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Thank You For Being a Friend: Women's Self-Disclosures and Social Support on Facebook

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ABSTRACT

This study focused on women's self-disclosures on Facebook and how they functioned to both gain and give support on the site. After employing 17 textual analyses of participants' Facebook pages and 17 in-depth interviews, a variety of themes emerged in regards to how and why women give and seek support on the site, the types of information disclosed, and the benefits of self-disclosing to gain support on the site. More specifically, results indicate that gender role expectations, which for women include exhibiting behaviors that convey warmth, kindness and politeness, play a large role in giving and receiving support on the site. Furthermore, the public nature of Facebook created a supportive and positive environment for women to both receive and give support. It is suggested that future research explore the ways in which others contribute to one's self-presentation. Future research should also explore the themes related to this study using survey methodology.

THANK YOU FOR BEING A FRIEND: WOMEN'S SELF-DISCLOSURES AND SUPPORT
ON FACEBOOK

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Women's Self-Disclosures and Support on Facebook

Facebook is not only an online community in which people communicate efficiently with their network of friends, but also a space where users can seek support for themselves and give it to others. It is not uncommon to log onto Facebook and see a friend's status update or photo as a 'cry for help,' which in turn prompts others to leave uplifting comments on the post to provide support.

The culture of Facebook is a space in which support is encouraged. Take for instance the 'like' button, which has come to symbolize support. Such support can be explicit (i.e., 'liking' a band, television show, or restaurant) or implicit; for example, 'liking' a photo of an acquaintance's new haircut. Either way, communicating support is a common occurrence on Facebook. The nonexistence of a 'dislike' button is further evidence of the supportive culture that exists on the site.

Women play a prominent role in online social networks by actively communicating with their articulated networks through posting photos, status updates, and comments to others (Hargittai & Hsieh, 2011). The online social network Facebook is no exception to this; as of 2009, 56.2% of Facebook users in the United States were women and it was projected that this percentage would continue to increase (Smith, 2009).

According to Petronio, Martin, and Littlefield (1984), self-disclosures can best be defined as the "revealing of private information about the self" (p. 268). When it comes to the subject matter of Facebook users' status updates and photos, self-disclosures are a frequent category of posting (Krasnova, Spiekermann, Koroleva, & Hildebrand, 2010). Moreover, women self-disclose on Facebook through status updates, photos, and comments to others more often than men (Boyd, 2009). According to Highlen and Gillis (1978), in offline communication,

people are more likely to make deeper self-disclosures if they are responding to a message from another person, rather than initiating the message. This is highly applicable when examining comments to others in online settings, as such comments can be considered as responses to an original message.

Past research has identified a variety of reasons for self-disclosing on Facebook including relationship building and enjoyment (Krasnova, et. al., 2010) as well as efficient communication with others (Urista, Dong, & Day, 2009). When it comes to women, though, an additional motivation to self-disclose on Facebook is to gain both affirmation and support from their network of friends (Dolan, 2012). Similarly, according to Selwyn (2009), it is common for college-aged people to implicitly ask their Facebook networks for support by using humor to convey a negative feeling or emotion they are experiencing. If such postings receive feedback from others in the form of a 'like' or comment, there are a great deal of emotional benefits for the person who originally posted the disclosure, including increased self-esteem and mood (Dolan, 2012).

According to Wasserman and Faust (1994), a chief function of offline social networks is engaging in social support with others. Furthermore, women are also more likely to benefit from and give support to others in comparison to men (Burleson, Hanasono, Bodie, Holmstrom, McCullough, Rack, & Rosier, 2011). According to Mansson and Myers (2011), when it comes to communicating emotions and support, it is likely that people are more open to expressing such emotions in an online setting as opposed to an offline setting.

A majority of the literature in the realm of supportive communication is currently limited to face-to-face communication (i.e., Burleson et. al, 2011; Coates & Winston, 1987). Therefore, an examination of supportive communication in an online setting is necessary. First, this is

because communication on online social networks such as Facebook allows for "new architectures of intimacies," which in turn can create novel ways of communicating with others (Zacharias & Arthurs, 2008, p. 197). Also, because supportive communication is typically conceptualized in the realm of interpersonal communication, this thesis will aim to bring the concept into the sphere of mass communication.

Furthermore, studies that address the supportive function of Facebook communication do not thoroughly examine this phenomenon, but rather succinctly address it as one finding in a myriad of others (i.e., Dolan, 2012; Ellison, Lampe, Steinfield, & Viatk, 2011). In addition, prior research briefly mentions gaining support as a motivator for using Facebook, but does not address the role of feedback in the role of comments or 'likes.' Therefore, there is a noteworthy gap in the literature when it comes to a thorough understanding of the role of self-disclosures in seeking and giving support on Facebook. This thesis will aim to fill this void.

A study by Mansson and Myers (2011) provides some insight into supportive communication on Facebook. By taking a quantitative approach, the duo examined the role of supportive communication in maintaining and strengthening relationships on the site. However, much like other studies that focus on self-disclosures on Facebook, it did not go so far as to qualitatively examine supportive communication in relation to self-disclosures. Therefore, little is known about self-disclosures and support from a framework that answers questions such as 'why?' and 'how?'

Keeping worries to oneself can be physically and mentally detrimental (Coates & Winston, 1987, p. 231). Therefore, it is oftentimes necessary that people discuss their worries and stressors with others in order to gain support and affirmation to enhance their own well-being (Coates & Winston, 1987, p. 231). In the context of communication on online social

networks, past research has found that people are more open to giving and receiving emotional messages on such sites than in offline situations (Mansson & Myers, 2011). Therefore, Facebook can serve as a superior medium for giving and gaining support, which in turn can increase the quality of life. Understanding the mitigating factors and outcomes of supportive communication on Facebook was a worthwhile endeavor because through the examination of such a phenomenon, the benefits of supportive communication on the site can be amplified whereas the negatives of self-disclosing to gain support can be lessened. Consequently, it is anticipated that this study will aid in bettering the lives of female Facebook users.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to thoroughly examine the influencers, outcomes, and benefits of supportive communication that occurs on Facebook. More specifically, this thesis aimed to understand the types of self-disclosures made by women that warrant feedback in the form of support as well as the reasoning behind making such disclosures. Therefore, the following research questions guided this study:

RQ1: How do women give and receive support on Facebook through self-disclosing?

RQ2: What types of information do women self-disclose on Facebook to give or receive support?

RQ3: Why do women post status updates and photos that warrant support in the form of comments or 'likes?'

RQ4: Why do women offer support to others by commenting or 'liking' status updates and/or photos?

RQ5: In what ways do women benefit in their offline lives from support they receive on Facebook?

The following chapter will discuss relevant literature for this study – gender role socialization and communication styles of women, computer-mediated communication, supportive communication, and self-disclosure. Each of these chapters will thoroughly define each concept and then explain relevant literature that will serve as a guide for the basis of this study. Next, the methodology specific to this study will be detailed. The results specific to this study will follow the methodology, and will be organized by the research questions. Finally, a conclusion will briefly summarize the results and make suggestions for future research.

Literature Review

Before delving into the proposed methodology of this study, it is necessary to review literature that is germane to the subject matter. Therefore, this section will address four concepts that are central to this study: gender role socialization and communication styles of women, online communication, self-disclosure, and supportive communication. Each section will aim to thoroughly conceptualize each concept for the purpose of this thesis and will also discuss what is known about women in these contexts.

A review of the literature on gender role socialization and the communication styles of women will commence the literature review. Next, online communication and Facebook will be addressed. Subsequently, self-disclosure and social support will also be addressed. To properly define the concepts of self-disclosure and social support, literature will derive from two sources: interpersonal communication and online communication.

Gender Role Socialization and Communication Styles of Women

Gender can be best understood as a "social identity" that is created by the culture and values of a given society (West and Fenstermaker, 1993, p. 153). More specifically, men and women are taught to behave in ways that are in accordance with the norms of their respective gender (Fagot, Rodgers, & Leinbach, 2000). Because the focus of this study is on women's self-disclosures and the process of giving and gaining social support on Facebook, it is necessary to further examine the processes that affect the ways in which women interact, give support, and self-disclose on Facebook.

According to Eckes and Trautner (2000), "Gender is one of the most important categories, if not the most important category, in human life" (p. 3). Furthermore, gender is learned and carried out by members in a given society in accordance with the gender stereotypes

and roles of a particular culture (West & Fenstermaker, 1993). Because gender is socially learned, it "does not reside in the psychological make-up of the individual" (Weatherall, 2002, p. 84).

Gender roles refer to the "shared expectations that apply to individuals on the basis of their socially identified sex" (Eagly, Wood, & Diekman, 2000, p. 127). Such expectations are oftentimes determined by the gender stereotypes of a particular culture (Martin, 2000). Furthermore, an individual carries out a gender role when he or she conforms their behavior to the expectations of a role to which he or she has been socialized (Eagly, Wood, & Diekman, 2000).

Commonalities in gender role expectations for women include the notion that they should be warm and helpful (Katz, Joiner, & Kwon, 2002). Other characteristics of women's gender role expectations include reliance upon others, expressing high levels of emotion, and possessing nurturing qualities (Langer, 2010). Women are also socialized to exhibit positive behaviors in group settings (Carli & Bukatko, 2000). On the other hand, men are socialized to believe that their gender requires them to be self-sufficient, self-assured, and motivated (Langer, 2010). Because members of each gender are socialized to act in the above ways, research has shown that women are more likely than men to have support networks (Langer, 2010).

The process of gender role socialization is convoluted and influenced by a variety of sources including those on the individual, interpersonal, group, and societal levels (Eckes & Trautman, 2000). For example, parents, peers, and media have a strong impact on gender role socialization (Fagot, Rodgers, Leinbach, 2000). Furthermore, gender role socialization is both "powerful and pervasive," (Trautner & Eckes, 2000, p. 424) and begins in the early stages of life

(Chafetz, 1988). This process is omnipresent throughout an individual's life and exists through adulthood (Katz, 1979; as cited in Chafetz, 1988).

According to Tannen (1994), socialization to fit a specific gender role is one of the most notable factors that shape behavior. Thus, members of each gender are socialized to not only behave in certain ways, but also to communicate in certain ways. To further this statement, according to Carli and Bukato (2000), research has shown there are gender-specific communication traits that emerge mainly because of the ways in which members of each gender have been socialized. In addition, the duo also found that in both small and large group communication settings, women and men exhibit communication styles that are in accord with their stereotyped gender roles (Carli & Bukakto, 2000), which further emphasizes the importance of examining gender role socialization.

Women have a clear style of language, which includes the ways they speak as well as the language they use to depict objects, things, and people (Lakoff, 1970; as cited in Talbot, 1998). For example, language behaviors exhibited by women include the tendency to use exact color terms, display extreme politeness when engaging in conversation with others, and use adjectives that express respect or admiration for a person, place, or thing (Lakoff, 1970; as cited in Talbot, 1998).

In addition to language use, the topics discussed by women and men have also been found to be divergent. More specifically, according to Tannen (1994), the conversation of women is more focused than that of men. Whereas men struggle with creating and maintaining conversations, women do not find it difficult to converse with others (Tannen, 1994). Women have also been found to communicate in ways that promote fairness among a group while stressing the importance of maintaining relationships (Carli & Bukatko, 2000).

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Conclusion

Gender role socialization plays an important role in the lives of both men and women (Eckes & Trautner, 2000; Tannen, 1994). Furthermore, gender role socialization affects the ways in which men and women communicate (Carli & Bukakto, 2000; Tannen, 1994). A manifestation of this process includes the finding that women are more sensitive and empathetic to the needs and emotions of others than are men when communicating (Metts & Planalp, 2002).

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Online Communication and Facebook

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Facebook is an online social network that enables people to create and articulate personalized networks consisting of groups, businesses, and people, and allows them to communicate with one another in resourceful and convenient ways (Facebook, 2011). At the current time, Facebook is a very popular online social network site which has over 800 million active users who spend more than 700 billion minutes each month using the site (Facebook, 2012).

Facebook has a variety of features which allow users to publicly post information to their network of friends. Examples of such features include status updates (blog-like posts), photos, videos, comments to others, and information pages. After making a post on Facebook, information is then published to friends' news feeds, which is the homepage of Facebook that lists the Facebook activity of one's friends.

Boyd and Ellison (2007) have defined social networks as the following:

Web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system (p. 211).

Furthermore, online social networks "carry expectations of sociability, meaningful connection to others, conviviality, perhaps even empathy and support" (Parks, 2011, p. 106).

When it comes to examining online social networks through a gender lens, it has been found that in general, females are more at ease when communicating through such sites than they are in face-to-face situations (Pierce, 2009). Women also are more vigorous users of online social networks (Hargittai & Hsieh, 2011).

Past research has identified a variety of motivations to communicate on online social networks. One of the most widespread findings is that people communicate on online social networks to feed their desire to connect with others (Urista, Dong, & Day, 2009; Subrahmanyam, Reich, Waechter, & Espinoza, 2008). Another motivation of communicating through online social networks is to articulate one's self-presentation (e.g., Mehdizadeh, 2010; Greenhow & Robelia, 2009).

One interesting characteristic of online social networks is their ability to increase levels of social capital (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007; Steinfield, Ellison, & Lampe, 2008). This includes both bonding social capital, or connections to people with whom one already has a strong relationship (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007) as well as bridging social capital, or connections to people with whom one has a weak relationship (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007). According to Wright and Miller (2010), there are specific characteristics of bridging social capital that lead people to prefer this type of tie over stronger ones including utility, comfort, objectivity, and risk.

For those with low self-esteem, Facebook, as well as other online social networks, are a superior medium to increase levels of bridging social capital (Steinfield, Ellison, & Lampe, 2008). In addition, according to Mehdizadeh (2010), people with higher levels of narcissism and

lower levels of self-esteem are more likely to post information on online social networks such as Facebook. The site also increases both types of social capital regardless of one's level of self-esteem (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007). More related to this study, though, is that there is a positive relationship between self-disclosure and social capital in online settings (Ko & Kou, 2009).

Conclusion

People who belong to online social networks report higher levels of happiness, trust in others, and political participation (Valenzuela, Park, & Kee, 2009). In the context of gender, women are not only more active users of online social networks (Hargatti & Hsieh, 2011), but also feel more comfortable communicating through Facebook (Pierce, 2009).

Because of the format of Facebook, people are able to self-disclose in a public manner. Furthermore, the public nature of Facebook enables people's posts to be broadcast to their set of connections and subsequently allows them to give feedback in the form of comments or 'likes.' Understanding that Facebook is an online space that enables self-disclosure, it is crucial to take a deeper look at the concept.

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Self-Disclosure

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According to Jourard (1971), "Self-disclosure is the act of making yourself manifest, showing yourself so others can perceive you" (p. 19). Furthermore, Chelune (1987) has asserted that self-disclosure can be understood as the process of exposing private information about oneself to others. To put this in other words, self-disclosure is an action in which "a mystery" of a person is exposed to another, causing the receiver of the message to alter his or her beliefs of the sender, for better or worse (Jourard, 1971, p. 5). Furthermore, past research in interpersonal

communication has found that women disclose more to others than do men in face-to-face contexts (Dolgin & Minowa, 1997).

Self-disclosure is a process that occurs through the lives of individuals and their relations with others (Dindia, 2000). Therefore, self-disclosure is not a one-time occurrence (Gilbert & Horenstein, 1975), rather it should be viewed as a circular process in human behavior (Dindia, 2000).

The choice to expose private information about oneself is a conscious process in which the sender of a disclosure distinguishes information to reveal or conceal based on the audience of the message (Petronio, 2002). Furthermore, self-disclosure is risky; successful disclosure depends highly on an accurate assessment of the nature of the relationship between the sender and receiver of the message (Forgas & Moylan, 2003). More specifically, self-disclosure typically occurs when the sender of a message believes the receiver is trustworthy, good intentioned, and will reciprocate the message (Jourard, 1971). This is especially true for women, who place a large emphasis on the receiver of a disclosure being "discreet, trustworthy, sincere, liked, respected, a good listener, warm, and open" (Petronio et. al., 2002, p. 271). The length of time that the communicative group has known each other has been known to have a large effect on such beliefs (Forgas & Moylan, 2003).

According to Derlega and Grezelak (1979), "Self-disclosure includes any information exchange that refers to the self, including personal states, disposition, events in the past, and plans for the future" (p. 152). Such information can be subdivided into three categories: affective disclosures, distress disclosures, and self-flattery.

According to Highlen and Gillis (1978), affective disclosures are messages that convey one's state of emotions. Furthermore, the duo notes that such disclosures are sex-linked, in that

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women are more likely to affectively disclose than men (Highlen & Gillis, 1978). Furthermore, Greenhow and Robelia (2009) have found that people are more relaxed communicating affective disclosures on online social networks than in face-to-face situations.

Distress disclosure, according to Coates and Winston (1987), is the process of communicating one's own unpleasant feelings or worries with others. In a study on university students, it was found that a major facet of communication on Facebook is posting and responding to distress disclosures (Selwyn, 2009). In this study it was found that one main example of a distress disclosure on Facebook occurs when a sender makes herself look "helpless" in order to gain support from others (Selwyn, 2009, p. 167).

However, not all disclosures are negative or emotional in tone. Self-flattering disclosures are messages that show a discloser in a good light (Dolgin & Minowa, 1997). An example of this could be a message in which a woman reveals that she received a good score on the Graduate Record Examination. Gilbert and Horenstein (1975) would equate disclosures that self-flatter to high valence disclosures, in that they are positive in tone. When it comes to self-flattering disclosures and the connection between the sender and receiver of a message, it has been found that disclosures with high valence create a higher level of attraction between a dyad in comparison to messages that are more negative in nature (Gilbert & Horenstein, 1975).

Self-disclosure can be measured by two means: depth and valence. The depth of a self-disclosure can be viewed in terms of intimacy (Gilbert & Horenstein, 1975). For example, a message that expresses information about a negative childhood experience has more depth than a message that conveys what one had for lunch that day.

