just saying happy birthday or something like a little message, that's nice</p> <p>JH: So how long do those feeling last for?</p> <p>P4: The whole day, on your birthday (l. 66-72)</p>

		<p>JH: Ok how long do those feelings generally last?</p> <p>P7: About 10 minutes (l. 64-65)</p> <p>P8: Happy, it makes you feel like people actually are bothered cos they take the time to post on your wall</p> <p>JH: Ok how long have those feelings lasted?</p> <p>P8: About a day or the day after (l. 76-79)</p> <p>P9: I do feel good because of the amount of people that write and say happy birthday</p> <p>JH: So how long have those feelings lasted?</p> <p>P9: Until my birthday is over (60-63)</p> <p>JH: How long did those feelings of unhappiness last?</p> <p>P1: A few weeks (line 159-161)</p> <p>JH: So how long have those feeling lasted then?</p> <p>P6: Very long when I say it, it was continuously through quite a bit of my primary school and a couple of years of my secondary school (l. 322-326)</p>
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Appendix H

Letter to Gatekeeper (1)

Joanna
Hammond
School of Psychology
Cardiff University
Tel: 02920 875393
hammondjl@cardiff.ac.uk

Dear Principal Educational Psychologist,

As you are aware, I am currently a Trainee Educational Psychologist studying at Cardiff University and am required to undertake a thesis as an academic requirement of the course. In light of the prominence of social media technology (SMT) in adolescent populations and the research surrounding SMT and social and emotional wellbeing and mental health, I am interested in exploring adolescents' experiences of using SMT, with the hope of uncovering possible considerations for young people, their families and educational professionals. The proposed study will attempt to answer the following research questions:

1.	What are adolescents' reasons for using SMT?
2.	What do adolescents perceive as the advantages of using SMT?
3.	What do adolescents perceive as the disadvantages of using SMT?
4.	What are adolescents' specific positive experiences of using SMT?
5.	What are adolescents' specific negative experiences of using SMT?

I am writing to enquire whether you would be willing to approve the recruitment of 12-15 young people between the ages of 14 and 18 within Gloucestershire Local Authority, for the purposes of my research. I will be conducting a semi-structured interview with each young person that will last around 40 minutes and will be audio-recorded with the consent of the participants themselves and their parent/s or carer/s.

Participants' confidentiality and privacy will be respected, which will involve not disclosing what an individual has said. However, if the participant discloses something that causes concern for their safety or that of someone else, I will share this concern with the school's Safeguarding Officer and my placement supervisor. This will be explained to the participant prior to the interview. The data will only be handled by myself and will be destroyed following transcription, in accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998). During the transcription phase, all data will be anonymised with the use of pseudonyms. Please note that participants have the right to withdraw at any stage during the

project, without reason, up until the point at which the data will be anonymised and amalgamated. After this point, the data will be untraceable.

Your help in this project will be greatly appreciated and will hopefully help understand the specific challenges and/or rewards SMT may present our young people with.

If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me. I can be reached on 02920 875393 or by email on hammondjl@cardiff.ac.uk.

Yours sincerely

Joanna Hammond
Trainee Educational Psychologist

This project has received ethical approval from the School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee, Cardiff University.

Tel: 029 208 70360

Email: psychethics@cardiff.ac.uk

I give permission for young people aged 14-18 within _____ Local Authority to take part in research exploring adolescents' experiences of using social media technology.

Signed..... Date.....

Print name.....

Contact details.....

If you have any questions relating to this study please do not hesitate to contact me at the School of Psychology, Cardiff University. You may also contact my supervisors, Dr Kyla Honey and Dr Simon Claridge, at the School of Psychology, Cardiff University, if you have any complaints.

