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All The Web's a Stage: The Dramaturgy of Young Adult Social Media Use

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ABSTRACT

This study presents an in-depth, qualitative examination of dramaturgy in young adult

interactions on the social networking sites, Facebook and Twitter. The dramaturgical

perspective introduced by Erving Goffman in the study of sociology and symbolic

interactionism is applied to a new media setting, wherein the interpersonal interactions of

users are influenced by a mass media context. The author ventures into the field of

dramaturgy as part of a broader sphere of hyperdramatic acculturation that millennials are

growing up in, with constant access to one another through social media and the

prevalence of dramatic and attention-seeking behaviors in entertainment media. A

grounded theory approach is used to discover the various levels of performance on the

two most popular social networking sites in the world today.

All The Web's A Stage:
The Dramaturgy of Young Adult Social Media Use

by

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B.A., The College of New Jersey, 2010

Thesis

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

In less than three seconds, an image of a young man and woman pouring beer on each other with the caption "#drinkingproblems" streams onto a computer monitor, followed by a post that reads, "finally in WILDWOOD!!!! Time to get crazy," which is followed by an alert that "Janelle changed her relationship status to single," along with a slew of sympathetic or angry comments. All of these announcements, among many others, are from and about "friends" on the popular social networking site Facebook and they immediately greet the signer-on at her homepage. After a quick read-through and a few clicks on uploaded YouTube videos under titles such as "I LOOOVE this song!" and "OMG! WATCH THIS," it becomes clear that each and every post, intended or not, has brought some level of dramatic attention to the posters' lives. The question that has plagued many since the beginning of the social media revolution remains: What is the purpose of these actions? Why bring others (some of whom may not be personally known) into the most inane or intimate moments of one's day?

Drama. Today the word is more powerful than its restricted reference to the theatre arts. For young people growing up in this information age, it receives special consideration. At a high school lunch table, drama turns the heads of students waiting for the next juicy tidbit of gossip. In a college classroom, drama can take the form of ears perking to share in the guilty pleasure of hearing someone else's woes. One of the six elements of drama, as identified in Aristotle's *Poetics* is "spectacle" (Hatcher, 1996). In

today's world of reality television, cyberbullying, viral videos and instant celebrity, dramatization and the spectacle of self are more pertinent than ever.

The concept of drama is often ignored in the study of media unless referring to the dramatization present in television and radio programming or films (Richardson, 2010; Bartsch et al, 2009; Smith et al, 2007). The advent and widespread use of social media has opened the door for further exploration of this important aspect of communication in a unique and timely setting.

Key Concepts

The study of drama is very interdisciplinary. In order to best examine this complex idea, several key concepts are presented here. These will be discussed in the upcoming chapters and explained further in the theory section.

Traditional drama.

Drama is conventionally known as a type of fictional performance found in theatre (Elam, 1980). Unlike other forms of art, the structure of drama is directly influenced by "collaborative production" by actors and "collective reception" by audiences (Pfister, 1977, p. 11). Drama is generally and widely recognized in entertainment media such as television or film. More and more, it is being used in traditionally non-entertainment media to capture the hearts and minds of newspaper readers, broadcast news viewers and internet news browsers. In this study, drama is examined as a type of performed identity taking place in interpersonal and computer-mediated communication. In this sense, it is also analyzed in terms of the overly

dramatized or theatrical behaviors of young adults in their daily interactions with each other, on and offline.

Dramaturgy.

The sociological theory of dramaturgy was first used by Erving Goffman (1959) to describe the context of human interaction. According to Goffman, humans gain their sense of self through interactions with others. These interactions are seen as a theatrical metaphor in which a person constructs a *role* and performs it to an audience (of another person or more). This "everyday acting" (Goffman, 1959, p.24) occurs when one manages the impression and identity that he or she gives off to others.

Performance and self.

The concept of *performance* is an integral part of the formation of one's identity, or sense of self (Goffman, 1959). Dramaturgy assumes that when humans are engaging in any interaction, they are performing for those with whom the interaction takes place (Ritzer, 2007). In this way, one's identity is fluid, constantly shifting based on the performances of the day. As Goffman posits, "What is important is the sense he [a performer] provides them [an audience] through his dealing with them of what sort of person he is behind the role he is in" (Goffman, 1974, p. 298).

Performance roles and regions.

A person's roles and the regions in which they perform are two important elements of dramaturgy. *Roles* refer to the types of acting one is taking part in, depending on the impression he or she wants to send to another. These will each be examined in

later chapters, but include three basic areas of role-play: performers, audiences, and outsiders who are unaware of the performance taking place (Goffman, 1959, p. 66). *Regions* are the physical areas of performance. In Goffman's theory they are front stage, where the performance takes place, and back stage, where the performer is out-of-character and comfortable (Goffman, 1959, p. 114).

Hyperdramatic interaction.

Hyperdramatic interaction is introduced here as a type of interpersonal communication that is characterized by dramatic, sensational behavior. As will be discussed in later chapters, the word *histrionic* has traditionally been used to refer to overly dramatic theatrical performance (Orzechowicz, 2008). In everyday interactions, this may be benign or extremely antisocial, as in cases of histrionic personality disorder (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2000). In this study, histrionic behavior is rephrased as *hyperdramatic* behavior and is examined in the context of everyday theatrical performances at the intersection of interpersonal and mass communication – the internet. These online performances can also be benign, as in general dramaturgical performances; or they can be dysfunctional, as in the following examples of cyberbullying, mean girl research and the type of interactions often found in reality television.

Cyberbullying.

Cyberbullying is discussed in this study as an example of online hyperdramatic behavior that is a popular topic in the media today. The term *cyberbullying* is used to describe the use of new technologies to repeatedly harass others (Belsey, 2002; Patchin &

Hinduja, 2006). Often, it is used in reference to bullying in student populations, where the internet offers limitless opportunities for the bullying that does not always take place in the schoolyard (Patchin & Hinduja, 2009). Cyberbullying has been found to occur primarily in populations of young women as part of the emotional aggression that has become so familiar in research about teen girls (MacDonald, 2010).

Mean girl research.

Mean girl research focuses on the recent increase of aggression in young women. Of particular interest is the rise in *relational aggression*, which refers aggression that is "intended to harm others through deliberate manipulation of their social standing and relationships" (Steinberg, 2008, p. 101). This psychological bullying can take the form of exclusion, gossip, humiliation and coercion (Steinberg, 2008). Although boys are traditionally thought to be more apt to verbal and physical aggression (Nansel, 2001), studies have found a rise in these forms of aggression in females as well (Gibson, 2004). Both young men and women, for instance, tend to use name-calling in confrontations (Baldry, 1998). The increase in popularity of these types of aggressive behaviors has been linked to media usage, especially in television and film (Behm-Morawitz & Mastro, 2008) This seems a fitting setting in which to study these behaviors in both men and women, as research shows that young people engaging in aggressive behaviors choose from a variety of roles to play in each encounter (Hatzchristou & Hopf, 1996). Sensational and hyperdramatic behaviors present in reality television have been considered in research into this kind of dramaturgical activity in young people (Patino, Kaltcheva & Smith, 2011).

Reality television.

Reality television is a popular television genre that documents actual events using supposedly unscripted drama (Hill, 2005). Rather than portray professional actors, these shows often use ordinary people and editing to emphasize the dramaturgical elements of character and plot (Murray & Oullette, 2009). Reality programs present an enhanced version of reality that uses "creative avarice" to sensationalize a show's events and attract ratings (Booth, 2004, p. C01). This type of editing to create drama not only makes reality shows more entertaining, but also makes them more popular among young viewers. Reality television has been called "the liveliest genre on the set" (Hirschorn, 2007, p. 1), pulling masses of young adults to its viewership (Nielsen, 2010). In fact, reality programming is the most popular television genre in young adult markets, with many shows attracting viewers with a median age of around 23 years (Carter, 2010). Young adults now spend roughly three quarters of their waking hours viewing television either traditionally or on their digital devices (Marketing Charts, 2013). Research has begun to find a relationship between reality television viewership and social media behaviors (see Stefanone, Lackaff & Rosen, 2010). This study examines the potential influence of these shows and their overly dramatic characters on the dramaturgical performances of viewers online. With viewers seeing "real" people engaging in obvious dramaturgy and "real" hyperdramatic acts on screen, they tend to model such behaviors in their own lives – particularly in the realm of social media (Stefanone, Lackaff & Rosen, 2010).

Social media.

Social media has been described as a system that "employ[s] mobile and web-based

technologies to create highly interactive platforms" through which individuals and communities "share, co-create, discuss, and modify user-generated content" (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy & Silvestre, 2011, p. 241). In short, social media can be thought of as an online public forum where users share their everyday or innermost thoughts. Popular social media include: blogs, which began as personal journals published to the internet, and grew to include well-known news sources such as the Huffington Post and countless other blogging subgenres; wikis, which are community webpages where users share and modify each other's information, (such as Wikipedia); and social networking sites, which are online communities where users create personal profiles and share anything from recipes to online videos. Social networking sites are the focus of this study.

Facebook and Twitter.

Facebook and Twitter are the two most popular social networking sites on the internet (eBizMBA, 2013). Facebook is a website that allows users to create an online profile detailing their interests, educational background, relationship status and more. Users can use these profiles to upload photos, videos and songs to share with online friends. "Friends" on Facebook, however, may include true friends from real life, acquaintances, or complete strangers who the user meets online. On their "wall," Facebook users can post their daily thoughts and any images or footage that they see fit. All of the user's friends can then view this content and make comments as applicable.

Twitter is very similar to Facebook, yet serves a different purpose for many (Hughes et al., 2012). Here, users can create their own profiles, complete with an image and background information, but can only update their statuses in 160 characters or less.

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For this reason, Twitter has become the place to go for immediate information and breaking news. Users can post links to articles, other websites and images that they would like to share. Unlike Facebook, however, Twitter profiles are almost always public. Users can follow the "tweets" of any other user they like, unless that user has a lock on their profile that requires pre-approval. This fact has gotten many celebrities and politicians in trouble, as they seem to forget that their profiles are not private, as many are on Facebook (See Canning & Hopper, 2011). Because of these differences, Facebook and Twitter will be analyzed as differing perspectives on dramaturgy in the social media landscape.

Hyperdramatic Behavior and Social Media – A Perfect Match?

In psychology, the term *histrionic* has been used to describe overly dramatic human interaction. Characteristics of this type of behavior include "discomfort in situations in which an individual is not the center of attention, consistent use of physical appearance to draw attention to one's self, and acts of theatricality and exaggerated expression of emotion" (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2000, p. 714). Such dramatic acts are commonplace among young adults and adolescents, who are forming identities and forging connections with peers in the challenging world of emerging adulthood (Marcotte, 1996). Due to the controversial history of the term "histrionic" in psychoanalysis, which will be discussed in the next section, this study reframes such behaviors as *hyperdramatic*. Feminist scholar, Eve Sedgwick, identifies hyperdramatic behavior as a type of "performative identity vernacular" through which individuals and groups present themselves (Sedgwick, 2003, p. 52). In the culture of clicks and social hierarchy present in young adulthood, the need to present an ideal self for external validation is a primary function of these emotional behaviors (Rasmussen, 2005).

Elements of modern American culture can accentuate this already dramatic environment of young adults. In recent years, reality television has become synonymous with the raunchy, aggressive and sensational behavior of its young characters. Research shows that two primary factors attract viewers to reality television: 1) identification with characters, and 2) drama (Godlewski & Perse, 2007). The combination of these factors has led to the extreme popularity of such shows, but may impact the already dramatic nature of interpersonal relationships between young adults (Behm-Morawitz & Mastro, 2008). Additionally, the emergence of social media and the ability of people to be in constant communication with one another - sharing the most intimate or inane occurrences and thoughts - has opened the door to various new forms of attention-seeking behavior, including the rise of cyberbullying.

According to the National Crime Prevention Council (NCPC), almost half of all U.S. teens are bullied online (NCPC, 2011). Many of these incidents occur on social networking sites. Social media use (social networking use specifically) is rapidly increasing, with nine out of every ten U.S. internet users visiting a social networking site each month and 20-30% of all online use attributed to social networking sites (Search Engine Watch, 2012). Such accessibility has led to the spread of aggressive, hyperdramatic behavior from the schoolyard to the Web, frequently with negative effects. The openness and availability of social media has encouraged research into the realm of social media marketing (Lieb, 2011; Kozinets et al, 2010), the impact of social networks on political campaigns and civic engagement (Freelon, 2011; Groshek & Dimitrova, 2010), and user uses and gratifications (Correa et al, 2010; Hamilton, 2009). There is a

significant research gap, however, in examining the context and content decisions of social media users.

Hyperdramatic self-presentation describes everyday interactions and how they turn daily situations into "dramatic scenes" and role-playing (Renner et al, 2008, p. 1304). Modern daily situations involve social media use, making this an important area to study. User self-presentation or impression management is similar to Erving Goffman's (1959) sociological construct of dramaturgy, part of the theory of symbolic interactionism. This type of dramaturgy can be applied to status of the social networking landscape.

All the Web's a Stage

In 1959, Erving Goffman presented the notion of dramaturgy, or the composition of drama in life. Dramaturgical sociology describes the everyday acting that all people take part in when attempting to portray a certain image to the world. In this context, dramatization occurs as individuals present themselves, independently or collectively, to create or destroy their general understandings of reality (Kivisto & Pittman, 2007). Goffman's theory relies heavily on the *roles* people play in their daily interactions, and the *regions* in which those interactions take place (Goffman, 1959). Dramaturgical sociology has been defined as a theory of interpersonal, face-to-face communication (Meltzer et al, 1975). The changes communications have undergone since the 20th century, however, allow the application of dramaturgical perspectives to other areas of communication – particularly in a mass media context. Recently, dramaturgy has been studied in traditional interpersonal settings of "total institutions" such as acute care

hospitals and on resort-style vacations (Album, 2010; Larsen, 2010), but scholars have generally ignored the dramaturgy of mass media interactions. Richard Ling's (2010) recent study of dramaturgy in mobile phone conversations emphasizes the transformation of interpersonal communication through digital technologies. A natural extension of this idea is to examine the dramatization of life present in the interactions of social media users. Using Facebook and Twitter as regions, this study uses a dramaturgical lens to explore user interaction in a social media environment.

This study applies a dramaturgical perspective to the content and interface between young adult users (18 - 22) of the popular social networking sites, Facebook and Twitter. Given the hyperdramatic acculturation of young adults growing up in the age of reality television, cyberbullying and the "mean girl," and knowing the immense influence of social media on young adult society, it is crucial to examine the context of interaction on websites such as Facebook and Twitter. This investigation addresses the following questions: How are young adult users forming their sense of self through Facebook and Twitter? How do young adult users control the identities they present to others on Facebook and Twitter? What roles do young adult users play in their interactions on Facebook and Twitter? What regions of interaction do Facebook and Twitter each represent? How is drama played out by young adult users on Facebook and Twitter, if at all? What kinds of dramatic messages appear in the content posted by young adults on Facebook and Twitter?

This study is a grounded theory study, meant to create a theoretical framework from which to pull potential hypotheses and research questions. It represents the first step in generating rich data for future studies. The dramaturgical frames found in the text

analysis provide background for the creation of future hypotheses in subsequent survey research. The following chapters provide a thorough discussion of relevant literature and outline the methods used in addressing the research questions posed. Chapter Two reviews pertinent literature in the fields of sociology, psychology and mass communication. These scholarly and trade sources present a comprehensive analysis of previous research within the realms of dramaturgical sociology and social media. Chapter Three lays out the methods through which the research questions are addressed, including an in-depth textual analysis of young adults' Facebook and Twitter posts. Chapter Four discusses the results of this analysis, while Chapter Five details the implications of the study's key findings.

CHAPTER II

Theory

This section presents an overview of literature relevant to the study of dramaturgy and social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter. A dramaturgical perspective has not yet been applied to the realm of new social media, yet with the surge in growth of social networking sites as sources for interpersonal communication, this area is ideal for further exploration about the context of individual interactions – a central focus of Goffman's concept (1959, p. 32).