It has been established that in online spheres, self-disclosures are more deep and intimate than in face-to-face exchanges (Schouten, Valkenburg, & Peter, 2009). One reason for this may

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be explained by the notion that individuals find it easier to reveal deep emotions through text than by visuals (Barnes, 2009). It has also been found that on Facebook, the deeper one self-discloses the more favorably she will be viewed by her friends (Sheldon, 2009). However, this assertion does not address the valence, or tone, of the disclosure, which could have an impact on the act and its outcome (Gilbert & Whiteneck, 1976).

As previously stated, valence is another way to measure self-disclosure. This dimension of self-disclosure, according to Gilbert and Horenstein (1975), refers to the tone of the message; mainly, if the message is positive or negative in nature. Disclosures that are high in valence (i.e., positive in tone) are more likely to be disclosed than statements that are negative in tone (Gilbert & Whiteneck, 1976). However, this is not to say that people do not make disclosures that are highly negative in nature. According to Gilbert and Whiteneck (1976), disclosures that have low levels of valence are made to people with whom the sender already has a close relationship, which is most likely because the group has already built a close relationship through disclosure and reciprocity.

It is important to note that although depth and valence are two ways in which to measure self-disclosure, they are not mutually exclusive (Gilbert & Whiteneck, 1976). For example, for disclosures that are characterized by low levels of depth, it is more likely that the information will be positive, rather than negative, in tone (Gilbert & Whiteneck, 1976). The opposite is true for disclosures that have high levels of depth (Gilbert & Whiteneck, 1976).

Although the act of disclosure depends highly on the audience (Petronio, 2002), individuals have their own motivations to self-disclose to others as well. For instance, Derlega, Winstead, Matthews, and Braitman (2008) identified a variety of motivations that people have when self-disclosing. One of which is the desire to attain help from the receiver of a message

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(Derlega, et. al., 2008). In addition, the need to inform a receiver about information in one's life is another reason why people are motivated to self-disclose (Derlega, et. al., 2008). Although these assertions from Derlega, et. al. (2008) may be applicable to online communication, where the audience of self-disclosures ranges from close friends to acquaintances, the group did not address this.

In computer-mediated communication, the general tendency to disclose as well as the desire to increase one's popularity motivates people to self-disclose on online social networks (Christofides, Muise, & Desmarais, 2009). Furthermore, relationship convenience and the general enjoyment of online social networks are additional motivations to self-disclose on online social networks (Krasnova, Speikermann, Koroleva, & Hildebrand, 2010). Also, in computer-mediated communication, people ask others more intimate questions than in face-to-face contexts, which in turn heighten levels of self-disclosure (Schouten, Valkenburg, & Peter, 2009).

According to Tidwell and Walther (2002), in terms of reducing uncertainty with others, people who communicate by means of computers disclose more on intermediate levels in comparison with those in face-to-face contexts. This can be explained mainly by the fact that computer-mediated communication has less of a context than face-to-face interactions (Tidwell & Walther, 2002). However, according to Sheldon (2009), although online social networks such as Facebook do not have a context in terms of nonverbal behaviors, those who disclose on Facebook typically know their friends offline, which in turn provides more of a context and confidence to disclose.

As with any action, there are positive and negative effects of self-disclosure. One major negative outcome of self-disclosure is unfavorable opinions from the receiver of a message, which is amplified if a disclosure is made in an inappropriate context (Forgas & Moylan, 2003).

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Such unfavorable opinions can lead to more severe consequences, such as the breakdown of relationships (Forgas & Moylan, 2003). The same holds true in computer-mediated communication, as the context is more abstract (Dolan, 2012).

However, there are a variety of positive outcomes of disclosing private information about oneself as well. For instance, according to Jourard (1971), the act of self-disclosure not only promotes good health but also higher levels of well-being for the discloser. This is further emphasized by Cozby (1972), who found a positive relationship between disclosure and psychological health. Past findings have also found that self-disclosures made through online communication also have a positive impact on the discloser's well-being (Ko & Kuo, 2009). However, because of the severity of the negative implications of self-disclosure, Dindia (2000) has pointed to the fact that self-disclosure is not always good for one's health or well-being.

Another positive outcome of self-disclosure, especially in the online sphere, is an increase in social support (Dolan, 2012). To further elucidate this, it has been found that in computer-mediated communication, people who disclose more about themselves have a greater level of happiness with their online "friends" (Bane, Cornish, Erspamer, & Kampman, 2010). Furthermore, in the context of blogging, those who self-disclose more about their emotions have a greater level of well-being than those who disclose less due to the positive relationship between self-disclosure, social capital, and social integration (Ko & Kuo, 2009). The same is true for women, as Bane, et. al. (2010), found that women who disclose more on personal blogs are more satisfied with their online friendships and also have more online friends than those who disclose less.

Conclusion

Self-disclosure is any message that conveys information about the self that others would not know (Jourard, 1971). Furthermore, the process of self-disclosure is complex and risky (Forgas & Moylan, 2003) but also has a variety of positive outcomes, including social support (Dolan, 2012). As the scope of this thesis focuses on women's self-disclosures on Facebook and how those disclosures seek and give support, it is necessary to comprehensively address the concept of social support.

Social Support

According to Coates and Winston (1986) there is a relationship between self-disclosure and social support. Furthermore, women not only think more deeply about supportive communication than men, but are also "more able and more motivated than men to process information about support information and messages" (Burleson, Hanasono, Bodie, Holmstrom, McCullough, Rack, & Rosier, 2011, p. 55). Past research demonstrates that in computer-mediated communication, women are more active in communicating emotion on Facebook than men (Mansson & Myers, 2009).

Interpersonal communication plays an essential function in social support (Cutrona, 1986). Although there is a variety of research on supportive communication, much of it is in the context of face-to-face interaction (e.g., Derlega, et. al., 2008). Furthermore, despite the fact that there is some research on social support in online forums dedicated to certain issues (e.g., McCormack & Coulson, 2009), none goes so far as to examine an online social network that does not have a specific communication context, such as Facebook. Rather, studies that examine support on Facebook focus on specific online support groups (i.e., online groups for breast cancer survivors). However, although communication on online social networks such as

Facebook differs from face-to-face interactions in some ways, there are various similarities in these communication contexts (Zacharias & Arthurs, 2008). Furthermore, many studies have pointed to the fact that online social networks such as Facebook are spaces to increase and provide support (e.g., Dolan, 2012; Urista, Dong, & Day, 2009; Ellison, Lampe, Steinfield, & Vitak, 2011; Selwyn, 2009). Therefore, this section will address supportive communication that occurs both online and offline.

Social support occurs though communication between two or more parties (Goldsmith, 2004). That is, one party receives support and the other gives it when she is prompted by supportive intentions, or "underlying desires to provide aid or assistance to targets perceived as needing help" (Burleson & MacGeorge, 2002, p. 399). Furthermore, those giving support to another do so in order to lower the levels of emotional distress for the person receiving support (Cutrona, 1984).

The goal of engaging in social support is to lower levels of doubt about one's situation, self, relationships, and other people (Albrecht & Adelman, 1987). Furthermore, a major outcome of social support is to enable a person to believe that she has control over her personal life experiences (Albrecht & Adelman, 1987). Therefore, those engaging in social support do so to better the lives of themselves or others (Goldsmith, 2004). However, much like self-disclosure, engaging in social support is a risky behavior; supportive messages can sometimes pose a threat to the receiver's independence or image (Burleson & MacGeorge, 2002).

According to Albrecht and Adelman (1987), three major themes exist in the realm of supportive communication. The first is that giving and receiving social support not only function as ways to interact with others, but also as mechanisms by which people internalize issues in their lives (Albrecht & Adelman, 1987). Secondly, the duo states that the act of social support is

successful when uncertainty is reduced in particular situations and relationships between the sender and receiver of a supportive message (Albrecht & Adelman, 1987). Finally, Albrecht and Adelman (1987) identify supportive communication as a reciprocal act.

Furthermore, supportive communication covers a wide array of actions including emotional support, advice, and socializing (Vaux, 1988). Albrecht and Adelman (1987) also identified a variety of dimensions of supportive communication including care, empathy, concern, affirmation of worth, esteem, and informational support. Moreover, and particularly related to this study, is the finding that seeking affirmation from others is a chief function of self-disclosure (Derlega & Grzelak, 1979).

On online social networks such as Facebook, people are more willing to both seek and give social support because such sites make it relatively easy for people to monitor the emotions of the people in their articulated networks because of the public nature of the site (Greenhow & Robelia, 2009). This is particularly true for women, who are more cognizant of emotional expressions than men (Mansson & Myers, 2011).

Social support has been shown to have an assortment of positive outcomes for those both receiving and giving it. For instance, according to Cutrona (1984), people who receive social support have higher levels of both happiness and self-esteem after being exposed to stressful life situations. Furthermore, the importance of social support in online contexts is highlighted by Shaw and Gant (2002), who found that levels of perceived social support and well-being increase when engaging in computer-mediated communication. This could be because high levels of supportive communication typically lead to the belief that one is understood (Weber, Johnson, & Corrigan, 2004).

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Conclusion

Supportive communication is a process in which a person gives another care, empathy, concern, affirmation of worth, esteem, and information, when an individual shows signs of needing such communication (Albrecht & Adelman, 1987). Furthermore, the ways in which people show that they are in need of support from another person come primarily from self-disclosure (Derlega, et. al., 2008).

In addition, women are more active in the process of giving and seeking social support than are men (Burleson, et. al., 2011). This, in combination with the fact that on online social networks, people are more willing to seek and give social support (Greenhow & Robelia, 2009), make it necessary to further examine the role of women's self-disclosures and social support on Facebook.

Methodology

This chapter will focus on the proposed methodology of this study. Beginning with the methods that were employed, this chapter will then discuss various other methodological considerations. More specifically, the proposed procedure, sampling, participants, data analysis, and role of the researcher will comprise the remainder of this chapter.

To gain a thorough understanding of women's experiences with self-disclosure and support on Facebook, this study took a qualitative approach of inquiry. More specifically, both textual analyses and in-depth interviews were carried out to explore the research questions specific to this study.

According to Schwandt (2007), the process of in-depth interviewing is a "behavioral event," in that data are collected through verbal and nonverbal interactions between a researcher and participant (p. 162). A major strength of in-depth interviews is that they are method of inquiry that seek to obtain "thick descriptions" of particular issues with those who have experience with them (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 95). Because the focus of this study was on how women's self-disclosures on Facebook elicit support from others, in-depth interviews were the appropriate method of inquiry because they focus on the "lived experiences" of participants (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 94).

As with any method, though, there are weaknesses to in-depth interviewing. Aside from ethical issues concerning the confidentiality of participants (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009), a major weakness of in-depth interviewing is that the data obtained from this method have the possibility to be influenced by the researcher (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011).

Textual analysis, on the other hand, is an "unobtrusive" and "naturalistic" way to gather data and elicit information about social life (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 228). Furthermore,

researchers who employ this particular method aim to comprehend how people understand their environment (McKee, 2003). To do this, researchers examine texts, or "something we make meaning from" (McKee, 2003, p. 4). In this case, Facebook postings (e.g., photos and status updates) were examined to make sense of the meaning and motivations behind them.

However, a weakness of textual analyses is that the researcher makes "educated guesses" when determining the meaning behind texts (McKee, 2003, p. 1). Therefore, although researchers have reason to believe a particular text conveys a certain meaning, it might not always be the intended one. In the context of this study, an additional concern with textual analysis is that the texts that were viewed were not always posted by participants themselves. More specifically, in addition to viewing participant's Facebook postings, comments on status updates and photos from others were also viewed.

However, by conducting both in-depth interviews and textual analyses, the strengths of each method can be amplified and the weaknesses of each method can be minimized. Although a major downfall of in-depth interviewing is the influence of the researcher, textual analyses are considered to be "naturalistic" because they concentrate on information that is not influenced by researchers (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 228). Additionally, by combining both methods, the researcher was able to ameliorate the fact that the information elicited in the textual analysis had the potential of being divergent from the intended meaning by speaking with the participants to understand how they make sense of their Facebook postings. Although the methods that this study employed are quite different, they complemented one another and subsequently aided in eliciting more thorough data.

Furthermore, the most appropriate way to discover people's online activities is not only by examining their online content, but also by gaining an understanding of their offline

circumstances (Orgad, 2009). Therefore, in order to reach a thorough perspective of women's experiences with support through self-disclosing on Facebook, it was necessary to employ both in-depth interviews and textual analyses of Facebook pages to understand the entirety of the participants' situations.

Sampling

This study employed three types of sampling: purposive, convenience, and snowball. More specifically, participants in this study were women who gave or received support on Facebook through self-disclosing. Participants were screened through e-mail communication to ensure that they had experience with the subject matter of this study. Furthermore, this study employed convenience sampling, as participants were recruited by posters that were posted on the campus of Syracuse University. In addition, participants were asked if they knew of anybody who they believed to have a unique perspective on the subject matter. In total, seventeen women participated in the entirety of the study. All participants in this study received a $25 gift card.

Procedure

Once women agreed to participate in this study, I became Facebook 'friends' with the participants on Facebook. Next, a textual analysis of each woman's Facebook page occurred for roughly one month, making this study longitudinal in nature.

Because I became 'friends' with participants on Facebook, they also had access to my information on the site. Therefore, I placed stringent privacy settings on my page that enabled participants only to see my profile photos (as opposed to tagged photos) and also disabled them from viewing my Facebook 'wall,' which featured public messages from friends. Furthermore, when viewing participants' Facebook pages, I did not comment or 'like' any of their photos or status updates. When the study concluded, participants were 'defriended.'

Both field notes and screen shots were taken of participants' self-disclosures on Facebook as well as subsequent comments on the postings. After taking field notes and identifying major themes on each woman's Facebook page, I conducted in-depth interviews with each woman. These interviews occurred in-person at coffee shops and online through Skype. The interviews were semi-structured and differed according to each woman's observed activity on Facebook. However, each interview addressed issues dealing with self-disclosure and support on Facebook. Field notes were taken for each interview.

Data Analysis

To analyze the data specific to this study, Cresswell's (2009) recommendations for data analysis were followed. Inherent to this view is that the process of analyzing data occurs in an interactive manner. This process begins with examining specific information and progressing to a more general understanding of themes within the data. It is important to note that each of the phases are interrelated and ongoing (Cresswell, 2009). Because this study involved mixing two methodologies, with one informing the other, Cresswell's (2009) six steps of data analysis did not necessarily occur in the order suggested, but were adapted accordingly to answer the research questions of this study.

Because the textual analyses were the initial phase in the collection of data, they were the first step in data analysis. According to Cresswell, the first step in analyzing data is to "organize and prepare the data for analysis" (p. 185). For this phase of analysis, photos were taken of each participant's status updates and subsequent comments and 'likes' from others.

The next step in analyzing qualitative data, according to Cresswell (2009), is to examine the data to attain a broad sense of their meaning. Therefore, when analyzing the information posted by each participant, I examined the entirety of each posted photo, status update, comment,

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and 'like' on each woman's Facebook page. Furthermore, in this phase, I made notes on each

document concerning the general meanings within the data. It is important to note that at this

stage of the research, the data collected from each woman's Facebook page were analyzed

separately from the data of other participants.

The third step of analyzing qualitative data is coding, or the process of organizing data

into correlated sections (Cresswell, 2009). To do this, I imported the photos of participants'

status updates and photos into Evernote. Additionally, each post was coded using the tagging

feature on Evernote in order to identify similar postings within each woman's postings.

Furthermore, data were coded based on Bogdan and Biklen's (1992; as cited in Cresswell, 2009)

list of categories of qualitative codes including "setting and context codes; perspectives held by

subjects; subjects' ways of thinking about people and objects' process codes; and activity codes"

(p. 187). Furthermore, data from the textual analyses were also coded in accordance to the types

of self-disclosure and the nature of the support that was received.

As stated previously, the textual analyses of this study informed the subsequent

interviews with participants. Therefore, after coding and analyzing the Facebook postings of

each woman, interview questions were developed based upon the findings. More specifically, in

the interview stage, specific postings that were germane to the issue of self-disclosure and social

support and more general themes that were found in the analysis of each woman's Facebook

page were discussed.

Each interview was recorded and transcribed. Field notes were also taken during each

interview to enrich the transcripts. The interview transcripts were then analyzed to identify

generalities relating to self-disclosure and support as well as the offline outcomes of giving and

receiving support on Facebook.

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The interviews were then coded to identify important segments of information from each interview. This was done using Bogdan and Biklen's suggestion of codes (1992; as cited in Cresswell, 2009), which were mentioned above.

The next step in the analyzing the data, according to Cresswell (2009), is to use the codes to "generate a small number of themes or categories" (p. 189). To do this, the data from all participants were looked at as a whole. Furthermore, the codes from each woman's Facebook page and interview were examined in unison with those of other participants in order to illuminate overarching themes within the entirety of the data. To do this, I read over all of the data that were collected and took note of repeating codes.

Cresswell (2009) asserts that the final step in data analysis involves "making an interpretation or meaning of the data" (p. 189). To do this, a researcher can incorporate his or her interpretation or incorporate previous studies or theories into the interpretation (Cresswell, 2009). It was my decision to use both of these techniques to interpret the meaning of the data specific to this study.

Throughout each step of the data analysis process, I checked for both reliability and validity (Cresswell, 2009). This ensured that the data presented in the final paper were both correct and able to be replicated (Cresswell, 2009).

Role of the Researcher

As a participant observer, I also played a role in this study. Therefore, it is important to note that I was not only an active user of Facebook during this study, but I am also a woman. Thus, I believe that my gender not only influenced my perspectives on the issue, but also influenced my relationships with participants. Additionally, although I rarely posted on my own Facebook page, I frequently posted on others' Facebook walls, statuses, and photos. Frequently,

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I was motivated to make such postings to give social support to my network of friends and subsequently, I have seen my own relationships with others strengthen as a result of offering support on Facebook. Although I did not necessarily believe that self-disclosing on Facebook was the best way to receive support, I did notice positive effects of giving and receiving support on the site. Additionally, I have been working on studies related to women and Facebook for roughly one year. Therefore, I believe that my gender as well as my personal and academic experiences aided in making sense of the data from this study.