Joanna Hammond
Trainee Educational Psychologist
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Appendix I

Letter to Gatekeeper (2)

Joanna Hammond
School of Psychology
Cardiff University
Tel: 07815 851021
hammondjl@cardiff.ac.uk

Dear Headteacher

I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist at Cardiff University, and I have to undertake a thesis as an academic requirement of the course. I am interested in exploring adolescents' experiences of using social media technology (SMT), with the hope of uncovering possible considerations for young people, their families and educational professionals. The proposed study will attempt to answer the following research questions:

1.	What are adolescents' reasons for using SMT?
2.	What do adolescents perceive as the advantages of using SMT?
3.	What do adolescents perceive as the disadvantages of using SMT?
4.	What are adolescents' specific positive experiences of using SMT?
5.	What are adolescents' specific negative experiences of using SMT?

I would like to ask your permission, for 6-10 pupils between the ages of 14 and 18 to participate in this study. I will be conducting a semi-structured interview with each young person that will last around 40 minutes and will be audio-recorded with the consent of the participants themselves and their parent/s or carer/s, if the young person is under the age of 16. To facilitate this, staff will need to pass on information sheets and consent letters to parents. Pupils who are aged 16-18 will not require parental consent as they will be able to give their own informed consent.

With your permission, the interviews would take place within the school setting and a member of school staff would be nearby at all times. The interviews would not take place during lesson-time; therefore young people who choose to participate would not miss any schooling.

Participants' confidentiality and privacy will be respected, which will involve not disclosing what an individual has said. However, if the participant discloses something that causes concern for their safety or that of someone else, I will share this concern with the school's Safeguarding Officer and my placement supervisor. This will be explained to the participant prior to the interview. The data will only be handled by myself and will be destroyed following transcription, in accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998). During the

transcription phase, all data will be anonymised with the use of pseudonyms. Please note that participants will have the right to withdraw at any stage during the project, without reason, up until the point at which the data will be anonymised and amalgamated. After this point, the data will be untraceable.

Your help with this project will be greatly appreciated and will hopefully help understand the specific challenges and/or rewards SMT may present our young people with.

If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me. I can be contacted on 02920 875393 or by email on hammondjl@cardiff.ac.uk. If you are willing to allow pupils to participate in this study, please complete and sign the attached form, *using the stamped address envelope provided.*

Yours sincerely

Joanna Hammond
Trainee Educational Psychologist

This project has received ethical approval from the School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee, Cardiff University.

Tel: 029 208 70360

Email: psychethics@cardiff.ac.uk

I _____ (NAME) give permission for pupils aged 14-18 at _____ (SCHOOL) to take part in research exploring adolescents' experiences of using social media technology. I agree to allow staff to pass on information sheets and consent letters to parents.

Signed..... Date.....

Print name.....

Contact details.....

If you have any questions relating to this study please do not hesitate to contact me at the School of Psychology, Cardiff University. You may also contact my supervisors, Dr Kyla Honey and Dr Simon Claridge, at the School of Psychology, Cardiff University, if you have any complaints.

Joanna Hammond
Trainee Educational Psychologist
School of Psychology
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Dr Kyla Honey
Research Supervisor
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Appendix J

Letter to Gatekeeper (3)

Joanna Hammond
School of Psychology
Cardiff University
Tel: 07815 851021
hammondjl@cardiff.ac.uk

Dear parent/carer

I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist at Cardiff University, and I have to undertake a thesis research project as an academic requirement of the course. In light of the visible presence of social media technology such as Facebook and Twitter in the lives of young people today, I am interested in exploring adolescents' experiences of using social media technology. Specifically, I will be asking young people what their reasons are for using SMT, what they perceive as the advantages and disadvantages of it and finally I will be asking them to explore their positive and negative experiences.

I am conducting this study with the hope of raising awareness of issues surrounding SMT and young people and uncovering possible considerations for young people, their families and school communities.

I would like to ask your permission, for your child to participate in this study. I will be conducting a semi-structured interview that will last around 40 minutes and will be audio-recorded with your child's consent. The interview will take place within the school setting and a member of school staff will be nearby at all times. The interview will take place during the school day but not during lesson-time so you can be assured that your child will not miss any schooling.