Social Networking Sites and Those Who Love Them

The advent of social media presents one of the most impressive phenomena of the 21st century. Some argue that social media was started as early as 1996, with the creation of the instant messenger system, in which people could send and receive typed messages online with a small image representing or identifying themselves (Borders, 2009). The trend that followed was the "peer-to-peer" sharing network boom that included music sharing sites like Napster and LimeWire. Finally, the invention of "Web 2.0" began with social networking sites such as Friendster in 2002 (Borders, 2009). This era truly took off, however, when Harvard student Mark Zuckerberg founded Facebook in 2007 (Vargas, 2010). Social media serve a variety of functions in what could be called a fusion of interpersonal and mass communication formats. They promote a free flow of information and forge connections among people from a range of backgrounds and geographic locations. Social media use has experienced double-digit growth every year since 2009 (GlobalWebIndex, 2013; Interactive Advertising Bureau, 2011). The

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impressive growth rate of social networking sites, in particular, has lead to a great deal of research in the direction of the new media.

Social media use.

Social media are defined as "a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, which allows the creation and exchange of user-generated content" (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 62). Applications vary from those in which people create and edit content together, such as wikis, to systems in which people share their own information with others, such as blogs or social networking sites. Examples of social media include Wikipedia (a wiki site), Tumblr (a blogging site) and LinkedIn (a social networking site for professionals. This study examines the context of young adult interactions on social networking sites, specifically Facebook (www.facebook.com) and Twitter (www.twitter.com), in creating and sharing user-generated content.

Facebook and Twitter represent the first and second most populated social networking sites globally (eBizMBA, 2013). Facebook alone boasts over 1.1 billion users globally (Facebook, 2013). In fact, one in every 13 people worldwide has a Facebook account, with young adults (ages 18 to 24) accounting for 74 percent of growth in 2010 (DigitalBuzz, 2011). In the United States, 83 percent of young adults use social networking sites, with 86 percent using Facebook and 27 percent using Twitter (Pew, 2012). Twitter serves 500 million users globally (Lunden, 2012), with college students (ages 18-22) being the primary users. All social networking sites, in fact, tend to be most heavily used by college-aged people (Harris, 2008).

Studies about social media have targeted people's uses and gratifications, with a recent trend toward social media advertising (Lieb, 2011; Taylor et al, 2011; Hamilton, 2009). Such inquiries inform the present study through an examination of the types of behaviors engaged in on social networking sites, as well as an analysis of the types of users engaging in said behaviors. Using survey and interview data, Quan-Haase and Young (2010) have found that Facebook users access the site for fun and an escape from their daily lives, plus to pursue new relationships. Users of social networking sites reach out to new people in order to form new social connections. How users interact with these new people is of primary interest to this study.

The desire to connect with new "friends" (both known and unknown) on Facebook explains why frequent users of social media tend to have personality traits such as extraversion and narcissism (Correa et al, 2010). Extraversion is exemplified by high levels of sociability and assertiveness (Poropat, 2009), while narcissism is demonstrated through exaggerated self-views (Gabriel, Critelli & Ee, 1994). Correa and colleagues show that social media users who rank highly in these personality traits not only access social networking sites more regularly, but also engage in voyeuristic behaviors – such as posting pictures on their sites as well as viewing pictures on others' profiles – more so than introverted users (2010). Additional research highlights the fact that social media users are more open about their political beliefs, sharing their opinions with others through "liking" who they are voting for on Facebook, joining the support page for a certain policy, or publicly following a candidate on Twitter (Groshek & Dimitrova, 2010). These types of behaviors align with the assertiveness and high value on self associated with the narcissistic and extraverted personality traits of users.

Studies about social media and social networking sites usually focus on the users themselves and their online activities. Few studies examine the context in which users and their activities occur. Social networking site users create online identities to help them meet new people – identities that may not relate to their offline lives. Evaluating how identities are formed and how new interactions and relationships are created and maintained has largely been overlooked. This study analyzes user interactions and the impressions given or received in online relationships through a dramaturgical lens of online *performance*.

Dramaturgy

The central construct used in this study is that of dramaturgy, individuals' performance of self in daily life. A dramaturgical perspective aids studying the context of communication within various situational factors and interactions. An analysis of Facebook and Twitter posts can help build a theory to explain individual users' behaviors on social networking sites.

Goffman's theory.

Erving Goffman first introduced the concept of dramaturgy in 1959, twenty-five years after the sociological theory of symbolic interactionism was formulated by George Herbert Mead (1934). Dramaturgy is rooted in the framework of symbolic interactionism, being based on the premise that social actions are based on meanings attributed to them and that those meanings are derived from, and modified in the course of, people's interaction (Manning, 1992). A symbolic interactionist approach stipulates that meaning is a behavioral process, rather than a cognitive one. Theorists such as Herbert Blumer

(1937) applied Mead's concepts to show that meaning is generated by people's interactions and movement toward consensus (Edgley, 2003). Dramaturgy suggests that society is made up of individual performances put forth by everyday actors. Through dramatic interactions with "like-minded others," meanings and beliefs could be formed and cemented (Goffman, 1959, p. 42). To Goffman, a performance took place in the process of "all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers" (1959, p. 32).

The dramaturgical perspective uses elements and phrases from the theatre world to describe real world acting. Goffman identified six dramaturgical principles of human interaction: The performance, the team, the region, discrepant (what this study refers to as "supporting") roles, communication out of character, and impression management (1959, p. 14). This study focuses primarily on the elements of performance, regions and roles, due to their frequent appearance in dramaturgical literature and their use in similar studies (see Ling, 2010; Krijnen & Tan, 2009; Miller, 1995). Seven aspects of performance were enumerated in *The Performance of Self*, including:

- Belief in one's role,

- The idealization of self in others' eyes,

- Misrepresentation of the message sent during performance,

- Dramatic realization in stressing an issue of performance,

- Maintenance, or the need to stay in character,

- Deception or concealment of information from audiences,

- The many "masks" of performance.

(Goffman, 1959, p.14)

Each of these elements refers to the person and his or her ability to convey the appropriate meaning to an audience. Goffman also identifies three regions in which performance may occur: the front stage, which is the performance created when others are present; the back stage, where actors can take off their "mask" around friends or family; and off-stage, where individuals are not included in the performance. In addition to a primary performer, five discrepant or supporting roles are identified in the process of everyday interaction:

- *The Spotter* is an individual with knowledge of the performance who may notify the audience.

- *The Informer* is an individual who pretends to be part of the actor's "team," but then reports on the performance to the audience.

- *The Shill* is an individual pretending to be an audience member, but who is really a part of the acting "team" and is in place to manipulate the audience.

- *The Non-person* is an individual who is present at a performance but is neither an actor nor an audience member.

- *The Mediator* is a facilitator of information or messenger communicating with both the actor and the audience.

(Goffman, 1959, p. 75)

In a dramaturgical context, acting or dramatization takes place when people present themselves, collectively and individually, in a way that can create or destroy general understandings of reality held by others (Kivisto & Pittman, 2007). Goffman

labeled this an act of *impression management*, controlling the meanings others create when one interacts with them. Impression management transforms a person into a role-player who uses an array of performance masks to form bonds, to deceive, or to follow rules (Manning, 1992). Often, the use of drama is meant to influence others where actors put themselves "in the best possible light and [are] shown to be fully compatible with a culture's general norms and values" (Manning, 1992, p. 41). This dramaturgical interaction is most commonly thought of as occurring in interpersonal, face-to-face settings, but the advancement of technology and the spread of social media have opened new arenas of communication for study.

Dramaturgy and the media.

In a mass media context, symbolic interactionism has been seen describe the television audience's interactions with the programs they watch, as well as the interactions of television characters. David Altheide (2003) describes the process of deriving meaning in which a television viewer and television show are the two "actors" involved in "mass media interaction" (2003, p. 658). Mass media are part of the identity-forming process of every person in the modern age, and the production of meaning in media creates symbolic meaning within social life (Altheide, 2000). Applying the theory of symbolic interactionism to the interaction of television and audience, Altheide clears the path for exploration of related concepts, such as dramaturgy, in the mass media sphere. Unfortunately, since the publication of his study, few scholars have followed his ideas to their full potential.

Dramaturgy applied.

Scholars have been hesitant to expand Goffman's conceptualization outside of the realm for which it was originally intended – that of "total institutions." Total institutions represent the ideal setting in which to conduct research about how individuals present (or perform) themselves and manage their impressions to others. This allows for constant observation of anyone inside the institution. The dramaturgical perspective was first applied to hospitals and prisons. For instance, Album (2010) analyzes the drama present in acute care hospitals, and in particular, how both caretakers and patients manage the impressions they present to others. Patients, in particular, were found to engage heavily in role-playing in their attempt to be perceived as "normal" or "healthy" when interacting with nurses and staff (2010).

Because scholars often perceive the dramaturgical approach as limited, new studies are uncommon (Jacobsen, 2010). Many emerging areas of communication, however, could benefit by studying new media and the intersection with total institutions. An example of applying dramaturgy to mass media comes from Richard Ling's (2010) application of dramaturgy to mobile phone use. In analyzing text messages and spoken conversations, Ling found that even from afar, cell phone users engage in performances with those they interact, acting parts they see fit and utilizing their front stage almost constantly, even when speaking to friends or family (2010). These findings support further exploration into interpersonal and mass mediated interactions. Ling suggests that dramaturgy should be applied to internet interaction. This study does just that, asking:

RQ1: *How do young adult users perform an identity on Facebook and Twitter?*

RQ2: *What performance roles do young adult users play in their interactions on Facebook and Twitter?*

RQ3: *What regions of interaction do Facebook and Twitter each represent?*

So Much Drama! Dramaturgy and Hyperdramatic Acculturation

This study represents a dramaturgical analysis of social media in the context of the larger construct of hyperdramatic acculturation. Hyperdramatic acculturation describes the overly theatrical setting in which this generation's young adults (also known as the *millennials*) are growing up. People currently between 18 and 22 have grown up alongside the new media explosion. They have experienced dramatized identity that includes the invention and subsequent popularity of reality television (where anyone can become a famous actor), as well as the ability to log online to social networking sites and post one's thoughts for the world to see. Because these young adults have lived most of their lives surrounded by a turn toward mediated attention-seeking or dramatic behavior, they are generally found to consume the most media (Nielsen, 2010). This study examines the dramaturgy of social networking sites as a form of communication within this dramatized sphere of social interactions.

Histrionic vs. hyperdramatic interaction.

The word *histrionomy* first applied to the dramatic performances of actors in the theatre (Moffitt, 1878). The term *histrionic* stems from the Latin word *histrio*, which was the title of a performer in ancient Rome. Histrionicism has been defined as a form of "emotional management" by actors who have the professional training to manipulate their feelings (Orzechowicz, 2008). However, according to Goffman (1959), all

individuals manipulate their emotions in the daily performance of their lives. Though once considered a general name for performance, in the late 19th century, "histrionic" began to be applied to the burgeoning field of psychoanalysis as a term for young women suffering from the condition of *hysteria* (Charcot, 1889). The term hysteria itself derives from the Greek *hustera*, meaning "uterus," and women were those most often diagnosed with the illness. Hysteria was believed to be caused by toxins from the womb rising to the brain, therefore causing women to go into fits that would now be diagnosed as nervous breakdowns (King, 1993). Freudian psychoanalysis began to merge the term histrionic with that of hysteria, identifying hysterical behaviors as histrionic ones (Freud & Breuer, 1895). This history has carried on with both terms, linking them in a gendered trend that assumes women are the only ones capable of true histrionics.

Histrionic and hysterical behaviors have more recently evolved in the field of psychology as a characterization of individuals suffering from the mental illness, Histrionic Personality Disorder (HPD), which is still diagnosed primarily in women (Vorvick & Merrill, 2013). Those engaging regularly in histrionic behaviors are classified as being extremely lively, with a predisposition to do something dramatic, often through making up stories or causing a "scene" if they are not the center of attention (Horowitz, 2004). The diagnostic criteria of histrionic personality disorder according to the DSM-IV-TR (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2000) follow. A person meeting at least five of these measures is considered histrionic (Barlow & Durand, 2009):

1) Discomfort in situations in which the individual is not the center of attention

2) Interaction with others characterized by inappropriate seductive behavior

3) Display of rapidly shifting and shallow expression of emotions

4) Consistent use of physical appearance to draw attention to self

5) Style of speech that is excessively impressionistic and lacking in detail

6) Shows self-dramatization, theatricality, and exaggerated expression of emotion

7) Easily influenced by others or circumstances

8) Perceives relationships as more intimate than they actually are

(APA, 2000, p. 714)

The criteria for diagnosis of Histrionic Personality Disorder are characterized by a daily foray into dramatic acting, much as in Goffman's (1959) conception of dramaturgy. In this case, however, the acting is highly exaggerated and can lead to negative results and tendencies. Though the measures remain the same, the extremely gendered history of the term "histrionic" has led this researcher to seek a new label for such behaviors – one that accounts for the tendency toward dramatics of both females and males. For this reason, the term "hyperdramatic" is used to describe the overly theatrical and sensationalized behaviors outlined in the criteria above. These criteria fit well within the general behaviors seen on many social networking sites. For instance, an extreme emphasis on appearance becomes abundantly obvious on a site such as Facebook, where one can upload pictures of him or herself, some posting a handful for their friends to comment on while others post thousands – in addition to a profile photo. Additionally, these are the types of behaviors often engaged in by young adults in their interactions with others (Marcotte, 1996), especially in new relationships that include bringing an outside person into one's social circle.

Hyperdramatic behavior has been identified as a way in which persons and groups represent their emotions to others (Sedgwick, 2003). As such, hyperdramatic individuals tend to be easily influenced by situational factors and the expectations of others. Rasmussen (2005) suggests that the need for external validation is a primary reason for overly dramatic and emotional reactions. Young adults are particularly susceptible to this type of behavior, as they are enveloped by the "clicks" and social hierarchies inherent in high school and early college. Bringing attention to oneself and engaging in dramatic or sensational behavior may help to cement a place in a particular social group. Therefore, emerging adults and teens have generally been found to dramatize situations more intensely and with more frequency than other age groups (Marcotte, 1996).

Scholars have examined the hyperdramatic self-presentation style to explain the shaping of daily interactions, including everyday situations that provide opportunities for role-playing and "dramatic scenes" (Renner et al, 2008, p. 1304). Hyperdramatic behaviors naturally fit into the dramaturgical context of performance. According to Renner and colleagues, histrionic presentation is a purposeful act by high self-monitors, who are acutely aware of the impression they project to others. These individuals act or dramatize events for the sake of humor or to settle a conflict (Renner et al, 2008), but this dramatization can also create conflict.

Dramatization in life.

At the root of hyperdramatic behaviors and dramaturgical presentations is the construct of dramatization. In the theory of dramaturgy, dramatization is a method of communication that presents an ideal self to the world. If taken to a level of

hyperdramatics, this becomes the exaggerated emotional expressions and attention-seeking commonly seen in various areas of mass media, including television.

Hyperdramatics are most evident in the over-acting and exaggerated emotional expressions apparent during the silent film era (Doane, 2003). That type of exaggerated expression is an example of the most familiar definition of dramatization, that of "an escalation of affect intensity" that is commonly seen in the mass media (Zillmann, 2006, p. 215). Film, television, and even radio programs, all include elements of drama, and the goal of this dramatization is often to create a plot in which there is obvious conflict (Weisman, 1952). Increasingly, television incorporates elements of feature films in its programming (Ebbrecht, 2007), to assist in molding more dramatic plotlines. This is especially evident with the injection of dramatic themes into television shows based in reality, where these elements may not be as obvious. In the study of reality television, affect intensity is immediately noticeable as a key element in dramatizing common or inane events in the lives of characters to make them more entertaining to viewers. Relatively mundane occurrences of real life must be edited out of reality television, for audiences who require more drama in their viewing experiences (Hansen, 2004).

The phenomenon of reality television.