<center>**Results and Discussion**</center>

This chapter will discuss the results specific to this study. Each section will address each research question and will be subdivided according to themes within each. In addition, this chapter will tie back the results of this study to literature that is germane to the subject matter in an effort to provide a deeper understanding of the themes and findings of this study.

In total, interview transcripts, which were spaced at 1.5 lines, amounted to 263 pages. Furthermore 456 Facebook postings were analyzed and coded to answer the research questions specific to this study.

All participants had experience with not only giving support to others, but also gaining support from their network of friends on Facebook. All women in this study were college-aged. In terms of racial background, four were Black, one was Asian, and twelve were White. Participants were asked to choose a pseudonym by which to be identified in the final manuscript; therefore, all names in this study have been changed to ensure confidentiality.

RQ 1: How do women give and gain social support through self-disclosing on Facebook?

This research question addressed how women both give and receive social support through self-disclosing on Facebook. Results indicated that various tools, such as status updates, comments and 'likes', and private messaging, enabled support to be given and received on the site. Furthermore, results indicate that the public nature of Facebook aided in creating a culture that was quite positive and supportive. Each theme is thoroughly discussed below.

Positive and Public Nature of Facebook.

Due to gender role socialization, in traditional settings of communication women are socialized to conduct themselves in ways that are warm and caring (Katz, et. al., 2002). Findings from this study broadened this notion to the realm of Facebook, where interactions are visible to

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others within a given network. Furthermore, women in this study vehemently strived to create and uphold a positive community on Facebook. With that, it can be asserted that rather than establishing an alternative space where women could break away from gender roles, Facebook was a space that perpetuated such existing roles.

All participants discussed a positive and supportive culture on Facebook that existed within their network of friends. More specifically, participants viewed Facebook as a space for kind interactions, rather than a space for argument and negative exchanges.

To emphasize the positive and supportive nature of Facebook, Scarlett said:

(On Facebook) you definitely feel like you're part of a group. It's a sense of belonging, I guess. Even though every single person belongs to it. It's more intimate…even when someone 'likes' one of your pictures, it can make you feel a certain way. You feel good about it, I'm not going to lie. It's just interesting. They wouldn't say you're pretty to your face, but they 'like' your Facebook picture and everybody sees that. It's an interesting concept.

Additionally, not only did Facebook create a sense of a supportive and optimistic community, but also the interactions that occurred on the site were typically quite positive. For example, Cathy, who believed Facebook was a great place to escape the real-world and enter a "different world," said:

It seems like people really do try to avoid situations like that, though (disagreement and negative comments)...everybody just knows that it should be positive and if you're going to say something that most people wouldn't 'like,' that is something that is not good.

Cathy continued by saying that hostile and unkind interactions were "embarrassing because everyone can see the conversation and is probably laughing."

Prior research has demonstrated that women are socialized to exhibit positive behaviors in group settings (Carli & Bukatko, 2000). In regards to this study, it appeared as if the public nature of Facebook, in combination with gender role socialization, perpetuated the positive culture on the site.

Diana, who believed that her interactions on Facebook were usually "nice and supportive" furthered this notion when she asserted: "I don't really like cattiness being out in the general public. If you have a problem with somebody that's between you and them; the entire world does not need to know your beef with them."

The public nature of Facebook, in combination with the fact that interactions on the site were documented also appeared to explain why the culture of Facebook was positive and supportive. For example, when discussing why she avoids negative interactions on Facebook, Francesca, who hoped to be viewed by her network of friends as "supportive, understanding, and nonjudgmental," said:

> I don't think things are worth arguing about on Facebook because most of the time I'm afraid I'll argue about something and I'll be wrong. It's not like you're just talking to somebody and you say something and you start arguing, it's not like things are being documented, and it's likely that the person will forget most of the things you said. But on Facebook if you're arguing with somebody and you're wrong, you end up looking really dumb and then other people can see that. Unless you delete it, it will always be there. I just don't like being wrong and having somebody see it.

Furthermore, some women discussed taking action when they noticed negative interactions occurring between their Facebook friends. For example, when Lillian noticed her

friends "attacking" one another over a Facebook post, she intervened. When reflecting on this, Lillian said:

It's really upsetting to see other people attack other people's wall posts. If I see that I will comment on it and say, 'Hey, this is not the time and place to do this. If you have an issue with each other then do it in person and not on Facebook.' It's ridiculous.

Lillian's assertion further exemplifies the notion that gender roles were intensified on Facebook. More specifically, past research has found that gender role socialization causes women not only to display excessive politeness to others (Lakoff, 1970; as cited in Talbot, 1998), but also to promote fairness within groups (Carli & Bukatko, 2000). Rather than behaving in ways that were contrary to such traits, women acted in accordance with them. With that, it appeared that specific traits and behaviors associated with the ways in which women are socialized to act are more apparent and intense on Facebook than in face-to-face settings.

Textual analyses of participants' Facebook pages also yielded a very similar theme. As a matter of fact, of the 456 Facebook postings and the subsequent comments that were viewed, only one status update garnered a negative comment, as the other 455 were either positive or neutral in tone. More specifically, after Lillian posted a status update regarding how happy and in love she was with her partner, one of her friends commented "I just threw up in my mouth a little bit…luckily I was able to swallow it before things got ugly." When discussing this particular comment with Lillian, she said: "I really don't know why she felt the need to say that. I think that she's really aggressive."

Therefore, participants not only agreed that Facebook was a space for positive interactions, but also some were willing to take action to preserve this positive culture when they noticed their friends interacting with one another in off-putting ways. In turn, this notion

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indicated that there was a norm on Facebook among women to avoid negativity and uphold positive interactions. Based upon participant interviews and textual analyses of participants' Facebook pages, the public and documented nature were the two main factors that created the positive culture.

'Likes' and Comments.

Although prior research has addressed the supportive nature of Facebook, none has gone so far as to tie features, such as 'likes' and comments, to how support is enacted on the site. Findings from this study indicated that 'likes' and comments are two of the main ways in which support is given to others. With that, given that participants believed that Facebook was a space for positive interactions, it is no surprise that the features on Facebook that enabled public interactions were the main ways in which women gave and received support on the site.

Although the 'like' button seems to carry an explicit meaning on its own, participants in the study assigned their own deeper meanings to what it means to 'like' another's content on Facebook or have others 'like' their postings on the site. With that, when discussing what it meant to comment or 'like' a status update, participants said that the 'like' button represented "agreeance," "appreciation," "affirmation," "coolness," "connection," and "care". Oftentimes, these words were used to describe not only the post itself, but also a message to a person who posted the status update or photo.

Participants also viewed 'likes' and comments from others to be important features on the site. When speaking with participants about what they do when they logged into Facebook, many gave priority to viewing their notifications. To illustrate this, Francesca said, "When I first log on, I look to see if anybody commented on my stuff. Then I look to see my newsfeed to see

what everybody else is doing." Another participant, Sarah, further elaborated on what it meant to receive notifications that others had 'liked' or commented on her posts:

I love it when people 'like' or comment. When you sign onto Facebook and you see the notifications that someone has done something with your stuff, that's better than getting a new friend in a way. I love it. That's probably one of my favorite aspects of Facebook.

When discussing how 'likes' and comments impacted her, Lillian said, "Facebook is a social networking site, so I post stuff so other people will see it and acknowledge and show that they 'like' when I posted and that they like me by commenting and 'liking' it." The supportive benefits that were reaped when comments and 'likes' were garnered will be thoroughly discussed in a later section.

The fact that women gained and gave support through commenting and liking others' posts was further supported when women discussed what it meant for others not to 'like' or comment on their status updates and photos. Just as garnering 'likes' and comments on a specific post was viewed as a positive reaction to not only the posting itself, but also the person who posted it, not acquiring any 'likes' or comments was viewed as a negative reaction by one's network of Facebook friends.

With that, the responses of many participants indicated that the reason that they post information is to garner positive and supportive feedback from others, which further illuminates the positive and supportive nature of Facebook. For instance, when discussing how she feels after some of her postings did not garner any 'likes' or comments, Olivia said:

Sometimes it makes me feel terrible (that nobody commented on or 'liked' my status updates). Because I like to post things that I think people are going to 'like' and that are going to make them laugh. So when people don't 'like' it, sometimes I'll go back and

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delete it and think that it's stupid, so I'll delete it. Because on Facebook, I'm looking for a reaction. I'm posting for a specific reason.

Similarly, when Addison was asked to discuss her Facebook postings that did not garner any 'likes' or comments, she said:

It was that awkward moment. Because with everybody having access to it, it puts more emphasis on the fact that no one is commenting. If I checked Facebook once a week, I wouldn't have this problem, but since I'm so addicted, it felt a lot more magnified and awkward.

By alluding to the fact that the public nature of Facebook made not receiving feedback from others more intensified, Addison's words not only served as further evidence supporting the positive nature of Facebook, but they also indicated the supportive nature of comments and 'likes' from others.

As previously mentioned, many participants viewed the support they received as very personal, in that they believed the subsequent 'likes' and comments they received communicated others' feelings toward them. When discussing how she feels when others do not comment on or 'like' her posts, Francesca said: "If I post something and people don't say anything back or they don't even at least 'like' it, I start to wonder if they even like me." With that, Francesca's comment not only further emphasized the supportive function of comments and 'likes,' but also illuminated the "personal" nature of one's Facebook activity. Similarly, another participant, Cathy, equated not receiving any comments or 'likes' to rejection. More specifically, when talking about not receiving and comments and 'likes' on her posts, she said:

It is like rejection. You're not accepted, people didn't like it. So you just put yourself out there. Because when you post a picture or publish a post, you're putting yourself out

there. People see your name and see what you wrote and what you decided to tell the world. So it is not good and other people see that you did not get any 'likes' or anything like that, and it's not a good thing.

Although there was a general consensus that receiving comments and 'likes' signified positive feedback from others, most participants discussed that comments and 'likes' from people who do so were viewed with less weight, therefore lessening the impact of the supportive action.

After viewing Olivia's Facebook page, one notable theme that emerged was that oftentimes one person would 'like' nearly every status update and photo on her timeline. When Olivia was asked to discuss this, she said: "…She always 'likes' everything on my page. She invalidates everything on my page by liking every single thing…if she comments on my things it does not mean anything. It doesn't mean anything." The negative attitude toward people who frequently commented on status updates and photos also held up in the context of how one interacts with her entire network of friends. For instance, Cathy said:

If you 'like' too many people's statuses, you must not really. Either you want your name out there, or whatever the case may be. So the people who usually don't 'like' my status updates or pictures are usually the ones who don't really 'like' too many people's statuses or pictures. I take that into consideration more than a person who comments and 'likes' everybody's stuff all the time."

To further illuminate the small impact that those who frequently comment and 'like' make on others, Francesca said the following when discussing how her relationship plays into what she gets out of 'likes' and comments from others:

It all really depends on the person. Because there are friends that I have that just 'like' everything that everybody says. So whenever I see that it's kind of like I don't even really see it at all because it's so common. But if there is somebody that I haven't talked to in a while and they 'like' something that I say, then that's really nice. Or if I get a lot of 'likes' on something it doesn't really matter who they are. It makes me feel good in general.

Therefore, 'likes' and comments served as a source for immense support. Furthermore, women also assigned a variety of positive meanings to the 'like' button. Although women indicated that not receiving any 'likes' or comments was troublesome, they also indicated that they view 'likes' and comments from those who do so frequently with less weight.

Status Updates.

All participants in this study discussed giving support through commenting and "liking" others' photos and status updates. Additionally, many participants acknowledged that they post their own status updates and photos to give support to others. Oftentimes, status updates that were negative in tone fulfilled this purpose, more so than status updates that were positive or neutral in tone.

For instance, when Joan was discussing why she posted a status update that addressed how she was ready to have a break from school during spring break, she said: "I feel like it's kind of a common theme between my friends. Most of my friends are in college, or are affected by spring break. It's a common thing so everyone can relate to it." With that, Joan's assertion indicated that she posted this status update with the hopes of reaching others who perhaps were going through a similar situation.

To further emphasize this notion, Olivia, who often posted negative information with a humorous tone said,: "It's funny, the negative things that I post are for other people to relate to." This finding was reinforced by a variety of other participants including Lillian, who said:

> I just want people to see my status updates (about having a bad day) and realize that maybe they're not the only person having a bad day. Because there are probably people out there having a bad day, too. It happens to everybody. That's why I do it (post on Facebook that I had a bad day).

In such instances, women gave support to others through posting their own status updates. However, the particular audience who gained support from such status updates was not always clear. More specifically, it was quite possible that women who gained support from reading others' status updates may not comment or 'like' it. As a matter of fact, this is quite likely given the surveillance feature on Facebook, which enables users to view others' status updates and photos as an "invisible audience," in that the person posting the information is unaware of who is viewing it (Boyd, 2007). Findings from this study illuminate this notion. Take for instance a comment made by Etta, who read a status update from a woman in her network that was negative in tone:

> One of my friends recently just posted on Facebook about how a guy doesn't think about her and how sad it is that she keeps checking his page and he doesn't care what she is thinking or feeling. So she posted this pathetic update. It was brave to post. I definitely have those feelings. So when people started to comment on her post, I started reading all of the comments to kind of see what they were saying and get my own affirmation because I knew exactly how she was feeling. Somebody posted a really great song and

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I've been listening to it nonstop for three weeks. She would never know because she and

I hardly talk, but I just saw it on her Facebook wall, and that's really cool.

Although women oftentimes gave and received support through their own and others'

status updates in an unseen manner, sometimes the support given through a status update was

more explicit. For instance, Lillian, who said that she oftentimes posts status updates that

convey positive emotions about her love and admiration for sister, said:

I post that especially if she's feeling badly about herself, just so I can post it and other

people will see it and comment on it and say that she's great, or other people will 'like' it

and that will make her feel better. Her knowing that other people are supporting me and

agree with what I had to say about her.

Understanding that women, both implicitly and explicitly, offered support to others

through posting their own status updates on Facebook signifies that Facebook was a unique

space for offering and gaining support. Because of the public nature of the site, women were

able to offer support to "invisible audiences" as well as offer explicit support to others, which in

turn caused others to offer their support in regards to the original message.

Wall/Timeline Posts.

Women also gave and received support through writing on others' Timelines and having

others write on theirs. Oftentimes, women found this type of support quite validating. Whereas

status updates and photos garner 'likes' and comments because they oftentimes prompt others to

comment on them, wall postings were not prompted and therefore carried more weight when it

came to supportive actions on Facebook.

After viewing Leslie's Facebook postings, it was clear that her network of friends would support her through writing on her wall. For instance, one of her friends wrote, "You need to be on that show The Voice!!!" When discussing this posting and similar ones, Leslie said:

It made me feel pretty good. Especially here in this entire environment where I do feel very isolated, alienated, and marginalized. Even though those comments come on Facebook, and they're positive, I see Facebook as a last resort kind of media to communicate with people. But the feeling is still real. I mean, those are, and I do like those comments, and they do boost my mood.

When discussing with Scarlett about how she feels when her friends post on her wall, she said: "That kind of gives me a sense of self-awareness. That makes me the most happy, that people are saying nice things to me on their own."

Whereas features on Facebook, such as status updates and 'likes' and comments, enabled support to be given and received on the site, it appeared as if supportive messages to one's wall or timeline carried a great deal of weight. Because women were aware that such messages were not prompted, it appeared as if they carried a significant amount of weight when it came to gaining support on the site.

Private Messages.

Although the previous sections addressed the public features that enabled support to be given and received, women in this study indicated that support was sometimes given through private messaging, in that the message was only seen by the person giving support and the person gaining support.

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While viewing Diana's page, her relationship status changed from "in a relationship" to "single." This relationship change was made public on Diana's Facebook wall. When discussing how her network of friends reacted to this news, she said:

> My boyfriend and I just broke up a week ago. I can't say I was necessarily expecting it, but as soon as that went on Facebook, I started getting messages from people asking me if I was okay and things like that. I had my friends messaging me asking me if I wanted to get drinks.

Although Diana's timeline garnered public comments, her close friends reached out to her through "the more personal" feature on Facebook: private messages. But what makes a woman offer support through private, as opposed to public messages? One participant, Scarlett, may shed light on this, as she discussed how she responds to viewing negative information posted by her friends on Facebook:

> I usually think about (commenting on somebody's negative status update), because I really want to reach out to this person. But I don't really know how to do that on a status, so sometimes I'll send them a message if I feel that they would appreciate my help, or caring really…I try not to publicly console people, because that's almost degrading in a way, that's how I see it. If I feel like I have a strong connection with them, I'll contact them privately.

Although the public nature of Facebook could be a productive way of gaining support from one's network of friends, it appeared that when it came to negative information that altered one's life, such as a breakup, support was given through a more private means.

Although women would oftentimes give and gain support on Facebook in a public manner, support was also given through private messages. The decision to offer support through

a private message often was based on how women believed their supportive message would make the woman to whom support was directed feel in a public setting.

RQ 2: What types of information do women self-disclose on Facebook to give or receive support?

This research question addressed the types of information women self-disclosed to both give and receive support on Facebook. Results indicated that women self-disclosed both positive and negative information to give and receive support on the site. Furthermore, results suggested that women would often self-disclose information that they believed others could relate to in order to gain support from their network. Similarly, women would also offer support through self-disclosing if they were able to relate to the original message.

Relatable Information.

Women in this study also sought support through self-disclosing information that they believed others could relate to. Participants also offered support by commenting and 'liking' others' postings to which they could relate. Therefore, support, whether it was sought or given, was dependent upon how relatable a status update or photo was to others.