Your child's confidentiality and privacy will be respected, which will involve not disclosing what he/she has said. However, if he/she discloses something that causes concern for his/her safety or that of someone else, I will share this concern with the school's Safeguarding Officer and my placement supervisor. This will be explained to your child prior to the interview. The data will only be handled by myself and will be destroyed following transcription, in accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998). During the transcription phase, all data will be anonymised with the use of pseudonyms. Please note that your child will have the right to withdraw at any stage during the project, without reason, up until the point at which the data will be anonymised and amalgamated. After this point, the data will be untraceable.

Your help in this project will be greatly appreciated and will hopefully help develop understanding of specific challenges and/or rewards SMT may present young people with.

If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me. I can be reached on 02920 875393 or by email on hammondjl@cardiff.ac.uk. If you are

willing to allow your child to participate in this study, please complete and sign the attached consent form, *using the stamped address envelope provided.*

Yours sincerely

Joanna Hammond
Trainee Educational Psychologist

This project has received ethical approval from the School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee, Cardiff University.

Tel: 029 208 70360

Email: psychethics@cardiff.ac.uk

Appendix K

Parent/Carer Consent Form

Guardian Consent Form

Dear Joanna Hammond

I agree for _____ to participate in the research study, "An investigation into adolescents' experiences of using social media". I understand the purpose and the nature of this research study and I understand that _____ will be participating voluntarily. I understand that the interview will take place within the school setting and a member of school staff will be nearby at all times. I understand that the interview will not take place during lesson-time.

I understand that _____'s confidentiality and privacy will be respected, which will involve not disclosing what he/she has said unless _____ discloses something that causes concern for his/her safety or that of someone else. If this is the case, I understand that Joanna Hammond will share the concern with the school's Safeguarding Officer and her Supervisor. I understand that this will be explained to _____ prior to the interview. I agree for _____ to be interviewed and recorded and I am aware that the recording will be will be destroyed following transcription, in accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998) and university policy. I understand that the transcript of _____ 's interview will be stored on a password protected computer that only the researcher will have access to. I understand that the data will be transcribed and anonymised with pseudonyms. I understand that I can withdraw _____, at any time during the project without reason, up until the point at which the data will be anonymised and amalgamated. After this point, I understand that the data will be untraceable. I grant permission for the data collected to be used in the process of completing a paper, a requirement of the Doctorate in Educational Psychology at Cardiff University. I understand that actual names and places will not be used in order to preserve confidentiality.

I, _____(NAME) consent for _____(CHILD) to participate in the study conducted by Joanna Hammond, Trainee Educational Psychologist, School of Psychology, Cardiff University with the supervision of Dr Kyla Honey (honeyk1@cardiff.ac.uk/029 208 70366), Research Supervisor.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

If you have any questions relating to this study please do not hesitate to contact me at the School of Psychology, Cardiff University. You may also contact my

supervisors, Dr Kyla Honey and Dr Simon Claridge, at the School of Psychology, Cardiff University, if you have any complaints.

Joanna Hammond
Trainee Educational Psychologist
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Appendix L

Participant Invitation Letter for Young People Aged 14-15

Dear young person,

My name is Joanna and I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist. I would like to talk to you about the project I am undertaking, "An investigation into adolescents' experiences of using social media". Your parent/carer has given their permission for me to ask you to be part of this study.

If you don't mind, maybe I could have a 40-minute chat with you in school, with a member of staff nearby, where I ask you some questions about your views on social media such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram and your experiences of using it. I would also like to record our conversations.



I would like to write down some of your ideas for other people to read and think about, but they won't know who you are because I will give you a pretend name.

Your whole interview will be private and that means that I will not be telling anyone, including your parents/carers and teachers, what you have said unless you ask me to or you tell me something that means that you and/or someone else might be unsafe. If this happens I will need to let the Safeguarding Officer in your school and my Supervisor know and I will let you know that I will be doing this.

If you change your mind during the study, you can choose to leave at any time, without a reason, up until the point at which your information is combined with other information and your personal details are removed. At this point it will not be possible to identify the information you have given me.

If you are happy to take part in this study then you can sign and date the form below and give it to your teacher. Please do ask me any other questions that you may have about the study.

Yours sincerely,

Joanna Hammond
Trainee Educational Psychologist

This project has received ethical approval from the School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee, Cardiff University.