Actors have historically been those privileged with the capacity to manage their emotions, but today's generation, who live in an environment where anyone can be an actor or a "star," Goffman's dramaturgy holds new meaning – not of the everyday performances of average persons, but in the ability of those acting to make themselves famous on reality shows. Research shows that viewers of reality television access social

networking sites with more frequency, have larger "friend" networks and share photos more than those who do not (Stefanone, Lackaff & Rosen, 2010). This suggests that there is a positive correlation between viewing reality shows and interacting with social networking tools.

Reality programming is a rapidly growing television genre that represents 40 percent of all television programs in the United States and captures the largest audience of any other television genre (Nielsen, 2011; Barnhart, 2010). Last year, reality shows were four out of Nielsen's top five most viewed programs, and *American Idol* and *Dancing with the Stars* consistently gained higher ratings than immensely popular live sporting events, such as Sunday Night Football (Nielsen Corporation [Nielsen], 2012 . Over the past decade, reality programming has become so ubiquitous that reality networks have been formed for the sole purpose of catering to reality show viewers (e.g., FOX Reality, Global Reality Channel, Zone Reality). Countless websites and magazines have been founded to give fans an opportunity to follow their favorite reality shows and stars (e.g., realitytvworld.com, realityblurred.com, Reality Magazine).

The arrival of dramatized true-life stories, or "docusoaps" (Murray & Oullette, 2009, p. 5) has expanded the pool of reality shows to include not only traditional competitions, but also "day in a life" shows that follow the activities of the individuals featured – much as in soap operas. Popular youth networks such as MTV, VH1 and Bravo have picked up this genre, and more are turning to them because they attract masses of young adult consumers (Carter, 2010). The appeal of the docusoap lies in the outlandish and hyperdramatic behaviors of its characters – behaviors that are being repetitively portrayed to the shows' young adult audiences.

In order to effectively dramatize stories in television programs, a producer must

focus on particular moments, and emphasize their significance "with very high density"

(Halberstam, 1998, p. 67). In the world of reality television, where actors do not have a

written script to refer to in order to create drama, they must build a compelling, and often

sensational, scenario with the help of storyline editing. Weisman (1952) describes the

editing techniques of reality television programs as "devices" through which a fictional

type of narrative plotline is implanted in a story (Weisman, 1952, p. 48). This

entertainment narrative is often organized in a way that promotes "conflict and drama,

vicarious and emotional identification, and spontaneity" (Altheide, 2003, p. 671). With

some young adults watching up to 44 hours of television weekly, including reality shows

(Nielsen, 2010), this imposition of conflict into the lives of reality show cast members

has been found to have emotional effects on viewers, much as in traditional, fictional

drama (Krijnen & Tan, 2009). Additionally, research has found a strong correlation

between viewer identification with television characters and audience's learning of

behaviors portrayed by those characters (Kincaid, 2002). This finding suggests that in

situations where identification is high, such as in reality programs in which characters are

recognized as "real" people in "real" situations, viewers will more effectively learn from

the performances of cast members.

Dramaturgy or dramatization?

Literature in psychology has used the concept of dramatization to interpret and

represent information (van Velzen, 1997). Freud (1899) was the first to use this term in

his analysis of dreams. In *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899), he used the term to

explain symbol formation and thematization – similar to symbolic interactionism – in the

subconscious mind. He described dramatization as a "generator of scenarios" and a process through which an individual creates meaning and learns from dreams (Garfield, 1988).

Studies have shown that there is a permanency in learning that results from the integration of a dramatic method into courses and lessons (Steinly, 1990; González Menéndez, 1985; Opp, 1933). Adding more energy and emotion, conflict, or a narrative storyline to the teaching atmosphere aids in learning and information retention for an audience of students (Bierman, 1917). The education field uses dramatization in a similar fashion as television and other mass media to capture attention and interest.

Creative dramatization frequently aids in the social development of young people (Rasmussen, 1934). In reality programs, wherein common knowledge and everyday experience play a large role, interpersonal interactions are frequently dramatized into "fascinating forms" for viewer entertainment (Bondebjerg, 1996, p. 29). Considering that drama promotes learning, and that this generation of young adults is engulfed in a media culture rife with dramatic influences to their already hyperdramatic tendencies, this study seeks to explore whether a tendency to perform or dramatize is present in young adult culture – particularly in an online space where one's personal interactions are on display.

Mean Girls and Bullies – Young Adult Relationships

Throughout history, young women have been seen as more emotional, catty and passive-aggressive than men (Hadley, 2004). As mentioned earlier, they have traditionally been considered the exhibiters of histrionic behavior – known for years in psychology as the "women's disease," hysteria (Gibson, 2004). Research has not attended

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to the possibility of dramatic or hyperdramatic behavior in both genders. Using the emerging field of "mean girl" research and the recent rise of cyberbullying as examples of overly dramatic behaviors online, this study aims to provide a backdrop in which these types of negatively dramaturgical behaviors – of both young men and women – have grown.

Mean girl research.

Recently, mass media research has begun discussing the "mean girl" – a popular, aggressive young woman who has come to replace the "vulnerable girl" of years past (Gonick, 2003). The mean girl is characterized by a nasty attitude, a sense of entitlement, and a need for drama. Mean girls like to gossip, backstab and create conflict wherever they go, yet research does not seem to recognize a male equivalent. Scholars have begun to examine this new problematizing of female relationships in media, wherein the acceptable norm is *mean* and the deviant is *violent* (Ringrose, 2006). The majority of mean girl research has focused on the presence of this type of character on film and television. In examining the broader spectrum of hyperdramatic behaviors and portrayals that surround the current generation of young people, it is important to also consider this aspect of young adult dramatization.

Behm-Morawitz and Mastro (2008) have found that after viewing movies and television shows that contain overly dramatic, "mean girl" characters and interactions, young adults use the information to guide future judgments, attitudes and actions, regardless of the accuracy of the portrayal (Behm-Morawitz & Mastro, 2008). Of interest to this study is that the relational aggression typically associated with young women in

both the real and media worlds (Hadley, 2004) may be spreading to the internet via social networking sites, which provide ample opportunities for displaying interpersonal drama to the world. Taking a dramaturgical perspective of interactions on Facebook and Twitter, this study addresses the vague area of mean girl research to reveal whether the hyperdramatic behaviors assigned to women are being acted out online by both young women *and* men.

Cyberbullying.

Cyberbullying is a form of teasing and harassment that is played out over the internet. This can take the form of cruel blog posts to derogatory emails to "hate pages" and fake accounts on Facebook and Twitter. New online technologies allow the dissemination of hateful speech to a much wider audience, sometimes with tragic results. In recent years, cyberbullying has become such a threat that the United States has formed a national research council to combat it (The Cyberbullying Research Center, www.cyberbullying.us). Social networking sites have aided in the increase of cyberbullying cases per year, as the anonymity available online provides a protective veil for bullies (CRC, 2010).

As mentioned earlier in this paper, more than 20 percent of all high school students report being bullied online, a number that is expected to grow with further advances in technology (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2012). A number of particularly tragic cyberbullying cases involving social media have occurred in recent years, sometimes even ending in death, as in the case of Tyler Clementi, a Rutgers University student who committed suicide after being bullied online (AP, 2007; Heyboer,

2010). Examining the dramaturgical context of young adult interactions on social

networking sites may help advance understanding of why cyberbullying has become a

popular new form of young adult hyperdramatics.

In discussing the various aspects of hyperdramatic behavior and dramatization, as

well as the influence of social media on these factors, the final research question is posed:

RQ4: *How is drama played out by young adults on Facebook and Twitter?*

Definitions

Presented above is an overview of the constructs used in research of dramaturgy

and social media. This short section provides a further analysis, as well as the operational

and theoretical definitions of the concepts being measured.

Performance roles.

A significant part of this analysis involves the performance roles of audience

members and performers identified by Goffman (1959). Five of these roles will be

examined in regard to social media users. One of the roles – that of a *non-person* – will

not be included in the study.

Primary performer.

The primary performer is one who engages the audience first and foremost. He or

she is seen as the person actively attempting to present a self to others in an interaction.

Online, this is often done through a personal Facebook or Twitter profile. This study

considers the likely zone of a primary performer to be his or her own profile page – an

ideal performance space. When one leaves that space, he or she will likely fall into one of

the supporting five roles outlined by Goffman (1959, p. 75): the spotter, the informer, the shill, the mediator or so-called "non-person."

Spotter.

According to Goffman (1959), the *spotter* is an individual who has knowledge of the performance being presented (p. 75). This person analyzes a performance and may inform the audience members of the acting that is taking place. In a social media setting, the spotter is someone who personally knows the person who is interacting online and can attest as to whether or not this person's performance is genuine. The interaction may take the form of a response comment referring to the event posted about, if the responder has experience with the subject of the post. Such responses will either support the original poster's position, or will correct or disprove it, therefore revealing an element of performance. For example, a post may read, "I raced in the 5k today and blew them all away," while a response may either read: "Yeah! I saw that!" or "I noticed you staggering a bit toward the end…" Each of these responses represents an example of a spotter, whose presence at the event either reaffirms or disavows a poster's performance online.

Informer.

Goffman's (1959) definition of the *informer* describes an individual who poses as an actor in a performance, but reveals parts of the performance to audience members (p. 75). In this study, it may be a person who is a "friend" or follower of a Facebook or Twitter user that points out incongruous information that is shared by the user with others. An informer shares a similar position to that of the spotter, but this character

consistently points to errors in the performer's posts, showing the audience members (other users of Facebook and Twitter) that there is deceit taking place. For instance, an informer may respond to the post mentioned previously that the poster does not even run 5ks, or that this person hates doing so, but brags about it online anyway. In addition, an informer may be someone who reveals to audience members that a performance is indeed taking place, even if others may be unaware. In the social media setting, this often results in informers commenting directly on a performer's use of a particular social networking site to obtain certain ends, or a commentary on presenting aspects of performance online. For example, someone who comments on another's intention to gain followers on Twitter or the popularity of another's Facebook posts is revealing that a social media actor is purposely seeking a reaction from audience members of a performance.

Shill.

The *shill* is in opposition of the informer, serving as a false audience member who is an actor put in place to manipulate the audience (Goffman, 1959, p. 76). This may be a friend who leaves positive or encouraging comments on a user's profile page with the likelihood that others will follow suit. Shills in social media interactions will always support the performance being played out, and will point to the performer's posts as genuine, regardless of whether or not the shill was present in life to see for himself or herself. Again using the 5k example, a shill may post something like, "Great job! You go, Speed Racer!" Oftentimes, the intention of this is for other users to then follow suit, congratulating the original poster on a job well done and confirming the performance.

Mediator.

Mediators are people who have the complex role of messenger between actors and audience members (Goffman, 1959, p. 76). These may be people who comment on Facebook or Twitter users' posts to clarify or add to the information already shared. A mediator in this case will be a user who was not necessarily present at the event posted about, but who has additional information about the post. For example, if a Twitter user posts about a particularly funny skit on a late-night comedy show (say, by sharing a video), a mediator may respond that the comedian in the skit is coming out with a new movie and made the late-night appearance to promote the film. This adds information to the online performance, but does not directly affect it in a positive or negative way.

Non-person.

The role of a *non-person* is someone who is neither an actor nor an audience member (Goffman, 1959, p. 76). This study does not examine this role, as the non-persons in a social media setting are those who are either not "friends" on Facebook or "followers" on Twitter. In other words, these individuals are not part of the interaction that is taking place, and are therefore not pertinent to this analysis.

Regions.

Goffman's regions of interaction (1959, p. 114), will be examined in regard to the type of interaction taking place in the settings of Facebook and Twitter. This study analyzes each of the websites, identifying which users tend to use as their front stage, and which they use as a back stage space. Off-stage spaces will be examined in terms of whether or not users see themselves as performing online or offline.

Front stage.

The front stage represents the arena of interaction wherein acting takes place. Here, actors give off a certain impression to audiences (Goffman, 1959). It is the zone of active performance. This study observes whether Facebook or Twitter serves as a front stage for performance behavior.

Back stage.

The back stage is a "safe zone," where actors can halt their performance and be themselves (Goffman, 1959). This is a space usually occupied by good friends and family. Either Facebook or Twitter may serve as a safe arena for off-duty performers.

Off-stage.

According to Goffman (1959), an off-stage area is one that does not contain performances; where actors take off their "masks" and are neither members of an audience nor part of a performance team. The interaction on Facebook and Twitter will be compared to interaction in real life, with an online space serving as a zone where performance is more likely to take place.

Performance.

This study examines many aspects of individual performances on Facebook and Twitter. Goffman (1959) outlines seven such aspects in his theoretical approach, but *belief in one's role*, *idealization* and *character maintenance* are most pertinent to the study of dramaturgy in social media.

Belief in one's role.

In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life,* Goffman (1959) identifies two extremes in the self-analysis of one's role. A person "may be taken in by his own act or be cynical about it" (p. 19). The sincerity with which one approaches his or her performance can effect how others perceive it. Similarly, if one is knowingly engaging in deceit to present a certain role, audiences may react differently. There is also a transitional point at which these two meet. Performers may have mixed feelings about their actions, knowing that despite some adjustments to the truth, what is happening is real.

Idealization.

Presenting an ideal self is part of the impression management process (Goffman, 1959). Using a dramaturgical lens to examine social media use, this study analyzes how users present themselves to others in the "best possible light" (p. 56). It is assumed that the presentation of self in social media is meant to send other online users a positive overall impression through posts about topics deemed important to a user's showcased identity. People who want to be perceived as members of the art sphere, for instance, would likely post images of their recent artwork or art they have liked recently, as well as up-to-date information on emerging artists.

Hyperdramatic content and behavior.

The final area of analysis in this study examines dramatic or hyperdramatic content as identified through social media users. The content of posts and other messages are defined as either dramatic or non-dramatic.

Drama.

Drama is examined in the context of messages containing sensational or attention-seeking content that Facebook or Twitter users post for others to see. It is identified through the textual analysis of user posts containing elements of a dramatic "plotline," specifically those that visually or emotionally stimulate audience members by involving them more personally in one's performance. These posts also contain the highest degree of responses by other users.

Non-drama.

User behavior and message content that is considered *non-dramatic* is that which does not contain theatrical or attention-seeking messages, and which other Facebook and Twitter users may not be typically attracted to.

An understanding of these components of drama and dramaturgy allows for deeper examination of their use in social media. The preceding concepts outline the aspects of dramaturgy that are first analyzed in a thorough reading of the social media texts, and then included in self-reflections of the social media users themselves. The elements of role, region, performance and hyperdramatic content are identified in the textual analysis of Facebook and Twitter users' status updates, photographs, and video or article posts.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

This analysis is the first half of a grounded theory study exploring the dramaturgical perspective of interaction on the social networking websites Facebook and Twitter. A textual analysis provides a thorough examination of dramaturgy in social media, while also giving a solid background to a future survey portion of the study. A survey conducted at a later date will be used to examine the validity and reliability of the results of this textual analysis. Such a method analyzes the interplay between emerging adults through their posts and site updates, in the context of hyperdramatic acculturation present in modern young adult life. Using Erving Goffman's construction of dramaturgy, an analysis of user communications and perceptions of this interface provides support for further theory building. The dramaturgical elements of role, region, and various aspects of performance are examined specifically, due not only to their importance to the dramaturgical perspective but also to their regularity of use in the dramaturgical research of various scholarly fields (see Album, 2010; Larsen, 2010; Krijnen & Tan, 2009; Edgley, 2003). As part of grounded theory research, this study uses theoretical methods for sampling, data collection and data analysis.

A grounded theory study is generated by participants who have experienced the topic being studied (Creswell, 2007). By examining the posts and interactions of young adult users themselves, a general explanation of dramaturgy in social media can be accurately shaped (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Although this type of approach presents an ideal setting from which to begin a more thorough theoretical analysis of dramaturgy in a

media perspective, the researcher must be aware of personal theoretical ideas, and set these aside to let a substantive theory emerge on its own (Charmaz, 2011).