In regards to offering support on Facebook, women in this study would oftentimes comment or 'like' a particular status update or photo that a friend posted if they were able to relate to or identify with the particular posting. For example, when talking about having a bad day and seeing a friends' status conveying that they also had a bad day, Francesca said: "I would be more likely to comment and say me, too. Something along those lines. If I can relate to it then I'll be more likely to comment on it more often than not."

According to Highlen and Gillis (1978), in offline communication, when responding to messages from others, people are more likely to self-disclose in a deeper manner. Results from

this study were similar. With that, results from this study indicated that oftentimes others' self-disclosures attract others to self-disclose back to provide support. One important aspect of this finding, though, is that the cause-and-effect relationship typically emerged when the original status update or photo that was posted was negative in tone. For example, one participant, Lucy, said:

> I'll usually comment and be like 'yeah, I've been there, don't worry, it gets better, or something like that. I don't tend to get into specifics, but I try to be like you are not alone. If they really want to know more, they can ask me directly.

Additionally, when discussing how and why she offers support to others, Diana said:

> I comment on the kind of things I can relate to or have something to say about.
>
> My friend posted something the other day about how she was so screwed that her professor moved her presentation up. And I was like, 'I'm really sorry, you know, that happened to me earlier in the semester and it sucked. But let me know if there is something that I can do.' Stuff like that. You don't necessarily want to pull the attention away from a person, but I might mention that what they're going through happened to me too and not necessarily go into depth with it.

Similarly, one of Kate's friends wrote on her Timeline: "Wrote ½ a sentence and I'm already distracted! Waah!" In response, Kate said: "Guess who hasn't written a thing…? Haha." When asking Kate about this particular posting and her response, she said:

> I posted that back just so she knew that I was in the same boat and that I hadn't done anything either. I just wanted to make sure she didn't feel bad. Just letting her know that I'm not doing my homework, either.

Correspondingly, women in this study oftentimes were prompted to self-disclose in a vague manner when a friend on the site posted a status negative in tone. Although women oftentimes would not disclose specific details regarding how they could relate, they would indicate, publicly to a network, that they also had felt the same way or gone through a similar situation. To illuminate the effect of this support, Stephanie said the following:

I think that a lot of time if people are going through situations like mine, comments and 'likes' give me support and the fact of knowing that even if it's not the same situation, I'm not the only one who is going through it.

Therefore, results from this study suggest that when women could relate to a particular status that carried a negative tone, they were prompted to comment and convey that they, too, had also felt that way. Furthermore, the support given through Facebook had valuable effects, as women found solace in knowing that they are not alone in facing difficult situations. Such effects of receiving support will be discussed thoroughly in an upcoming section.

However, women did not only offer support to others by commenting on others' negative status updates. Sometimes the 'like' button is also used to convey support to others. To illustrate this, Lucy said the following:

I definitely 'like' things if I can relate to them. If it's somebody that I'm casual acquaintances with, I'll 'like' it but I won't actually say anything. Sometimes I don't comment because I'm worried that someone will take it out of context and hate me.

Additionally, women in this study also posted status updates that they believed others could relate to in order to gain support from others. When discussing what types of information she posted to gain support from others, Laney, a young woman who viewed Facebook as a very personal form of communication, said: "My rule of thumb is that if it will be interesting to

somebody else, then that's fine and I post it." Therefore, the audience played a large role in deciding what information to post on Facebook to gain support. To further elucidate this finding, when discussing a status update that conveyed her irritation with the difficulties of being on campus during an event, Diana said:

I needed to get a negative emotion out because it was driving me crazy. I think in this case (I posted it because) it was something that people can relate to, people who go here and are not into that stuff.

Addison was a young woman who limited herself to posting one status update a day that encompassed the general mood of her day. Oftentimes, such status updates were in the form of quotes or song lyrics. Take for instance the following status update:

Another midnight run, I'll still be breathing come the morning sun. It's hurting my eyes, it's hurting my ears, I know, I know I know there'll be tears. You're hurting inside, been hurting for years, I know, I know, I know there'll be tears, but it's never that clear.

After discussing that such quotes often convey her mood, she discussed why she posted them:

Quotes are a way, instead of me saying personal statements about myself, it's a personal statement that relates to something in my life at the moment, but it also might be applicable to other people, and that will call their attention to the status. Instead of saying, 'Oh I'm really saddened, my day sucks,' nobody will comment or 'like' that, that's whiny. But if I put up a quote, people will be inspired to 'like' it or will comment on it and therefore I am given an indirect mood boost through that interaction and then I feel better.

With that, women in this study often posted information that was vague in nature in order

to have others relate to it, and therefore comment and 'like' it. Given that comments and 'likes' on Facebook provided a source of support for women, the interactions that were accumulated after posting a status update provided them with a more positive outlook on their situation.

Negative Information.

Based upon textual analyses of participants' Facebook pages, women oftentimes posted status updates or photos that carried a negative tone. Information negative in tone was defined as the conveyance of an emotion that expressed sadness, anger, stress, worries, and/or made a distress disclosure**.**   However, despite the fact that women in this study frequently posted information that carried a negative tone, there appeared to be a dissonance between what they found inappropriate to post and what they posted.

Many participants used Facebook to voice their aggravations. When discussing posting feelings on Facebook, one participant, Maria, said: "If something happens and I just want to vent I'll post it. So if it's a really strong feeling, I'll post it to vent." Furthermore, when discussing with Maria about why she chooses to post such status updates on Facebook, she said: "I guess I just post it to see if anybody else has experienced it so they can share their feelings, too. So it makes me seem like I'm not the only one."

Similarly, based upon a textual analysis of Stephanie's page, it was clear that she oftentimes conveyed negative information that carried an irritated or exasperated tone. Take for instance a status update she posted regarding her school work:

Seriously hate my professor!!! So I was sick and missed 3 spastic classes and 1 lab this entire semester and so you go complaining to my advisor (Even though I have an A in your class) that I'm an "at risk" student. Go pound sand!

One of Stephanie's friends, who commented on her status, was also going through the same thing and commented, "I 100% agree that she is the worst teacher I've ever had…she is insane." When talking about this status update with Stephanie, she said: "When other kids in my class are then like 'oh my God, me too, I feel that I'm not alone, and it makes you feel better and it calms you down."

As previously stated, disclosures that were negative in tone reached far beyond status updates and photos that expressed emotions of anger and irritation. More specifically, some status updates and photos carried a melancholy tone. For instance, Elizabeth, who, in the interview, said that she preferred posting positive, as opposed to negative information, posted a status update that said: "It's the first Christmas without my grandpa. It's sad what has become of our family. But I am thankful for the people I am spending time with today. " When discussing with Elizabeth why she sometimes posted status updates that carried such a tone, she said: "I think sometimes on my really sad days, I will post something in hopes that somebody will comment on it."

Although Elizabeth chose to convey the reasons for her sadness, most participants actively kept their postings dealing with sadness vague, not only to attract others who could relate, but also to avoid letting their Facebook posts become too "personal." For instance, one participant, Lucy, who in the interview discussed how she does not post negative information because she did not "want to look like a whiny person," posted a status update that said "The minute I think I'm ahead, I fall behind." When discussing with Lucy why she posted this particular status, she said:

Sometimes I just post stuff like that because I'm exasperated and maybe someone out

there does relate and I'm not the only one out there and I'm not necessarily the only one going through it. The comments and 'likes' on that stuff make me feel like I was not the only one.

Distress disclosures were the most frequent type of negative disclosure made on participants' Facebook pages. For example, in a status update, Etta, a young woman who believes that "You should let people see you sweat. You should let people see you struggle, because struggle is humanity," posted the following status update:

That feeling when the week is over and you are totally exhausted and don't even know how you managed to put one foot in front of the other but rather than feeling glad, relieved, proud, or even thankful…you just feel sad and a little defeated…almost as if it's week one. But I suppose there's always next week and the week after that.

Although Etta's postings typically garnered a variety of 'likes' and comments, this particular status update received one like and two comments. One of which said: "…and the months and years after those! :)" With the other reading: "Don't hang your head." When discussing this post with Etta, and more specifically, why she was motivated to post it and what she got out of the comments and 'likes,' she said:

I was worn out. I guess I just wanted people to know that I was worn out and that I was sick and tired of being sick and tired. But I like my postings to get more support, I want to get people who identify with how I'm feeling. So, if somebody was like, 'Don't hang your head,' you might as well say 'don't be so dejected, why are you so dejected?' Nobody wants to admit that they're going through it. That further highlights that I'm going through it. So I would want something more along the lines of somebody saying 'I had a really miserable week, too. This is what happened. It's so crazy how you can have

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ups and downs. But sometimes I read this to inspire me. So more than just saying it's okay or one-liners like that.

Etta's status update not only conveyed a negative emotion, but also conveyed such information in a manner that was quite vague; in that her network of friends would be able to tell that something was wrong, however, they would not necessarily know what caused such feelings. Etta, along with most other participants, would post negative information in their status updates, however, in interviews nearly all participants who posted such negative, yet vague information, said that they didn't believe such negative posts were acceptable to post on Facebook. For example, despite posting a status update that said "I think my brain might explode at the end of this week," Joan said:

I try not to post really personal feelings. I won't post 'god life sucks, this is terrible.' Because I see people who do that and I'm just like, 'Why?' If something is that terrible, why are you talking about it on Facebook? Go tell someone else about it. We don't care.

With that, in most interviews, participants expressed that they did not believe that it was acceptable to post information that was deep and negative in tone, which they described as "too personal." However, many participants would convey such information in their respective status updates and photos. For example, Elizabeth, who would post status updates that conveyed negative information, such as "Paying bills. It's about to get depressing," said:

I try to stay away from the statuses that are like 'Oh God I hate my life, or the ones that no one really cares about, or the ones that I don't want people to perceive me as that type of person.

At first glance, it appeared as if the women in this study had a disconnect between what

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they deemed inappropriate to post and what they actually posted. However, based on both textual analyses and interviews, it appeared as if negative information was deemed appropriate to post if the information was vague in tone, in that it did not fully disclose what caused the negative emotion. This point was illustrated by Scarlett: 'It is easier to convey something if it's abstract and you're more likely to get more 'likes' because it may look creative and people think it's cool. That's cooler than saying I'm having a bad day."

Therefore, findings from this study are not in accordance with those by Sheldon (2009), who found a positive relationship between deep disclosures and favorable perceptions by one's network. More specifically, findings from this study indicated that although women did post status updates that were negative in tone, they did not convey such information in a deep manner. Thus, findings from this study also contradict those from Gilbert and Whiteneck (1976), who found that messages containing low levels of depth are more likely to be positive, as opposed to negative, in tone. Based on participant interviews, women oftentimes were prompted not to disclose their negative emotions in a deep manner because they did not perceive others' deep and negative disclosures to be appropriate. With that, women in this study perceived disclosures that were shallower in nature to be viewed more favorably by their network of friends.

In addition, participants indicated that negative information also was deemed appropriate to post in the form of status updates and photos if it carried a tone that was humorous. Therefore, this finding is in accordance with that of Selwyn (2009), who found that oftentimes college-aged Facebook users would use humor to convey negative information. For example, one participant, Olivia, posted a status update that said: "Dear sleep, please start happening before 3AM so I don't keep missing my morning obligations. Sincerely, Tired and Pissed." When discussing negative posts, Olivia said:

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I ignore others' negative posts. I just think posts like that are, I don't know. If I post something like that (negative in tone), I try to make it funny. I would be like, 'Today was a shit sandwich on moldy bread. It would be something silly, something that people can laugh about.

Olivia furthered this statement by explaining why she posts negative information with a humorous tone:

You know, I'm not going to just throw my worries out there on Facebook. It does not seem productive. It is when I will legitimately talk about that stuff with my therapist or my mom. But it's like we're all locked up in life together, and if we're going to talk about it (negative information) in a public forum, then just be funny about it. I just feel that people attach to humor versus 'oh so and so, I'm having a bad day.' You want others to laugh at it and relate or say everything will be fine. It needs to be beyond the laugh.

Similarly, Francesca, who posted status updates such as "Thanks again, immune system. Just in time for the weekend" and "I forgot how slippery icy pavement can be until I was lying on my back in a parking lot," said the following about posting information that is negative in tone on Facebook:

I do post about bad things, but I try to make it funny because I feel that more people will comment on it as opposed to being like 'I fell on ice, I hate my life,' because that's annoying. I hate signing in and seeing Debbie downers. If it's funny, more people are more likely to read and comment on it...I know when other people commented on it and said 'oh, I'm sorry you fell,' it was nice to know that they cared.

Francesca's commentary regarding why she posts negative information with a humorous

tone on Facebook highlighted an important finding when it came to offering support to negative information: women believed posting status updates and photos that were purely negative in tone and deep in nature were not acceptable to post to their network of friends. This not only translated into one's own postings, but it also affected the support that occurred after a particular post was posted. The frequency of such postings, according to participant interviews and textual analyses, also had a significant impact on the act of receiving support. Many participants discussed that seeing a great deal of negative posts from particular people within their network of friends caused them not to offer support. For example, Lucy said, "If it's consistently negative, it's almost like the boy who cried wolf."

However, participants did report that there was an exception to this rule. More specifically, participants agreed that sad or negative information that impacted one's life in a major way was acceptable to post. For example, Olivia said:

You know when something really sad or something really great happens to you I think you should announce it and just say that this happened, because it has a significant effect on your life. Whether it is good or bad. I'm not going to post that I'm just really tired and annoyed, though. I will vent to my roommate about it but I'm not going to go on Facebook.

Therefore, results from this study indicated that information that carried a negative tone was not always an appropriate choice to post. Similarly, women in this study indicated that there was a negative relationship between the frequency of negative posts and subsequent support. However, adding humor and vagueness were two main ways in which women felt comfortable both giving and seeking support on the site.

Positive Information.

During interviews, participants discussed that they believed that positive, as opposed to negative information, was appropriate to post on Facebook. Textual analyses yielded a similar theme, as many participants would post information that carried a positive tone. Information that carried a positive tone was considered to be any information about the self that conveyed happiness, excitement, and/or optimism.

When discussing her status updates that conveyed positive information, Lillian said, "When I'm happy or excited, I can't stay away from the computer and not post something." This in turn, signified that women often preferred to post positive information to their network of friends. Similarly, when speaking with Sarah about posting her emotions on Facebook, she said: "I don't think my emotions need to be publicized to the world. Unless it is a good emotion." Similarly, her Facebook page often conveyed positive emotions. One example of her positive status updates included: "Spinning at 9:30 am…my new favorite activity."

One participant, Scarlett, posted a variety of positive status updates and photos on Facebook. Take for instance one status update that said, "Officially done with my first semester!!! It's been a great experience, so happy :)." Similarly, Elizabeth also posted status updates that conveyed positive emotions. For instance, one said, "Less than 12 hours ago I sang 'I'll Make a Man Out of You on the Great Wall of China. :) I love my life." However, these were not the only positive self-disclosures made on the site. All participants posted at least one status update or photo that conveyed a positive emotion.

When discussing with participants why they post status updates and photos that conveyed positive emotions, nearly all cited the audience, or their network of friends, as a main reason why

they posted positive updates. For instance, Cathy, who posted a great deal of photos and positive

information about herself said:

> Venting on Facebook is a little tacky. But I feel like if we are going to put something out
>
> there that everyone is going to read when they log into their Facebook, it should be
>
> something positive. So I try to keep my posts positive or neutral.

> Similarly, when talking with Lucy about why she posted positive information on

Facebook, she said, "I don't say that I had a bad day on Facebook because I don't want to look

like that whiny person." Therefore, when disclosing emotions, positive, as opposed to negative

emotions were preferred by participants. Mainly, it appeared that positive emotions were

conveyed due to the acknowledgement of the audience, and with that, the fear that they would be

perceived as a negative person.

Therefore, results from this study were in agreement with previous findings in regards to

self-disclosure that found that disclosures that are positive in tone are more likely to be disclosed

than information that is negative in tone (Gilbert & Whiteneck, 1976). Furthermore, results from

this study elaborate on this finding by stressing that conveying information that is positive in

tone is also perceived to be more productive than disclosing negative information.

Furthermore, while observing participants' Facebook pages, it was clear that they

oftentimes would post status updates and photos that conveyed pride. Take for instance a status

update from Diana that read, "Papers are in, presentations are done, I am now officially on

break!" Another participant, Laney, who celebrated her 21st birthday while her page was being

analyzed, posted a photo of her 21st birthday bucket list, which listed 21 things she wanted to

accomplish on her birthday, which included "Start a conga line, Convince someone you're

French, and have a stranger buy you a shot." This post garnered nearly 25 'likes' and four

comments, in which those who commented said things such as "That's my girl!" When asking Laney why she decided to post this, she said: "I finished it and I was so proud of myself."

However, there appeared to a border between posting information that one is proud of and information that could be perceived by others as arrogant. For instance, many women in the interviews discussed that they did not give support on Facebook to others when they posted information that appeared to be conceited. Although Laney admitted to posting information to "brag" about an event in her life, she did not like to see others display arrogance on Facebook, which in turn caused her to not offer support to others who conveyed such a tone. When talking about this, she said:

> If I feel like someone's post is not sincere, I would not comment or 'like' their stuff to boost their mood. Okay, so there is one girl that I know, she will post and she just brags all the time on Facebook. She'll post pictures of herself and stuff. One caption was 'This is from the photo shoot today, not photo shopped, had no idea I looked so good in a bikini.' So I don't compliment her to validate her. But I have a friend who just got an internship in France and so I posted that it was so exciting because it was something that she really wanted.

Laney's mentality on not offering support to others who displayed themselves in an arrogant manner was also evident in textual analyses of participants' Facebook pages. For instance, Francesca, who typically received both comments and 'likes' on status updates and photos, posted the following status update that did not receive any 'likes' or comments: "If looks could kill, I'd be dead." Similarly, another participant, Cathy, posted a series of four "self-photos," in which she posed for the camera while making a variety of faces including a smile and

sensual faces. Although the photo with the smile garnered two comments from others, the more sensual photos failed to garner comments and 'likes'.