Tel: 029 208 70360

Email: psychethics@cardiff.ac.uk

I agree to be involved in the study/ I would not like to involved in the study

Signed..... Date.....

Print name.....

If you have any questions relating to this study please do not hesitate to contact me at the School of Psychology, Cardiff University. You may also contact my supervisors, Dr Kyla Honey and Dr Simon Claridge, at the School of Psychology, Cardiff University, if you have any complaints.

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Appendix M

Consent Form for Young People aged 14-15

I agree to take part in the research – “An investigation into adolescents’ experiences of using social media”.

I understand what the study is about and Joanna has explained what I will be asked to do. I have been given the chance to ask any questions I have.

I agree to do short interview in the school setting with a member of staff nearby, where I will answer some questions for Joanna. I understand that all my answers and results will be kept strictly private/confidential unless I tell Joanna that I am unsafe or someone else is unsafe, in which case I understand that Joanna will need to pass that information on to the Safeguarding Officer at school and her Supervisor. I understand that this will be explained to me before the interview begins.

I understand that the interview will be audio-recorded.

I agree to let Joanna use my interview in her paper - but only when all my personal information has been removed.

I understand that taking part is up to me and I can choose to leave up until the point at which my information is combined with other people’s information and my personal details are removed. I understand that, at this point, it will not be possible to identify the information I have given.

Name _____ Signature _____

Date _____

If you have any questions relating to this study please do not hesitate to contact me at the School of Psychology, Cardiff University. You may also contact my supervisors, Dr Kyla Honey and Dr Simon Claridge, at the School of Psychology, Cardiff University, if you have any complaints.

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Appendix N

Participant Invitation Letter for Young People Aged 16-18

Dear young person,

My name is Joanna Hammond and I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist. I am currently working on a research project called, "An investigation into adolescents' experiences of using social media".

I would like to ask whether you would be happy to have a 40-minute interview with me within the school setting with a member of staff nearby so that I can ask you some questions about your views on social media, such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram, and your experiences of using it. I will record our conversation so that the information you provide can be written down and used in my research. However, I will remove personal information, such as your name and school and any other identifying information, before doing so.

Your interview will be private/confidential and I will not pass on any information you tell me unless you ask me to or you tell me something that means that you and/or someone else might be unsafe. If this happens I will need to inform the Safeguarding Officer in your school and my Supervisor and I will let you know that I will be doing this.

If you change your mind during the study, you can choose to withdraw any time, without reason, up until the point at which your information is combined with other information and your personal details are removed. At this point it will not be possible to identify the information you have provided.

If you are happy to participate in this study then please could you sign and date the consent form attached, and give it to your teacher. You are free to contact me if you have any questions. My contact details can be found below.

Yours sincerely,

Joanna Hammond
Trainee Educational Psychologist

This project has received ethical approval from the School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee, Cardiff University.

Tel: 029 208 70360

Email: psychethics@cardiff.ac.uk

I agree to be involved in the study/ I would not like to involved in the study

Signed..... Date.....

Print name.....

If you have any questions relating to this study please do not hesitate to contact me at the School of Psychology, Cardiff University. You may also contact my supervisors, Dr Kyla Honey and Dr Simon Claridge, at the School of Psychology, Cardiff University, if you have any complaints.

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Appendix O

Consent Form for Young People aged 16-18

I agree to participate in the research – “An investigation into adolescents’ experiences of using social media”.

I understand what the study is concerning and Joanna has explained what I will be asked to do. I have been given the opportunity to ask any questions I have.

I give permission for Joanna to interview me within the school setting with a member of staff nearby. I understand that all my responses will be kept strictly private/confidential unless I tell Joanna that I am unsafe and/or someone else is unsafe, in which case I understand that Joanna will need to pass that information on to the Safeguarding Officer at school and her Supervisor. I understand that this will be explained to me before the interview begins.

I understand that the interview will be audio-recorded.

I give permission for Joanna use my interview in her research paper - but only when all of my personal information has been removed.