The examination of user dramaturgy in social media was conducted using a cross-sectional design, analyzing a contemporary phenomenon of social networking websites in the sites' users. Because social networking sites are a recent creation and ongoing modern movement, this study used a cross-sectional design that evaluates the phenomenon being studied at one current point in time. For this study the field period of January 2012 to March 2012 was used. Such a design allows for more thorough analysis of a particular use of dramaturgy (or dramatic "acting" through various impression management techniques) by current young adult users of Facebook and Twitter.

Facebook and Twitter were chosen as the two sources for data collection because they currently hold the first and second spots of the most popular social networking sites in the world (eBizMBA, 2013). They are two of the most frequently visited social networking sites, and have the most registered users (Alexa, 2013a; 2013b). This holds particularly true for young adults, who are the primary users of such websites (Mashable, 2011).

Procedures

A textual analysis of 50 Facebook and Twitter users' (25 male, 25 female) profile updates spanning a month-long period was conducted in order to effectively evaluate the dramaturgical context of such posts and user interactions.

The researcher analyzed 25 Facebook profiles and 25 Twitter feeds. A qualitative textual analysis presents the best option for a study of inherent drama in these outlets, as

it allows for the revelation of both manifest and latent themes in communication. In delving deep into these posts, certain themes became apparent that would not have been clear in the surface coding present in quantitative content analysis. Through interrogating the texts of Facebook and Twitter posts, the hidden or implicit meanings of the text was deconstructed to reveal the types of dramatic impressions users may be attempting to portray to others (Hesse-Bieber & Leavy, 2011). A thorough textual analysis of the discursive and semiological practices of young social networking users shows that meanings are not fixed, but that the practice of communication on these sites constructs a reality for users that is composed of various ideologies and representations (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011).

This study combines a purposive, theoretical sampling technique – recruiting members of the phenomenon being studied – with a convenience sample of young adult social media users. Participants in the textual analysis were recruited using a snowball sampling technique, which began with a request to allow the researcher to "friend" a potential participant on Facebook and "follow" him or her on Twitter. Each participant was then asked whether any friends would be interested in participating, who were then contacted in a similar way. Participants were male and female U.S. citizens between the ages of 18 and 22 living in the United States, attending either a local or national college or university. Participants chosen were those who engaged with Facebook and Twitter multiple times a week (providing the researcher enough data for a thorough analysis) and who followed at least one reality show or reality show star on either site. They were recruited on a "first come-first serve" basis based on who responded to the researcher first, and whether they met the aforementioned criteria. Of the 50 final participants, all

but three were Caucasian. All participants came from a middle or upper-middle class background. This sample, though homogenous, allowed the researcher to control for ethnicity, socio-economic status and similar cultural factors in the study. Future studies should examine similar behaviors in participants of diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

After recruiting participants, the researcher then examined posts from the two weeks prior to becoming "friends" and analyzed posts for the duration of one full month. A month-long analysis was necessary because Facebook and Twitter represent very different social networking formats. Facebook users may choose to be more private, only allowing friends or family to "friend" them, or they may have thousands of "friends." Twitter users may be more apt to engage in dramaturgical performing, as their posts are visible to anyone, regardless of whether one is following the user. In this way, varying numbers of posts for each user on each site were required for the researcher to reach theoretical saturation.

Facebook and Twitter posts were transcribed, along with notes about the users who posted and a computer screenshot of their homepages. As this is a grounded theory study, interpretive open coding took place during the analysis of website texts. These were then reviewed and re-coded later in the analysis process. The codes present will be used to frame and direct future research.

After data collection, the researcher hand-coded all textual data, analyzing emergent themes. This was later coded into NVivo software, creating nodes for each theme discovered and looking for more connections and themes further within the data.

The coding process analyzed all elements of dramaturgy, with special attention paid to the roles played by young adult social networking site users in their daily interactions and posts, both to their own accounts or on others'. A thematic framework was used examining dramaturgical methods for performing, social media tools for invoking drama, and the dramaturgical roles mentioned previously – primary, spotter, informer, shill and mediator. Interactions were coded as they resembled each role. Additionally, the role of primary performer was analyzed for its own themes. An analysis of the regions of interaction that Facebook and Twitter each represent was also conducted. These were coded as front stage, back stage or off-stage locations.

Despite a thorough data analysis, a number of possible threats to validity present themselves in the design of this study. One risk to be aware of is the fact that textual analysis requires a detailed reading by the researcher, and due to this, all may not agree upon the coded reading. For instance, one researcher may interpret a dominant meaning of the text, while another may discover an oppositional reading. In this way, an emergent theory based largely upon textual analysis may vary depending upon the researcher. In order to combat such a threat, this study has been designed with a future quantitative survey analysis in mind, using the themes and frames discovered throughout.

Another possible threat to validity is in users editing their online communications, knowing they are participating in a study. In requesting to "follow" or "friend" these users, data is put at risk of being edited or deleted if users do not want a researcher to have access to it. Analyzing posts from two weeks prior to "friending" participants can be an effort to circumvent this. Both Twitter and Facebook keep records of older posts on members' pages, allowing users to read updates from months ago. In choosing these

posts as the objects of textual analysis, the researcher will attempt to avoid the possibility of losing data, as most users would likely not go back months in time to edit former postings.

Researcher Role

The researcher in this study is an avid user of social networking sites, including Facebook and Twitter. As such, she will engage other users not only as an inquiring scholar, but as a fellow member of these social networking sites. While being a proponent of social media use, she also firmly believes in the somewhat negative influence of such sites on the increasingly hyperdramatic acculturation of young people's already dramatic lives. She has studied hyperdramatic behavior in the past and is trained to discern dramatic tendencies in young adult communication. With this knowledge, she has made every effort not to perceive hyperdramatic behavior where it does not exist.

Additionally, as a woman, the researcher is fully aware of how dramatic or hyperdramatic behavior is often projected upon young women and girls. Although there is evidence to support the "drama" inherent in young female interactions, the researcher is interested in discovering similar drama in the interactions of young men as well. This interest is not meant to show that young men are more important in this study, rather, it can be ideal in examining the online communication of both young men and women, as either's form of interaction will be just as significant as the other. The researcher is cognizant of the effects of her feelings on this research, and is vigilant not to let her opinions sway her analysis.

CHAPTER IV

Findings

This chapter discusses the results of the textual analysis conducted of 50 Facebook and Twitter profile pages over a one-month period. Findings help to shape the conceptualizations of Erving Goffman's dramaturgy in a social media setting, while providing a basis for future research into young adult hyperdramatic acculturation. Results show a previously unidentified type of dramaturgical behavior being played out in cyberspace – one that is directly correlated to Goffman's original theory, but that represents the unique way young adults in the 21st century communicate. This chapter will discuss findings regarding the research questions posed. Results reveal trends toward dramatic and often hyperdramatic role-play by young social media users, as well as trends regarding these users' gender in relation to dramaturgical behaviors online. A thorough textual analysis was conducted in order to answer the four research questions posed at the beginning of this piece. In order to provide adequate background for the remainder of the study, the first research question is answered:

RQ1: *How do young adult users perform an identity on Facebook and Twitter?*

By examining user posts, a general method for creating an online self was uncovered. A natural second step for this analysis is to then examine what versions of *self* are being presented on these social networking sites, and on which of the two sites such versions are present. Therefore, the second and third research questions will be discussed:

RQ2: *What performance roles do young adult users play in their interactions on Facebook and Twitter?*

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RQ3: *What regions of interaction do Facebook and Twitter each represent?*

Research questions two and three provide a dramaturgical framework through which to consider the types of identities formed and behaviors witnessed on Facebook and Twitter user profiles. The fourth research question continues this dramaturgical pathway into discovering how young people actually use drama in online social networking.

RQ4: *How is drama played out by young adults on Facebook and Twitter?*

This final research question will be addressed by culminating the findings from each of the previous questions and laying out a specific technique by which young adults form online identities through the assistance of dramaturgical tools available to social media users.

Performing Identities

The first objective of this study is to discover how young adult social media users are performing an identity through social networking websites. This inquiry examines Facebook and Twitter users' profile pages to see what methods are being used to create an online self. What became apparent through this analysis was that Facebook and Twitter users are relying on other users to help create a self or identity. As pinpointed in Mead's symbolic interactionism (1934), people form meaning through interactions with others. Findings reveal that this also holds true in the social media realm, where users of Facebook and Twitter tended to nurture a particular identity through performance and other users' (audience members') reactions to said performance. This was expressed through responses to posts made on personal profiles and on those of friends, as well as through associations with groups and pages devoted to various interests or celebrities.

Methods for performing identity.

In responding to RQ1 (*How do young adult users perform an identity on Facebook and Twitter?*), four initial categories were discovered. These categories emerged based on participants' methods for performing an identity. Such methods utilized the various tools provided by social networking websites to display a particular self to the online public. Users of both Facebook and Twitter performed various identities through Association with Influential Others, Emphasis on Career, Highlighting a Hobby, and The "Public Diary" Effect.

Association with influential others.

A common way in which users performed an identity through social media was in connecting themselves to influential public others. Associations were made both with celebrities and with influential members of one's own community, as well as with local and national companies or brands. These associations were made through "liking" a particular page on Facebook or by following other users on Twitter. By "liking" a celebrity's or brand's Facebook page, one announced to the rest of the Facebook world not only that he or she supports this influencer, but that he or she wants others who view this profile to connect the celebrity or brand and the user. On Facebook, one's "likes" are prominently displayed at the top of a profile page, for other users to acknowledge and perhaps "like" themselves. Consistently found in this section were television and film actors, as well as a variety of both well-known and locally known corporations. Sports figures and reality television stars played a large part in the number of celebrities included, displaying users' attraction to these public figures over any others they may

know of or be interested in. A reason for this may be to exhibit potential sports knowledge or athletic prowess, as well as to showcase the possible desirability of drama and hyperdramatic characterization inherent to reality shows. By associating with such figures, participants noted a similarity to these people in their performed identity.

In addition to celebrities and more public members of one's own community, some participants emphasized the relationships they had with significant others, marking such persons as most influential and performing a primary identity through them. Although this was found to be the case primarily with females, a number of participants most frequently posted updates regarding their romantic relationships. By posting more about a romantic relationship than any other aspects of one's life, users identified themselves as one half of a pair – as a devoted lover to whomever it was they recognized as a partner.
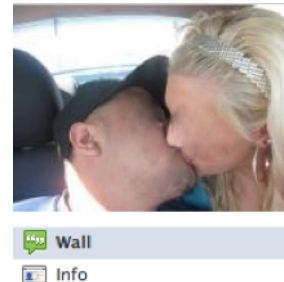
When it came to companies, users tended to affiliate more with local organizations than with national or international corporations. This was a somewhat
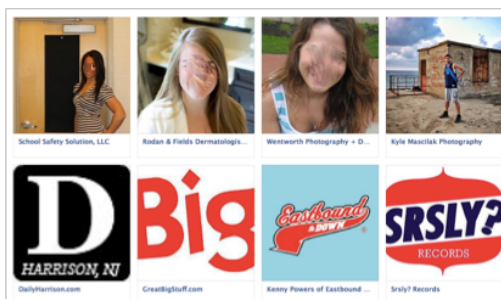
surprising finding, as the social media presence of large, global conglomerates is often thought to be significantly more prevalent than that of smaller "mom and pop" establishments. It therefore emerged that this generation of social media users is, in part, performing a group identity that prioritizes showing strong support for local business. This researcher wonders if the national economic downturn and renewed concern for small businesses since 2008 has assisted such a trend.

On Twitter, users affiliated with influential others through following their accounts and often by retweeting (re-posting another user's post) pertinent tweets from them. Just as on Facebook, one's "following" list is obviously displayed on a profile page, showing other users with whom (and what) one aligns him or herself. Many of the accounts followed by study participants represented television or film actors, just as on Facebook. There were not nearly as many companies followed on Twitter regardless of whether local or national. The great majority of participants did, however, follow an explicit type of business, namely, news and entertainment corporations. Additionally, most of the Twitter accounts examined followed an explicit type of celebrity: comedians. Both of these findings suggest that Twitter is used for different purposes than those of Facebook – as an information and entertainment curator, rather than a traditional performance space. This will be discussed later on.

An interesting discovery regarding the influential others with whom participants associated surfaced when comparing the social media associations of males and females. The majority of males in the study followed a greater number of news outlets and television broadcasters than females, while females tended to follow more Twitter feeds of brands and companies. In the sample examined, sports news sources were extremely popular among males, with every male participant following at least three sports teams or television networks. In addition, women tended to affiliate more closely with personal friends and influencers through following and retweeting them, while men tended to follow more nationally recognized or "famous" people and organizations. Such results indicate that not only are Twitter and Facebook often used to different ends, but that men

and women also use them in performative ways that differ from each other. These trends will be discussed more in the following chapter.

One of the types of influential others participants associated with was that of professionals in their particular field of interest or career path. Similarly, another way for users to perform an identity through social media was through emphasizing elements of one's career.

Emphasis on career.

One's career was a particularly strong identity marker in fields where a career is culturally seen as more of a lifestyle, for example, with members of the military and musicians. Participants performed the identity most closely associated with their careers by posting mostly and most explicitly (i.e. posting photographs and links rather than simple comments) about one's current professional status, events held or related to one's career, images of oneself at work or in work uniform, or simply a persistent commentary on one's career. One user shared her passion for nursing by posting a number of links to meaningful stories and poems about helping people. As a nurse, she wanted to make sure her audience knew her role well. For those who are involved in a career path that is often considered a way of life rather than an overt career, this tendency was particularly common.
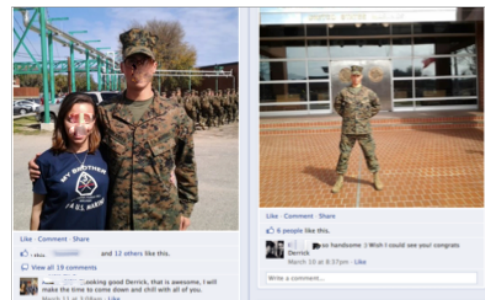
Two participants in the study were active military personnel living on bases in the U.S. These young men performed the role of soldier both on and off-line. Nearly every

post in each of their Facebook profiles reflected this, whether through pictures of fellow soldiers graduating basic training, status updates about being on post, or even ending unrelated posts with the phrase, "HOORAH!" These young men chose for the online world to see them as soldiers in the U.S. military rather than any other potential identity they could have presented, based on their other connections and interests. Some Facebook users made use of their pages' "cover photo," which appears as a large heading at the top of their profile, to underscore their performance as a particular professional. One musician showcased a large image of himself playing the drums as a header for his page, which clearly identified him as a drummer, guitarist and music producer. Of the Twitter and Facebook users involved in the study, Facebook users were more likely to perform a career-oriented identity than Twitter users, again possibly due to an ever-more apparent difference in purpose between the two websites. For many, Twitter seemed to


serve a more casual role that may not have had space (or enough characters) for a person's career-based identity.

When one's career was not utilized as the primary element of a performance, other daily activities, such as hobbies, were often a source of identity.

Highlighting a hobby.

Whether cooking, reading, running or even "partying," continuous posts about a specific pastime in one's daily life are a meaningful way to perform a
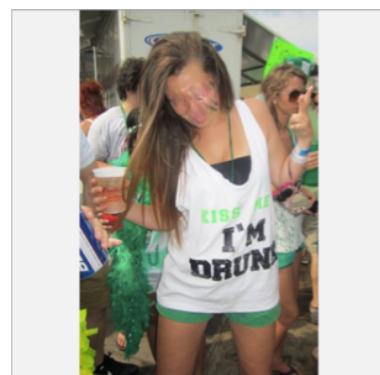
particular identity. Like the previous theme, highlighting one's hobby was something that most participants expressed through Facebook rather than Twitter. This was often done through "liking" certain activities, but also through frequently posting images or comments about those activities – sometimes both. As with the previous theme, Facebook cover photos often exhibited these pastimes, performing at the very top of a user's profile the identity he or she most wanted to convey. Many participants associated most closely with a particular sport, while others in this age group could be best recognized through hobbies such as "music" or "hanging out with friends."