Therefore, women deemed it appropriate to post and comment on positive status updates and photos that conveyed feelings of pride; however, there was a line that was drawn when it came to posting information in which a woman came off as vain.

However, although women did not offer support to others who appeared to be vain or arrogant, women in this study discussed offering support to other women when they posted a positive and impactful achievement in their life.

When discussing how she offers support to others on Facebook, Scarlett said:

Usually I 'like' and comment on things that I can relate to at that moment. But not necessarily all the time. I mean, if my friend got accepted into college and I'm sad that day, I'm still going to comment on it and say congratulations.

Therefore, the support that occurred on Facebook was quite prevalent when it came to achievements in one's life. Although women in this study would oftentimes offer support based upon whether they could relate to a particular posting, offering positive support and validation to others on their positive achievements overruled this mentality.

To further emphasize this notion, when talking with Addison about what types of status updates that she was likely to give support to, she said:

If someone has accomplished something, not bragging or anything, but just something like they got a job, or something you can tell them good job on. I 'like' milestone things, like a new relationship, a job, or an internship, those are the times I feel a pressure to comment or 'like' something, when a big event is occurring in somebody's life.

This notion was also supported in the textual analyses of participants' Facebook pages. For instance, when Maria posted a status update on Facebook that said: "Got a paid internship in San Francisco!!!" she garnered 48 'likes' and 11 comments that conveyed positive support from others including "Congrats, I'm so proud!" Furthermore, of all of Maria's status updates, this particular update garnered the most comments and 'likes' by others by a significant amount.

Women not only posted content on Facebook that conveyed positive information, but also perceived posting such positive emotions to be the most acceptable type of information to post. Furthermore, although it was acceptable to post positive information about accomplishments and events, there was a division between such information and arrogance. This division affected subsequent support that was received.

RQ 3: Why do women post status updates and photos that warrant support?

This research question addressed the motivations women have for self-disclosing through status updates and photos to receive support from others on Facebook. Results indicated that the nature of Facebook as well as the various psychological and social benefits of self-disclosing to gain support on the site, were two major motivators.

Facebook is a Unique Venue for Support.

The nature of Facebook appeared to be a large motivator in regards to seeking support. More specifically, compared to more traditional forms of support, that typically occur in synchronous time and between a small group of people, the nature of Facebook, which is public and asynchronous, created a venue which enhanced support. More specifically, factors such as large networks and ease of communicating made Facebook a space in which women were motivated to self-disclose in order to gain support from others.

First, many participants noted that because their Facebook networks were quite vast, they would use the site to seek support. For example, Diana, in regards to seeking support, said:

Facebook helps with getting support, in terms of the variety of people that you get. It's nice to put something out there and to reach out to a lot of people, rather than seeking all of these people and giving them all the information at different times.

Similarly, Kate said:

I think Facebook helps with getting support. If you put something up there and you're asking a question or saying something, it makes it easy for other people to support you and that's helpful. If it's the people that matter to you and the people that you might not talk to as often, it's pretty beneficial.

Past literature has shown that online social networks such as Facebook are superior venues for enhancing levels of bridging social capital (Ellison, et. al., 2007; Steinfield, et. al., 2008). This study elaborates on such findings to illuminate that the use of sites such as Facebook strengthens weak ties in regards to not only connection, but also support. More specifically, this study illuminated that the use of Facebook enabled women to gain support from a wide array of people, including weak ties, which in turn created a more supportive environment.

As previously mentioned, the fact that weak ties were able to offer support on Facebook motivated women to self-disclose to gain support from others. To further this motivation, take for instance, an excerpt from Stephanie's interview in which she discussed why she self-disclosed on Facebook to gain support:

Sometimes when I'm on Facebook, it's just a moment to gather my head, to get away from anything I was doing. Facebook is a way I can gain support at that time…I need to get a perspective that's not my own perspective. I get really tunnel-visioned when I am

doing something and I can't do it or it freaks me out or frustrates me. But then I have other people talking to me through comments and it makes me feel a lot better.

With that, it appeared that not only were women able to reach out to more people when seeking support on Facebook, but the site also made it easier for them. Additionally, the nature of Facebook not only had the potential to garner support from many people, but it also had the potential to provide deeper support to women than in more traditional settings. Take for instance a comment from Maria, who, when she was discussing why she posts status updates and photos seeking support, said:

> I post to get that in the moment support and sympathy. Compared to me just meeting with one person and talking about it and them being like, 'oh I feel you.' But on Facebook, it's with a lot more people and they can do it whenever they want, it just doesn't have to be right then or right there.

Maria continued her statement by saying:

> It's more supportive on Facebook than it is in person because it's so in the moment. It's exactly when you want it. When you expect it. I think we all kind of expect it. I guess I feel that we get more support on Facebook than in person.

> However, not all participants felt that they got more support on Facebook than in-person.

Many did feel, though, that Facebook was a supplement to offline support. For instance, Addison, who posted status updates and photos with the hopes of her friends boosting her mood said:

> I'm really busy throughout the day and I don't get that face-to-face throughout the day, so Facebook is my supplement. So I just like to have some sort of dialogue going on throughout the day, and comments really achieve that.

Facebook was a unique venue for seeking support, and could oftentimes be a less intrusive place to seek support than in comparison to a face-to-face context. Additionally, it appeared that seeking support on Facebook had the potential to be as beneficial as receiving support in an interpersonal context. Based upon interviews with participants, the nature of Facebook aided the site in becoming a beneficial space to seek support. The ease of using Facebook is one explanation of this notion. This, in combination with the fact that dialogue on the site had less of a context, aided in making the site a productive space for gaining support. Therefore, findings from this study are similar to those by Tidwell and Walther (2002), who found that there is less of a context in computer-mediated communication in comparison to more traditional settings of communication.

With that, participants also noted that the simple and asynchronous nature of Facebook also made it a superior venue to seek support. For instance, Olivia said:

> If I told people that I updated my blog, a lot of people wouldn't flat out be like 'hey I like your blog.' But if I posted it on Facebook, people 'like' that and they show their excitement. But they might not personally come up to me and say that they're excited and they love what I write. I think that Facebook makes expressions automatic. And so I do treat comments and 'likes' with a little more weight. People just don't communicate like that to each other in real-life. So, they carry a lot of weight to me.

The nature of Facebook made gaining and receiving support not only easier, but also more frequent. Furthermore, the support that women received affected them in a positive manner. Mainly due to the textual and asynchronous nature of the site, support was able to be given and received without a great deal of effort.

Enhance Mood and Self-Perception.

Women in this study also indicated that they sought for others to enhance or augment their negative psychological states. Furthermore, results from this study indicated that women were motivated to self-disclose to gain support in order to enhance their self-confidence.

In regards to the motivations for posting information that carried a melancholy tone, Diana said, "It's my hope that my friends will comment and 'like' my stuff. Especially if I'm posting something about me having a bad day, I want somebody to cheer me up." Similarly, in regards to whether she hopes people will comment on her status updates, Elizabeth said:

> I think on my really sad days I will post something in hopes that someone will comment on it…if I'm sick I want someone to say 'feel better' or 'get well soon.' If I am going through a hard time, I want someone to give me a little push. Or anything. I like when people interact with me.

Women in this study also discussed posting their worries or stressors with the hopes of others ameliorating such negative feelings through commenting and 'liking' a particular post. For instance, in regards to why she self-discloses her personal problems on Facebook, such as one status update that read, "Why can't I figure this out? I wanted to sleep tonight, but here I am lost and hopeless…" Stephanie said:

> I don't necessarily expect my friends to know the right answer or the reason why I feel the way I do. But I at least want them to comment on it and ask why I have been super stressed lately. Sometimes I need somebody to kind of be like 'you have been stressed, you're freaking out, you need to calm down.'

With that, when discussing her motivations for posting status updates that conveyed her worries in a vague manner, she said:

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If I post stuff like that, I'm usually looking for support. There have been a lot of difficult decisions I've had to make these past couple of months, and in doing so, I was not always 100% sure of the decision I made, which led to the posts. And that's why I posted that, at some point I felt it would be the right decision. So especially people who know the situation, they can come in and say 'no, you're fine, don't worry about it, it will all work out, it's okay. Even if it's not people who know the situation, I think a lot of the time if people like something like that, they're going through a similar situation. Some kind of decision. And that gives me support, the fact of knowing that even if it's not the same decision that's being made, I'm not the only one who is going through difficult situations.

Additionally, because women in this study discussed that they oftentimes sought support through posting status updates and photos that they believed others would relate to, it is no surprise that women were motivated to post their negative emotions to get others to relate. For example, when discussing why she posts her worries on Facebook, such as one that read, "Making a website. It's a really good thing I don't know what I'm doing…" Scarlett said:

Nobody likes a Debbie downer…but there are things that I'm like, 'This really sucks' and I'm going to talk about it on Facebook and maybe someone will see it and be able to relate to it because misery likes company.

Therefore, although women believed posting negative information, such as sadness and stressors, was not necessarily the most appropriate subject matter to post, many posted such feelings with the hopes of others commenting to enhance their mood. To further elaborate on this, Addison said: "I post to bring the high to a high and the low to a high."

As Addison's quote above exemplifies, women were motivated to post status updates and photos not only to boost their low moods, but also to enhance their pleasant moods. For example, when discussing why she posts positive events in her life on Facebook, Cathy said:

I can say that I'm a little guilty of liking attention. It's kind of a rush that you get when you get a 'like' from somebody. It's like, 'Oh so and so was paying attention to me,' or 'Oh, they're happy for me,' or 'I have more attention than other people.' I think we all need attention. It doesn't matter who you are. So something like that I would post because I want a thrill because I'm happy for myself, why not bring more happiness to myself?

Women were also prompted to post photos of themselves on Facebook with the hopes of others affirming their looks. With that, Cathy said the following:

I think Facebook is a good way to boost your ego and low self-confidence, because a lot of people have confidence issues. So why not post a cute picture on Facebook and have 50 people 'like' it? Or even 10 people like it? And it's like, 'Oh, maybe I do look pretty, or yeah, maybe I do have great style.'

Results from this study indicated that women oftentimes were motivated to seek support on Facebook not only to affirm their personalities, but also their physical appearance. Furthermore, women also were motivated to self-disclose to gain a boost in confidence through garnering comments and 'likes' from others. Therefore, this theme builds upon findings from Derlega and Grzelak (1979) that found that a chief function of self-disclosure is gaining affirmation from others.

In regards to seeking affirmation for aspects of their personality, women oftentimes sought affirmation for two traits: humor and opinions. For example, when discussing why she conveys humor in her self-disclosures, Francesca said:

When I post humorous stuff I want people to 'like' it or comment on it and be like, 'Oh! Your status is so funny, it made me laugh so much,' and that almost gives me a sense of self, it makes me feel really good.

Receiving support from others also had the potential to affirm the women's beliefs about their sense of humor and personality. Therefore, in this case, support was in the form of giving positive feedback in regards to personality.

Similarly, when discussing why she posts humorous posts, Olivia said:

I'll post things with the view that people think what I'm posting is really funny and they'll see how snarky and funny I am…and then I get comments and 'likes' and it's like people do like my stuff and they think it's funny and they'll laugh or share it and that makes me feel good about myself and that's why I keep doing it.

RQ4: Why do women offer support by commenting and liking others' status updates and photos?

This research question addressed the motivations women had for offering support to others through commenting and 'liking' others' status updates and photos. Results indicated that women were prompted to give support to others in order to increase their levels of mood and confidence. Furthermore, women were also prompted to offer support to inform others that they could relate, and thus, lessen their feelings of loneliness in a specific situation. Although such findings identify genuine reasons for offering support, findings from this study also illuminated

more superficial motivations for offering support to others, which included relationships and pressure.

Mood and Confidence Enhancement.

All women in this study discussed that they were motivated to 'like' or comment on others' postings in order to raise others' moods and confidence. This finding applied to posts that carried both positive and negative tones.

For instance, when discussing commenting and liking others' status updates and photos, Kate said, "If somebody posts something about how they're having a bad week, I'll definitely comment and let them know that it will be okay and try to make them feel better. I feel like encouragement is always nice to have."

Similarly, Elizabeth, in regards to offering support on others' negative postings, said:

In regards to my student friends, a lot of us tend to hit a wall sometimes and most of the time, if I put myself in their situation, I would want someone to comment a positive thing. So I'll say, 'We got this, we can do this, pull through it.' Those sorts of things. If someone needs a confidence boost or something bad is happening in their life, I would want someone to do that to me, so I would do that to them.

Therefore, not only did Elizabeth, as well as other women in this study, offer support to others to enhance their moods and confidence levels, but they also did so because they would hope that others would do the same for them. Not only did this notion illuminate the positive nature of Facebook, but it also demonstrated that women offered support in the ways in which they would hope to receive it.

Women also took the person and their situations into context when offering support. To further this, Etta, a Black woman said, "When my Black friends post photos, I give them a lot of affirmation because I know Black women don't get a lot of affirmation in general."

The nature of Facebook was also unique when it came to offering support to enhance others' moods. For instance, when Francesca spoke about commenting on others' photos she said:

> If someone has a new hairdo, I'll be like, 'Oh your hair looks really nice,' especially if I know a person is insecure about it. I have one friend, she had blonde hair since middle school and she recently died it back to her original color, which is brown. She has not posted a photo on Facebook yet, but I was thinking when I saw her in class, that when she does post it on Facebook, I'm going to tell her on there how good it looks because she's not really sure if she likes it because it's a big change. So the extra support. I know I told her it looks nice in class, but the fact that it's documented on that picture once I comment, it makes it so if she's feeling bad about her hair, she can go back and read that and hopefully feel better.

Textual analyses of Facebook pages showed that positive, as opposed to negative information, received the highest amount of support from others within a given network. When discussing with Laney about giving support to others when they post positive information, she said, "Normally, if I'm happy for someone, of course I'll 'like' it." Similarly, Stephanie said, "If my friends post something positive, especially if it's one of my best friends, I'll be like 'that's awesome, or congratulations.' I like to show them that I'm there and that I'm happy for them."

Also in regards to offering support on positive information, Scarlett said, "You're rooting for others with every 'like.'" Therefore, 'likes' and comments served to not only boost others' moods, but also offer encouragement.

Similarly, the ease of communicating through Facebook also influenced women to give support to others. For instance, Sarah said, "The comments that I will put, I do it so I can give my contribution. It's like giving a compliment in a way. People like getting compliments, people like the interaction. Facebook makes it easy to compliment others."

The ease of communicating was not the only aspect of Facebook that prompted women to give support that enhanced others' moods and confidence levels. More specifically, the asynchronous and textual nature of Facebook also assisted in supportive actions on the site. For instance, when discussing why she gives support to others through Facebook, Francesca said:

> When I post on people's status updates, it's more together and collected. Because sometime it's hard to get the right words out sometimes. If I am sitting at a computer, I have the time to collect my thoughts and say something really nice to make them feel really good.

However, although women would often offer support to others in the form of positive comments and 'likes,' one factor appeared to mediate this: their mood. For instance, one participant, Olivia discussed how her mood impacts liking and commenting on others' statuses by saying:

> A lot of when I comment and 'like' depends on my mood. I don't know, I get into moods where I just feel really happy and I'll just start liking and commenting on a bunch of things or writing on people's walls. When I'm down, I don't even care about other people's stuff on Facebook.

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Francesca also discussed how her own mood influenced the support she offered to others through commenting and liking others' Facebook posts. She said:

It depends on my mood, though. If I'm in a really great mood, I will go and 'like' everybody's good stuff or I'll comment on it. But if I'm having a lousy day and I see that people are having fun and I'm not, I'm less likely to comment because I'm not thinking positive things and so I won't be posting because I'll only post positive things and I'm just not thinking that way.

Eliminating Feelings of Loneliness.

The second research question of this study addressed the notion that women both gained and received support through status updates that were relatable to others. With that, when the status update was relatable, women were motivated to offer support to let a person know that they were not alone in the way they were feeling. This notion applied specifically to offering support to others' status updates and photos that carried a negative tone.

To illuminate this finding, Lillian, a young woman who discussed posting status updates to offer support for others because it allowed others to also offer their support to the subject matter of the post, posted a status update that said, "RIP Aizeya. You have touched many lives and will be greatly missed. Please keep her family in your thoughts and prayers during this extremely difficult time." When discussing with Lillian why she decided to post this particular status update, she said:

I posted it because I felt heartache for her family because she was so young. I know if that happened to me or my family, it would be nice to know that people were thinking of us. A lot of people in the community and my friends were also posting things like that. I just wanted to let her family know that they weren't alone.

Whereas most of Lillian's status updates and photos typically garner roughly 10 'likes,' this particular status attracted 28 'likes' from her network. Therefore, others were very inclined to offer their support to this particular status.

Furthermore, women were prompted to offer support on status updates and photos that they could relate to in order to let others know that they were not alone and also feel less alone themselves. For instance, when discussing how her mood impacts the support she gives others, Francesca said, "If I see that somebody else is also having a bad day, I can relate to that, so I'll comment or 'like' it. I feel like I'm not alone and I hope they realize they're not alone." Therefore, Francesca not only offered support to let others know that she was going through a similar situation, but also so that she could feel better about her own situation.

Also, it appeared as if women would connect and relate to others' status updates and photos in order to identify with others and eliminate their feelings of being alone in a particular situation. For instance, Addison said:

> If I know what someone is going through, I'll comment or 'like' a status update or photo. I think just saying something to them is a way to touch them or connect with them. If I know someone is going through a tough time, I'll post something nice on Facebook. Yeah, definitely.

Pressure.