I understand that taking part is voluntary and I can choose to withdraw up until the point at which my information is combined with other people’s information and my personal details are removed. I understand that, at this point, it will not be possible to identify the information I have provided.

Name _____ Signature _____

Date _____

If you have any questions relating to this study please do not hesitate to contact me at the School of Psychology, Cardiff University. You may also contact my supervisors, Dr Kyla Honey and Dr Simon Claridge, at the School of Psychology, Cardiff University, if you have any complaints.

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Appendix P

Young Person's Debriefing Letter

Thank you for taking part in my study. It is important to talk to young people about their experiences to make sure that they feel understood and listened to.

The aims of this study were to find out young people's views on social media and explore their experiences of using it. I hope that this will help adults to understand the needs of young people more clearly so that young people can receive the support they need.

You have completed an interview with me within the school setting and your responses will contribute to answering the following research questions:

1.	What are adolescents' reasons for using SMT?
2.	What do adolescents perceive as the advantages of using SMT?
3.	What do adolescents perceive as the disadvantages of using SMT?
4.	What are adolescents' specific positive experiences of using SMT?
5.	What are adolescents' specific negative experiences of using SMT?

Your answers and results will be kept strictly private/confidential unless you have told me that you are unsafe or someone else is unsafe. If this is the case, I will be passing that piece of information on to your schools' Safeguarding Officer and my supervisor, as I have explained to you.

The information you have given me will be held anonymously. This means that it will be impossible for people to know what you have told me. If you decide that you would like to withdraw your information from this study this can only be done up until the point when I have transcribed the interview by writing down what you have said and anonymised the interview by taking away all of your personal details.

If you think of any questions you would like to ask once I have gone then you can ask to speak to (insert name of school staff member). If you would like to withdraw your information then this can be arranged by asking (XXXXX) to contact me by (Date), which is within X days.

Yours sincerely,

Joanna Hammond
Trainee Educational Psychologist

If you have any questions relating to this study please do not hesitate to contact me at the School of Psychology, Cardiff University. You may also contact my supervisors, Dr Kyla Honey and Dr Simon Claridge, at the School of Psychology, Cardiff University, if you have any complaints.

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Appendix Q

Parental Debriefing Letter

Study Title: “An investigation into adolescents’ experiences of using social media”

Thank you for giving permission for your son/daughter to take part in my study. I feel that it is important to talk to young people about their views on contemporary issues such as social media to make sure their voices are heard, particularly given its widespread use and the element of controversy surrounding it.

The aims of this study were to investigate young people’s views on social media and explore their experiences of using it. It is hoped that this will help improve knowledge and understanding in this area and help adults to support young people more effectively by answering the following the following research questions:

1.	What are adolescents’ reasons for using SMT?
2.	What do adolescents perceive as the advantages of using SMT?
3.	What do adolescents perceive as the disadvantages of using SMT?
4.	What are adolescents’ specific positive experiences of using SMT?
5.	What are adolescents’ specific negative experiences of using SMT?

Your son/daughter completed a short interview with me and the information he/she gave me will be held anonymously. This means that it will be impossible for people to know what he/she has told me.

If you think of any questions you would like to ask me please do not hesitate to contact me using the details provided.

Yours sincerely,

Joanna Hammond
Trainee Educational Psychologist

If you have any questions relating to this study please do not hesitate to contact me at the School of Psychology, Cardiff University. You may also contact my

supervisors, Dr Kyla Honey and Dr Simon Claridge, at the School of Psychology, Cardiff University, if you have any complaints.

Joanna Hammond	Dr Kyla Honey	Dr Simon Claridge
Trainee Educational Psychologist	Research Supervisor	Research Supervisor
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Appendix R

Interview Schedule

Introduction (to include):

- Explanation of the purpose of the interview.
- Explanation that they may skip any questions that they find uncomfortable or end participation in the study at any time.
- Explanation about use of audio-recording equipment and confidentiality and anonymity (names and identifiers to be changed).
- Caveat: explain that if the participant reveals he/she or another person is unsafe the researcher may need to pass the information on.
- Ask if the young person has any questions before starting the interview.