While these hobbies were certainly not the only pastimes participants enjoyed, they were the ones which participants shared most with the public and which certain users highlighted as a critical aspect of the performance of their respective selves. Some hobbies, such as "soccer" or "running 5Ks" helped to shape a somewhat positive or wholesome role, while others, such as "partying" portrayed a more sensationalized role. When not performing through a hobby, users performed a different type of identity through making their inner-most thoughts and actions the most important aspect of performance.

The "public diary" effect.

Perhaps the most interesting of findings regarding methods of identity formation emerged as something this researcher is calling the "public diary" effect. This occurred when a user of a particular social networking site continuously referred not to hobbies, professions or others, but to oneself. This may take the form of a multitude of "selfies" (photos a person snaps of him or herself – also called the "MySpace shot"), ongoing

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accounts of one's daily activities from waking up to going to bed, or posts of lyrics and

quotes that pertain to one's current mood. Often, this involved using other social media to

link and report through Facebook or Twitter, such as tagging locations one was at with

FourSquare and posting pictures with the photo sharing application, Instagram. This type

of "social media through social media" was rarely present in other methods of identity

performance, yet proved essential to nearly all participants falling into this category. A

public diary method of identity formation represents a kind of inner monologue turned

outward. One of the more discernible contributors to this effect was a young woman who

engaged in the preceding behaviors but also repeatedly made posts linking to a personal

blog, "365 Days of This" (blog name

changed), which was precisely a virtual

diary recounting her day-to-day

thoughts and actions, headed by a daily

photograph of the young woman

herself. This type of activity not only presented a diary of sorts, but also made this diary

public and popular, enticing potential viewers or readers.
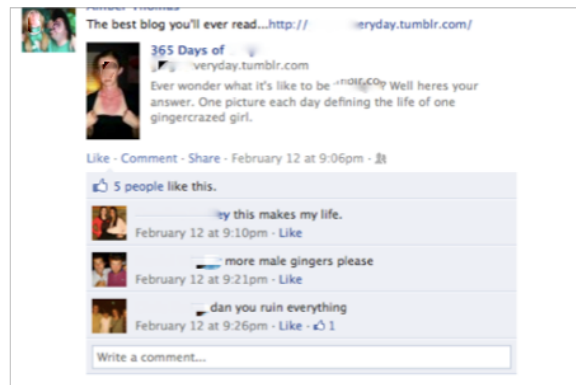
The "public diary" phenomenon relies heavily on a person creating a sense of self

through others' thoughts about him or her. Users who engage in this type of performance

relied on the responses of others to adjust whom they were presenting themselves as

accordingly. This is easily facilitated through both Facebook and Twitter, making it a

very common way of performing identity. As such, it incited many conversations – more

than any other method. Other users not only commented on participants' posts, but this

type of performance method also led others to share participants' links and photos more

often than other methods. The drama intrinsic to diary-type interactions may prove to be

especially intriguing for users of social

networking sites. Because sharing the most

intimate details of one's life provides a type

of dramatic storyline and brings great appeal

in other media settings (such as the television

and film examples mentioned previously), it

carries into this setting extremely well. The

social media context of such drama allows

the public to become actively involved and invested in one's personal narrative – a

narrative influenced by the role one performs for his or her audience.
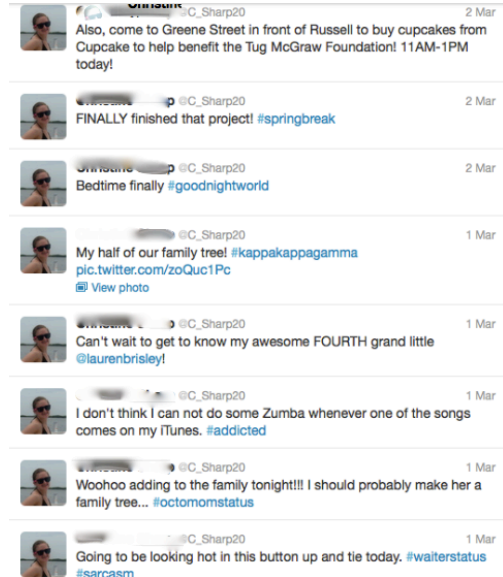
Roles on Facebook and Twitter.

The second research question posed asks: *What performance roles do young adult*

users play in their interactions on Facebook and Twitter? To answer this question, the

profiles and posts of participants were examined for themes regarding the primary roles

they tended to exhibit, as well as the supporting roles they engaged in. Out of the

aforementioned methods of performing identity, participants created numerous versions

of self.

Primary performer roles.

Though performers played multiple parts for their online audiences, a thorough

analysis of participants' Facebook and Twitter profiles revealed the emergence of five

primary roles: The Healthy Lifestyler, The Local Celebrity, The Pop Culture Maven, The

Sports Insider and The Girls' Girl (or Not) – as well as new iterations of the supporting

roles of Shill and Informer.

The healthy lifestyler.

The *healthy lifestyler* is someone who exhibits the merits of a fit and healthy

lifestyle – at least, that is what they show their online followers. Those Facebook and

Twitter users who post most often about activities such as going to the gym, cooking a

healthy meal or playing a sport all fall into this healthy lifestyle

role. These users are often tweeting from the gym or uploading

mobile photos from their latest bike ride. They maintain a healthy

lifestyle and want everyone to know it. This is their ideal self,

presented for the online masses. Such users tended to follow

influential others who are also healthy lifestylers and tended to "like" a variety of fitness

and health activities. The posts and conversations taking place on their Twitter feeds and

Facebook walls involved praise for healthy habits and regret for a recent lapse into

unhealthy ones. Some healthy lifestylers carried on public conversations about a

particularly exhausting day at the gym, while others lamented their lack of recent

attendance. One female participant in this study commented on her latest workout with

friends, and those friends carried on the initial post into a conversation that dominated the

user's profile that day:

Facebook User 1: "intense workout at FitEx."
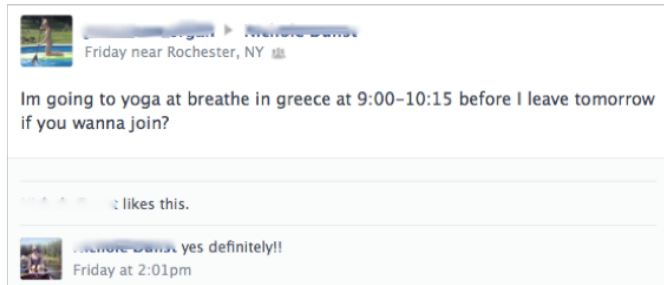
User 2: "Seriously. I cant feel my legs"

User 1: "Shaun T ain't got nuthin on me! lolol"

User 3: "Jealous! I need to start hitting the gym again ☹"

User 1: "Youre still a hottie"

User 3: " <3 <3 "

Other healthy lifestylers regularly used Facebook as a way to announce their plans to go to the gym or to run a race, while even more used the site as a method of contacting

friends to join them. These types of activities performed a role that attracted others with active lifestyles, who then further confirmed the performance.

In addition to posting commentary about health and fitness activities, healthy lifestylers posted many images of themselves and friends engaging in sporting activities. For some, this was the very first image they wanted others to have of them, as it greeted visitors at the top of their profile pages. No role was performed as clearly as when it was

displayed in the cover photo of one's Facebook account. A young college student and sorority member was not first identified by

her school or sisterhood, but by her affinity for tennis. Her primary performance was of someone who was certainly fit, healthy, and active and for whom sports played a major part. Photographs such as these were the key signifiers of one's chosen role. While sporty status updates and links or tweets about healthy recipes on blogs aided in the performance of the healthy lifestyler, the photos posted by such users made their role clear. Additionally, every healthy lifestyler on Facebook "liked" a number of health or fitness-

Travel   Hiking   Running 5 Ks
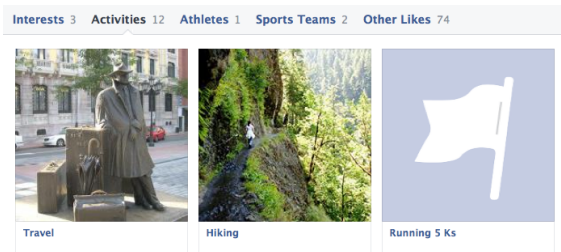
related hobbies. Whether yoga, golf, or even a hobby such as travel, those who performed the healthy lifestyle role consistently shared a passion for wellness. Very few of the hobbies shown on these users' pages could be construed as unhealthy or negative.

The only pieces that made a healthy lifestyle performance more well-defined than the hobbies and interests such participants involved themselves in were the influential others a healthy lifestyler associated with. From Insanity's personal trainer, Shaun T. to the Maharishi, healthy lifestylers chose to affiliate with public figures who exemplified
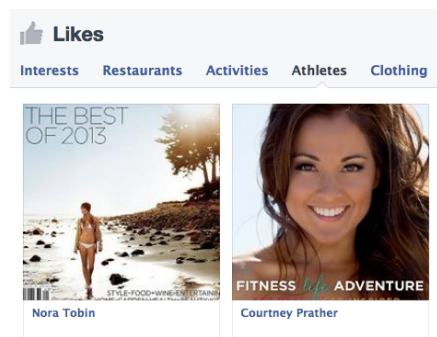
the type of role they were performing themselves. Both Facebook and Twitter users who performed a healthy lifestyler role followed other, more famous healthy lifestylers. One female participant, although a fashion student, followed very few fashionistas or designers on Twitter, but instead chose to follow nearly 70 health bloggers, nutritionists, yogis, and vegan activists – including Marisa Miller-Wolfson, Kimberly Snyder and The Institute for Integrative Nutrition. This put forth a somewhat different online role than would be expected in the physical world. Companies were also shared on a healthy lifestyler's profile as health-promoting businesses alongside health-promoting celebrities and sport figureheads. Most of these businesses were local gyms or yoga studios (as the previously noted Yoga House of Charleston), as well as training groups or fitness clubs. Through connecting themselves with others who perform

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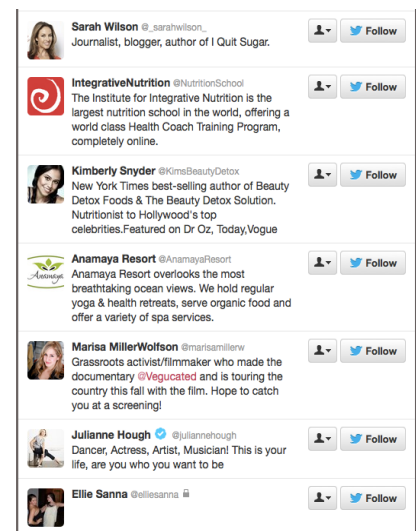
a healthy role, healthy lifestylers show the online world that who they are – or who they want to be – is someone others can look to as a model of health and wellness.

The sports insider.

Like the healthy lifestyler, the *sports insider* performs a role of expertise. In this role, however, the expertise is not in how to live a sporting lifestyle, but rather how to maintain awareness of the sports and athletic world. These are the sports fans who fill their profiles with images of their favorite teams and ongoing statistics for the latest games. Often, one can tune in to sports insiders' Twitter feeds for a blow-by-blow account of the night's big playoff, interrupted by fuming or jubilant exclamations rallying other sports fans. Anyone who wants to know about the latest happenings in the sports world can turn to the sports insider for insight. The role of sports insider emerged in this study as primarily males who tended to do most of their sports announcing on Twitter.
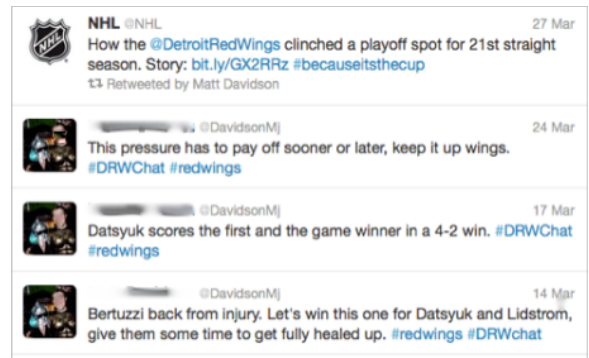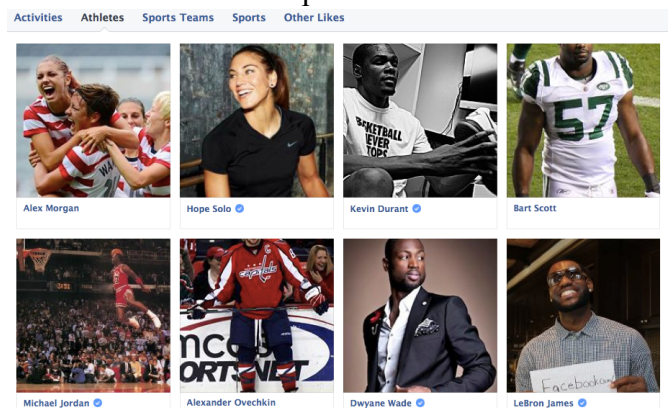
One of the primary ways a participant performed this role was through a running commentary on the days' sporting events. Unlike other roles, which relied heavily on shared photographs and followed celebrities, sports insiders used their own sports knowledge and influence to provide valuable information about the topic to audiences. This knowledge may have come in the form of sports stats tweeted just before a game or from shared sports headlines that many others may not have known about. Often, such headlines would come from reputable

sports entertainment companies or organizations, and be retweeted by these devoted fans. The sports insider was sometimes an expert in only one team, but often shared information about many teams and leagues, from professional to college levels. Such information led sports insiders to frequently have a large number of followers on social media, many of whom regularly engaged the insider in live discussions about games or about a team news story as it was breaking

In addition to commentary and stats, however, sports insiders each held a long list of influential others – namely, athletes and teams – who were emphasized in their profiles. In the setting of Facebook, these athletes were often the *only* influential others who were even listed on a sports insider's profile, rather than simply the majority of those listed. This, combined with the longest lists of "liked" sports teams of any of the study's participants, helped to solidify the sports insider as a popular and powerful role enacted by primary performers.

The pop culture maven.

If the sports insider played the role of a sport news maven, then the *pop culture maven* was the role performed by apparent insiders of the music, television and film world. The pop culture maven is a role that emerged from the large number of Facebook and Twitter users who seemed to have their fingers on the pulse of Hollywood. The pop culture maven represented participants who posted a great deal about popular television

shows, movies and musicians. This included retweeting a television series' actors or

holding online conversations in real-time about the latest episode. Other times, it would

be a quoted line from a character on a show, or as one Twitter user put it, even a theme

song: "zooby zooby zoo…zou bisou bisou.. #thanksmadmen". Often, a comment was

merely an exclamation over the season finale's cliffhanger or a surprise onscreen

revelation. Regardless of whether such a post would garner comments in return and spark

conversation, the pop culture maven is

someone who was invested enough in a

program's plot and characters to simply require getting such thoughts off his or her chest.
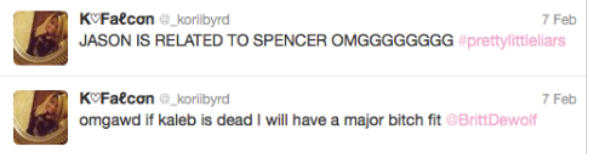
In addition to television shows, a number of participants were very involved in

reporting on movies they had recently seen, whether old or new. Sometimes this was

done through a third party social media application, such as GetGlue. One Facebook user
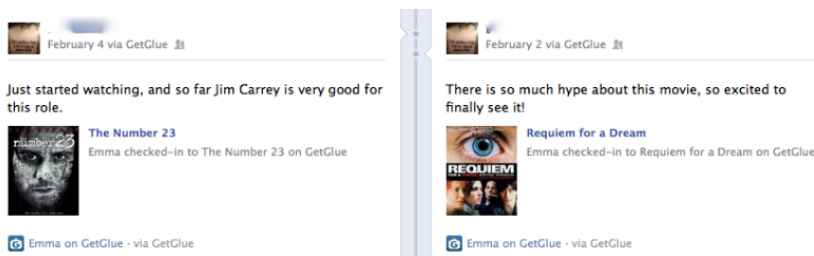
in particular not only

provided a GetGlue update

as to what film she was

seeing, but also provided a

brief review of the movie. This was a pop culture maven performing her role at its peak

and providing others with information they may not have previously had.