Although women were often motivated to offer support for genuine reasons, such as boosting others' moods and confidence levels, as well as decreasing others' feelings of loneliness, women also offered support for more superficial reasons. More specifically, most women in this study discussed feeling a pressure to comment on and 'like' others' status updates and photos.

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First, women felt a pressure to comment on or 'like' others' status updates and photos that conveyed positive information about a significant life event. To illustrate this, one participant, Leslie, said, "I feel like there's a pressure to comment and 'like' when it's big things. If somebody has a child or got a new job or promotion, something like that."

Furthermore, it appeared that the pressure to comment or 'like' came from a worry that the person who posted the status would believe that others were not supportive of the positive information that was posted. To further this, Etta also discussed the pressure she felt to comment or 'like' others' postings:

> I feel like I have to comment or 'like' others' posts. So, this person I know recently got engaged, but I'm not really close with her. We had so many mutual friends liking that status about her ring, she had a picture showing the ring and holding her fiancée's hand. I felt like I had to do it. I didn't really like it, but everyone I knew was 'liking' and commenting on it, so if I didn't 'like' it, it would look like, I don't know, my lack of communication could communicate something.

Etta's story indicated that that there was a pressure to comment or 'like' others' significant status updates and photos not only because of a fear of not showing support, but also because others had offered support to a person. Olivia furthered this notion when she said:

> I think that's the herd mentality sometimes. I think that Facebook is, it's very groupy and you do what you do for people because it's very social, and in social settings people just naturally evolve, they naturally form into packs…So it's like that mentality, if everyone 'likes' it, I need to, too.

When speaking with Scarlett about liking others' status updates and photos, she shared a story that further illustrated the pressure to comment on or 'like' others' significant life events:

One of my friends from home also goes to school here and she came over for my birthday in the fall. We were hanging out in the dorm lounge and one of my friends came over and they definitely had chemistry, so I hooked them up. They made it Facebook official two days later or something and apparently I didn't 'like' my friends' change in relationship post. Maybe I didn't see it or something. So she called one of my friends back home and told them that I didn't 'like' her change of relationship status. So she thought I had a problem with them being together, even though I hooked them up. She took it like just because I didn't 'like' her change in relationship status on Facebook, even though I hooked them up, that meant that I didn't support it. It was a crazy thing. She's not a crazy person though.

Based upon Scarlett's story, perhaps the pressure that women feel to offer support on others' significant life events emerged from fear of creating a problem between two people. However, Scarlett was not the only woman to experience such a situation. As a matter of fact, other participants in this study also shared stories about experiencing negative outcomes from not interacting with messages that sought support. For instance, Francesca said:

If it's somebody who posts on my stuff, I feel obligated to post on theirs. That sounds horrible. But I mean, whenever I post something and my friend posts back on it, and then she posts something and I don't comment, she'll be like 'why didn't you post back to me?' so I feel like I'm kind of obligated to post things to people who post things on our wall and statuses.

Textual analyses of participants' Facebook pages further emphasized this theme. For instance, after posting about receiving a job offer in Los Angeles, 124 people 'liked' Maria's status and 23 people commented with positive messages. However, other positive posts, such as

one that read, "FINALLY starting to feel confident/settled about my last/busiest semester of college," garnered only one 'like' and no comments.

Findings from this study made it clear that there was oftentimes a significant pressure for women to offer support to others on the site. This pressure was often created when a particular status update or photo had received a considerable amount of 'likes' and comments, which prompted women to offer their support. Furthermore, women also illuminated that not offering support in the form of comments and 'likes' could be perceived as a negative action by others, which in turn created a notable pressure.

Relationship.

The relationship between the person seeking and giving support appeared to be a large motivating factor in giving support. More specifically, women were motivated to give support based upon not only their offline relationships with others, but also their online relationships.

In regards to online relationships with women, it appeared as if there was a reciprocal relationship when it came to giving support to others. For instance, Kate said, "When people 'like' my stuff I'll 'like' theirs back." Other participants in this study felt similarly. Another participant, Cathy, who often posts photos of herself, reflected on why she sometimes offers support to others:

> There are some people who comment and 'like' stuff on my profile, so I feel like I should 'like' their stuff. Not everything they post, though. I think it's wrong not to 'like' a picture. I mean, they might think it's really nice, but maybe it isn't. It's a false boost, I guess, but it works either way.

Therefore, it appeared as if women were motivated to give support to others based upon others' supportive actions to them. This, in turn, created a reciprocal relationship on the site, in

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which support was both given and gained based upon a relationship on the site. Therefore, this finding is similar to those of Albrecht and Adelman (1987), who found that support is typically a reciprocal act between two or more people. However, it appeared that the reciprocal nature of support on Facebook could oftentimes be perceived as shallow.

Moreover, women were also motivated to offer support to others in order to affirm relationships. For instance, Etta said:

If a friendship is dissolving sometimes to keep it afloat you'll reach out through social media because it might be the only way to stay in touch. So people from home that I was good friends with before but don't really see now. So I'll make a lot of comments on their photos and their status updates to stay in contact with them because our relationship is changing.

Similarly, when discussing when she offers support to others, Stephanie said, "I like to show others that I'm there, because a lot of my friends don't live here, so that's my way of staying in touch and showing that I care even though we're not together."

The finding that women were motivated to offer support to others in order to affirm relationships demonstrates that one important aspect of Facebook, in regards to support, is that support is prompted in order to maintain relationships in an efficient and easy manner. As past literature has shown, connection and relationship articulation are two main motivators for using Facebook (Krasnova, et. al., 2010; Urista, Dong, & Day, 2009). Findings from this study are in accordance with such notions, but go further to illustrate that such relationship articulation and sharing often comes in the form of support.

Also, the act of offering support was also dependent upon a woman's offline relationship with the person seeking support. For instance, when discussing giving support to others, Maria

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said, "The first thing that motivates me to 'like' or comment is if I talk to that person on a normal basis."

Relationship played a key role in motivating women to give support to others. However, such relationships existed not only offline, but also online. It appeared as if the relationships that existed offline led to more genuine support on Facebook, whereas the relationships that existed mostly on the site led to more superficial and pressured support.

RQ5: In what ways do women benefit from receiving support on Facebook?

This research question sought to illuminate the ways in which women benefit from receiving support on Facebook. Results indicate that women benefit from not only receiving boosts in mood and self-perception, but also relationship articulation. Furthermore, women also benefitted from knowing that the support they received was visible to their entire network.

Self-Presentation.

Because of the public nature of Facebook, and more specifically, the fact that one's entire network of friends are able to see support from others, it appeared as if women benefitted from knowing that others saw the attention that they garnered from status updates and photos. For example, when articulating how she prefers to receive support from others on Facebook, Lillian said, "I want my friends to 'like' my status updates and photos. I don't necessarily care if they comment on it. So I don't really care if I get comments, but it's really nice when people 'like' my stuff."

The excerpt from Lillian's interview signaled something interesting about the supportive nature of Facebook. More specifically, whereas support is often deep in nature, and includes concrete sentences and dialogue between two or more people, support on Facebook came with hitting one button, the 'like' button. Perhaps the public nature of Facebook aided in illuminating

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this phenomenon, as 'likes' are quite visible and quantifiable. When it comes to interactions on Facebook, it is quite simple to see the number of 'likes' that one received on a post. Therefore, it appeared that women were receiving support in a rather non-traditional way, one which never would have been possible without Facebook: they are gaining support based upon how they believe others are perceiving how others are viewing them.

This notion is further illuminated by Scarlett, who said:

When other people 'like' or comment on my stuff, it definitely makes you feel good. It definitely boosts your self-esteem. You know that other people are seeing that, too and you know that that ingrained some kind of message in their minds.

Furthermore, a variety of past research has found that a major motivation for communicating through websites such as Facebook is the desire to articulate one's self-presentation (Mehdizadeh, 2010; Greenhow & Robelia, 2009). Findings from this study are in accordance. However, it appeared as if women reaped benefits not only from articulating their own self-presentation, but also from having their interactions with others documented and visible to others. Therefore, findings from this study suggested that women benefit from receiving support on Facebook in more abstract ways. More specifically, it appeared that support on the site not only came from others, but also came from women being cognizant that their positive interactions were visible to others.

Increased Mood and Self-Perception.

The fourth research question found that women were often prompted to offer support to others to increase their moods and confidence. Similarly, when women gained support, they often experienced such feelings.

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All participants in this study discussed the benefits they receive when others 'like' or comment on their posts, which in turn, raised their moods, self-esteem, and self-perception. For instance, Scarlett said, "I want my friends to 'like' things. Because that means they're agreeing with you, and when people agree with you, it gives you a sense of self-esteem and security with yourself. You're like 'Yeah! People like this.'"

Many other participants, whether explicitly or implicitly, discussed the validating nature of the support they received on Facebook. For instance, when Laney discussed the comments and 'likes' she received on a status update in which she showcased her journalistic writing, she said "They made me feel validated. It's always nice when someone says you did a good job."

Support also came in the form of affirming women's sense of self and "coolness." For instance, when Diana was asked to discuss how she felt when others commented or 'liked' her posts, she said, "This is going to sound really shallow, but it's definitely a sense of validation. It's like I did something cool for once."

Furthermore, there appeared to be a connection between the support that one received on a particular post and future posts. More specifically, many participants noted that the validation and affirmation that they received from posts that attracted a significant amount of support influenced them to create future posts that were similar in nature. Lillian illuminated this finding by saying:

> If a lot of people 'like' or comment on my stuff, I'll probably just post more things like that. I love it when people 'like' my stuff. Sometimes, I'll be like 'well, if 30 people 'liked' it I must have had something really good to say.' So then I try to base my other statuses to be like that one.

With that, it appeared that there was a cyclical relationship between receiving support and future status updates and photos. Olivia, a young woman who predominately posted status updates and photos that conveyed humor, furthered this point when she said:

It's pretty validating to have people comment and 'like' my stuff. It's like people do like my stuff and they think I'm funny. So it's really nice. And that makes me feel good about myself and that's why I keep doing it.

Support given through Facebook appeared to be beneficial for women who self-disclosed negative emotions. For instance, when discussing positive comments that others post on her status updates and photos that carry a negative tone, Stephanie said:

When they post things like, 'You can do this' or 'you got this,' or other things like that, it makes me feel much better, more motivated…sometimes I get really tunnel-visioned, so when I am doing something that I can't do, it freaks me out and frustrates me. Then I have someone commenting and telling me good things and it makes me feel a lot better.

Similarly, when Scarlett posted a status update at 12:30 a.m. that said "1000 more words on this paper…agh," she and a friend started discussing her worries through comments on the post. When discussing the impact this interaction had on her worries, she said, "It definitely lifted my worries and made me feel better to know I wasn't alone or by myself. It definitely had a human element. It definitely made me feel better."

However, not all women experienced positive outcomes from receiving support on status updates and photos that conveyed negative emotions. An example of this came from Scarlett. When discussing making her breakup public on Facebook, she discussed a comment from one of her Facebook friends:

One person said, 'What happened?' That really made me angry. She didn't want to know

how I was doing, if I was ok, or that she was sorry. She asked 'what happened?' What happened is like they want the details, they want to know what exactly went on, my whole experience. It was like she didn't care about me or the other person. That was really off-putting to me. It's almost degrading in a way. I feel like she should have contacted me privately.

Also, when she discussed comments on her negative status updates, Diana said, "When someone asks for details, it doesn't necessarily make me angry. I feel like curiosity is natural. But it frustrates me. I mean, because maybe I'm not ready to talk about it publicly."

Similarly, when speaking with Etta about gaining support from her status updates that carried a negative tone, she said:

One of my cousins commented on some status like, 'It's okay, what wrong?' It was annoying because I feel compelled to answer and tell you that it's okay and what happened. I just want to vent and see if someone else is going through the same thing because it's nice to know that somebody else is going through it.

Etta furthered this statement by elaborating upon the comments that give her the most support:

I want something more along the lines of somebody saying 'I had a really miserable week, too. This is what happened. It's crazy how you can have ups and downs. Sometimes I read this to inspire me.' So more than saying it's okay or just asking what's wrong. It makes me feel better once somebody posts that they're going through the same thing.

With that, results from this study indicated that women gained the most support when

others would relate to their negative status updates. Furthermore, results indicated that asking for details on a negative status update actually had an adverse effect on supportive actions on the site.

Not only did women experience an increased mood state when others offered support after they posted a status update or photo that carried a negative tone, but they also benefitted from receiving support on their status updates and photos that carried a positive tone.

For instance, when discussing with Diana about when others commented on her positive status updates, such as one that read, "Just ran into my professor who thought my writing was really strong and I should come by his office to talk about writing sometime. Day. Made.," she said, "My excitement was even bigger."

Similarly, when discussing with Francesca about how she felt when others commented and 'liked' her positive status updates, she said, "If I see people commenting on my good things, I'll feel even better about them." To further illuminate this beneficial aspect of Facebook, when discussing how she feels when others comment and 'like' her positive updates, Addison said:

> You know, in high school and middle school you used to receive awards. But when you
> enter the real world, there is not a certificate or award. So having the attention and the
> boost from friends kind of supplements that.

The quote from Addison above also exemplifies another finding within this theme: many participants in this study experienced positive feelings because of the public attention they received from others. For instance, one participant, Francesca, said, "When I get a lot of 'likes,' it makes me feel really good. It's nice to know that people were paying attention to me."

One notable aspect of this theme is that women oftentimes gained benefits from posting photos and receiving subsequent support in the form of 'likes' and comments. For instance,

when talking with Laney about receiving comments and 'likes' on the photos she posted, she said:

> I think it helps my self-image. I think every girl thinks she's fat sometimes. So if you have one picture where your face is angled just right, I'll post it and hope that others will see it and think that I look like that all the time. That makes me feel good when I get comments and 'likes' on that"

Similarly, when Kate posted a photo of herself, she received 27 'likes' and 6 positive comments. When discussing this post with Kate, she said: "It made me feel good because I think if a lot of people like my picture they think it looks nice. So it makes me think that I look good and helps boost my confidence."

Hence, women in this study benefitted not only from receiving increased mood states when posting negative information, but also from gaining validation and affirmation on their positive posts. Often, these positive outcomes not only affected their feelings about the post itself, but also feelings about themselves. This was particularly true for photos.

Relationships.

The supportive benefits of receiving support on Facebook also allowed women to have a better outlook on their relationships as well as strengthened relationships with others. With that, this study elaborated on previous literature that found that a chief motivation for self-disclosing is to build relationships with others (Krasnova, et. al., 2010). More specifically, it appeared that a major positive outcome of self-disclosing on the site was receiving support from others, which in turn strengthened relationships.

Women who received support on Facebook believed that their relationships with those giving support were strengthened. For instance, when discussing how she felt when one of her

friends wrote, "Miss you!" on her timeline, Maria said, "I think that kind of stuff makes my relationship better with people. The fact that she randomly posted on my wall made me know she cared about me."

Stephanie also believed that she gained positive outcomes from receiving support on the site when it came to her relationships. When discussing her negative posts, such as one that read, "These next few weeks are going to be seriously intense. I just hope that I am strong enough to get through them," she said:

> When I post that stuff and my friends comment on it, knowing that they saw it and that they took the time to realize there was something wrong, it makes me realize who I'm actually close to. A friend is a term that I find to be really overused. When I post stuff like that and I'm hurting and someone sees that and tries to make me feel better, it makes me feel better to know who my real friends are, because they're the ones commenting and trying to cheer me up.

Stephanie's assertion made it clear that women oftentimes felt that their relationships were strengthened because others showed care. Many participants agreed with this notion. For instance, Laney's birthday occurred while her Facebook page was being viewed. She received nearly 150 posts to her timeline from others wishing her a happy birthday. When she discussed how this made her feel, she said:

> I normally don't have my birthday on there, but two days before my birthday I switched it so people would wish me a happy birthday. Sometimes it's like, 'Oh yeah, I got more happy birthday messages than last year.' That's embarrassing. It's pretty nice, though. It's like 100 people were thinking about me today, 100 people care about me.

With that, women also felt that their relationships with others were strengthened because

the support that they received gave them a heightened sense that others support them. For example, when discussing how she feels when others offer support to her through Facebook, Stephanie said:

> Knowing that my friends are compelled to spend 30 seconds to write me back, even if I haven't seen them in months, or even talk to them often, knowing that makes me feel good. It makes me realize that people are on my side, that sort of thing…it's nice knowing that my friends are going to support me regardless, it makes me feel a lot better.

Thus, when they received support from others on Facebook, women were better able to recognize the care that others had for them. Furthermore, such support also led women to be more cognizant of the nature of their relationships with others.

Conclusion

Supportive communication not only enhances women's moods, but it also allows them to build on their relationships with others. The nature of Facebook, which aids in creating interactions that are simple, amplifies the acts of giving and gaining support for women. Furthermore, because women are socialized to behave in ways that convey warmth and politeness, it is no surprise that they often engage in supportive communication.

This study examined how support was given and gained on Facebook among women through self-disclosure. Findings indicated that women used Facebook to both gain and give support on the site. Furthermore, various features on the site, such as status updates, 'likes' and comments, and posts to one's wall/timeline, aided in making Facebook a space where support was quite common. With that, it is hoped that this study has illuminated the meaning of a 'like' on Facebook in regards to support.

A notable finding in this study is the positive and public nature of Facebook. It appears that gender role socialization plays a large role in the ways in which women communicate with one another on the site. Moreover, the positive and public nature of Facebook also encourages women to seek and give support within one's network of friends. As the fifth research question addressed, women identified one major benefit of receiving support on the site to be an enhanced self-presentation to others. With that, the knowledge that their positive interactions are visible to others within their network causes women to benefit in a major way from self-disclosing and gaining support on the site. Thus, this study builds upon previous literature which addresses self-presentation on online social networks to address not only the actions of the self, but also others.