General Information / Rapport Building:

What is your age? Which SMT application do you use? When did you start using SMT? How regularly do you use it?

Interview questions:

1. Could you tell me a little about your reasons for using twitter/facebook/other SMT?

(Probe: Are there any other reasons? What was the most important reason?)

2. Could you tell me a little about what you feel are the advantages of using SMT and in what ways it makes your life better?

(Probe: Could you explain a little more? What is the main advantage in your opinion?)

3. Could you tell me a little bit about any particularly positive/uplifting experiences on SMT and how these experiences may have affected your feelings or happiness?

(Probe: How long have these feelings lasted?)

4. How do you feel if you are not able to access SMT when you want to – for example you are on holiday and do not have access to your phone/tablet/computer?

(Probe: Why is this do you think?)

5. Could you tell me a little about what you feel are the disadvantages of using SMT and in what ways it causes problems in your life or makes you feel sad?

(Probe: Could you explain a little more? What is the main disadvantage in your opinion?)

6. Could you tell me a little bit about any particularly negative/upsetting experiences on SMT and how these experiences may have affected your feelings or happiness?

(Probe: How long have these feelings lasted?)

7. Do you think you are a similar person online and offline or are you different in some ways?

(Probe: Why is this do you think?)

8. Could you explain whether you feel any pressure to come across a certain way online?

(Probe: Could you explain why? When did you begin to feel this way?)

9. Could you explain whether you find it easier or harder to express yourself online?

(Probe: Could you explain why? When did you begin to feel this way?)

10. Which person do you prefer your online self or offline self?

(Probe: Why is this do you think?)

11. Overall, do you think SMT makes your life better or worse?

(Probe: Could you explain why you have come to this conclusion?)

12. If you had three wishes and could change anything about SMT what would those wishes be?

(Probe: Could you explain why?)

13. Is there anything you would like to tell me that I have not already asked you, that you think may be important for me to hear?

Ethical considerations:

If the young person has revealed negative experiences and this appears to have affected them, the researcher will ask the young person to talk about their favourite hobby, joke, television programme or something else that makes them really happy to ensure they do not leave the interview in a negative frame of mind.

The researcher will remain mindful of the young person's needs and follow-up the interview with appropriate remedial measures following debriefing if she feels it is ethically appropriate to do so. Such measures may incorporate a one-to-one talking and listening session, signposting the participant to relevant

support services and/or liaising with parents and staff if the participant reveals he/she or another person is unsafe or he/she particularly requests and consents to such liaison.

Appendix S

Ethical Considerations

Informed consent

Consistent with the British Psychological Society's (2014), *Code of Human Research Ethics*, the researcher obtained written, informed consent from all 12 participants. Gatekeepers (including the Principal EP from the local authority in which the researcher was operating, Headteachers of the chosen schools and parents/carers of those participants under the age of 16) were contacted using letters with relevant information about the study and consent forms (Appendix H, I, J & K). Following written consent from Gatekeepers, the young people were approached individually and consent was sought using information sheets and opt-in consent forms. These were differentiated for 14-15 year-olds (Appendix L & M) and 16-18 year-olds (Appendix N & O) to ensure clarity.

Confidentiality

The researcher used a private room within the school buildings to provide confidentiality and privacy during interviews. At the interview stage, participants were reminded of confidentiality and privacy procedures including the fact that their responses would remain unidentifiable to everyone apart from the researcher, pseudonyms would be used for all transcribed interviews and that all data would be handled solely by the researcher, stored on a password-protected computer and destroyed following transcription (in accordance with the Data Protection Act, 1998).

Rights to withdraw

Participants were reminded of their right to terminate the interview at any time and withdraw from the study without reason, up until the point at which their data is amalgamated. All participants were provided with contact numbers in case of complaint and/or any queries they may have and to ensure they were able to withdraw if necessary.

Debriefing

Participants and parent/carers received a differentiated debriefing letter summarising the purpose of the research once again and thanking them for their/their child's involvement (Appendix P & Q). In case of any questions or concerns, these letters also outlined contact details of the researcher, the research supervisors and the Cardiff School of Ethics Committee.

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