When it comes to influential others, pop culture mavens interestingly appeared to

pay most attention to reality television shows and their "real-life" actors. Among those

reality stars most associated with were the Kardashian sisters, the wives from *The Real*

Housewives of New York, Big Ange from *Mob Wives*, and the cast of MTV's *The Jersey*

Shore (with particular reference to "Snooki" and "DJ Pauly D"). The level of popularity

of such shows, combined with the palpable drama played out by these characters, led

those who performed an extreme interest in popular culture to express even more interest

in reality television. This type of shared celebrity interest allowed pop culture mavens to

express to the online world a type of celebrity themselves, one who could share their

passion for the popular with everyone else.

The local celebrity.

Another common role of the primary performer is that of the *local celebrity*. A

local celebrity is widely recognized in his or her online network. Though they may be

famous, infamous or even anonymous in the physical world, they are the "stars" of social

media. Someone performing the role of local celebrity falls largely in the category of

performers on Facebook and Twitter who engage in
the "personal diary" behaviors mentioned in the
previous section. These social media users post
mostly about themselves – their inner thoughts, their
outer thoughts, pictures of themselves and pictures
of places they have been. The local celebrity rarely
retweets, but instead keeps an ongoing stream of
their original thoughts in play on Twitter. These
performers are the people who use social media more than most others. They may be the
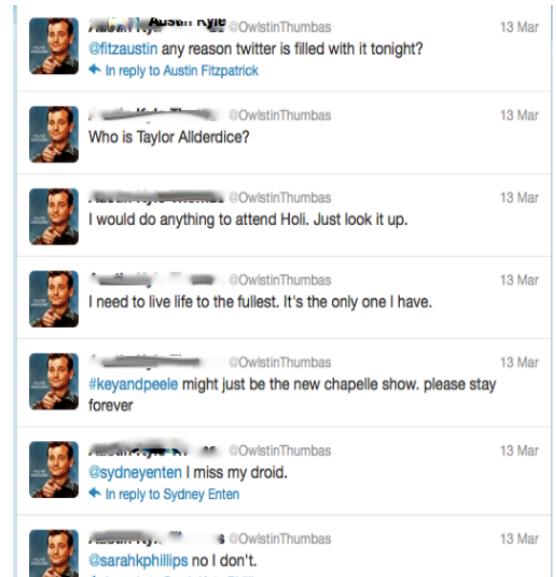
ones who are online throughout the day, adding here and there to a version of the self

which is so ideal that it attracts even relative strangers' attention. The local celebrity is

not a Facebook or Twitter celebrity, but rather a celebrity to others in their various

networks (school, work, city or otherwise) on the websites.

This role emerged from participants of this study who had a significant social media presence. Many of the participants in this category had both Facebook and Twitter profiles, which were examined by the researcher. Not surprisingly, both sites showed the same trends. Local celebrities posted daily to both Facebook and Twitter, often posting multiple times a day. Twitter was an especially popular venue for these performers, as it allowed for easy access to quickly update one's audience. One participant utilized this service more than many international celebrities, tweeting over 80 times a day about anything from song lyrics to photos of her dogs. Other local celebrities used Facebook and Twitter to draw attention to their various alternate social media accounts. As discussed earlier, this could take the form of directing someone from one's Facebook
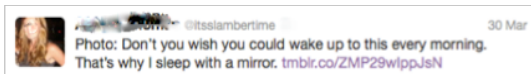
 page to a personal blog. The author of "365 Days of This" not only shared her blog's Tumblr account with her Facebook page, but also shared it on her Twitter feed daily and then shared her Twitter feed on Facebook. For reasons such as this, local celebrities had far more followers than most other performed roles, easily surpassing 1,000 friends on Facebook and having over 200 followers on Twitter. By comparison, other participants averaged around 600 Facebook friends and 80 Twitter followers. As engagers in a "public diary," these followers provided the foothold for the local celebrity's status as a "celebrity." Often requesting more information, or sharing a performer's posts on their own pages, followers helped to define and cement the role of a local celebrity.

In addition to posting comments more often than other users, local celebrities also posted far more pictures than others. Many young adults post images of themselves with friends and at special places to their social media profiles. The local celebrity not only

posted more of these, but also posted a great deal of "selfies," or photos of him or herself

alone, looking into the camera. Although both men and women

performed as local celebrities, one difference stood out in their

online activities: Female local celebrities were more likely to post

photos of themselves, while males were more likely to post

humorous anecdotes or thoughts. Additionally, though both male

and female local celebrities affiliated with reality television stars nearly as often as pop

culture mavens did (and often with the same ones), women followed the great majority of

such characters. This presents another intriguing finding that will be discussed in the next

chapter.

Despite the connections made to reality show stars, local celebrities in this study

were not principally identified through their associations with influential others or

through their hobbies, as other primary roles were. Instead, local celebrities identified

themselves through the dramatic narrative that they provided to the followers of their

online lives.

The girls' girl (or not).

A final primary performance role that emerged from this study was that of *the*

girls' girl (or not). The girls' girl is a role enacted only by female participants, which is

characterized by messages of female friendship and sisterhood, but punctuated by public

displays of relational aggression. This role seems to

provide credence to "mean girl" research – showcasing

seemingly sweet, but catty and aggressive female

relationships (Steinberg, 2008). This role, along with that of the local celebrity, displays the capacity for an online space to serve hyperdramatic tendencies.

Girls' girls had Facebook profile pages full of photos of their girlfriends, tagged locations where they recently had a "girls' night out" and posts from those friends about what a great time they had or how fun they are together. Some friends checked in every so often just to say, "I miss you! Can we go out again soon?" or to send other messages of affection and encouragement. At times a girls' girl would share a favorite product online such as a fashion accessory or perfume and tag other women whom she thought would like it in the post. On Twitter, the girls' girl tweeted most to her friends, often holding full conversations online that lasted for multiple days. Inside jokes were frequently hinted at and heart emoticons (<3 <3) were a very common post on these performers' walls.
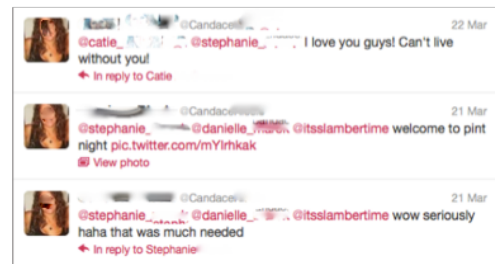
These performers tended to affiliate with many strong, feminine influential others, such as musicians or iconic actresses. Through "liking" or quoting such women and notifying friends, girls' girls portrayed a certain identity that linked them to these other women. On the other hand, girls' girls also associated themselves with many of the reality stars *pop culture maven*s did. This was especially true regarding female reality characters, such as cast members of
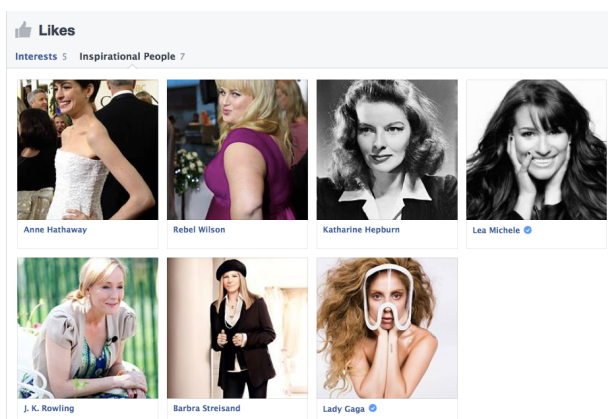
popular women-centered shows such as the *Real Housewives*, *Mob Wives* and *Keeping Up With the Kardashians*. Despite the hyperdramatic conduct intrinsic to such associations, humor and inspiration were popular means of promoting a girls' girl perspective. A participant performing as a girls' girl had the propensity to post a majority of female-centric videos and links, from "What a Girl Does in a Car" by YouTube sensation Jenna Marbles, to songs by Esperanza Spalding about the strength and beauty of women outlasting those of diam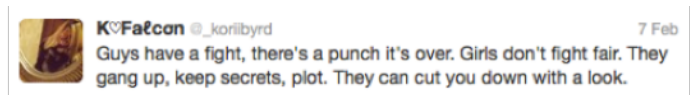onds. Female empowerment appeared to be the message of these posts, sending love and support to other women who happened to visit the performers' pages that day.

When simply glancing at such activities, one may not help but see flourishing, positive female relationships emerge. Upon closer inspection, however, tiny

K♡Falcon @_korilbyrd   7 Feb
Guys have a fight, there's a punch it's over. Girls don't fight fair. They gang up, keep secrets, plot. They can cut you down with a look.

cracks in the varnish of these interactions appear. What seemed to be simple lyrics or words of wisdom aimed at an anonymous someone turned into subtle attacks of other young women – whether general or specific. These findings resulted in the appearance of an overly dramatic, "mean girl"-like approach to social media interaction. The hyperdramatic behaviors in female relationships that attract audiences to traditional media sources (Behm-Morawitz & Mastro, 2008) seem to be just as appealing to audiences of social media performers. As one participant noted in two posts immediately following each other: "Where my gurls at?? lets go out tonight!!" and "Whatevs if you hate me. I probly talk shit about you anyway."

The various parts played by the primary performer in social media interactions, just as in Goffman's (1959) face-to-face interactions, would not be complete without the

help of supporting roles. In order for a performance to be believable, an actor must have a team of others backing his or her behaviors (Goffman, 1959). In the realm of social media, there are countless roles to play.

Supporting roles.

The results of this study revealed two key supporting roles being performed by young adult users of Facebook and Twitter. The roles of *shill* and *informer* remained prevalent, while instances of someone performing as *spotter* or *mediator* were quite uncommon. Therefore, the findings discussed will center on the former pair.

Shill.

The most common supporting role for participants to perform was that of the *shill.* The shill is a person who is a member of the performance being presented and is planted in the audience to support the actor (Goffman, 1959). He or she may be a friend or a stranger online, but they are an important part of the performance team. In a social media setting, the shill is someone who bolsters the version of self a Facebook or Twitter user is performing. Shills not only collaborate an online actor's story, but they also often provide positive feedback to further bolster the role being performed.

Participants in this study were more likely to be shills on Facebook than on Twitter. This is likely due to the fact that any supporting comments are not automatically seen by other Twitter users visiting a primary performer's profile, but rather they appear as replies to certain tweets that must be selected and viewed purposefully. On Facebook, however, any commentary is seen immediately under or around a primary post. Such commentary can also be posted to a performer's page on its own, without needing to

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reply to a previous remark. This therefore allowed the shill to stand on his or her own in support of the primary actor, rather than relying on the primary to call them into the performance awkwardly.

The vast majority of participants interacting on Facebook were shills when not posting to their own walls. Here, any reinforcing comment in response to a primary post was seen as a shill movement. In this study, nearly all comments in response to an initial post were positive, whether simply "liking" something an actor posted or commenting on

it in a way that maintained rather than undercut its message. For instance, when one participant posted that she wanted to go for a run, a shill responded "Where? I'm on campus and can meet you." This simple act helped to reaffirm the performance of the primary actor's current self – a runner. Another participant tweeted, "right on brotha" to a primary performer who had tweeted that his band was coming to town. By affirming the primary performer's role as a musician, the shill effectively shows the Twitter audience that this role is indeed valid.

In addition to responses to posts, shills also posted on primary performers' walls,
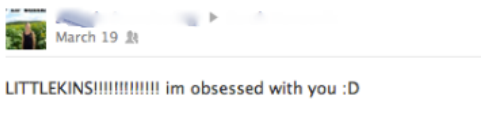
sending messages that reaffirmed the actors' roles. One shill posted a request on a *local celebrity*'s wall to share a link to the blog she had created. This same young woman, who had been sharing her "365 Days of This" blog, had her role reiterated as a shill requested she again present an element critical to her performance. Another shill merely posted a

note of support to a primary performer's Facebook wall, yet because this performer was acting the role of a sorority's "little sister," her shill's post, "LITTLEKINS!!!!!!! im obsessed with you", solidified such a performance.

While the shill is in place to support the performer from the audience, he or she may still let the audience in on the performance, which could damage the interaction (Goffman, 1959). The informer, who is also part of the acting team, is the one in place as a double agent of sorts, giving valuable information away to the audience.

Informer.

The *informer* is a supporting role that is in place as a "false actor" of sorts, who gives away performance secrets to audience members (Goffman, 1959). This can certainly be detrimental to a performance in face-to-face interaction, but in the social media sphere it was found not to be the case. Due to the performative nature of social media interactions, informers were not found to be interrupting a performance, but rather providing an almost humorous commentary to the acting that many seem to know is already going on.

This study identifies informers primarily by their revealing of the inner working of online social networking interactions. These were not directed at one primary performer, but rather at all performers online. Most often, such comments were made about using Twitter or Facebook themselves, and the purposes behind such use. Comments such as, "i have a face for every page," as one participant tweeted, let audience members know that the person they are seeing represented on this particular profile is only one of the many roles the user performs. Many of the posts and tweets

made by informers were not ill-intentioned, but intended to poke fun at themselves and

others who were engaging in perhaps equally zealous performances. One participant

noted that he wanted to go look at the sun "before i forget what it looks like.

#twitterless". This commentary on his reliance on the social networking site humorously

unveils an oft-reported fear that perhaps these types of online performances are taking

away from important face-to-face interactions.

Other informers made similar comments regarding a performer's use of social

media – whether they used it too much in

the wrong ways (i.e. "you don't post on my

wall enough") or perhaps whether they used it too much in the right ways (i.e. "you like

social media a lot for being on vacation"). A common form of informing involved

complimenting a primary performer on his or

her use of a social networking site, particularly

regarding a large number of followers or friends. Participants who let someone know how

many followers a performer has on Twitter, or those who announced "Just wanted to let

you know Panera is following me for some reason", described an unspoken rule of social

media performance: Many people join such websites to gain followers – audiences –

whether friends, family or otherwise. In these ways, informers do not undermine a

performance, nor do they confirm it. Instead, they shed some light on a set of guidelines

that has become widely accepted by users of both Facebook and Twitter. Exposing this

type of "unwritten code" falls into a category of dramaturgical "secrets" outlined by

Goffman (1959, p. 141). These non-harmful secrets are referred to as "free secrets,"

which performers may reveal to audience members
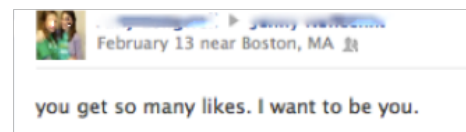
but that do not discredit a performance (p. 143).

Informers and shills, though only two of Goffman's identified supporting roles, represent a critically important element of any performance, online or off. Through bolstering an actor's role, the shill reaffirms the performance and adds to audience members' belief in that role. This does not change when applied to the world of social media. The informer, on the other hand, while in place to reveal information to audiences that may undermine a performance and aid audience awareness (Goffman, 1959), is often found in social networking sites to have a null effect on a performance.

Regardless of the role one is playing – one of many primary roles or that of a shill or informer – all aspects of these performances take place in a specific setting. Regions of interaction (Goffman, 1959) are those spaces that are used as a stage for one's performance. This study examines two such spaces, Facebook and Twitter, to determine which participants use as a front stage (an area of primary performance) and which they use as a back stage (an area of preparation and non-performance).

Facebook and Twitter as regions of interaction.

The third research question posed by this study inquires: *What regions of interaction do Facebook and Twitter each represent?* This inquiry is addressed through examining the types of posts shared on either website, as well as the aspects of each that make it appealing to users' performance needs. Guided by Erving Goffman's regions of Front Stage and Back Stage (1959), distinct areas of performance and of preparation emerged from the two social networking sites.
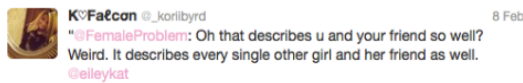
Twitter as back stage.

Despite Twitter's largely public archive and the tendency for participants to have entirely public feeds, a thorough analysis of the website revealed that young adult users tended to use Twitter as a *back stage* area of relaxation and preparation for major performances that later took place on Facebook.