Furthermore, such a finding introduces a novel aspect of self-presentation on online social networks. More specifically, because the public nature of Facebook allows for not only a particular person to articulate themselves, but also others to articulate the specific individual, it appears that there is a communal self-presentation that occurs on the site. This communal self-presentation includes women's own self-disclosures as well as others' comments and 'likes.' Insofar as interactions were positive, women often benefitted in major ways from knowing that others were able to see the support they received. With that, in-depth interviews with participants indicated that they often are quite aware of their audience, which in turn influenced their postings.

In regards to gender role socialization and the positive and public nature of Facebook, results from this study indicate that women are fulfilling traditional gender roles, publicly, on Facebook. Moreover, it appears that on Facebook, women are socialized to enhance others' self-presentation through giving support on the site.

Textual analyses and in-depth interviews related to this study indicate that women have clear norms and expectations on Facebook, which align with traditional gender role expectations. With that, women not only engaged in positive interactions with others, but also attempted to keep their own self-disclosures positive in tone. However, this is not to say that women did not disclose information on the site that carried a negative tone. When posting information that carried a negative tone, there appeared to be an implicit norm that unless the information conveyed a significant and life-changing message about oneself, humor and vagueness were needed in order to gain support on the site.

This study also further details the relationship between self-disclosure and supportive communication by identifying a major factor that leads to gaining support – the extent to which a

self-disclosure is relatable to other women. Moreover, it appeared that support, which often was given in order to let others know that they weren't alone in their situations and feelings, functioned in the most beneficial manner when a particular self-disclosure was relatable to others.

Women often seek support on Facebook not only because of its unique nature, but also because they hoped to enhance their mood and self-perception. Results from this study indicate that women often receive such benefits from self-disclosing on the site. Thus, it appears as if self-disclosing on Facebook is a productive way to receive and give support. However, it is necessary to note that receiving support is not productive if one goes against the norms of the site. For instance, giving off an impression of arrogance oftentimes did not lead to support from others. Other examples of this include allowing a particular post to become "too personal," which participants defined as messages that were negative in tone and deep in depth.

Moreover, because Facebook enables individuals to set the context of communicative messages, it appears as if such a feature makes it easier to both give and gain support. Because of large network sizes that included both weak and strong ties, women often found giving and receiving support on the site through self-disclosure to be quite beneficial. However, this is not to say that support that is received on the site is always genuine in nature, as various pressures, such as reciprocity and online and offline relationships, prompt women to offer support that is superficial in nature.

Of course, this study had its limitations. More specifically, women in this study were rather homogeneous in regards to age and geographical region. Also, although this study attempted to include a variety of women from all racial backgrounds and sexual orientations, there was not a significant amount of diversity in the sample. Therefore, future research should

strive for a more diverse sample in regards to women's self-disclosures and social support on Facebook. Future research should also examine particular groups of women based upon sexual orientation, race, and age in order to thoroughly understand the phenomenon.

Future research should examine communal self-presentation among women on Facebook. More specifically, studies in the future should address how others' comments and 'likes' on status updates and photos affect a woman's perception of herself. With that, future research should thoroughly examine how communal self-presentation aids in enhancing feelings of affirmation and validation. Future research should also examine how and why women are fulfilling gender role norms on Facebook through posting their own content on Facebook, as well as commenting on and 'liking' others'.

Because qualitative research does not lead to generalizable results, future research should examine the themes in this study using survey or experimental research in an effort to apply such findings to women as a whole. With that, such quantitative studies should take into consideration not only age, race, and sexual orientation, but also personality factors, such as extroversion, self-satisfaction, and personal privacy boundaries.

Because women have a vast presence on nearly all online social networks, future studies should also examine other platforms of social network sites, such as Pinterest, Twitter, LinkedIn, to understand how women use and adapt to such sites. Furthermore, such studies should examine the relationship between self-disclosure and support on such sites. Finally, this study also found results that were contrary to findings in the realm of face-to-face communication. Therefore, it is suggested that future studies explicitly compare self-disclosure and social support in face-to-face settings to those in computer-mediated settings.

Appendix A
Interview Script

S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications

Women's Self-Disclosures and Social Support on Facebook
Overview of Study and Interview Script

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this two-part research study. All information obtained from this study will be kept entirely confidential and will only be shared with the advisor of the project, Dr. Brenda Wrigley. When we conduct the interview, I will ask you to provide me with a made-up name for yourself. This is how I will identify you in the final manuscript of this study. If you do not want to take part, you have the right to refuse to participate, without penalty. If you decide to take part and later no longer wish to continue, you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time, without penalty.

It is necessary to note that the purpose of this study is not to degrade women for self-disclosing and giving/gaining social support on Facebook. Rather, the purpose of this study is to examine the phenomenon of self-disclosing and giving/gaining support on the site. It is hoped that the final manuscript of this study will illuminate the influencers, outcomes, and benefits of supportive communication that occurs on Facebook. If you would like to view the final manuscript of the study, I will be happy to provide you with a copy.

It is necessary that you are 18 years of age or older to participate in this study.

In the first part of the study, I will view your Facebook page for one month, paying attention to only your postings (including photos, information page, and status updates, and comments). The second part of the study will be an interview in which we discuss your Facebook use and activity. This interview will take roughly one hour. You will find the interview script below.

Interview script:

1. Because I will be transcribing this interview, I will need to record it. Do you agree to have your responses recorded?
2. I will be identifying you as a false name in my manuscript. What would you like this name to be?

3. Can you tell me a little about yourself?
   a. Where are you from?

      b.   What is your major?

      c.   Are you a freshman, sophomore, junior, senior, or graduate student?

4. How long have you been using Facebook?
5. How many times per day do you log in?
6. How long do you spend on the site on average?
7. How do you feel about the fact that people can comment on your Facebook postings and that you can comment on others'?
8. When you log onto Facebook what types of things do you do (i.e., look at your news feed, post a status update or photo, update your profile)?
9. How often do you post status updates?
10. What types of information do you provide in your status updates?
11. Do you post status updates that convey your feelings?
      a.   If so, how often?
      b.   Can you give examples?
      c.   Why do you post such information?
12. Do you post status updates about things that have happened or will happen in your life?
      a.   If so, how often?
      b.   Can you give examples?
      c.   Why do you post such information?
13. How often do you post photos?
14. What types of photos do you post?
15. How does it make you feel when others 'like' or comment on your postings?
16. How does it make you feel when others do not 'like' or comment on your postings?
17. What do you think the overall tone (positive, negative, or neutral) is of the comments and 'likes' you receive?
18. How often do you write on others' walls?
19. What types of information do you post on others' walls?
20. How often do you comment on other people's status updates?
21. What types of information do you post on other people's status updates?
22. Do you ever feel pressured to 'like' or comment on another person's posting?
      a.   If so, why?
23. Do you ever 'like' or comment on a status update or photo to boost that person's mood or make them feel better?
      a.   If you comment, what types of things do you write?
24. Do you think that your interactions on Facebook have positive outcomes?
25. Do you think that your interactions on Facebook have negative outcomes?
26. Do you feel more comfortable expressing yourself on Facebook than in face-to-face contexts?
27. Discussion of Facebook activity specific to participant
      a.   How do these interactions and postings affect your life?
          i.   Positive or negative?
      b.   Do you feel that posting such things on Facebook betters your life?
      c.   Why did you post these photos/status updates?
          i.   Did you hope others would comment on them?

This concludes our discussion. Do you have any questions for me concerning the study or your rights as a participant? From what establishment would you like your $25 gift card? How may I contact you when I have it ready for you?

If you have any questions in the future, please do not hesitate to contact me at eadolan@syr.edu or (724) 992-1832. You may also speak with my thesis advisor, Dr. Brenda Wrigley, at brwrigle@syr.edu or by phone at (315) 443-1911.

Thank you very much for agreeing to take part in this study. Your participation is greatly appreciated.

Appendix B
Data Coding Material

Theme	Evidence – Textual Analyses and Interviews
How Support is Given and Gained: Positive and Public Nature of Facebook Positive community Types of interactions on the site – mostly positive Comments and likes – positive in tone Interaction between public nature and positive interactions	Textual Analyses: 456 posts viewed; only one garnered negative comment (Lillian). Interviews: "You definitely feel like you're part of a group. It's a sense of belonging, I guess. Even though every single person belongs to it. It's more intimate…even when someone likes one of your pictures, it can make you feel a certain way. They wouldn't say you're pretty to your face, but they like your Facebook picture and everybody sees that. It's an interesting concept." – Scarlett "I don't really like cattiness being out there in the general public. If you have a problem with someone, that's between you and them; the entire world does not need to know your beef with them." – Diana "It seems that people really do try to avoid situations like that, though…everybody just knows that it should be positive and if you're going to say something that most people wouldn't like, that is something that is not good." – Cathy "I don't think things are worth arguing about on Facebook because most of the time I'm afraid I'll argue something and I'll be wrong. It's not like you're just talking to somebody and you say something that you start arguing, it's not like things are being documented, and it's likely that the person will forget most of the things you said. But on Facebook if you're arguing with somebody and you're wrong, you end up looking really dumb and then other people can see that. Unless you delete it, it will always be there. I just don't like being wrong and having somebody see it." – Francesca

	"It's really upsetting to see other people attack other people's wall posts. If I see that I will comment on it and say 'hey, this is not the time and place to do this. If you have an issue with each other then do it in person and not on Facebook. It's ridiculous." – Lillian
How Support is Given and Gained: 'Likes' and Comments Receiving 'likes' and comments Meaning of the 'like' button - positive Not receiving 'likes' and comments Nature of people giving 'likes' and comments	"I love it when people like or comment. When you sign onto Facebook and you see the notifications that someone has done something with your stuff, it's better than getting a new friend in a way. I love it. That's probably one of my favorite aspects of Facebook." – Sarah "Facebook is a social networking site, so I post stuff so other people will see it and acknowledge and show that they 'like' when I posted and that they like me by commenting and 'liking' it." – Lillian Likes equated to: "connection," "care," "coolness," "agreeance," "appreciation," "affirmation" – Various participants "Sometimes it makes me feel terrible (that nobody commented or 'liked' my status updates). Because I like to post things that I think people are going to 'like' and that are going to make them laugh. So when people don't 'like' it, sometimes I'll go back and delete it and think that it's stupid, so I'll delete it. Because on Facebook, I'm looking for a reaction. I'm posting for a specific reason." – Olivia "It was that awkward moment. Because with everybody having access to it, it puts more emphasis on the fact that no one is commenting. If I checked Facebook once a week, I wouldn't have this problem, but since I'm so addicted, it felt a lot more magnified and awkward." – Addison (Discussing how she felt when she did not garner and 'likes' or comments on her status updates and/or photos.)

	"It is like rejection. You're not accepted, people didn't like it. So you just put yourself out there. Because when you post a picture or publish a post, you're putting yourself out there. People see your name and see what you wrote and what you decided to tell the world. So it is not good and other people see that you did not get any 'likes' or anything like that, and it's not a good thing." - Cathy

"If I post something and people don't say anything back or they don't even at least 'like' it, I start to wonder if they even like me" – Francesca

"…She always 'likes' everything on my page. She invalidates everything on my page by liking every single thing…if she comments on my things it does not mean anything. It doesn't mean anything." – Olivia

"It all really depends on the person. Because there are friends that I have that just 'like' everything that everybody says. So whenever I see that it's kind of like I don't even really see it at all because it's so common. But if there is somebody that I haven't talked to in a while and they 'like' something that I say, then that's really nice. Or if I get a lot of 'likes' on something it doesn't really matter who they are. It makes me feel good in general." - Lillian |
| **How Support is Given and Gained: Status Updates**
 Offering support
 Gaining support
 Audience of status updates | "I feel like it's kind of a common theme between my friends. Most of my friends are in college, or are affected by spring break. It's a common thing so everyone can relate to it." – Joan

"It's funny, the negative things that I post are for other people to relate to." – Olivia

"I just want people to see my status updates (about having a bad day) and realize that maybe they're not the only person having a |

	bad day. Because there are probably people out there having a bad day, too. It happens to everybody. That's why I do it (post on Facebook that I had a bad day)." – Francesca "One of my friends recently just posted on Facebook about how a guy doesn't think about her and how sad it is that she keeps checking his page and he doesn't care what she is thinking or feeling. So she posted this pathetic update. It was brave to post. I definitely have those feelings. So when people started to comment on her post, I started reading all of the comments to kind of see what they were saying and get my own affirmation because I knew exactly how she was feeling. Somebody posted a really great song and I've been listening to it nonstop for three weeks. She would never know because she and I hardly talk, but I just saw it on her Facebook wall, and that's really cool." – Etta
How Support is Given and Gained: Wall/Timeline Posts Unprompted nature	"That kind of gives me a sense of self-awareness. That makes me the most happy, that people are saying nice things to me on their own." - Scarlett Facebook post from friend to Leslie: "You need to be on that show The Voice!!!" "It made me feel pretty good. Especially here in this entire environment where I do feel very isolated, alienated, and marginalized. Even though those comments come on Facebook, and they're positive, I see Facebook as a last resort kind of media to communicate with people. But the feeling is still real. I mean, those are, and I do like those comments, and they do boost my mood." - Leslie
How Support is Given and Gained: Private Messages Non-public messages between women giving and gaining support Nature of information typically negative	"I usually think about (commenting on somebody's negative status update), because I really want to reach out to this person. But I don't really know how to do that on a status, so sometimes I'll send them a message if I feel that they would

	appreciate my help, or caring really…I try not to publicly console people, because that's almost degrading in a way, that's how I see it. If I feel like I have a strong connection with them, I'll contact them privately." – Scarlett

"My boyfriend and I just broke up a week ago. I can't say I was necessarily expecting it, but as soon as that went on Facebook, I started getting messages from people asking me if I was okay and things like that. I had my friends messaging me asking me if I wanted to get drinks." – Diana |
| **Types of Information Self-Disclosed to Give/Gain Support: Relatable Information**
Support sought – relatable
Support given – relate
Self-disclosure → self-disclosure
Nature of disclosures – depth and valence | "I would be more likely to comment and say me, too. Something along those lines. If I can relate to it then I'll be more likely to comment on it more often than not." - Francesca

"I'll usually comment and be like 'yeah, I've been there, don't worry, it gets better, or something like that. I don't tend to get into specifics, but I try to be like you are not alone. If they really want to know more, they can ask me directly." - Lucy

"I comment on the kind of things I can relate to or have something to say about. My friend posted something the other day about how she was so screwed that her professor moved her presentation up. And I was like, 'I'm really sorry, you know, that happened to me earlier in the semester and it sucked. But let me know if there is something that I can do.' Stuff like that. You don't necessarily want to pull the attention away from a person, but I might mention that what they're going through happened to me too and not necessarily go into depth with it." – Diana

"I think that a lot of time if people are going through situations like mine, comments and 'likes' give me support and |

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	the fact of knowing that even if it's not the same situation, I'm not the only one who is going through it." - Stephanie
	"My rule of thumb is that if it will be interesting to somebody else, then that's fine and I post it." - Laney
	"I needed to get a negative emotion out because it was driving me crazy. I think in this case (I posted it because) it was something that people can relate to, people who go here and are not into that stuff." – Diana (Speaking about posting a status update that expressed her displeasure with the hectic nature of campus during an event)
	"Quotes are a way, instead of me saying personal statements about myself, it's a personal statement that relates to something in my life at the moment, but it also might be applicable to other people, and that will call their attention to the status. Instead of saying, 'oh I'm really saddened, my day sucks,' nobody will comment or 'like' that, that's whiny. But if I put up a quote, people will be inspired to 'like' it or will comment on it and therefore I am given an indirect mood boost through that interaction and then I feel better." - Addison
Types of Information Self-Disclosed to Give/Gain Support: **Negative Information** Sadness, anger, stress, worries, distress disclosures Dissonance – "too personal" – mediating factors Influence on support	Stephanie status update: "Seriously hate my professor!!! So I was sick and missed 3 spastic classes and 1 lab this entire semester and so you go complaining to my advisor (Even though I have an A in your class) that I'm an "at risk" student. Go pound sand!" Comments: "I 100% agree that she is the worst teacher I've ever had…she is insane." "When other kids in my class are then like 'oh my God, me too, I feel that I'm not alone, and it makes you feel better and it calms you down." – Stephanie

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Elizabeth status update: "It's the first Christmas without my grandpa. It's sad what has become of our family. But I am thankful for the people I am spending time with today. "

 "I think sometimes on my really sad days, I will post something in hopes that somebody will comment on it." - Elizabeth

Lucy status update: "The minute I think I'm ahead, I fall behind."
"Sometimes I just post stuff like that because I'm exasperated and maybe someone out there does relate and I'm not the only one out there and I'm not necessarily the only one going through it. The comments and 'likes' on that stuff make me feel like I'm I was not the only one." – Lucy

Etta status update: "That feeling when the week is over and you are totally exhausted and don't even know how you managed to put one foot in front of the other but rather than feeling glad, relieved, proud, or even thankful…you just feel sad and a little defeated…almost as if it's week one. But I suppose there's always next week and the week after that."
Comments: "…and the months and years after those! :)", "Don't hang your head."
"I was worn out. I guess I just wanted people to know that I was worn out and that I was sick and tired of being sick and tired. But I like my postings to get more support, I want to get people who identify with how I'm feeling. So, if somebody was like, 'don't hang your head,' you might as well say 'don't be so dejected, why are you so dejected?' Nobody wants to admit that they're going through it. That further highlights that I'm going through it. So I would want something more along the lines of somebody saying 'I had a really miserable week, too. This is what happened. It's so crazy how you can have

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ups and downs. But sometimes I read this to inspire me. So more than just saying it's okay or one-liners like that." – Etta

Elizabeth status update: "Paying bills. It's about to get depressing."
"I try to stay away from the statuses that are like 'Oh God I hate my life, or the ones that no one really cares about, or the ones that I don't want people to perceive me as that type of person."