Although some participants performed for large audiences on Twitter, tweeting comments such as, "Hey everyone, you can see Venus tonight if anybody cares" or "bedtime finally #goodnightworld", the majority of participants used Twitter more as a

K♥Falcon @_korilbyrd   8 Feb
"@FemaleProblem: Oh that describes u and your friend so well?
Weird. It describes every single other girl and her friend as well.
@eileykat

way to have an ongoing chat with friends throughout the day. Even when sharing information with the so-called "Twitterverse," participants tended to tag friends in these posts, making them more personal and directed at one or two individuals rather than the masses. Additionally, many tweets were tweets not created by the performer and sent out to the world, but responses to tweets from

@OneNeatDude   26 Mar
@MCentrelli it's an iPhone. not Iphone. HOW COULD YOU?
↵ In reply to Michael

friends or people a participant was following. Therefore, this was not a zone of active performing as often as it was a zone of connecting and rehearsing with personally known others.

Participants were also more likely to tweet their exact locations, including addresses, to followers on Twitter, something normally saved for more personal interactions between friends or family rather than aspects of a performance meant for countless audience members. Whether to meet up with friends or for an event, the

@C_Sharp20   2 Mar
Also, come to Greene Street in front of Russell to buy cupcakes from
Cupcake to help benefit the Tug McGraw Foundation! 11AM-1PM
today!

revealing of personal information to such a degree was not something to be found in a traditional front stage performance space.

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Yet another way Twitter presented a back stage space was the way in which its photo-sharing is configured. While Facebook allows users to post pictures that are immediately visible to anyone who visits one's profile page, Twitter users must share a link with others in order for someone to click that link and open a picture. In the social media generation, which is accustomed to immediate information available at one's fingertips, this may simply take too much time and effort. Images play a key role in in online performance, where the body language and appearance available in face-to-face interactions is often not an option. Without pictures to share with the other elements of performance, something is lost in translation. Twitter, therefore, does not always make for the best front stage, and users seem to be aware.

As a back stage space, however, Twitter has become immensely important for young adults to not only share information with friends, but as mentioned earlier in this paper, to seek information from other sources. Rather than a primary performance space, Twitter was found to be an information space. Participants here rehearsed their performances through practicing with friends, and gained additional useful information for their performances through the constant stream of news and entertainment updates in their feeds. Users tended to follow a great deal of information hubs that would aid in future front stage performances. For instance, *sports insiders* on Twitter tended to follow a large number of sports news outlets, athletes, and team accounts. With the information gathered from them, the performers could then go enact a more effective role through Facebook.

Facebook as front stage.

When presented with a theoretical backdrop of dramaturgy, a concern for some scholars in the field of media studies is the reliance of Goffman's (1959) theory on the richness of face-to-face interactions (Miller, 1995). When translating to the online sphere, some feared that such depth would not be attainable without the "expressive resources" available in the physical world (p. 2). It was assumed, however, that as technology advanced, so to would its ability to incorporate such resources. Participants in this study consistently used Facebook as an area to engage in the various elements of performance because unlike Twitter, the expressiveness required for effective dramaturgical performance has become readily available.

While Facebook is purportedly for "friends" and Twitter for a more traditional mass audience, Facebook retains the upper-hand in successful performance. Young adults

appear to have more freedom to actualize their chosen roles on this site, due in part to the variety of ways in which to express one's role. While Twitter provided a space to chat directly with friends through tagging them in a tweet, participants used Facebook less to tag friends and more to make statements about themselves. This was accomplished in large part through the assistance of images. Photographs of a performer and his or her friends were prolific, while pictures of one's "likes" –
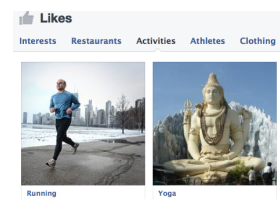
including hobbies, celebrities or even restaurants – helped to create a very specific role to play. Links and videos shared by performers on Facebook did not appear as merely links, as on Twitter, but as thumbnail images with links underneath, so that audiences members could better engage with this aspect of the performance. Such images bring additional expressiveness and an additional narrative to the performance. Rather than just reading about something in a post, one can see part of it.

In addition to the assistance of images, users of Facebook used the many applications (apps) available to help perform their roles. Twitter does not have the add-on capabilities of Facebook, and therefore the service it offers is singular. Facebook, however, not only allows users to post images, comments and links that shape and facilitate their performance roles, but it also allows users to sign into many of the apps offered, such as Instagram, FourSquare, GetGlue and countless others. These apps each serve a specific purpose, whether to share one's location or to share one's favorite books, which helps to round out the role being performed. The more information an audience member has about a performer's role, the more likely he or she is to believe it. Performance is therefore more successful on Facebook than on Twitter.
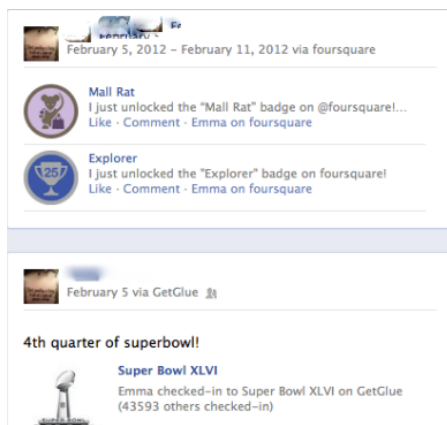
Simply put, people perform better on Facebook than on Twitter. The young adult participants of this study clearly engaged in their performance roles in more various ways through Facebook, thus resulting in a more successful performance and a higher likelihood of choosing that social networking site as a front stage region. The primary

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reason for the dramaturgical success of Facebook's image-sharing and app-connecting capabilities is the drama inherent in such tools. Images and apps demand attention. They involve a user's multiple senses and active engagement. As such, these devices bring additional dramatic elements into a performance. With their help, a dramatic (and sometimes hyperdramatic) storyline develops on every Facebook and Twitter page.

Drama enacted.

The fourth and final research question posed asks, *how is drama played out by young adults on Facebook and Twitter?* As discussed, there are a number of elements available on the two social networking sites that aid in the performance of a role. Truthfully, nearly all elements of Facebook and Twitter bring some level of dramatic attention to those posting and sharing their information. This is due merely to the fact that by facilitating the sharing of nearly every detail of one's daily life, these websites are helping performers to create their own storylines – their own online lives.

Photos.

In the previous section, the dramatic elements introduced by Facebook's photo-sharing capacity and its many apps were mentioned as a primary reason for front stage behaviors. When examining both Facebook and Twitter, a number of such elements present themselves as ways of attracting dramatic attention. Above all else, photographs and other images are the foremost method of engaging drama on Facebook and Twitter.

Participants posted a great deal of comments to their own and others' profiles, but none received as much attention as a picture.

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Images are attention-grabbing, and through posting them, not only were participants

bringing more people into their story, but they were providing additional information that

added to any existing narrative. Thus, just as in watching a television show, audience

members were "hooked." Across the board, posts involving an image received more

"likes" and more comments than those only involving commentary, revealing such visual

stimulation as a fundamental dramatic tool.

Additionally, images could be used to tell any number of tales. Participants

sometimes tagged other users in their photos, bringing yet another character into their

stories. Other times, an entire photo album was uploaded from one's mobile phone,

which characteristically caused a flurry of responses. An image, of course, may not

always be flattering, or may incite unintended or even hyperdramatic responses. In one

such case, a participant had to apologize after a friend who was tagged disliked the way

she looked in the photo: "i look like a BFD. Untag please." Images can also send certain

messages that words cannot. One participant who performed a *girls' girl* role, posted up

to ten Facebook posts a day (including photos), many of which held similar messages.

Even if the images she shared were not her own photos
and instead came from internet sources, they often put
forth the message she had been trying to convey all day
– in this case, making fun of a popular stereotype.

Links.

Another way young adults brought dramatic attention to their online profiles was

through posting links. These could be links to a news

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eyjyNw3OKFk
It takes more than pressure to change rock to diamonds

Esperanza Spalding – Precious
www.youtube.com
From her 2008 self-titled "Esperanza"

story that a participant tweeted to his followers on Twitter or a website linked to a post on a Facebook page. Most of the links participants in this study shared were to videos hosted on YouTube. Just as with photographs, posting a link to one's profile brought significantly more responses than commentary alone. This held especially true for these YouTube links. Linking to a video was found to grab peoples' attention and also provided an opportunity for others to immerse themselves in a particular element of expression in a performer's dramatic role. Through sharing a favorite song or a Saturday Night Live clip of a favorite actor, performers not only provided audience members an additional layer of entertainment to the often already entertaining pastime of looking into another's online world, but also provided the audience an opportunity to get closer to the performer – sharing in some of his or her favorite things. Participants also shared links within Facebook and Twitter themselves, as when one retweets someone else's link or clicks "share" under another Facebook user's post to repost it to their own profile. Such links, again, are used to connect oneself to what one deems as an attention-worthy topic or to garner further attention from curious followers, this time including those from which the original post was copied.

#***Hashtags.***

A method of playing out drama that is unique to Twitter is

@OneNeatDude   11 Mar
#oj #orangejuice #6am #drunk #tastytreats instagr.am/p
/IBxT55GNEC/
View photo

the now famous hashtag (or #). Hashtags were used by participants to denote not only the topics they were discussing (such as "#studentteaching", but in some cases to coin a personal catchphrase that would appear in subsequent tweets, such as "#tastytreats." In

K♡Falcon @_korlibyrd
I'm happy to screw up everyone's normal #rhobh

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other cases, a hashtag that was being used by others on Twitter would be used by a participant who was trying to join in on the larger conversation. One example of this was a *girls' girl* participant who used "#sororitygirlproblems" in a number of her tweets. Some of her followers then replied using the same hashtag, which could be found after a search to be included in over 1,000 tweets by other users, as well as a Twitter account devoted solely to the topic (@sororproblems). Hashtags bring the element of drama, and sometimes of hyperdramatic interaction, into a Twitter user's online life by making he or she a part of a larger conversation and narrative being shared by sometimes thousands of Twitter users. This sometimes can result in very public disagreements or even cyberbullying, as when one participant in this study found herself defending a hashtagged tweet – "I'm happy to screw up everyone's normal #rhobh" – that had attracted so many negative replies that she finally responded, "eff you all." Such as reaction falls into the category of extremely dramatic, or hyperdramatic, interactions.

Hyperdramatic posts.

A somewhat obvious way that participants engaged in dramatic behaviors online

had less to do with the attention-seeking posts of photographs and video links, and more to do with inciteful or cryptic posts made to one's profile. Those most likely to engage in this type of dramatic behavior were the performers included in the *girls' girl (or not)* role. Of course, posts such as the "Whatevs if you hate me…" remark mentioned previously factored heavily into this trend, but unlike cases of cyberbullying,

many of these posts were not necessarily negative. Several participants who made

hyperdramatic comments made a serious or profound statement, but left no closure,

leaving something apparently missing from their posts of this nature. This type of

dramatic "cliffhanger" called for attention. Some responses questioned, "Are you

alright?" or stated "im callin you" in a sign of solidarity. Others would simply be an

emoticon of a confused face   (:/) or a question mark. These types of posts seemed to

confuse other users and audience members more than anything else, leaving few

responses, but a hint of unease on that profile page for the rest of the day. One of the

ways posts were classified as hyperdramatic in this study was the amount of profanity

included. Such commentary undoubtedly catches the eye and provoked attention from

audience members. Remarks such as "I ain't

never been a pu**y…" demanded attention

not only from this researcher but also from

the number of other users who felt the need

to share their thoughts (with 13 "likes" and 8

responding comments). As much as images,

links and hashtags, such commentary invites

other users into the daily drama of one's life, almost begging for input.

After reviewing the findings of this study, it becomes clear that the performance

space presented by social media and social networking sites provides a unique

environment for dramaturgical interactions, especially regarding the young adults who

use their services most often. Whether performing their ideal selves through a variety of

primary roles, a limited number of supporting roles or simply engaging in the everyday

drama being played out on the World Wide Web, young adults are living in and around a remodeled form of Erving Goffman's original dramaturgical sociology – one that is tinged around the edges by exaggerated drama and hyperdramatic behaviors. The next chapter will discuss the implications for such findings, and offer directions for future research into the dramaturgy of social media.

CHAPTER V

Discussion and Conclusion

According to Erving Goffman (1959), a performer is someone who engages in the presentation of self. This self-presentation occurs everyday and everywhere. A performer traditionally holds many roles from which he or she switches into and out of according to interaction setting and audience (Goffman, 1959). This type of adjustment is meant to assist in the presentation of an "ideal self" – one whom the audience of said interaction will believe in and relate to in some way. Goffman believed a performance consists of any activity of an individual that occurs during a period of continuous presence before a set of observers, which also has some influence on observers (1959, p. 32). In no space is this more fitting than in the setting of social media, in which a performer has both a truly continuous presence (sometimes even after death, as in Facebook memorial pages) in the form of a profile page, and a captive audience. An effective performer makes his audience believe "that he is related to them in a more ideal way than is always the case" (p. 56). This chapter discusses the findings of this study that are most pertinent to such performance and idealization of identity, as well as what future paths may be used to study them.

Goffman's perspective presents a fitting framework through which to examine the concepts of hyperdramatic acculturation – concepts involving not only the dramatization of life, but its overdramatization as well. Some of the characteristics that exist in the drama and sensationalism of reality television (Booth, 2004) are being played out today in the online realm. The existence of "mean girls" and cyberbullies has been well

documented (see Belsey, 2002; Gonick, 2003; Hadley, 2004; Patchin & Hinduja, 2009), but how these roles are actually enacted has not been a topic of study until now. In analyzing social media users' roles and stages through a dramaturgical lens, a more organized assessment is presented through which to view this current phenomenon. Findings show that individual performers with certain hyperdramatic or non-dramatic proclivities undertake specific roles that appeal to these sensibilities. In addition, certain online social networking spaces provide backdrops of interaction for each of these types. Hyperdramatic social media users, for instance, are expected to engage with others more often on the front stage (Facebook) than the back stage (Twitter). In a culture rife with tendencies toward the dramatic, young adults are finding a fitting space to perform their own reality shows for the mass audience that is available in the digital sphere.

Social Media: A Personal Reality Show

The hyperdramatic acculturation of young adults is best exemplified through the "personal reality show" that is social media and social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter. Just as heavy editing introduces additional dramatic elements into the plot of a reality television program, the various dramaturgical props available on profile pages of Facebook and Twitter users present tools for dramatic narratives to young adults' lives. While some users perform roles of expertise on these stages, such as the *sports insider* or *pop culture maven*, other, more hyperdramatic characters perform the sensational, attention-seeking roles of the *local celebrity* or *girls' girl*. With a predisposition to the dramatic (Marcotte, 1996) and a culture rife with hyperdramatic messages and role models (whether through the demographically popular reality television or computer-

mediated interaction), young adults are utilizing the new dramaturgical outlet of social media to enact their own unique roles in countless online reality performances.

Drama, whether in television, film or real life, is an act of "collaborative production" by actors and "collective reception" by audiences (Pfister, 1977, p. 11). In Erving Goffman's time, this was enacted on screens big and small, as well as in the everyday interactions of people throughout the world. Today, there are many more spheres of dramatic production than some have ever thought possible. With the advent of computers and the introduction of the "world wide web," new spaces for performance have promulgated. No space in modern times seems more fitting for the adoption of Goffman's dramaturgical theory (1959) than the zone of collaborative production and collective reception presented by social media.

With the help of supporting roles and audience interaction, performers online can often present a more ideal self – one that fits their exact specifications and inferred audience needs – than performers in the physical world. Because individuals at the forefront of a performance are always attempting to give their audiences an ideal version of themselves (Goffman, 1959), the primary performance roles outlined in this study can be seen as idealized versions of one's self that that meet the needs of online audiences. Though not always "ideal" in the conventional sense, the roles of Healthy Lifestyler, Sports Insider, Pop Culture Maven, Local Celebrity and Girls' Girl (or Not) each provide Facebook and Twitter users with a reference for which to interact with other young adults on the websites. Though the first three roles mentioned here do provide audiences with a character who impacts the interaction positively, with expertise in a particular area, the

latter two – *local celebrity* and *girl's girl (or not)* do not necessarily provide this type of idealism.

Based on audience needs, a performer can fulfill a role that may be desired in other ways, albeit negatively at times. After all, an audience requires heroes and villains in any theatrical performance. The role of *local celebrity* personifies this well, offering a truly performative glimpse into the role of one person who often plays many smaller roles at once. These performers, who also tend to use Facebook and Twitter as a "public diary," self-present in a way that attracts a particularly large amount of attention, and therefore drama. Their audiences follow them closely, requesting further performance. The role of local celebrity best embodies the ability for social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter to provide a personal, online reality show for other social media users to "view." With an ensemble of different roles, including both primary and supporting actors, Facebook and Twitter represent a zone of the ultimate reality show – one in which the characters really are "real," and their interactions can personally involve audience members (a characteristic not normally experienced through reality television).

Young adults are the primary viewers of reality television (Carter, 2010) and represent the vast majority of social media users (Mashable, 2011). As such, it follows that this particular generation, when given the drama-inciting tools of Facebook and Twitter – such as photo sharing and hashtags – would engage fully in their own reality show-like existences online. Depending on the interaction at hand, users can share dramatic elements such as photographs, video links, and retweets or "likes" of influential others to perform an ideal form of self. When confronted by all of these social media props to a performance, audience members cannot help but be drawn in. Much as in the

editing of a reality show (which left unedited would surely not be as dramatic), the varied strategies of attention-seeking in social media provide "plotline devices" through which drama is enacted (Weisman, 1952, p. 48).

All of the performance roles outlined in this study play into the personal reality show that is social media by bringing attention to the small microcosm of each individual performer's lived experience, highlighting personal details for the online world to see that in the past were only available to friends and family. These details and performances that occur everyday are now put on display. Like a reality show, even the most mundane minutiae of one's existence are brought into dramatic play and the proliferation of images shared on one's profile read like scenes from a live-action film. As viewers of reality television, young adults may not find this as intrusive as their older or younger social media counterparts. Viewers of reality television engage in a great deal of drama online, through posting more dramatic elements such as photos and garnering more followers and "friends" than their non-viewing peers (Stefanone, Lackaff & Rosen, 2010). Given this fact, it is no surprise that the most outwardly dramaturgical role of this study – the local celebrity – tended to not only engage in precisely these activities, but also to follow more reality show stars than any other role except for *girls' girls*.

Reality television is popular in part because it allows average people to become overnight sensations and attract slews of fans, particularly young adults (Carter, 2010). Social media allow the same phenomenon online. Every person who interacts through social networking sites has the opportunity to perform an ideal self – one that will attract friends, followers and even critics. The behaviors seen on *Jersey Shore* can be modeled online with great effectiveness. In fact, the ease with which hyperdramatics in reality

shows is translated to social media performance is so pronounced, a small number of

upcoming reality shows are now incorporating social media as an essential part of their

plots. *@SummerBreak* is a new program by The Chernin Group that exists solely on

social media. It follows nine pre-college young adults who live-chat, post and stream

videos to their accounts on Twitter, Instagram, Tumblr and YouTube to create what is

being advertised as a "reality show" out of the actions other users of these sites engage in

every day (Fitzgerald, 2013).

Another new show, called *Social Media Stars,* is currently casting for "social

media superstars" much like the *local celebrity* of this study, to "engage in social media

challenges and show your stuff" on air (socialmediastars.tv, 2013). These future stars,

who may be local celebrities online now, are being sought to become "real life"

celebrities as well! Reality television and social media are inexorably linked by the

overly dramatic behaviors of reality show viewers online (Stefanone, Lackaff & Rosen,

2009), and now these performers can enact their roles to the fullest by feeding back into

this "hyperdramatic loop." The dramaturgical or hyperdramatic performance of a role on

social media not only results in social media as a personal reality show, but is now

moving toward adoption as a privately funded, professionally produced reality show

hitting more screens (television, computer, tablet or mobile) than ever before. This begs

the question: how will young adults perform when the reality shows they watch are about

social media and presented through social networking sites?

    Hyperdramatic reality.

As part of the process of growing up, young adults engage in many exaggerated and hyperdramatic behaviors in order to perform a type of identity (Sedgwick, 2003). In fact, hyperdramatic tendencies are more common in young adults than any other age group (Marcotte, 1996). The exaggerated expressions of emotion and attention-seeking behaviors of Histrionic Personality Disorder (APA, 2000) have become intrinsic to the young adult experience. Because hyperdramatic interactions provide ample opportunity for dramatic role-playing (Renner et al, 2008), the social media world presents an ideal setting for young adults to act out such roles. In fact, most of the interactions and performances examined in this study fall into the category of hyperdramatic behaviors, as the young adults involved used Facebook and Twitter almost exclusively for the purpose of bringing some kind of attention to themselves, good or bad. Social media provide a space where performance is "compressed," with all action taking place on the small but globally available stage that is one's profile page. The number of collaborators and tools at a Facebook or Twitter user's disposal not only aid in presenting an ideal performance of self, but an increasingly hyperdramatic, or over-acted one. In this way, social media require more hyperdramtic *scripts* (Goffman, 1959) than face-to-face dramaturgical performance.

In addition to young adults, hyperdramatic behaviors have, for generations, been affiliated with the female form (Gibson, 2004). Reality programs such as *Mob Wives*, *The Real Housewives of…* and *Keeping Up with the Kardashians* help to cement this role of women in modern culture (Behm-Morawitz & Mastro, 2008). The findings of this study show that such a trend may be continuing. Through the media, young women (and men) are being shown the behaviors that are expected of them and societally appropriate

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for them (Kincaid, 2002). With the current examples proliferating the pop culture world, young adult females are being inculcated with the types of overly dramatic and hyperdramatic behaviors so familiar in mean girl research (Ringrose, 2006).

The performed role of *girls' girl (or not)* exhibits this tendency better than any other. Though generally positive and supportive, when interactions turned even slightly negative while performing this role, they turned hyperdramatic. Previous research has found that young women are more likely to engage in cyberbullying behaviors than young men (MacDonald, 2010). In this study, more hyperdramatic exchanges between women trended towards cyberbullying or trolling (e.g. complete strangers insulting someone through reply tweets). This may be due in part to the social media setting of such interactions. When confronted with a very public dismissal, a public rebuttal was displayed for others to see. More interesting, however, is the fact that every female participant falling into the girls' girl role followed a majority of female television stars, many of whom were from the reality genre. Such a finding begs the question of whether these young women are learning from their influential others, or whether this trend is merely a result of publicly displayed drama. This researcher believes the reason to be a little bit of both.

Though examining hyperdramatic behaviors in young men and women, this study found that the "mean girl" variety of hyperdramatics present in the *girls' girl* simply was not seen in this particular sample of young men. While young men in this study engaged in hyperdramatic behavior when performing the role of local celebrity, this was performance of a more positive attention-seeking nature, rather than a negative type of attention brought into an otherwise positive display. This is not to say that similar

hyperdramatic interactions do not exist in the online performance of males. Rather, it may simply emerge in different age groups or in different settings. This study set out to release hyperdramatic tendencies from their gendered past, and although findings support the theories present in mean girl research, there is dramatic potential for a "mean boy" in social media.

Hyperdramatic interactions and dramatic interplay – whether "mean" or not – are a part of the dramaturgical performance of social networking sites. In order for a personal reality show to be successful, a number of requirements must be met.

Removing the Mask

Roles, props and regions are the foundations of dramaturgical performance. The analysis presented in this study looks behind the actor's mask to reveal the various selves being presented online, and how exactly it is they are being enacted. A number of primary roles identified fall under the "hyperdramatic umbrella" of attention-seeking behaviors, while others present more helpful or "expert" roles for their audiences. This presents the argument that some Facebook and Twitter users have more hyperdramatic personalities than others, displaying some of the characteristics that are so identifiable in Histrionic Personality Disorder (i.e. emphasis on physical appearance, demands of attention, exaggerated expressions of emotion). Overall, social networking sites tend to provide a safe haven for hyperdramatic behaviors, and in fact reward users for more dramatic actions with followers (Quan-Haase & Young, 2010). A number of supporting performers, however, are necessitated for this level of success.

Though Goffman outlined several "discrepant" or supporting roles in his work (1959, p. 14), this study identifies two supporting performers – the *shill* and the *informer* – who are primarily visible in social media interactions. These other roles assist a primary performer in effectively portraying his or her role. Shills and informers serve important but disparate functions: one to reinforce the version of self presented by a primary performer, another to provides an ally for audience members. In this way, both actors and audiences more readily accept a performance.

Both the shill and the informer are supporting roles most amenable to dramaturgical interaction on social networking sites, because such a space provides them an ideal setting to navigate between audience and performer. Shills can play their parts through simply clicking "like" on Facebook posts or retweeting a person on Twitter. This makes the requirements of a shill particularly easy to fulfill. Additionally, because social networking sites are designed in part for responding to and sharing thoughts with others, posting a supportive response to performers is accomplished directly and with ease. Informers, on the other hand, are able to see audiences' thoughts and reactions to a performance firsthand on social networking sites, allowing them to best read audience requirements and give audience members the desired information, which will then appear posted on a performer's page for all to see. Though informing on the "unwritten rule" of social media, the "free secrets" (Goffman, 1959, p. 143) revealed by informers do not undermine a performance, and in fact, may lead audience members to feel more involved in a performance. Social networking sites provide an apt location for such disclosures, with all members of an interaction following these rules or taking part in these types of secrets on their own profile pages. Due in large part to the "short and sweet"

characteristic of social media communication, other supporting roles were not as prominent on Facebook and Twitter. Although dramaturgical in nature, the concise methods of contact on social networking sites make the kind of detailed information required of mediators and spotters more difficult to share in such settings.

Both before and after the personal reality show takes place on the online front stage, a performer must prepare in a safe, back stage space. Back stage behaviors are necessary for both recuperating from and rehearsing for a performance (Goffman, 1959). While the front stage is the performance space, the back stage is "a place, relative to performance, where the impression of the performance is knowingly contradicted" (p. 114). Often, this space is occupied by friends and supportive others who can be interacted with in a casual way, withholding any performative tendencies. It is important to remember, however, that despite Goffman's proposal of a performance-free space, the back stage is often occupied by a performer's acting "team" – including supporting roles such as shill and informer (p. 75). These team members, as well as the primary performer, may still be engaging in some elements of performance in the back stage (Zarghooni, 2007).

For this reason, Twitter presents an ideal back stage space. While still remaining in the realm of social media, a performer can remove his or her mask, but maintain some level of dramatic interaction. Because participants tended to use Twitter as a way to connect with friends and gather information rather than a space to thoroughly present themselves, the social networking site fits Goffman's requirements of a space where elements of performance are contradicted, but where rehearsal and preparation can take place. The information retrieved from entertainment and news feeds can be preserved for

a later performance, while the more relaxed interactions with friends can help a performer to present a slightly more ideal self – practicing for a future performance or relaxing after one.

In stepping into the online back stage, a clear difference between the two social networking sites examined becomes apparent. While Facebook is intended for "friends," it provides the necessary props and tools for a more complete performance. Twitter, while often open to a larger public (and therefore audience), is not as amenable to performance. Despite this, both websites were valuable contributors to the overall performance of self of young adult men and women, who used the services in somewhat different ways. Such tendencies should be examined in future research.

Areas of Future Study

The preceding study revealed many elements of dramaturgical interplay in social media, however, like any research it raised a number of questions. The different dramatic uses of social media by men and women is of primary interest to future research, in addition to the next stage of this two-part study.

Men and women and social media.

It has become a well-known fact that women use social media more than men (Pingdom, 2010). The majority of Facebook accounts belong to women and so do the majority of Twitter accounts. In fact, in the process of beginning this study, it proved difficult to find as many social networking profiles of men as there were of women. In addition to this, most male participants did not post as much on their profiles as female participants did. These tendencies may simply be due to the differences in

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communication styles between men and women. Women tend to be more relational, reaching out to and nurturing relationships with others, while men are often seen as being more aloof in their friendships (Ringrose, 2006). This, however, can backfire, given that the relational aggression present in female relationships (Hadley, 2004) may become more evident when in an online setting.

In addition to this, young women tended not to perform the role of sports insider, while men did not tend to perform the role of pop culture maven – despite both of these roles being gender inspecific. Females also tended to post far more pictures than males when performing the role of local celebrity. Female local celebrities showcased themselves primarily through photographs, while mal local celebrities performed their role primarily through wit and thought-provoking commentary. This leads the researcher to believe that the cultural elements of social media should be examined further. It appears that men and women still play roles that may be culturally and socially pre-determined for them, leading men to engage in more stereotypically masculine roles, and women in stereotypically feminine roles.

Further, the posting of images by women and posting of comments by men in the same role reveals a possible subconscious knowledge of the male gaze. Young women may be posting mostly pictures because they have been acculturated to be an object to gaze upon, rather than a fully operational actor, as their witty male counterparts seem to be. A deeper analysis of such cultural and social issues online would be a fascinating and instructive addition to this study. Additionally, involving other increasingly popular social media sites in this analysis would be helpful. With mobile and photo-sharing social networks such as Instagram, Pinterest and SnapChat growing more each day, an analysis

of any cultural and social influences on social media would not be complete without including them.

The differences in performance of male and female roles in social media may be further illuminated in the second part of this two-part study, which delves further into hyperdramatic behaviors and performance roles of self-presentation.

The future of dramaturgy and hyperdramatics.

This study investigated the sociological context of interactions of young adults on Facebook and Twitter. Although these interactions reveal many characteristics about social media users, Erving Goffman's (1959) construct of dramaturgy is applied to analyze various dramatic or hyperdramatic features specifically. Future research should not only examine the concepts identified in this study, but further elucidate the theoretical conception of *hyperdramatic acculturation* by quantitatively analyzing the hyperdramatic behaviors of young adults online. A future survey will be helpful in more specifically assessing these foundations. Additional elements of Goffman's theory should be considered, as well as other theories of self-presentation, such as Mark Snyder's concept of self-monitoring, or "self-observation and self-control guided by situational cues to social appropriateness" (1974, p. 526). Much like Goffman's presentation and idealization of self, Snyder's model will assist in further clarifying the dramaturgical predispositions of young adult social media users, and their place on the hyperdramatic scale.

While also providing an even deeper analysis of the dramaturgy in young adults' social media use, future studies will help to alleviate some of the limitations of the first.

These limitations include the inherent subjectivity of a qualitative textual analysis. Although the researcher made every effort to disregard any biases in examining the data collected, absolute objectivity can never be guaranteed, as it is the nature of research of this kind. In planning for and anticipating a second study, the researcher was especially careful not to let her own preconceptions color her analysis. In executing the second study, however, data from a very different standpoint – that of the Facebook and Twitters users themselves – will allow for a combined analysis of dramaturgy in young adult social media from multiple perspectives. This will result in a more objective and thorough investigation.

Additionally, because Facebook and Twitter have both undergone significant changes since the start of this study, resulting in a different appearance of both website's user profile pages, the results of this textual analysis may appear slightly different than a more recent analysis. Such issues cannot be helped when it comes to technology, however, with social media sites updating almost monthly. The addition of a future study using a different methodology will again help to rectify any possible limitations due to such changes.

Much in the same way a reality television show is "reality," the performance of self in everyday life is "reality." Nowhere is this clearer than in interactions on social networking sites, which provide users a profile page for the ultimate presentation of a particular role. Though Goffman (1959) may have intended for his theory to remain in the physical world, and though some scholars have expressed concern at its adaptation to the online realm (Miller, 1995), the dramaturgical perspective seems to find a renewed life in the social media setting, where technology has provided new tools for invoking

drama and where the dramatic role-play of daily interactions is explicitly rewarded with followers and "friends." This is a unique space where performance does not need to be as secretive, but rather is expected to be open. Though only a segment of Goffman's theory is presented here, this study provides a starting point for future research into the very fitting role of dramaturgy in online self-presentation. All humans are performers, and social media merely provide a large-scale stage on which to enact life's many roles.

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