Joan status update: "I think my brain might explode at the end of this week,"
"I try not to post really personal feelings. I won't post 'god life sucks, this is terrible.' Because I see people who do that and I'm just like, why? If something is that terrible, why are you talking about it on Facebook? Go tell someone else about it. We don't care." – Joan

"It is easier to convey something if it's abstract and you're more likely to get more 'likes' because it may look creative and people think it's cool.   That's cooler than saying I'm having a bad day." – Scarlett

"I ignore others' negative posts. I just think posts like that are, I don't know. If I post something like that (negative in tone), I try to make it funny. I would be like 'today was a shit sandwich on moldy bread. It would be something silly, something that people can laugh about." – Olivia

Francesca post: "Thanks again, immune system. Just in time for the weekend"
"I do post about bad things, but I try to make it funny because I feel that more people will comment on it as opposed to being like 'I fell on ice, I hate my life,' because that's annoying. I hate signing in and seeing Debbie downers. If it's funny, more people are more likely to read and

	comment on it...I know when other people commented on it and said 'oh, I'm sorry you fell,' it was nice to know that they cared." – Francesca "You know when something really sad or something really great happens to you I think you should announce it and just say that this happened, because it has a significant effect on your life. Whether it is good or bad. I'm not going to post that I'm just really tired and annoyed, though. I will vent to my roommate about it but I'm not going to go on Facebook." – Olivia "If it's consistently negative, it's almost like the boy who cried wolf." - Lucy
Types of Information Self-Disclosed to Give/Gain Support: **Positive Information** Happiness, optimism, excitement, pride Appropriateness Role of audience Nature of positive information and subsequent support	"Less than 12 hours ago I sang 'I'll Make a Man Out of You on the Great Wall of China. :) I love my life." - Elizabeth "Spinning at 9:30 am…my new favorite activity." - Sarah "I don't think my emotions need to be publicized to the world. Unless it is a good emotion." -Sarah "Officially done with my first semester!!! It's been a great experience, so happy :)." - Scarlett "When I'm happy or excited, I can't stay away from the computer and not post something." - Lillian "Papers are in, presentations are done, I am now officially on break!" – Diana (status update) 21st Birthday Bucket List photo – Laney Roughly 25 likes, 4 comments "If I feel like someone's post is not sincere, I would not comment or 'like' their stuff to boost their mood. Okay, so there is one girl that I know, she will post and she just

| | brags all the time on Facebook. She'll post pictures of herself and stuff. One caption was 'This is from the photo shoot today, not photo shopped, had no idea I looked so good in a bikini. So I don't compliment her to validate her. But I have a friend who just got an internship in France and so I posted that it was so exciting because it was something that she really wanted." – Laney

Francesca status update: "If looks could kill, I'd be dead." – no likes, no comments

"Usually I 'like' and comment on things that I can relate to at that moment. But not necessarily all the time. I mean, if my friend got accepted into college and I'm sad that day, I'm still going to comment on it and say congratulations." – Scarlett

"If someone has accomplished something, not bragging or anything, but just something like they got a job, or something you can tell them good job on. I 'like' milestone things, like a new relationship, a job, or an internship, those are the times I feel a pressure to comment or 'like' something, when a big event is occurring in somebody's life." – Addison

Maria status update: "Got a paid internship in San Francisco!!!"
48 'likes' and 11 comments - "Congrats, I'm so proud!" |
|---|---|
| **Reasons for posting status updates and photos that warrant support: Unique Venue for Support**
Public and asynchronous nature of Facebook
Large networks and ease of communicating
Impact on support
Context | "Facebook helps with getting support, in terms of the variety of people that you get. It's nice to put something out there and to reach out to a lot of people, rather than seeking all of these people and giving them all the information at different times." – Diana

"I think Facebook helps with getting support. If you put something up there and you're asking a question or saying |

something, it makes it easy for other people to support you and that's helpful. If it's the people that matter to you and the people that you might not talk to as often, it's pretty beneficial." – Kate

"Sometimes when I'm on Facebook, it's just a moment to gather my head, to get away from anything I was doing. Facebook is a way I can gain support at that time…I need to get a perspective that's not my own perspective. I get really tunnel-visioned when I am doing something and I can't do it or it freaks me out or frustrates me. But then I have other people talking to me through comments and it makes me feel a lot better." – Stephanie

"It's more supportive on Facebook than it is in person because it's so in the moment. It's exactly when you want it. When you expect it. I think we all kind of expect it. I guess I feel that we get more support on Facebook than in person." – Maria

"I'm really busy throughout the day and I don't get that face-to-face throughout the day, so Facebook is my supplement. So I just like to have some sort of dialogue going on throughout the day, and comments really achieve that." – Addison

"If I told people that I updated my blog, a lot of people wouldn't flat out be like 'hey I like your blog.' But if I posted it on Facebook, people 'like' that and they show their excitement. But they might not personally come up to me and say that they're excited and they love what I write. I think that Facebook makes expressions automatic. And so I do treat comments and 'likes' with a little more weight. People just don't communicate like that to each other in real-life. So, they carry a lot of weight to me." - Olivia

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Reasons for posting status updates and photos that warrant support: Enhance Mood and Self-Perception	"It's my hope that my friends will comment and 'like' my stuff. Especially if I'm posting something about me having a bad day, I want somebody to cheer me up." – Diana
Enhance negative states Increase confidence Enhance positive moods Affirming self	"I think on my really sad days I will post something in hopes that someone will comment on it…if I'm sick I want someone to say 'feel better' or 'get well soon.' If I am going through a hard time, I want someone to give me a little push. Or anything. I like when people interact with me." – Elizabeth
	Stephanie status update: "Why can't I figure this out? I wanted to sleep tonight, but here I am lost and hopeless…" "I don't necessarily expect my friends to know the right answer or the reason why I feel the way I do. But I at least want them to comment on it and ask why I have been super stressed lately. Sometimes I need somebody to kind of be like 'you have been stressed, you're freaking out, you need to calm down.'" - Stephanie
	"I post to bring the high to a high and the low to a high." – Addison
	"I'll post things with the view that people think what I'm posting is really funny and they'll see how snarky and funny I am…and then I get comments and 'likes' and it's like people do like my stuff and they think it's funny and they'll laugh or share it and that makes me feel good about myself and that's why I keep doing it." – Olivia
	"When I post humorous stuff I want people to 'like' it or comment on it and be like 'Oh! Your status is so funny, it made me laugh so much,' and that almost gives me a sense of self, it makes me feel really good." - Francesca

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	"I think Facebook is a good way to boost your ego and low self-confidence, because a lot of people have confidence issues. So why not post a cute picture on Facebook and have 50 people 'like' it? Or even 10 people like it? And it's like 'Oh, maybe I do look pretty, or yeah, maybe I do have great style.'" – Cathy "I can say that I'm a little guilty of liking attention. It's kind of a rush that you get when you get a 'like' from somebody. It's like 'oh so and so was paying attention to me' or 'oh, they're happy for me,' or 'I have more attention than other people.' I think we all need attention. It doesn't matter who you are. So something like that I would post because I want a thrill because I'm happy for myself, why not bring more happiness to myself?" - Cathy
Motivation to Offer Support: Mood and Confidence Enhancement Motivation to offer support to boost others' moods – both positive and negative information Documented nature Positive information received highest amount of support Dependent on own mood	"If somebody posts something about how they're having a bad week, I'll definitely comment and let them know that it will be okay and try to make them feel better. I feel like encouragement is always nice to have." - Kate "In regards to my student friends, a lot of us tend to hit a wall sometimes and most of the time, if I put myself in their situation, I would want someone to comment a positive thing. So I'll say, 'We got this, we can do this, pull through it.' Those sorts of things. If someone needs a confidence boost or something bad is happening in their life, I would want someone to do that to me, so I would do that to them." – Elizabeth "When my black friends post photos, I give them a lot of affirmation because I know black women don't get a lot of affirmation in general." – Etta "If someone has a new hairdo, I'll be like 'oh your hair looks really nice,' especially

if I know a person is insecure about it. I have one friend, she had blonde hair since middle school and she recently died it back to her original color, which is brown. She has not posted a photo on Facebook yet, but I was thinking when I saw her in class, that when she does post it on Facebook, I'm going to tell her on there how good it looks because she's not really sure if she 'likes' it because it's a big change. So the extra support. I know I told her it looks nice in class, but the fact that it's documented on that picture once I comment, it makes it so if she's feeling bad about her hair, she can go back and read that and hopefully feel better." – Francesca

"If my friends post something positive, especially if it's one of my best friends, I'll be like that's awesome, or congratulations. I like to show them that I'm there and that I'm happy for them." - Stephanie

You're rooting for others with every 'like.'" - Scarlett

"The comments that I will put, I do it so I can give my contribution. It's like giving a compliment in a way. People like getting compliments, people like the interaction. Facebook makes it easy to compliment others." – Sarah

"When I post on people's status updates, it's more together and collected. Because sometimes it's hard to get the right words out sometimes. If I am sitting at a computer, I have the time to collect my thoughts and say something really nice to make them feel really good." – Francesca

"A lot of when I comment and 'like' depends on my mood. I don't know, I get into moods where I just feel really happy and I'll just start liking and commenting on a bunch of things or writing on people's

	walls. When I'm down, I don't even care about other people's stuff on Facebook." – Olivia
	"It depends on my mood, though. If I'm in a really great mood, I will go and 'like' everybody's good stuff or I'll comment on it. But if I'm having a lousy day and I see that people are having fun and I'm not, I'm less likely to comment because I'm not thinking positive things and so I won't be posting because I'll only post positive things and I'm just not thinking that way." - Francesca
Motivation to Offer Support: Eliminating Feelings of Loneliness Connecting with others Types of information initially disclosed – negative, relatable	Lillian status update: "RIP Aizeya. You have touched many lives and will be greatly missed. Please keep her family in your thoughts and prayers during this extremely difficult time." 28 likes "I posted it because I felt heartache for her family because she was so young. I know if that happened to me or my family, it would be nice to know that people were thinking of us. A lot of people in the community and my friends were also posting things like that. I just wanted to let her family know that they weren't alone." "If I see that somebody else is also having a bad day, I can relate to that, so I'll comment or 'like' it. I feel like I'm not alone and I hope they realize they're not alone." - Francesca "If I know what someone is going through, I'll comment or 'like' a status update or photo. I think just saying something to them is a way to touch them or connect with them. If I know someone is going through a tough time, I'll post something nice on Facebook. Yeah, definitely." – Addison
Motivation to Offer Support: Pressure Reciprocity Types of information – positive	"I feel like there's a pressure to comment and 'like' when it's big things. If somebody has a child or got a new job or

Anticipated negative perceptions if support was not offered Bandwagon effect Fear of creating problems between people	promotion, something like that." - Leslie "I feel like I have to comment or 'like' others' posts. So, this person I know recently got engaged, but I'm not really close with her. We had so many mutual friends liking that status about her ring, she had a picture showing the ring and holding her fiancées' hand. I felt like I had to do it. I didn't really like it, but everyone I knew was 'liking' and commenting on it, so if I didn't 'like' it, it would look like, I don't know, my lack of communication could communicate something." – Etta "I think that's the herd mentality sometimes. I think that Facebook is, it's very groupy and you do what you do for people because it's very social, and in social settings people just naturally evolve, they naturally form into packs…So it's like that mentality, if everyone 'likes' it, I need to, too." – Olivia "One of my friends from home also goes to school here and she came over for my birthday in the fall. We were hanging out in the dorm lounge and one of my friends came over and they definitely had chemistry, so I hooked them up. They made it Facebook official two days later or something and apparently I didn't 'like' my friends' change in relationship post. Maybe I didn't see it or something. So she called one of my friends back home and told them that I didn't 'like' her change of relationship status. So she thought I had a problem with them being together, even though I hooked them up. She took it like just because I didn't 'like' her change in relationship status on Facebook, even though I hooked them up, that meant that I didn't support it. It was a crazy thing. She's not a crazy person though." – Scarlett

	"If it's somebody who posts on my stuff, I feel obligated to post on theirs. That sounds horrible. But I mean, whenever I post something and my friend posts back on it, and then she posts something and I don't comment, she'll be like 'why didn't you post back to me?' so I feel like I'm kind of obligated to post things to people who post things on my wall and statuses." – Francesca Olivia status update – received job offer in Los Angeles 124 likes
Motivation to Offer Support: Relationship Online relationships – Reciprocity of support Offline relationships – Affirm	"When people 'like' my stuff I'll 'like' theirs back." – Kate "There are some people who comment and 'like' stuff on my profile, so I feel like I should 'like' their stuff. Not everything they post, though. I think it's wrong not to 'like' a picture. I mean, they might think it's really nice, but maybe it isn't. It's a false boost, I guess, but it works either way." – Cathy "I like to show others that I'm there, because a lot of my friends don't live here, so that's my way of staying in touch and showing that I care even though we're not together." - Stephanie "If a friendship is dissolving sometimes to keep it afloat you'll reach out through social media because it might be the only way to stay in touch. So people from home that I was good friends with before but don't really see now. So I'll make a lot of comments on their photos and their status updates to stay in contact with them because our relationship is changing." – Etta "The first thing that motivates me to 'like' or comment is if I talk to that person on a normal basis." - Maria

Benefits of Support: Self-Presentation Awareness that support was public – communal self-presentation Role of 'likes' Others' perceptions	"I want my friends to 'like' my status updates and photos. I don't necessarily care if they comment on it. So I don't really care if I get comments, but it's really nice when people 'like' my stuff." – Lillian "When other people 'like' or comment on my stuff, it definitely makes you feel good. It definitely boosts your self-esteem. You know that other people are seeing that, too and you know that that ingrained some kind of message in their minds." - Scarlett
Benefits of Support: Increased Mood and Self-Perception Others agree Validation Affirm self and "coolness" Influence on future posts Types of initial self-disclosures – positive/negative Mediating factors on reaping supportive benefits Types of information disclosed and subsequent benefits of support	"I want my friends to 'like' things. Because that means they're agreeing with you, and when people agree with you, it give you a sense of self-esteem and security with yourself. You're like 'Yeah! People like this.'" – "They made me feel validated. It's always nice when someone says you did a good job." - Laney "This is going to sound really shallow, but it's definitely a sense of validation. It's like I did something cool for once." - Diana "If a lot of people 'like' or comment on my stuff, I'll probably just post more things like that. I love it when people 'like' my stuff. Sometimes, I'll be like 'well, if 30 people 'liked' it I must have had something really good to say.' So then I try to base my other statuses to be like that one." – Lillian "It's pretty validating to have people comment and 'like' my stuff. It's like people do like my stuff and they think I'm funny. So it's really nice. And that makes me feel good about myself and that's why I keep doing it." – Olivia "When they post things like 'you can do this' or 'you got this,' or other things like

that, it makes me feel much better, more motivated…sometimes I get really tunnel-visioned, so when I am doing something that I can't do, it freaks me out and frustrates me. Then I have someone commenting and telling me good things and it makes me feel a lot better." – Stephanie

Scarlett status update: "1000 more words on this paper…agh,"
"It definitely lifted my worries and made me feel better to know I wasn't alone or by myself. It definitely had a human element. It definitely made me feel better." – Scarlett

"When someone asks for details, it doesn't necessarily make me angry. I feel like curiosity is natural. But it frustrates me. I mean, because maybe I'm not ready to talk about it publicly." - Diana
"One of my cousins commented on some status like 'it's okay, what wrong?' It was annoying because I feel compelled to answer and tell you that it's okay and what happened. I just want to vent and see if someone else is going through the same thing because it's nice to know that somebody else is going through it.
I want something more along the lines of somebody saying 'I had a really miserable week, too. This is what happened. It's crazy how you can have ups and downs. Sometimes I read this to inspire me.' So more than saying it's okay or just asking what's wrong. It makes me feel better once somebody posts that they're going through the same thing." – Etta

Diana status update: "Just ran into my professor who thought my writing was really strong and I should come by his office to talk about writing sometime. Day. Made."
"My excitement was even bigger." – Diana

	"If I see people commenting on my good things, I'll feel even better about them." - Francesca
	"You know, in high school and middle school you used to receive awards. But when you enter the real world, there is not a certificate or award. So having the attention and the boost from friends kind of supplements that." – Addison
	"When I get a lot of 'likes,' it makes me feel really good. It's nice to know that people were paying attention to me." – Francesca
	"I think it helps my self-image. I think every girl thinks she's fat sometimes. So if you have one picture where your face is angled just right, I'll post it and hope that others will see it and think that I look like that all the time. That makes me feel good when I get comments and 'likes' on that." – Laney
	Kate photo post: 27 'likes,' 6 comments comments. "It made me feel good because I think if a lot of people like my picture they think it looks nice. So it makes me think that I look good and helps boost my confidence." - Kate
Benefits of Support: Relationships Outlook on relationships Support on the site strengthened relationships Recognition of care	Laney's birthday - 150 posts to her timeline "I normally don't have my birthday on there, but two days before my birthday I switched it so people would wish me a happy birthday. Sometimes it's like 'oh yeah, I got more happy birthday messages than last year.' That's embarrassing. It's pretty nice, though. It's like 100 people were thinking about me today, 100 people care about me." - Laney Wall post from Maria's friend: "Miss you!" "I think that kind of stuff makes my relationship better with people. The fact

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	that she randomly posted on my wall made me know she cared about me." - Maria Stephanie status update: "These next few weeks are going to be seriously intense. I just hope that I am strong enough to get through them." "When I post that stuff and my friends comment on it, knowing that they saw it and that they took the time to realize there was something wrong, it makes me realize who I'm actually close to. A friend is a term that I find to be really overused. When I post stuff like that and I'm hurting and someone sees that and tries to make me feel better, it makes me feel better to know who my real friends are, because they're the ones commenting and trying to cheer me up." - Stephanie "Knowing that my friends are compelled to spend 30 seconds to write me back, even if I haven't seen them in months, or even talk to them often, knowing that makes me feel good. It makes me realize that people are on my side, that sort of thing…it's nice knowing that my friends are going to support me regardless, it makes me feel a lot better." - Stephanie

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